



Summer Institute Fellows & Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest Winners 2011
Connecticut Writing Project
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Jones River: New World, Near Plimoth

By Sheila Murphy, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Winner in Poetry

Who placed stone on stone to build this wall
that marks the shifting edge of land, before
houses grew along the hill, before train tracks
and highway swallowed trees and silence,
surrounding saltmarsh, riverbed and pines?

Who tilled the level plain, fished and clammed
in river and bay, before and after the crew
of Captain Jones sailed their shallop on
an incoming tide, and saw a westward
wilderness unfurling around each bend?

You walk these marshes more than I,
know where, beyond bayberry bushes,
the path is lost to *phragmites* looming tall,
blocking out the sun. You came to aid
my search for heather, steady me over
the stone wall, search for the worn path
our children made between purple heather,
buds ripening to mounds of royal haze.
Armfuls we'd hoard, holding summer until
they'd fade to lavender, then silver-gray.

Like Plimoth settlers, we attend the tide,
sometimes in kayaks explore the river bends,
or walk where heather bloomed. Today
you lead us through a waving sea of marsh grass,
spartina, tufted in wind-swirled clumps,
heat-dried, its green dimmed down to gold.

Once, the rise would flaunt its August heather
as faithfully as tidal ebb would call
that shallop to retrace its winding path
past Ichabod's Flats out into Kingston Bay,
around the shoals of Rocky Nook to Plimoth
and a new world, ever changing, ever strange.

Letter to a Young Teacher

By Eric Maroney, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Winner in Fiction

First, let go of your dreams; all of them. You wanted to be a writer, spent hours scrutinizing over your manuscripts in college, but reality requires a surrendering of desire. Coat-check your wants. It's a material world and there are bills to pay; the car note, credit cards, those student loans that just won't go away. Remember those creative writing classes you loved so much, those fleeting moments of partial genius when you beamed on account of a delicate metaphor put together like marzipan holds a layered cake. That part of your life is gone now. Throw it a small funeral, a second line marching down the page. Now you can begin.

Begin by undoing what you have already done. You won't need Shakespeare or Byron. You won't need the Brontës or that text of Latin literature you took your sophomore year with the professor who talked too fast about such wildly interesting details that it left your head in a tailspin like a night of great sex. Keep Blake on hand. You'll refer to him time to time even if it's only to put your world in perspective. Relinquish the joy of poetry and agree to teaching.

On your first day, the students may be nice to you. If this is the case, try to set an even tone. Exude an air of discipline but compassion. Use the buzz words you learned in your education courses, the ones you enrolled in after your mother persuaded you that writing wouldn't pay your student loan bills. Tell the class that you have high expectations, that you'll take no excuses, that the achievement gap is something to be overcome this semester in your eighth grade English class. Believe this is all true, at least for a little while.

If you are like most young teachers, this will not be your experience. You will walk into the classroom that you spent weeks decorating with posters of apostrophes and a bulletin board showcasing your admiration for the semicolon, but the students will not be so polite. They will tell you that you are short, that you have too much hair on your arms; they will imitate the way you talk and this will transport you back to the horrific days of your own middle school experiences: the scowl of the Italian teacher whose lips, from behind that curtain of black drugstore dyed hair, tell you there's a good reason you weren't accepted to the creative arts high school the next town over. Try to tuck this away deep in the recesses of your memory. While it may make a lovely ghazal, it will do nothing to help manage a classroom.

In your first few weeks there will be good days and there will be not so good days. Nothing will prepare you for your first October. It is a rapid descent into anarchy. Watch as paper balls sail across the room and then pile up beside your homework bins which remain empty of completed work but seem to trap the broken pencils and crayon fragments that are casualties of an unending war waged among the students in row three. Collect these at the end of each day to make room for more dead soldiers. Mourn them. Press their graphite and waxy insides into the garbage pail and move on. The pace of being only grants you a moment to grieve.

When you learn that your district has made national news for the overhaul of its teacher evaluation system for tying teaching appraisal to the outcome of standardized testing, tack the Times article up behind your desk. In the teachers' lounge say, "This is great," pointing to the headline, "isn't it?" Be met with stares as blank as manila folders. Rush home and call your mother who was an educator for nineteen years until a brain tumor, a nervous breakdown and the threat of another district litigation drove her from her place as an elementary school psychologist. "Was it something I said?" you ask as you pick at a paper cut that has scabbed over. Hang up the phone and compose a vignette from the point of view of a veteran. When you have finished, fold the paper and implement its use as a coaster. There are things you still don't understand.

Your classroom will be absolute chaos at times. Books will spill from the cabinets, papers will coat the floor, the temples of your head will pulse—thump, thump, thump—and you will pray for snow days. Run to the window at dawn and squint up at the street lights. In the absence of flakes, allow your heart to sink. Put on your snow boots and think about calling in. Don't.

You've spent days composing a lesson on the thesis sentence; it'd be a sin to allow it to go to waste. Imagine your model essay being left to exposure, alone on a hillside. Brave the cold, blow into your mittens, stencil the date and objective on the whiteboard, and wait for them to file in. Begin with a sense of purpose. After all, the work you are engaged in is of great consequence, important enough that you've left behind the marzipan metaphors, discussions of enjambment, and since parted from the world of Blake. Put this thought into your mouth; run your tongue over it and swallow.

When the students arrive, smile and tell them good morning. Say a thesis sentence is like a light in the dark. Say a thesis sentence will tell you where you are going. Say it is the beacon illuminating your course in the otherwise murky waters of the writing's soul. Be met with stares as blank as manila folders and when your back is turned for the moment it takes to diagram the paragraph on the board, the crayon fragment and pencil combat commences. Consider taking refuge at your desk where you may be able to bury your disappointments behind a pile of district paperwork avoiding the cosmic mortars pitched about your middle school classroom. Don't.

At home, watch the news. Renew your subscription to Education Weekly. Learn words like choice and charter, accountability and merit pay. *These sound alright*. Call your mother and share your outlook with her. *This could be the change the country has ached for*. Listen at the other end of the line as she tries to tuck her sighs between your sentences. Think for a moment that she is the old guard, sentential in her stoicism, left standing from another era. Put this thought in your mouth, run your tongue over it, then spit it out. The taste of loss will be left on your palette. Tomorrow comes. Return to the white board; try again.

There will be a boy, one of the militia in row three, who will steal your heart. He will be the first to need you. The kids tease him about his haircut and shoes, the moustache he sports at age thirteen. To you, he is an absolute terror. A guerilla warrior misplaced within the walls of your school. He will duck behind counters launching rubber band slingshots into your prized lesson on the thesis sentence. He will spill mounds of half-consumed sunflower seeds into the spines of your classroom library. He will expose his behind to the opposing forces in row two in an act of sudden mooning.

In the weeks that follow, you will begin to give him everything, everything you have to give and more. Drain your emotional life for this child. Speak of him as if he were your own. Take him for pizza, hide donuts in the pockets of his coat when he leaves it on your chair because his locker has jammed. Throw every bit of instructional know-how his way and watch, awestruck, as his writing blossoms. His stories, still awkward, branch out in the most elaborately detailed plots. He spends a paragraph describing the crack in a sidewalk. He crafts a tale about a truck driver determined to win back his wife. Be elated, at least for a little while.

In time he stops coming to school, starts skipping your classes and you will learn there is such a thing as too much love. Start again. Barricade yourself in the classroom after the bell has rung. Cry when you think of the hallways empty, the pencil on the floor, the sound made by his shoes and just when you have determined you aren't cut out for this, hear a voice at the door. Collect your tears in your shirt cuffs, barking, *Go home, Michael. Go home*, and as he turns away from you, the roundness of his face, the eczema swathing his hands, the wrinkle in his voice, question: is it your duty to give yourself up for the ones who love you, who outright would give themselves up for you despite the demands, the impossibilities, of being thirteen in this city, for

now thirteen and alive, in the face of a growing list naming those who are not? *I will pass that test, Mister*, he says and right then you hear your mother's sighs.

Begin to think you will not return next fall. Consume elaborate cocktails while lounging on your couch next the throw pillow that smells like cat pee. You are a long way from the Brontës but sense the possibility that you can find your way back home. Think of your mother swaddled in blankets despite the late spring heat, think of your mother swaddled in cigarette smoke despite the late noon hour, think of your mother swaddled in schoolhouse memories despite the unrelenting movements of time. Demand a recess.

The principal has been making rounds to your classroom and though she is glad to see your word wall and objective in place she tilts her head and makes these teeth sucking sounds as you teach "Those Winter Sundays." Know that you'll wait until the school year is over to decide if you're coming back. Know that mastery of the profession takes far longer than just that time. Wonder if you can broker a peace treaty among the students in row three. *I'd like to see more test skills in your lessons*, the principal tells you.

Find yourself with your fists in your hair, with your teeth gumming down your nails and piles of paper on your desk. Find disgust. Find anger and then on your prep period sweep the halls and find the signs the third row warrior has pasted to the doors:

Missing: Toy spider

Name: Mr. Longlegs

Age: 25

Reward: Big

And find tears in your eyes, laughter in your mouth, humility. Ask yourself, *can these things be measured*.

Return to your apartment with crates full of notebooks. Scour their journals for hope; *the thing that I want most is for my family to be together*. Listen as late June firecrackers pop off like tiny missiles and the hair stands straight on your arms. It is not a sound you are unused to, only bullets don't come in so many colors. Illuminate the impossibilities of being thirteen in this city, for now thirteen and alive, in the face of a growing list naming those who are not: a boy they call Peaches, Miller, Tyrone. Fifteen homicides. What will happen by next September? Your attention turns to the cat in heat, jet lag, and the quest for a beer on a Sunday—God damn blue laws—to anything but this: Jeffrey, Antwone, Rudell.

Consider having your head examined. In the cool of the night you've begun to wake up terrified, the sound of hopelessness scratching at your head, the constant nag of self reprisal—*I am not cut out for this*—yet there are things that will bring you back. There are people, little people, who need you, whose opinions of you matter more than the lines of poetry you memorized in literature class. The aching will not subside, nor the torrent of longing, the unrequitable need for an intellectual life; the pen scratching paper, the district exam, *did my score increase* Michael asks, his crippled brother tottering down the halls behind him carrying that obvious, toothless smirk on his face. This is power, this is prestige, in the moments that follow a surge swells up from beneath all of you, lifting you from the pain, the sweat, the groaning of words put on paper I can read, I can't read, I can do this, I can't and when that groundswell subsides you smile, place a hand on Michael's shoulder and painfully look away because the child has once again been labeled basic.

Summer of Sedona

By Lynn Frazier, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Winner in Nonfiction

It is funny how the past can fly out of the shadows and with one quick venomous bite, flood the bloodstream with memories long tucked neatly away. So it was with Sedona. This was to be my summer of healing, a summer of rest, exercise, time for my body, mind and spirit to recover from a grueling school year. I had agreed to watch my daughter's dachshund, Sedona, for the summer. She had been part of our family for the past 3 years and a wonderful addition to my three shih-tzus. I left school envisioning long walks in the morning with my little pack to start my summer days. This was not to be.

It was my second day home that I noticed Sedona was very quiet. A long-haired red ball of Diva attitude, this was very unusual. By the next day I was really worried. Her chocolate brown eyes were pleading with me, her brow furrowed. She was limping. I called the vet and we went in the next morning. The vet checked her out and determined it was her back. He gave her a shot of cortisone assuming that would take care of it and sent us home.

The next day she seemed worse and by the afternoon, she was barely walking. I went on the computer and Googled, "dachshunds and backs." I came across a website titled IVDD, Disk Disease. It took my breath away. Genetic, it strikes dachshunds about 3 years old, with a 12-24 hour window of opportunity for surgery or permanent paralysis.

It was Sunday evening. I wrapped her up in a blanket, jumped in the car and drove to my vet hospital. I ran in holding Sedona like a football, sobbing and barely able to talk. I couldn't get the time frame out of my head. 12-24 hours. This little dog was my daughter's companion and confidant when she moved to Boston knowing no one. Now her life was in my hands, the love of my daughter's life.

I could barely get the words out to the vet tech. She brought me in a room to get me out of view more than anything, I am sure. Dr. Grace walked in. Dr. Grace....he was not my usual vet, but his name was the first thread of the rope I began to cling to.

He confirmed my worse fear. Yes, it was IVDD and yes, we had a small window of time. He also shook his head while he explained there were only two surgeons in the state who could perform this kind of surgery and only one on this side of the state. He left the room to start making phone calls. I sat and quietly cried while Sedona licked away my tears. The fear roiled through my body, a tsunami threatening to drown me.

Dr. Grace walked back in the room shaking his head. "You will never believe it. The surgeon is coming here for another surgery and has one more opening."

A small light glimmered in the darkness of my soul. I was afraid to ask the next questions. "What are her chances of recovery and how much will it cost?" My husband just lost his job and I was not sure how we would pay for it.

"Her chances of recovery are over 85%. The cost....in the thousands." 85%, thousands?! I took a deep breath and started to crunch numbers in my head. They were not making it. I looked down at Sedona. 85 %; Dr. Grace; the surgeon just 'happens' to be in the hospital the next day. "Where do I sign?"

While Dr. Grace took Sedona, I signed on the dotted line. I went home hopeful. They operated on Sedona the next day. I got a call the next morning. There were complications. There were other disks, blood clots. She had no feeling in her back legs. Her chances of walking were less than 50%. I could feel my throat close; tears welled up and I took a seat on the roller coaster I would ride for the next two months.

A day later I received a call that Sedona was refusing to eat, and did I think I could care for her at home? I had a crash course in surgery after-care, expressing a bladder, holding a medically fragile dog, and moving a medically fragile, paralyzed dog. I was terrified. I went to pick her up and saw the train tracks down her shaved back. My heart lurched. I picked her up gingerly, snaking my hand between her legs trying to hold her spine rigid. Her bladder let loose and I was drenched—my state of being for the next four weeks. I looked at Dr. Grace with tears in my eyes, suddenly overwhelmed by the responsibility of Sedona's well-being.

"There are wheelchairs for dogs Lynn...." I just nodded, unable to speak. No! my brain screamed. She is going to walk again, she has to walk again. I knew he was trying to help, but I refused to believe that was the path I was on.

"She has to remain crated for at least a month." Crated??? I didn't think I could handle any more bad news. I wrapped Sedona up and headed for the car. Every step, every move frightened me. Was I holding her correctly? Would her disk burst? I could feel movement in the front, but the dead weight in the back terrified me. The dance with the devil began. Fear and hope squared off.

I came home and looked at our home. Sedona was NOT spending a month in a crate. She WAS going to walk. My mind was made up.

I took a shower, changed my clothes and settled Sedona in a basket. I hopped back in the car and went to a second-hand baby store. I found the perfect crib and wrestled it in my car. I stopped at the grocery store and bought ground lamb and then I headed home. I set it up the crib with all of Sedona's toys and a little sheepskin bed and pee pads. I put a magnet under her matt. I started boiling lamb, washed a pile of towels, set up the baby wipes and we were off.

The first week my family came over and asked if I could put her upstairs, she was too difficult to look at. I understood, but it broke my heart. Sedona and I became joined at the hip. I couldn't leave her alone, so I spent most of the day holding her, then changed my clothes. I was averaging 5-10 showers a day. I brought her outside and crawled on all fours trying to express her bladder. I washed her, moved her legs, rubbed her back and squeezed her feet to check for "deep pain."

By the end of the week I was beside myself. I thought I would have to put her down. A life in a wheelchair with no bladder control was no quality of life. But I couldn't get the picture of her and Carlie out of my head. I went back online.

In the midst of all the horror of IVDD I found one blog that caught my eye. The person wrote about how much her handicapped dog loved to swim. Swimming! It made perfect sense. No weight on the joints. I set out for Petco once again and found a life jacket. It was Diva appropriate in pink floral. The next day I went down to Columbia Lake. Begging is like breathing to me: There always seems to be someone saying no to me and this was no different. "There are no dogs allowed on the beach."

"I know," I replied "but look," I said as I showed her shaved back and limp, dangling legs. I am shameless when I am begging.

"This is her only hope for ever walking again." You have to love teenagers. They always get it. In the water I went and when I heard a woman indignantly questioning why there was a dog in the water, the young lifeguard replied, "She has special permission."

Every morning from that point on Sedona and I had a date at the beach. Every day for about an hour I walked her back and forth in the water moving her back legs in a circle whispering in her ear, "You're going to walk, you're going to run."

Every night I wrapped her in towels and held her on the couch, moving her legs, whispering, “You are going to walk, you are going to run.”

I held her back feet in my hands, pressing, waiting for her to move. I was desperate for just a flinch. And then I remembered. It was then when I understood why my desperation seemed to reach into my soul.

Many years ago I held another’s hand, whispered in another’s ear, “Please squeeze my hand if you hear me. Please wake up.”

I still miss Wayne. Thirty years later I can see his face as clearly as I could before his accident. I can hear his voice and silly laugh. I know that Sedona would be a mission he would understand. We were like that; chipmunk hospitals for those who had a run-in with a cat; popsicle sticks on broken wings. Wayne would understand more than anyone why I couldn’t walk away from Sedona simply because she was a dog. He would have bought the crib.

After a week of crawling behind Sedona, my back went out. I needed another plan. I read about wrapping a towel underneath me, but that still meant bending. I decided I needed some kind of sling. I went to Joanna’s Fabric, bought pink material with crowns, a towel and a clasp. I designed my first sling. It was perfect. It slipped under her quickly enough that we had a chance to get outside, was washable and most importantly, worthy of a Diva.

One morning in the third week I was running her outside, wrapped in a towel, when I felt something push. I stopped short and unwrapped her, pressing on her feet, pressing on her legs. Hope whooshed out of me like a deflated balloon. I put her down and slipped on her sling.

Afterwards we donned her little jacket and left for the beach. We walked up and down. By now Sedona was the belle of the beach. Shouts of “Is she walking yet?” rang out from her cheering section. “Not yet!”

We walked back and forth as I chatted to bathers, one hand holding the life jacket, one hand behind her. I felt a flutter, but couldn’t tell if it was a ripple from kids swimming. I pushed my face near the water and put my hand behind her feet. Her foot moved! I screamed to the life guards “I think she moved!!” The father swimming with his daughter moved towards us. “Did she?” He asked excitedly. I think she did, I yelled. I stood in the lake holding Sedona against my chest laughing as tears joined ripples to celebrate hope.

Calling Your Name

By Jon Andersen, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Honorable Mention in Poetry

Their heads pop out of drive-through windows
calling your name. Rebel angels, cherubs,
prophets: they sneak up on you
with delighted smiles and almost
familiar faces, say things like
“It’s me – Derrick.”

Suddenly, the kid who carved *KKK*
into his copy of Frederick Douglass
and threw a chair at you across the room
opens big man arms
and wants a hug.
Oh, and this is his baby, Amarilis.

A giggly, boy-crazy ninth-grader
who earned detentions and C plusses
turns around a woman, standing heart-
breakingly tall in the political science stacks
at Barnes and Noble. You’ve caught her reading
when she should be working and while
she says it’s nice to see you, she has to go.
You stammer goodbye and blush like a little girl.

Now it’s getting to the point
where they show up again sitting in A period
but turn out to be Brian Grochowski, *Junior*.
And damnit how they come careening out of
the morning paper, trapped in fatigues or crashing
through glass and ice and collapsed steel
to land in your kitchen!
Sometimes sobbing, you brush the shards to the floor
searching for a lesson, some kind of plan.

Most never return
except in dreams: one dead Born Again boy –
I’m sorry – Nicholas – his name was Nicholas –
hovers over you in a surgeon’s mask.
The operating room lamp blazes
like the light at the end of the tunnel to Heaven
which is, after all, only the birth canal.

You close your eyes and hope for the best.

**If I Knew Then What I Know Now (NOTE:
This poem was written as the text for a
children's picture book.)**

*By Jane Cook, Teacher-Consultant Writing
Contest, 2011 Honorable Mention in Poetry*

If I knew then what I know now,
I'd probably rather be a cow.
I'd stand and chew my cud all day.
At night I'd sleep on warm, sweet hay.

Or maybe I would rather be
An acorn that becomes a tree.
I'd turn into a mighty oak.
And shelter birds and other folk.

Once in a while I imagine that
It might be nice to be a cat.
I'd run and jump and dance and play.
Then lie in the sun and sleep all day.

There are some times I'd like to be
A busy little bumblebee.
I'd buzz around from flower to flower.
My honey would be sweet not sour.

Then there are times that I will wish
That I was a brightly colored fish.
I'd swim around and slap my fin.
Everyone would watch and grin.

From time to time I wonder if
I could become a grand steep cliff.
People could come from miles around.
To scale my sides from peak to ground.

I've contemplated, of course,
That I would like to be a horse.
I'd canter round the pasture free.
Everyone would envy me.

I might be better off if I
Was a scrumptious, juicy apple pie.
I'd smell so good and taste so sweet
I'd be such a special treat.

Once in a while, when I'm in a fog,
I think I'd like to be a dog.
I'd bark and frolic every day.
I would never tire of play.

Once when I was drinking juice,
I thought I'd like to be a moose.
I'd wander in the woods and then
I'd graze on grass in a quiet glen.

One day while I was eating a fig,
I dreamed I'd like to be a pig.
I'd lie in my sty and oink and eat,
Friends would bring a special treat.

Then while riding in a truck,
I thought I'd like to be a duck.
I'd swim in the pond for days and days
And watch the cows and horses graze.

Once while I was eating a carrot,
I thought I'd like to be a parrot.
My brightly colored plumage would shine
Each time I flew from tree to vine.

While I was putting on my coat,
I thought I'd like to be a goat.
I'd cross the bridge and scare the troll,
That would be my only goal.

But wait, I have been thinking that
It might be fun to be a bat.
I'd fly around from dusk till dawn
Eating bugs between each yawn.

I've thought and dreamed for years on
end,
And talked this over with a friend.
But when everything is said and done,
I wouldn't trade with anyone.

She Didn't Know

By Bernie Schreiber, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Honorable Mention in Poetry

She holds her great-granddaughter softly
As if a fragile flower were in her hands,
Petals trembling with every breath,
Bright and radiant with color.
The lines on her face etch her story,
Belying the unconditional smile
Pushing through them
Like life itself
Pushing through the cracks
Of the uncared-for sidewalks
Of human existence.
Her soft kiss on the forehead
Doesn't tell of her clinging
To her mother's hand
In the middle of a thunderstorm
On the Russian border, where she left
Her tranquil life behind,
Running from one horror to another;
It doesn't show the inhumanity of gas chambers
Or the inhumanity of humanity,
Of potato-digging in hard earth,
Of wrapping up in blankets
To stave off Siberian cold,
Of watching death visit
With uninvited regularity.
Her kiss is unconditional
As if to say I am here and
You are here as proof
That we can crack through
The concrete of darkness
With the fortitude of will
And endurance,
Reaching the life-affirming light
In spite of the blackness before,
Like the moment of birth itself.

Her kiss on the forehead says
When she survived
She didn't know why.

Diver

By Kisha Tracy, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Honorable Mention in Poetry

The words I didn't understand fell melodically from his tongue.
I was supposed to dive down into their depths,
then return to the surface clutching the bright gold,
their inner treasure.
But I fought against the clutching current.
I stayed too shallow, swam too far in the wrong direction.
I didn't have the breath in my lungs to stay under.
So I came back with nothing.
Except pride.
My father was a poet.

Tradition

By Jon Andersen, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Honorable Mention in Fiction

“ANITA! TAKE THE PICTURE!”

She looked like a little doll way down there, and I don’t mean that affectionately, but I guess I do, too, although that particular term of endearment would send her off for sure. I was maybe a hundred feet up the Nehantic Hill transmission tower (felt more like a thousand) and she was standing at the base. With my left hand I had a white-knuckled grip on the cold angle iron. I fought to keep down a little stir of panic. I breathed. With my right hand I also had a white-knuckled grip: on a big bottle of Smirnoff. I hadn’t actually touched the stuff, at least not today. Then I heard my father’s words: “It’s a stupid goddamn tradition.”

Anita didn’t look up, and I wasn’t even sure if she could hear me. She was staring intently down at the digital camera, pressing buttons, fiddling.

“Hey!” I screamed. Damn, that was kind of shrill, I thought. She looked up: “I THINK THE BATTERY’S DEAD! MAYBE WE SHOULD SKIP THIS, JIM!”

“Where’s your phone?” I called down.

“I LEFT IT HOME!”

Of course.

I made an extra big grin and waved with the bottle hand: “Run back down the trail! I’ve got a disposable camera from the semi-formal in the glove box. I think there are a few shots left!”

“JIMMY!”

“Don’t worry. I can wait! Great view!”

She threw up her arms and shook her head, then turned and ran down to the trail opening and disappeared into the woods.

I tried to wedge myself in the grid-work of the tower, take some strain off my arms and legs, and head off the fatigue. My hands and pant legs and t-shirt were smeared with rusty stains. Dad was right: stupid tradition. I had been going through his trunk and came across an album of photos last week. I sat on the edge of his bed as we leafed through. In one black and white photo my grandfather, who looked a hell of a lot like my father, stood on the peak of a roof – I think it was the barn on the family homestead – smiling and looking up, raising a big pint glass like he was toasting God or the sky. From his hair and work khakis hiked up, I guessed that this was an early 1950s shot. In an Instamatic on the next page, my father shows he’s not to be outdone. He hangs upside down shirtless and gleaming, his legs wrapped around a forklift mast fully raised. Maybe he’s eighteen. Even in the photo, the sun looks merciless, and he’s chugging a can of Budweiser, giving a little extra pump to his bicep for the camera. Then there’s another photo (a Kodachrome, Dad tells me) of his father clutching a green Ballantine Ale bottle standing balanced on the outside window ledge of his Thames City apartment in the Morton Building that finally collapsed last year. Whoever took the photo must have been on the roof of the bank right across Sergeant Street. My grandfather has a dark beard in the picture, a cigarette hanging from his lower lip, and sort of a screwed up, half smile. Uncle Terry told me that his idol had been Ernest Hemingway, and I remember him looking a little like Papa Hemingway with his grey beard. He sure had the manic-depression thing going for him. This partially explains his Ballantine beer

obsession. In the big moldy stacks of *Time* magazines, I had come across an ad for Ballantine: Ernest Hemingway himself sitting in a boat, fishing, and in the corner of the page, in what I guess was the author's handwriting itself: "When I'm in the woods or on the water, I pack Ballantine." Signed, "Ernest Hemingway." Gramps would have denied that practically the only inheritance he left my father and Terry was a collection of Ballantine bottles. And to give him credit, if you can call it that, the other reason he liked Ballantine was for the distinctive wide-neck bottles. In his youth, he'd drive from one of his occasional jobs in the woods or at the mills in northern Maine back down to Connecticut without a pit stop – every bottle he drank, he'd fill back up when he had to take a leak, still cruising along. He left with a full six pack and arrived with a full six pack every time. The Old Man and the Pee.

Anita shot back out of the woods. "ARE YOU OKAY?"

I flashed her thumbs up. Ok, we could get this over with now.

"JIM: YOU HAVE THE KEYS! THE CAR'S LOCKED!"

Oh, fuck me. I could feel the thing actually move a little in the big winds. Thick guy cables stretched out to enormous anchor points in the distance. Hugging the steel and shoving the bottle between my thighs, I slowly extricated my keys from my jeans pocket and without looking, tossed them out towards Anita standing in the field. I held my breath and watched her run and pick them up out of the grass and dart back towards the woods again, not even giving me an argument this time.

This wasn't going to work. Even if Anita got the shot with that shitty little throw-away-camera, I was much too far away for an image that would live up to the grand tradition. There'd be no light in my eyes, no wind-swept hair, no attitude preserved for the ages. It was a stupid tradition, but I loved those pictures anyway and I wanted one. In art appreciation, Mr. Carter said that a famous photographer called photography "the saddest art." Thinking about the images of my long-dead grandfather and my soon-to-be-dead father – both of them bristling with strength and wild light – I really got it. You could capture the most vigorous, joyful image and all you've done is frozen something that can never, ever happen again. A momentary tableau in our big death march. And what was I going to be, here in my immortal moment? An anonymous spot. An anomalous blot in an industrial landscape.

I craned my neck back – far above me strobes and red lights flashed. The weather was changing, the warm fall day giving way to what promised to be a frosty night. Clearing sky. I could see cars glinting on a stretch of 593 headed south into Thames City. The speedbowl to the east. Farms that weren't really farms anymore. To the south I could see the pavilion at Breaker's Point beach. The Geitner Trucking Company lot, where Dad would pick up a rig in the middle of the night sometimes for long hauls, now empty and broken through with weeds and small trees, ringed by a chain-linked fence. My elementary school where Mrs. Belanich spent every afternoon with me, letting me clean and color, waiting for mom. Sometimes she gave me rides home. The whole world was frozen, I thought. Maybe life is the saddest art.

I looked down and Anita was standing down below. "HEY! YOU READY?" she yelled.

"NO! HEY, THIS IS WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO. CLIMB UP HERE WITH ME!"

"WHAT?"

"COME ON UP!"

Now, I really didn't expect this to happen. In fact, if I thought for a second she'd do it for real, I never would have said it. Or maybe that's not totally honest. Maybe I was willing to risk us both. Or maybe I just had learned to believe she could do anything, and everything better than me. But after looking up at me for a few moments, she made her way over to the base – I was nearly sick looking straight down at her, standing on the concrete pad, reaching for the first rung – and Anita Valenzuela started to climb. She had her stupid punk boots on. I was thrilled and scared out of my head. What a shithead I was, putting her in danger like this. It was going to take a while for her to get up here – it had taken me at least fifteen minutes. I unscrewed the Smirnoff cap and sniffed – the smell of Vodka in a bottle – the smell of nothing at all. I took just a little swig and screwed the cap back on. Just enough to cut the fear.

It was getting late. The russet colored oak leaves and the fiery red poison ivy vines roped around the trunks and spreading in at the edge of the fields popped in the late light. Pretty soon, though, there she was coming up from beneath me breathing hard but grinning: "Hey, cutey."

"Well look at you, danger girl."

I shuffled over and she scrambled up against me – "Yeah, kind of sexy, no?"

"Whooooah!" I laughed. "Yeah, I said," daring to kiss her briefly on the lips. "You see, you thought I was your project, but it's been my evil plan all along to let you believe you could reform me, when in fact the whole time I was luring you into my trap."

"This does feel like a trap" she giggled, looking around. "A sublime trap."

I pulled her close and brushed her lips with mine, then kissed her long and hard, and felt her hair blowing around my face, her warm, strong hands gripping my thigh.

"OK, OK, stop. You're going to get us killed." She pulled my hand down, but gently. "I thought we came up here to take get a picture."

"Didn't I just tell you that this was part of trap?"

"Right. Now this camera has one shot left, so let's get it right. I need you to climb a little higher."

"I've got a better idea." I let the bottle of vodka slip from my hand and watched it plummet and smash. "I'd rather have you in my arms."

"Oh yeah, nice, Jim. How moving. Replace vodka with girl."

"No! Totally new tradition. Or no tradition. This is just me and you. Come on."

She shuffled over close in and I held out. I had one arm around her and one hand stretched out holding the camera. She held me. I snapped the shot. I still have it, and she's smiling.

Literature Relationship Paper

By Tiffany Smith, Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest, 2011 Honorable Mention in Nonfiction

I was a girl who asked for a Swiss Army Knife for my birthday. A pink one. Of course I also played with dolls and invited my girlfriends over for tea parties, but there was something liberating about seeing myself reflected in *Harriet the Spy*. I could be both of those girls, and it was okay. I could be a pink Swiss Army Knife.

I rode my bike up and down historic Chaplin street for hours every day, wind whipping past my long dark hair, waiting for something questionable to spy on. What I was really waiting for was a seemingly innocent situation that I could twist into a fabulous discovery. If my neighbor walked out to her garden to check on her plants, I frantically recorded some brief notes in my black and white flecked notebook that something suspicious was happening with the crazy woman next door. Perhaps she was hiding something in the ground, beneath the lilac bush...

This is when I became a storyteller. I decided to become a writer when I grew up.

I often felt slow in school. I hated math; I couldn't tell time; I couldn't spell, and my penmanship was atrocious. I didn't know what I was good at, and most things took me a long time—longer than they took my peers. Harriet felt like I did, "She hated math. She hated math with every bone in her body. She spent so much time hating it that she never had time to do it. She didn't understand it at all, not a word. She didn't even understand anyone who did understand it. She always looked at them suspiciously. Did they have some part of the brain that she didn't have? Was there a big hole missing in her head where all the math should be?" (139).

But then, as I became a habitual reader, and started keeping a notebook like Harriet, stories just started tumbling out of me. My teachers noticed. My classmates noticed. I was getting the six out of six on prompts; I was getting the Outstanding Writer award; I was selected to give my D.A.R.E speech. *Harriet the Spy* changed me, so not only did I see myself in the novel, but I also found myself through it (as much as a fourth grader can find oneself, or oneself at the time). My relationship with this novel was only the beginning of a succession of reading relationships I would experience throughout my life; books would find me at just the right time, leaving me different than I was before I met them. But Harriet was my first, and they say you never forget your first love.

You also never forget your first bully. Mine lived up the street from me, and like a typical girl-bullying relationship, one day she was my friend, and the next day she was not. This lasted throughout elementary school, up until the end of middle school, when we parted ways for separate high schools. I'm not going to pretend I was an innocent victim or that this girl was evil; that's not really the point. I don't remember what was said, although I do remember how I felt, and my struggle to understand why she hated me. Why doesn't she like me? What is wrong with me? Similar questions would pop up throughout my life. Will they like me? Do they like me? The point is that in Harriet I found my reality reflected back at me. While I would continually struggle with acceptance, of myself mostly, I found Harriet's example to be inspiring. She accepted herself.

Harriet's nanny, Ole Golly, helps Harriet to learn self-acceptance. Ole Golly is very much her own person, and Harriet mimics her "tell it like it is" approach, especially in her spy notebook. When Harriet's observations turn malicious though, Ole Golly responds with a letter of advice. She writes, "Little lies that make people feel better are not bad, like thanking

someone for a meal they made even if you hated it, or telling a sick person they look better when they don't, or someone with a hideous new hat that it's lovely. Remember that writing is to put love in the world, not to use against your friends. But to yourself you must always tell the truth" (276).

Harriet's classmates ostracize her for writing her opinions, her truth (the ugly truth), in her notebook, which they discover and read aloud. Whereas she at first allows the nasty treatment from her peers to upset her, she doesn't let it keep her down for very long. Harriet continues to write in her notebook and refuses to censor her thoughts. She continues to write her truth, and one day she writes, in the midst of everybody "hating" her, "I LOVE MYSELF" (210). She is a character who is far from the perfect "nice girl," but she loves herself still, and that is the example girls need. We don't need any more lessons on how to please people. We don't need to change ourselves just because "everybody hates me" (194). We don't need to be the "nice girls." It is more important to be the honest girls: honest with each other and honest with ourselves. Although Harriet's honesty lacks tact, she learns how to protect her friends' feelings by the end of the novel.

"I'M GLAD I'M NOT PERFECT—I'D BE BORED TO DEATH" (68).

So really, it wasn't just Harriet who inspired me, it was Louise Fitzhugh, who wrote a novel that represented real kids, with not a perfect outcome; Harriet still has a lot to learn, just like I did (and still do). In 1964, when the novel was published, "it set up a whirlwind of controversy about realism in children's books, something that wasn't much seen at that time." Fitzhugh's New York Times' obituary, published November 19, 1974, states, "The book helped introduce a new realism to children's fiction and has been widely imitated."

Harriet records pieces of Ole Golly's wisdom in her notebook, and one piece in particular has become a philosophy I live by: "PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEIR WORK LOVE LIFE" (72). Even though I read *Harriet the Spy* as a fourth grader, this novel set me on a path that led to my chosen profession as an English teacher. It wasn't exactly a direct path, but a path nonetheless. Fitzhugh and Harriet also helped carve another path, one followed by Young Adult lit, a genre of which I'm a passionate reader and supporter to this day. I want my students to read books with real characters, and I want them to construct their identities through the books and characters that inspire them. I want them to see their lives reflected in the books they read—their experiences, although not necessarily the answers.

I am now a teacher who takes risks because I know the power of finding oneself in literature. I still keep a spy notebook, eavesdropping on my students' conversations, or just recording the hilarious things they say to me; I want my writing to be real. As Harriet once inspired me, now my students do, and maybe one day I will put some love in the world.

Works Consulted

<http://www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/birthbios/brthpage/10oct/10-5fitzhugh.html>
<http://purple-socks.webmage.com/obit.htm>

A Christmas Memory

By Stephen Carey

Christmas has always been one of my family's favorite holidays. Growing up, there seemed to be at least one interesting family story for every Christmas. Many of these are happy stories; some are even quite funny and endearing. Then there are those stories that need to be told, the stories that may not portray people in the best light, but still show the wacky dynamic that my family, and I guess many other families, have.

Of all the stories I can remember of the holidays, none has been more often retold or celebrated than the story of a Christmas morning in a year I can't remember. This is not one of those sweet stories of a Christmas years ago that warms your heart and makes you feel good. Well I guess it could make you feel good that it's not your family. Out of all the tales I could tell this one probably represents my family the best, albeit not in the best light. I am going to guess that I was about five or six years old at the time of the account. I know this because my sister Liza had to be about three. My sister and I were insanely excited for Christmas; actually I miss that excitement, and it is an unchecked feeling that I have lost over the years and one of those things that makes me miss being a child. Our parents were holding their customary Christmas Eve dinner party with their friends, who also happened to be the parents of my friends, making Christmas a joyous holiday every year. As was the "policy," my parents had a very well stocked bar for that and every Christmas party.

That Christmas party was forgettable, very similar to others. I remember being incredibly excited about everything, my sister and myself running around the house trying to will the hours away so that we could get our presents. We played with our friends, drinking soda and just being kids. It was during this time that the adults engaged in their own activities. My parents were much more active and social then, with tons of company, and drinks. Needless to say, my parents may have imbibed too much; actually I am sure that they imbibed too much. In other words, they were fucked up. My sister and I were blissfully unaware of this fact, though we always noticed the subtle changes in behavior; we had no idea that they were drunk. I have no idea when we went to bed, but I am sure that my parents were up much, much later.

Despite their condition, my parents were still quite dutiful, arranging our gifts around the living room. I guess Santa just dropped them off; it was my parent's job to sort them out. Like many children that age, on Christmas night I was very restless, tossing and turning, just waiting for morning to come, bringing the excitement of all those toys, and hopefully not that many clothes. My sister was, like many children of that age, also insanely excited for Christmas to arrive.

Liza is a quiet, polite, and caring girl. Even at the age of three these qualities were fully evident. She would go around the party cleaning up after all the guests and just being plain adorable. She always got a so much attention for her incredibly curly hair, and her pleasant demeanor. Now, I am not trying to say Liza was perfect by any means, but put her next to me and she was damn close.

Christmas was our favorite holiday; both of us were amped when it came to Christmas. Liza, especially, had this sweet innocence when it came to Christmas, she was so thrilled that the holiday was here, she was getting tons of presents and got to spend some time with her family. This was truly the best times of the year for me and Liza. I always liked Christmas over my birthday because there was no yearly doctor's appointment coupled

with it. There were parties with all of our friends, and of course since we were typical materialistic children, we could not wait for our presents. As the night wore on we lay sleeplessly in our beds. I awoke to find that my little sister had snuck into my bed, as she sometimes did on nights that she could not sleep for whatever reason. As soon as the sun came up Liza was ready to go, she woke me up and proceeded to my parents' room down the hall. My parents had probably gone to bed not three hours earlier, and as I would learn in my adult years, if you stay up that late drinking, well, you don't feel all that great in the morning. My parents were of course no exception.

My sister, unaware of our parents' current state, bounded into their room. She was shouting, and squealing with the pure unblemished joy that only someone under the age of five can have. This was not the absolute best attitude to have when dealing with our parents' delicate state. "Mommy, Daddy wake up, it's Christmas!" she announced with elation. At this point I can only imagine the regret my mother had for having those last half dozen drinks.

Before proceeding, I feel the need to give some background information about my mother. My mom is a very blunt individual. This is a woman who had no problem telling her six year old son that he almost died on the operating table. She does not pull punches and I love her for that. In fact it is this unabashed honesty that I want to have with my own children one day. Needless to say there was very little sugarcoating going on in my household and it was something that even at that young age we were used to. Although, even my mother tried to hold her tongue on Christmas morning.

My parents were enjoying what little sleep they knew they could get, and trying to forget the mistakes of the night before. All of this while dealing with a hyper-excited three year old, all of these factors finally converged into one single breaking point. After listening to Liza for what to her probably seemed like hours she rolled over, looked Liza in the eye and said, "Fuck you! Bah Humbug." Then rolled over and attempted to go back to sleep. I cannot say exactly what Liza was thinking at this time but I can imagine she had no clue what the fuck was going on. This less than positive reaction caused my sister to run back into my room crying, thinking that she had done something very wrong. I can only imagine that my poor mother immediately regretted that last statement. Finally I had to be the big boy and get up and go to my parents' room to wake them up, no matter what they said.

It should also be noted that my mother was wearing a nightshirt from Atlantic City that had bah humbug written on it. If her statement did not properly convey her mood, her shirt certainly did. In a few short minutes we were in the living room, ready to begin our Christmas routine. My mother was of course still wearing her nightshirt, which thankfully Liza could not read yet. She spent a good portion of the morning apologizing to my sister for her unfortunate use of words. Though she is harsh, my mother is still and incredibly caring parent. Of course I have no clue what presents I received that year, but the best present is definitely the story that we all tell now.

Rise Up

By Rose Clack

Silver and Gold,
I do not have.
But such as I do,
I surely will give.

As a man thinketh so is he—

Take up your bed!
Take up your cross!
Help Yourself!
You are not lame!

Rise Up and Walk!

Why do you carry that lame man around?
Always looking for sympathy,
Misguided love,
Enabled in your mind,
Sincerely you are wrong!
You are not weak!
You are strong!

As a man thinketh so is he—

Those material things cannot help you!
Others cannot forever carry you!
If only I had this, If only I had that...
Rid yourself of those paralyzed thoughts!

Rise Up and Walk!

Hey, I'm talking to you!
Does he live in your house?
Those excuses you make,
Only cripple you!

As a man thinketh so is he!

Why do you carry that lame man around?
Begging and pleading,
For a meager existence,
Helplessly entitled,

Stagnated and bound.

You are not sick!
You are well!

Rise Up and Walk

Lay your burdens down!
Possess your liberation!
Forgive and let live!
Throw off those grave clothes, now!

As a man thinketh so is he—

A dissatisfied soul,
You murmur and complain,
Of your thirsty and parched land,
Don't be overtaken!

Rise Up and Walk!

Stop carrying that lame man around!
The path is set before you,
The choice is yours,
Don't be a fool!
Press your way through!
You are not deaf!
Listen,
You can hear!

As a man thinketh so is he—

At the Rooftop Garden: A Memoir

By Jena DeMaio

Like an Impressionist painting, that warm October afternoon stands as a snapshot in my memory, a part of a soft reality. Colors are vibrant and the skyline of Manhattan commands our attention. Similar to a Renoir painting, the layers build. Wet paint is applied directly over wet paint, before the initial layer is dried. The effect is those soft, warm, intermingling colors. Every layer of paint matters. Every moment between me and my sister matters.

Some say that the Empire State Building is the closest thing to Heaven in New York City. I disagree. The Rooftop Garden at the Metropolitan Museum of Art carries you to Heaven's door. Outside, in the open air, under the warmth of the sun, Mary and I breathe in the City. We feel its majesty, its power, its life. Just like in Impressionism, the colors reflect from every object, light plays with the eyes and the senses. The light beckons, calling for us to look, observe, understand.

Ornate sculptures fill the Rooftop Garden – beautiful works of art, intelligence, creativity. They make us pause, stop for a moment, for they are like paint applied impasto. Short, thick strokes of paint used quickly to help capture the essence of the Garden, the City, the bond between me and Mary.

While we sit on a bench, I don't look at my watch with the gold face and dark Roman Numerals. Mary does not feel the brown leather watch band around her wrist. Time stops here. Time stops, and the optical mixing of colors transpires. The city skyline becomes a plein-air painting and we are part of it. We are part of the edges, the colors, the light.

Mary and I sit on the bench for a while, eating biscotti, drinking coffee, watching the city, the people. We talk about the tapestries we just saw inside, the ancient Roman pottery, the gold altar pieces from Prague. How we now hope to reach Prague someday! But the background of our day slowly fades and we sit only in this moment. In the way that Degas relaxes the boundary between subject and background, the effect of his paintings, like the Rooftop Garden, resembles a more complete reality. However, to me, my Impressionist painting in time would not be complete without Mary. Renoir once said that he leaned on Monet, their bond gave him life. Renoir says, "Without him I should have given up." Without Mary, I would not have this moment, this understanding, this love.

Custodian

By Max Echevarría

Here we go again. It's like that movie, "Ground Hog Day," an endless loop of the same day. I've walked through these same doors for 19 years now. Like yesterday and the day before, the smears on the windows are situated so perfectly as to prevent me from peering into the corridors that are as familiar to me as my own children. The halls twist and turn like the pipes hidden within a home's walls. What really sucks about this home is the fact that it feels like the storm of the century hits here on a daily basis. You know what this place needs? It needs its own disaster relief organization...unfortunately, it looks like I am it, and you know what I get to fight these daily disasters? A two year old Rubbermaid bucket and a dust mop with a broken handle that's sutured with the all-important duct tape. I'm guessing an upgrade to a 2010 dustbuster is out of the question now that the budget is cut another 10%. Whatever, the story of my life. It's what I get for choosing this profession, not that I had a choice.

Look at these kids, loitering around here, thinking they own the place. They can't even keep their pants up. The boys buying pants two sizes too big and the girls two sizes too small and you know what's on their mind 24/7. Everyone knows where they're headed, they keep this up and they're gonna end up like me, dreams gone and pushing a broom. I don't know how those teachers do it. All you gotta do is listen to what these kids say and you know they aren't even interested in learning what they gotta learn to live life. Too bad they don't get it, there ain't no doing things over...they'll find out though.

First stop, the main office, the brains of this organization, or so they like to think. After years of watching principals come and go, I kinda like this one. She's young, new and attractive, that is if she would just lay off the Clairol extra blond. She works way too long, but few people know that she grew up just around the corner from the school and her dad started off doing exactly what I'm doing. Then there's the secretary; who is she kidding, I mean really lady, you think people don't notice your little crush on the Ken doll upstairs. If you want to keep it on the down low, how about not leaving the little notes tucked away so close to the wastebasket. Ugh! Anyway, back to work. Pick up the garbage cans and empty into larger ones. Oh brother! Look what they did again, and these people call themselves educators, I mean really, if it's blue with R-E-C-Y-C-L-E written in bright white letters, why the hell would they empty trash in here. Hello! White paper only, it's not as if you don't have enough of that laying around the floor. Ok, keeping calm...gotta finish, put new bags in. If I do this quietly and long enough, I might catch something happening. After all it's not as if anyone notices what I'm doing. Oh wait, what was that, new vice principal coming? Wonder what's happening to the other guy...maybe I'll catch that tomorrow.

I continue to walk the corridors like a sheriff in an old western, inspecting each room in my area. The fact is that I don't need to inspect anything. I already know what to expect. Each room the same. The chairs scattered, the desks completely in the wrong places. How am I supposed to do my job if the chairs are down! I guess taking 30 seconds to just put them up is too much to ask for. Don't they get it, it can take me 10 to 15 minutes and I still can't get the job started. They leave so much in my way. It's as if they do this on purpose. They must think that some magical fairy comes every night and puff! Back to the perfectly parallel rows and rectangular groups. I walk in here and my heart just sinks...like I said before it's a never-ending cycle...what's the point sometimes. The walls are all grey with smudges, the board, like a fraternal twin to the front doors, is greased up with their fingerprints. Spray, wipe, clean, spray, wipe, clean. Look at all the pencils on the floor...I'm sure they need those, so what do I do, I pick them up, put them on the tray...something so simple. What are they teaching them? Jesus, you'd think they'd at least show them how to pick up after themselves. I'm not their maid! I maintain! This looks like a construction site, but whatever, it's not like they ever see me, but when they do, not even a thank you, in 19 years, not even a thank you.

Senses of a Weekend

By Raymond Kasper

The floral colors in the Seurat painting
Were as tender as the softness of your hand.
How I didn't want to let go as we kissed, drawing
In each other's breath. I felt your heat, listened
To your voice and ignored everything else around us.
I noticed your pewter mesh watch for the first time –
Its Roman Numerals conveyed our lack of it.

The restaurant's endless din drew me closer to your side.
The whipped goat cheese, its pleasant tanginess in our mouths;
Suddenly stimulated, the corners of your red lips as they turned upward.
I wondered if you were thinking about our experiences yet to come.

I noticed when you took off your black dress that had silhouetted your body,
How it hugged your curves,
I walked over, tucked a strand of your long black hair behind your ear,
With the silver hoop earring glowing in the dim light.
I listened to your slow, steady, soft breathing as you slept.
Captured memories from the day as I drifted off to sleep.
Pulled you close in the 4am darkness.

Your silver locket reflected in the evening, city lights –
The taste of Spanish Tapas—creamy, salty, smooth and warm explosions,
The club's soft jazz embraced us as we entered,
Felt as smooth as your arm against mine.

In the air on the way home, your head against my shoulder,
The sun reflected off your watch, an unexpected flash
That told me how quickly memories are made.

Beach Day

By Alice Kuzel

You, sitting in your chair—aluminum with striped webbing—and a light blue canvas fishing hat, a long-sleeve man's shirt, concealing an ever-black bathing suit, and glasses with the clip-on shades seated cross legged with a book propped in your lap; I, with salt-drenched hair clinging to my shoulders, bottom on the cooling sand, legs outstretched before me, both hands smoothing the warm soft grains into circular patterns beneath my palms, looking at the endless sea horizon. It was a balmy day, the kind of day in which the waves lap tiredly at the shore; most of the beach-goers gone home for the afternoon. We were silent, just being. I was turning eight that summer.

I remembered this day with Nana on an afternoon in the winter of 2003, after she died. It came into my mind and unfolded like a series of photographs in an album. She died on a clear day in early July. I was turning thirty-five that summer. When I was eight, it didn't occur to me that Nana wouldn't live forever; she was so strong. At least I saw her that way when I was eight. In July of that year, after she died, the heat and rain drove many memories out from hiding and I found myself reflecting on her presence in my life.

When little children go to the seashore they often stand by the water's edge and wait for the tide to wash the sand over their feet; I used to do it for hours, mesmerized. The murmur of the ocean's coming and going on a shore of conversations lulled me into meditation. Suddenly, I would jerk my feet out of the wet, sloppy sand and watch the water fill the holes left by my feet, gently smoothing the sand flat.

When I remember this day at the beach I know that Nana was grieving, so was I. She had lost her husband the year I was born; I lost my father when I was five. She was firm in her resolution to overcome her sadness and I was hopeful. Our time together was often like this beach day—quiet. It wasn't busy or full of conversation; instead it was balmy, like the weather. Being in her sixties at the time of our beach days together, she had experienced life's losses. I believe that I resigned myself to adapt like the sand, which molds itself to the tides.

Shortly after my oldest daughter was born in 1990, Nana bought a new bathing suit. It was a skirted one-piece with big, bold, pink and yellow flowers on a lime-green background. It reminded me of a bedspread from the 60s and made me smile. Nana loved that suit, but I don't remember her wearing it. She hung it on her bedroom door. My grandparents were married 31 years. I imagine that her sixties were a time for reinventing herself and her marriage because their children were grown and having families of their own. I am saddened by the brevity of this time they shared and sometimes feel apprehensive about the uncertainty of life.

It took my mother and me two years to clean Nana's house after she died. Many times we had coffee and listened to the old records on the turntable while going through papers and piles of clothing. Out in the yard, my husband continued to hang buckets from the maple trees and collected sap for syrup. The girls would sled in the backyard and come in to warm up in the living room while my mother and I went through the odds and ends of eighty-six years of collecting. Occasionally, we would go and just have coffee and talk in the living room. Eventually, we made piles ourselves of things to keep, and things to give away, things to go to good will, things ultimately for the dump and those that could be sold. In reflection it seems that piles tell us about the lives we lead. Piles of records, CDs, books read and

unread, things to do, bills to pay, mail to sort, mail to mail, music notation, laundry to do or fold or put away, piles of wood, newspapers. Piles: they all have stories to tell.

As I sit here looking out at the maples, in the middle of what has become a long, cold winter, I see them with their plastic milk-jugs hanging functionally at their sides, I remember that when the sap starts running it flows and halts as the weather permits until it suddenly stops for another season. We collect the clear fluid while it's flowing to preserve it for the remainder of the year that is dry; like memories, we make them and they're there for the times when we need to recall them.

As I sit looking out the window at the still frozen ground I know will eventually thaw, I am thankful for the silence. This long winter offers respite and time for mediation and contemplation. Before we know it the snow will melt away, the bulbs will poke their greens out of the ground, the new-green leaves of the trees will show themselves, and the tides of our lives flow again.

My First Student: A Personal Essay

By Alexandra Mannheim

With a black do-rag pulled tight around his head and baggy pants showing off the very top of his boxers, he was my first student to come to class on my very first day teaching at an urban community college. He walked with confidence towards me, and had brightness to his demeanor.

“Are you the professor?” he asked, and I said, “Yes,” as he extended his hand. Although he didn’t say so, I could tell he was a bit surprised by how young I was. I was fresh out of graduate school, about half his age, and rather naïve. “Malik*,” he said, to which I replied “Alexa, nice to meet you.” “You know, I just wanted to let you know,” he started to say, “I’m sort of in my second phase of life, if you know what I mean. I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my first phase, and I’m starting over. I’m 43. I don’t have a lot of chances. This is it for me.” There was a pregnant pause, as I took in the gravity of what this man was communicating to me. I don’t recall how I responded to his comment, other than knowing that my response was completely insufficient.

One of my most inspirational students yet, Malik was someone who had the drive to succeed, remarkable character, great intelligence and warmth. I, being Jewish, white, middle class, and from a well-educated family in the suburbs, had my own misconceptions about urban life. Malik changed my view of what it means to be an African-American Muslim man who was recently discharged from prison.

I was too nervous that morning to eat breakfast, convinced that I couldn’t keep anything down. I had arrived early to set up the classroom, only to find that I had to supply my own chalk. Feeling like I was headed for disaster, I walked into the secretary’s office and I waited for her to pull up my roster since I wasn’t yet in the system. She offered me food since my stomach was grumbling. Malik was there early as well, having gotten up early for morning prayers, and his presence not only put me at ease, but affirmed for me why I was there, and reminded me to do a damn good job as a teacher.

It was that introduction to him, my welcome to the school, which solidified my belief that I was in the right place. Where else would I have the opportunity to meet someone like Malik?

It was on my very first day that I began the dismantling of the architecture of my mind. Having grown up in an Orthodox community, I had been taught to fear people like Malik—they were dangerous, violent, blood-thirsty. I had seen the videos of Black Muslim clerics shouting “Death to the Jews” in Arabic and wielding knives as they bellowed over the pulpit. I had read the writings of Muslim terrorists looking to kill Jews wherever they could be found, even hiding behind rocks. Fear begets fear, as the people in one community would fear those in other communities, and in turn the people in other communities would reciprocate.

Despite the fear that was ingrained in me, Malik stood before me as a student who I instantly liked. Over the course of the semester, I got to know this incredible person. I learned that during the time he spent in prison, he converted to Islam, and his faith gave him the courage to pursue trampled dreams. He had not been a part of his son’s life until recently, but now he was the father that many young men would long for. Malik told his son to go to college, and his son had said, “Why should I? You never went to college.” Now, they’re both enrolled in school. Malik worked his ass off in my class and earned a good grade. He injected

humor into the class. I remember on one occasion, I had divided the class into teams of three. He named his team “Three’s Company,” and another group named their team, “In Living Color.” “Wait a minute,” he said, “No, no, no. We’re the *Urban* Three’s Company.” Everyone laughed. On another occasion, when a student and I were arguing over an answer to a question, the student said: “Miss, I know where your car be at.” Malik responded to that comment by standing up, turning himself around to face the student, and saying with a commanding presence: “Don’t say that to her! She’s from the suburbs.” Although the student was trying to be funny, I appreciated that Malik had defended me. He cooked delicious Middle Eastern food that he shared with the class; I still remember the taste of the lamb salad. His email address had the word Salaam followed by a number. He even included daily literary quotes on the homepage of his Internet browser. On one occasion, he shared with me how surprised a friend of his was to find out that he knew how to write a thesis statement. “You see me, and I’m all academic. But you don’t know this about me, I’m actually streetwise, too,” he explained to me.

During a particular class, we read an essay about sacrifice. It described how many current and historical figures fought for a cause at the expense of their families. I gave the example of Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., who engaged in civil disobedience even though he knew that it could lead to arrest or assassination. I asked the students to imagine what it would be like to be his children, to be neglected that way in the fight for freedom. “What about Malcolm X?” Malik’s voice boomed from the front row. Malcolm X, a controversial, militant Black Muslim, was someone who I would never have considered while planning my lesson.

Having grown up with the inherited trauma from my grandfather’s experience as a Holocaust survivor, I have yearned my entire life to meet my family who perished, and those who would have been descended from them but never got the chance to breathe. I think back to my grandfather’s family—parents, four sisters and a baby brother—who all suffered the unthinkable. How could it even be explained? Malcolm X, therefore, was a particularly vile character to me. I had heard audio of Malcolm X screaming into the microphone words that trivialized my grandfather’s memory, and those who had been murdered. It was at that moment in the classroom when I had to re-evaluate my views of Malcolm X. For Malik, this man represented strength, dignity, and a refusal to surrender in the fight for African-American rights. In fact, Malcolm X’s words and life had inspired Malik to return to school. The man who called on his followers “not to shed crocodile tears for the Jew,” was the same man who called education “a passport to the future.” Malik, steadfast and resolute, sitting in the front row, was damn sure going to get his degree “by any means necessary.”

I still run into Malik in the hallways. Whenever I do, he continues to shake my hand. There is so much that I don’t know about him, including why he went to prison. I’m sure that there is an entire well of rich life experiences that I’ve only seen the surface of. I do know that this man has profoundly affected my worldview, and given me reason to teach. I now know that two people can coexist on the hyphen of two vastly different worlds. “I’ve always wanted a degree,” Malik once told me while we were working on his essay after class, “Always.” What he didn’t realize was that while I may have been his teacher, he gave me an education.

* Student’s name and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect privacy.

Losing (*excerpt*)

By Eric Maroney

The night Magdelyn's husband, Major Krupp, decides he will accept the company transfer after all and take the post in Arizona at the new Marlin Firearms plant for the year, they sit down to dinner in the three bedroom cape, where together they have raised two children on a quiet cul-de-sac in the north end of town. Magdelyn is thinking of the modern townhouse that the firearms company will provide for them, the vase of orchids that will sit on the marble counter, the stainless steel refrigerator and the leather accent furnishings she has always wanted but never asked for. She is alive with a girlish joy as she arranges the serving plates and lays down the meatloaf she had baked earlier that afternoon, careful not to upset the water glasses with the weight of her frame.

At the table, Clark, their youngest, pushes his food around the plate.

"What's the matter?" Major asks between mouthfuls of peas. His voice still carries the harsh intonations of a youth in Staten Island and Magdelyn wonders if her own accent remains too. It all seems so long ago: the rent stabilized building she lived in with her parents, the cat who hid behind the olive rattan chair, the windows that looked out over a parking lot, beyond that an A&P and further still, a little park where you could stand and watch the Statue of Liberty if the sky was just right. It was in that apartment that Magdelyn watched her mother decline as the weight layered on. She could remember kneeling on the living room floor to wash behind her mother's knees with a metal bucket of lukewarm water and a sponge.

"Your mother is not well, Magdelyn," her father said to her one night as they stood washing the dishes together. He said this as if it was something she hadn't known, as if she were unaware of the pressure sores that gathered among her mother's hips, or as if she hadn't been there when the building super had come to re-size the doorways so her mother could pass through. She knew all this and more. Doctors believed it to be a glandular problem, maybe the thyroid, but Magdelyn knew better. She saw the pound cakes, the custards, the cannoli and Bavarian cream donuts her mother put away when no one was looking. Eating was a secret that together they shared.

Some pastry for Mama, her mother would whisper pressing a folded bill into Magdelyn's fingers as she dressed for school in the tiny bedroom where the dim light that filtered through the blinds cast stripes against her body. Now, this same fate has become her own and as she sits at the table feeling her body swim all around her it still feels unreal. Even after all these years.

"I'm not going," Clark answers after a moment. "I finally make varsity this year and you're telling me I have to move." He drops his fork against the plate, which lands in a clatter and pushes his blonde hair from his face. Magdelyn folds her arms; Major looks up from behind the newspaper.

"I won't go," Clark presses. He has always been a vocal child, not at all like his brother whose quiet presence had filled the cape with a stoic balance only Magdelyn seemed to notice. This is her secret: Kyle is her favorite, Kyle is the son she loves best, Kyle, who, on his second term in Iraq, still sends photographs from basic training, labeling them Baghdad, Sadr City and Falujah. She shakes her head, pushing the thought away, and finds herself stranded between her husband and youngest son. The three have had so many dinners together, each the same—their heads silently ducking into their plates like animals leaning to drink from a pool of water.

Major glances at Magdelyn from across the table and sighs. There is an air in the room signaling something about to be undone. Magdelyn is quiet. She presses her fingers to the plastic tablecloth, scratching at a crumb that's trapped beneath. What she is doing is holding her

breath, what she is doing is waiting for the other shoe to fall, holding out for the moment Major will make a decision about their life together and where it is they are going to be.

“I have to give a decision by tomorrow,” Major says as he reaches across the table towards her. It is a gesture of civility but not love. A spot of gravy has nested in his moustache but Magdelyn pretends not to notice. Next to her, Clark leafs through the pages of a muscle car magazine. His narrow elbows rest on the table.

“It’s a good deal. The pension, the salary, and Clark, you will be able to go to BU like you wanted.” Major pauses to chew over a lump of meatloaf, eyeing the boy as he speaks. Clark looks up from his magazine. Magdelyn sits absolutely still.

“You can’t make me go,” Clark tells them. He shrugs his thin shoulders and tosses the magazine onto the chair beside him where it lands in a flutter of pages.

Major turns to his wife. He lets out a sigh and then tells her, “You’ll have to stay with him.”

Magdelyn winces. Her eyes grow thin as she concentrates on those words. “Major,” she finally says in a voice that is barely audible, “shouldn’t we talk about this?” In a moment her hopes have been dashed. The new home, the marble counters, the vase, the accent furnishings—gone. She gulps for air and steadies herself gripping the lip of the table; the new neighbors, the fresh start, her husband—gone. Suddenly, she is struck by the permanence of this undoing and she can’t imagine what a year alone will bring. Magdelyn leans over her plate where a hunk of meatloaf is growing cold and watches where the skin of her forearm sags to meet the table. She feels like a sack of tissue. No bones, just meat and eyes.

“The boy is a senior. He is the starting pitcher for the Oysters this year and they could win the title,” Major’s voice booms throughout the tiny kitchen cluttered with the knick-knacks they have collected throughout nineteen years.

“Oh we will win that title,” Clark interrupts.

A smile creeps across Major’s thin lips, “A man will not have too many opportunities in his life to shine this way,” he eyes Magdelyn as he speaks and in his words she hears his threat.

* * *

The night Magdelyn’s father told her that the family would be taking her out of school, she had stayed late at the park watching the ferries cruise alongside the Verrazano Bridge, running up steep stairs that had been cemented into the hill and tumbling after her friends where it crested in a descending game of tag. She walked home under the street lamps and when she reached her building, her father’s shadow paced the window of their apartment. “I want you home early, Magdelyn,” he said slapping a forkful of spaghetti onto her plate. “Your mother is sick and I need you here.”

She hadn’t known then what to make of his tone—this man whose severe voice and stern look told her it was better not to ask questions. Even now, Magdelyn remembers something in his touch as he cupped the base of her then slender neck that said *I’m sorry*.

No Hay Nada Como Una Madre

By Jessica Mueller

Dear Gramma,

It's been a while since I've written anything to you. I used to love making you holiday cards. Each time I visited you in Flushing, I knew I could expect to see them on the freezer door of your faded vanilla refrigerator, posted up by a miscellaneous real-estate magnet that Uncle Frank picked up at a bank. My cards were neighbors to that unsightly old Christmas picture of me and my brothers from 1998.

Every once in a while I could hear you singing. You were so theatrical when you really got into it. For a few minutes you would take your hands, rough from years of dishwashing, away from the Chi-Chi popping with grease on the stove and let them float in the air to the rhythm of your song. Your floral dress would sway as you danced. As kids we sort of rolled our eyes once you were really in the zone because it was always some old Spanish song we had never heard of. But the more we pleaded, "Grammaaaa stooooop," the deeper belly-breaths you would take, sinking the tone of your voice to hold the last note with such strength and drama, hands raised in the air, muscles tight, stiff posture—it was almost comical.

As I got older and you got sicker, I missed hearing you sing. I don't think I ever saw you so happy. It baffled me how, even in some of your worst states, you could remember a song you hadn't heard in sixty years, but not how old you were.

Mom and I still joke about that night before we left Spain for the last time. It was in the midst of the threat of more terrorist attacks in the States, the day after they found the liquid bombs and started prohibiting electronics in carry-ons, fearing that they were detonators. Mom was spinning the dial of your old brown cord phone vigorously, trying to reach someone who could tell us what we were allowed to bring on the plane. She was stressed the hell out—I could tell by the way she was practically holding her breath, gripping the receiver with white knuckles; the visible tenseness in her shoulders. And I, of course, was freaking out about the fact that I might have to face a seven hour flight without an iPod. Standing in a pile of anxiety, we heard you from down the hall exclaim, *Look at me* in the most juvenile tone you were capable of, and we turned to see one of Christopher's neon orange toys wiggling on top of your head. We all burst out in relieving laughter. Sometimes I wonder if that was a sign.

I miss having you around to model the evidence of a long day at the mall; the way you would hold the material between your finger tips, tell me to spin around, pat my *coolito* gently with the proudest smile and say, *mina nena*. Maybe it was *your* patience with *me* that always kept me from telling you on the phone that that I had just heard the same story from you not three minutes before—verbatim. I remember only once, I cut you off and said, "yes, Gramma, the guy down the street left his garbage in front of the house again—don't you remember you just told me this?" I hope you know that question generated from concern and not impatience. I felt horrible afterwards when you slowly answered, "Oh... yea?" and it

wouldn't be the last time you would confess, in that beautiful Spanish accent, "You know, sometimes, my hearin es not so good." I could picture your head shaking in disappointment next to the receiver, held by a trembling hand.

Do you remember the first time you told me you were dying? I was in 8th grade. You didn't die until seven years later. You always talked about *my* mom's strength and *your* mom's strength, but you were always underestimating your own.

Speaking of mom, we could sure use you here to help break the news to her that she's gained some weight. Remember the time you gave her your two cents about Lydia shoveling bread into her mouth? At least by then we could blame your frankness on your disease. Now do you see why mom and I would always prep you before meeting with certain family members, in the fear that you might say something you shouldn't? Mom would tell you over and over, *Ma, no le digas eso* and you would look at her through the corners of your eyes with that menacing smile, and nod your head *yes*, to motion that you were complying, but we knew you wouldn't. That nod was only to acknowledge that you heard what she said. And once you let out whatever cat was in the bag, we would smack our foreheads in a "there she goes again" gesture and mom and I would just look at each other and laugh. Lydia did put down the bread after that, so maybe you did her a favor.

I try to think of these laughable memories more often than the grim memories of you in a faded blue hospital gown, but unfortunately that was your attire for the last few years we had together. I hated the way some of the family was afraid to touch you, like Alzheimer's was a sickness you could catch. Mom rubbed your aching body for hours in a desperate attempt to make you feel even minutely comfortable. I followed her lead. I reminded myself that you were not a hospital patient, you were my grandmother. The same person who cuddled me with bleeding knees when I ran too fast on the sidewalk, and fed me two extra bowls of Neapolitan ice cream after dinner.

One thing I am very thankful for is how much time I spent with you in the years nearing your grand departure. One thing I regret is not spending that time together sooner before the disease stole so much of your memory. Did you know how many times I came to visit you? Did you remember? I often wonder if God filled in the blanks for you once you met him. It's hard for me sometimes to believe in Him when most of me wants to blame Him for letting you suffer for so long. For erasing most of your past. For making my mother explain to you over and over that your mother never came to visit you in the hospital because she died eight years ago. For letting us spend Christmas watching you wilt away in a psych ward. For letting the nurses drug you up so much that you couldn't possibly put up a fight when they stole your wedding ring, your only lasting piece of Grampa. But part of me still believes in God and prays to Him at night because I am banking on His existence as a means of seeing you again one day. It gives me hope.

You know, I haven't been to your house since the day of your funeral. I wonder if dad has taken down the little things which used to hang on the fridge that made your house a home to us as well. I think I understand why dad is cleaning out the house rather than mom; I don't think mom could bear it. I think she stays away from it for the same reason I haven't

come to retrieve your old furniture for my new apartment: taking those possessions out of your home finalizes the fact that you are no longer with us.

I remember after a day of long visiting hours, mom told me about a conversation you had with her about missing *your* mother. In this conversation you told her, *no hay nada como una madre*. Mom's tears mirrored my own as we both held your sickness in our throats, and I knew what you had said was exactly right. In that moment I understood. I had never felt so connected to you, my mom, and your mom. Four generations of strong women who may have been nothing without each other.

I keep a mental photograph of you from the last day we saw each other. That familiar adoring smile and the loving recognition in your eyes told me you still knew exactly who I was. Your health, your wedding ring, and your memories were stolen from you, but even this horrible disease could not force a chasm in our bond. You were right: there is nothing like a mother. There is nothing like a grandmother either. It seemed like a sick joke that you passed away on Mother's Day, of all days. But I think I'm starting to understand the significance of that. I love you and I miss you dearly. Please give Grampa and Lini a squeeze for me.

With much love,
Jessiquiña

Remembering Debbie

By Bernie Schreiber

October 18, 1989. “Good morning, Kevin. Did you get enough sleep last night?” Debbie greeted one of her charges as he sauntered towards her. While other students made their way through the hallway to their rooms, Debbie focused on one little boy.

“Yes. Mom made me go to bed at 8:30, but I read for an hour.” Kevin, one of her fourth graders, smiled impishly. “She didn’t know.”

“As long as you don’t fall asleep in class, you’re allowed to stay with us,” Debbie joked and winked at Kevin. He beamed at her. “Go on in, sweetie, and start your morning routine.” At that moment, Debbie eyed another boy swing the front door to the school open and begin his sprint towards her.

“Jack, honey,” she began, holding her right hand up as a stop sign. “You know you shouldn’t be running in the hallway.”

“Sorry, Mrs. Sullivan. I wasn’t thinking.”

She gently cupped his face in her hands. “You’re such a wonderful person. I wouldn’t want you to get a bad reputation. Why don’t you go back to the door and show me that you know how to come into this school. Thank you.”

Without a word, Jack complied. The building buzzed with students as more buses emptied their cargos. At the end of the main corridor, Debbie waited outside her room and greeted every one of her students by name and by recognition of their uniqueness.

I last saw her alive on Friday, August 16, 1991 at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. A group of colleagues from the Ashford School wanted to visit with her. She was not in good shape. Cancer was ravaging her body and she knew she had a short time left. Rhabdomyosarcoma. A relatively rare childhood cancer. How does a young woman in her mid-twenties get this? No answer.

She was not in pain. Morphine and sedatives took care of that. When she asked to speak with me privately, I wheeled her into an empty visitors’ lounge. With every ounce of strength she had, she looked at me and told me that she was dying.

“I wish it was different, but everything that could be done was done,” she said in a soft raspy voice. “I can’t fight this any more, and I don’t want to.”

We had become friends almost from the start of her career in Ashford. In many ways, we were an odd couple, but she saw a mentor and I saw a wounded soul. We were good for each other. And now in this sterile lounge, Debbie was saying goodbye to me. She told me not to be concerned for her. She was at peace with herself and just wanted to have enough time to say goodbye to her friends and family. She didn’t want to prolong the pain and suffering that accompanied her disease, not just for herself, but also for those closest to her. Yet that’s not why she wanted to talk to me alone. We all knew she didn’t have long to live.

“Bernie.” Her voice had weakened. “I want you to give my eulogy.”

It was nine months earlier that she got the devastating news. She had been complaining about back pain and nothing seemed to work. I had urged her to go to a doctor and when she finally did, she found out the truth. It was a grapefruit-sized tumor. Surgery removed most of the tumor, but because of the multiple tendrils associated with this cancer, attachments to muscles and bones, it could not be entirely removed. Chemotherapy followed. She began to feel better and even came back to her classroom. Hope prevailed for a short time. Then it collapsed. The cancer began its final onslaught and held siege to her body.

Debbie’s life was troubled from the start. Born into a lower middle class, struggling family in northwestern Connecticut, she grew up with occasional abuse. She had talked about her alcoholic father and a younger brother who, after Debbie had permanently moved away, got himself into some problems with the local police. She had hinted of assaults in the home, but never wanted to talk about the details. These early years did leave her scarred and scared as she grew into adulthood. Her mother, who saw Debbie as different from other family members, expected her to break out of the cycle of alcoholism and dysfunction. She urged her to get away, to find her success and happiness elsewhere.

As soon as she graduated from Western Connecticut State College, Debbie left for the other side of the state. When she received her teaching certificate, she looked for jobs in northeastern Connecticut. She married Mark, her high school sweetheart, who was already working in that part of the state, bought a house in Ashford with him, and began to work at the Ashford School in September 1986.

Debbie Sullivan was a teacher, first and last. She could not have had a better calling in life, and the lives she touched could not have been more enriched. At the Ashford School, she could be seen bounding up and down the hallway, always with a smile, always anticipating the arrival of her students, and, in her fourth grade classroom, always working on authentic ways to teach and assess, long before it was fashionable and research driven.

To me, she was both a colleague and a friend. It was often difficult to separate one role from the other. As my coeditor of our union newsletter, *The Ashford Advocate*, we spent endless hours working together. In that capacity, as in teaching, “good enough” just wasn’t good enough. She wanted our newsletter to be the best. Every article had to be reread and revised. Every graphic had to be the right one in the right spot. Every issue had to meet her high standard of excellence. Her persistence did pay off. In May 1991, the Connecticut Education Association honored us with the award for the best local association newsletter in the state. She insisted on attending the award presentation with me, even without hair. She wore a scarf.

Her creativity in the classroom was also recognized. Earlier in 1991, the Connecticut Department of Education presented Debbie with a Celebration of Excellence Award for an exemplary teaching project she and another colleague submitted. “Joyful Noise” became her legacy for teachers throughout the state.

Before her illness, we had opportunities to just sit and talk. And we did. As I listened to her story and saw the pain associated with it, I urged her to get help. Eventually, she attended an Adult Children of Alcoholics meeting and discovered that two other colleagues had been going to these meeting for quite some time. She was not alone. Feeling emboldened and affirmed, Debbie had found a way to begin the healing process.

Debbie’s joy for teaching and love of reading never stopped at the classroom door or with her own students. Two years before her death, a former Ashford student, who was working at the school as a custodian, saw her reading *Alice in Wonderland* and asked her about the book.

“You look like you’re really into this book,” he observed.

“Oh, yes. It’s a wonderful fantasy for both kids and adults. You might like it.” Her enthusiasm for that book and for reading was so contagious that this young man went out, bought the book, read it, and later called her to clarify some sections of the story. She had that kind of effect on many others as well.

Debbie’s love affair with reading was evident and she wasn’t shy about sharing. She showed several of us how to make reading guides for exploring literature. She introduced us to poetry pockets and library banners. She created James’s Giant Peach and Pippi Longstocking’s house with her students. And I could always count on her to take her students on a Chinese New Year’s Dragon Parade through the halls of our school.

One day, just before the beginning of the school year, I asked her for some suggestions for activities with a book, *The Wheel on the School*, a story about children in a small community in Holland who wanted migrating storks to nest on their school.

“Is it a chapter book?” she asked.

“Yes, the chapters aren’t very long,” I answered.

“Let me borrow a copy and I’ll look it over,” she said. “I’ll have something for you on Monday.”

Over the ensuing weekend, Debbie read the book and created a packet of activities, which included a board game based on the book. The following Monday I had everything I needed to start the school year with this story. I sure didn’t expect that! Can you say authentic teaching and learning?

Her students’ lives were enriched by her gift of teaching. She loved them all as if they were her own and saw the best in every child. Sadly, she had no children of her own. By the time she had decided she was ready to have a baby, cancer was already growing in her.

Debbie had the innocence, curiosity, and fragility of a child. Yet she also had determination, strength, compassion, and wisdom. And throughout her life ran one common denominator: love. She never expected any of life’s big prizes: a Pulitzer, a Nobel, an Oscar. She took delight in the small pleasures of

life: a hug, a kiss on the cheek, a serene sunset, a full moon, walking barefoot in the sand, browsing through The Hoot Gift Shop, a ceramic cat, chicken soup, the smile on a child's face. She enjoyed life's tiny delights because she knew there was plenty for all. She taught me about life and about death and dying – with dignity and peace. So how could I say no to her final request?

August 23, 1991. St. Phillip's Church in Ashford was filled beyond capacity. Speakers had to be placed outside for those who could not get inside, but wanted to hear the service. I don't know how I got through Debbie's eulogy. I only remember some laughter when I spoke about her favorite moments. I mostly remember that, as I began to read, part of me seemed to leave my body, and I watched myself from above as if someone else were reading from the pulpit. That's probably the only way I could have made it through this most difficult moment.

There was a brief ceremony at the Westford Hill Cemetery. But here is where the most amazing and eye-opening event of that day occurred. It was an event that every teacher there remembers to this day. And it brought me closer than ever in believing that God sometimes lends a hand or shows the way. The casket had been lowered in front of the head stone and two workers began the task of shoveling the dug-up earth back into the open grave. People began their slow descent from the cemetery's hill down to the road. A soft westerly breeze tempered the humid air just a little. Mostly teachers remained.

We had planned to send balloons into the blue sky to honor Debbie one last time that day. Positioning ourselves on the hill above Debbie's grave, and spread out over a large area of the hill, we waited for the signal from Linda, one of our first-grade teachers. About thirty of us held helium-filled balloons of a variety of colors. Nobody noticed that only one person had a green one. Why should we? So the countdown began and at zero, we released the balloons. We said our goodbyes to Debbie and watched the balloons play in midair as children would at recess. They rose higher and higher with each passing second.

But then the mysterious unexplainable happened. The wind turned from the west to the east. That in itself might not be a cause for awe. But in the shifting wind, the balloons were somehow brought closer and closer, as if recess had ended and it was time to line up. And line up they did, by twos; one pair behind the other. It was a remarkable sight. If that's all we saw that day, I'd agree. Yet there's more. Out of that march of balloons came the single green one, a few feet to the left of the others, like a teacher walking her students back into the school. I don't know if this was all a big coincidence. It was, however, remarkable because, as a result of the shift in wind, the balloons, or Debbie and her class, as we all believed from that day on, were on a direct easterly flight toward the Ashford School, only a short mile away.

In his book *Among School Children*, Tracy Kidder, referring to another teacher, but just as applicable to Debbie, wrote, "Even the most troubled children had attractive qualities for her. Even the most toughened, she always felt, wanted to please her and wanted her to like them, no matter how perversely they expressed it. She belonged among school children. They made her confront sorrow and injustice. They made her feel useful. Again this year, some needed more help than she could provide. There were many problems that she hadn't solved. But it wasn't for lack of trying. She hadn't given up. She had run out of time."

Isn't that the truth about all of us who have embarked on this journey called teaching? Year after year, we want so much more for our students and we just run out of time. But we come back with renewed hope the following year. We say, "Let me try again." There are always new souls to nurture, to save, all beyond the written curriculum. Debbie knew this innately. I loved her for it and I was blessed to drink from her soul.

And now as summer drifts its carefree way toward September, to the first days of school, I remember Debbie as she was with her joyful noise and as she would want me to remember her. And in that remembrance, give her life once again.

A Poem for Bobby

By Jenna Senft

The Glory Days

“Stay away from the Hooligan boy!” my mom’s words ring;
A tried and true trouble-maker,
Funniest kid I knew.
Mr. Eberle’s worst nightmare,
“The Golden Foot” we called him
Serving punishments on the football bench,
With his valuable kicking foot losing value.
“Don’t put it out with your boots, Ted!”
We shout our favorite *“Billy Madison”* lines in class,
He had his demons.
Looking closer, head down, hands folded, left thumb encompassed by his brown birthmark,
Tension, worry, inside of his eyes never revealed.
Getting out would do him much good,
His life would take a turn in the right direction.

A Fresh Start

He headed south to Middle Tennessee State University,
Clanking our red keg cups together, we sent him off.

2 days later we hear: Orientation by Arrest.
Public Intoxication.
His reputation from home clings to him like a shadow...

But he improved.
He joined a frat and his grades went up.
He started dating.

Each time he was home, his southern accent had gotten thicker.
“How Ya’ll Doin?” he would say,
We knew him before the acquisition of his newfound southern drawl.

A Cold Winter

Snow fell by the inch on that December night,
“Where are you guys? Bob just got here.”
A text zapped up on my phone,
A text I would never delete. Ingrained forever.
Firmly packed snow below our feet
The beep beep of snow plows reversing,
And into the Vic House we go.
Adam and Bobby sit, awaiting our arrival,
With 4 celebratory shots.
We are home for the holidays!

He wore his UConn basketball sweatshirt,

Even with that country twang he remained a CT boy at heart.

“Don’t you ladies look beautiful—Give me a kiss!”

He noogied our heads in a bear hug.

There was something he wasn’t telling us,

3 sheets to the wind and we didn’t notice.

Pete the Bartender re-filled our drinks

6 college students: Reunited. Home from Tennessee. Central. Bryant. UConn.

Reclaiming our home turf at the local dive.

Fake fighting with peanuts across the bar, swing dancing to the juke, no indication of what was to come.

The Nightmare

On the phone with Sophie we giggled about the night before.

“Man we should make Pete cookies or something”—

“Ya we were wrecked, we owe him!”

We laughed together...

I called him but he must’ve been sleeping.

I did my best British accent on his voicemail and laughed some more.

He never called me back.

Later it rang.

Another voice, but different, meek.

“Bobby died last.”

20 questions begin.

What?

No, he must be in the hospital?

What? I was just with him...

I just called him!

Is this a joke?

Matt fell to the floor when he heard.

His best friend, like Kevin and Paul from the “Wonder Years.”

It was the kind of emotion a hug would not fix.

We stood there tearless,

Too in shock to move or even breathe.

“Mom?” – And then came the tears.

“It’s bad mom,”

“I’m ok, but it’s bad.”

“Bobby is dead.”

“We don’t know anything yet.”

I’ll always remember Mr. Messina,

“Hate to tell you guys this—

But it won’t be the first time.

It's part of getting older."

Older? I thought...we're only 23.

The Rumor Mill

And in the days after the blow,
Came the whirlwind of whispers.
Flunked out of school.
DUI.

Arrests.

But then it got worse...

Klonopin, Vicodin, Adderol.

"I heard there was an empty pill container."

"He wasn't himself."

The whispers got louder...

Would he do something like that to himself?

Swat the idea out of your head like a housefly on the kitchen table.

The Dash

"I have to be a pallbearer," he said.

"It will be the heaviest weight you ever have to carry."

As his friends carried his casket out of St. Bridget's

The song played:

And he said someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying.

Tim McGraw was one of his favorites.

He dreamt of teaching history, like his parents.

His mom admits she's been calling his voicemail. Needs to hear the sound of his voice. We do it too, late in the night.

After the ceremony

We sit on the couch in his basement,

Where it happened.

The last place he was living,

Afraid we might "catch death"

As if it were a cold.

His fluffy stuffed dog sits on my bed. A keepsake from his mother.

We let go 25 balloons on his 25th birthday.

Sent up to heaven,

We toasted champagne as they floated towards the sun.

And today, on your 26th birthday, another year has gone by without you,

We still wonder what you could've been.

Essence

By Violet Jiménez Sims

Life,
The flame on a candle's wick, flickering
As it dances to the rhythm of a light breeze

Moments,
After the flame is extinguished,
All that we saw while it existed
Is engraved in the minds
Of its fortunate witnesses

Life,
A mystical drop of water glistens on the edge of a branch
In the dawn of a dewy night

Moments
After the water drips off
Or evaporates during sunrise,
Its inevitable fate does not deter its beauty
Or its miraculous formation

Life,
A summer solstice
Anticipated by roosters, loathed by owls

Moments,
After a flame subsides,
Morning dew dissipates
and sunsets resurrect,
Their essence remains to justify existence.

Biographies

Teacher-Writers

Jon Andersen (SI '09) is the author of a book of poems, *Stomp and Sing* (Curbstone Press, 2005). He is an Associate Professor of English at Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson and Willimantic.

Stephen Carey (SI '11) is an Intervention Specialist at Windham High School who believes teaching writing is one of the most important things an educator can do. Through his own writing, he has developed many different writing styles and has found a new interest in poetry. He currently lives in South Windsor.

Rose Clack (SI '11) was inspired at a young age by her aunt Mary Ellen and knew that like her aunt, she too wanted to become a teacher. She now works at Interdistrict School for the Arts and Communication teaching Literacy and Journalism to grades six, seven, and eight. She lives in New London.

Jane Cook (SI '07) has worked as a Staff Development/Literacy and Educational Technology Specialist for EASTCONN for the past 25 years and serves as the CT Writing Project Technology Program Leader. She has created and/or joined more than 60 Wikis and is addicted to using Wikis as collaborative online learning environments and as tools for teaching and learning.

Jena DeMaio (SI '11) used encouragement from her mother to pursue her dreams in becoming a teacher. After receiving her M.A. from the Neag School of Education at UConn, she is now teaching honors and college prep English to the tenth graders at Coventry High School. Outside of the classroom, she enjoys gardening at her home in Glastonbury.

Max Echevarría (SI '11) has taught fifth and six grade students at Windham Middle School in a dual language program called Compañeros for the past ten years. He also works to incorporate technology into the classroom, which he feels gives students more opportunities to write and learn new skills. He lives in Colchester.

Lynn Frazier (SI '09) is a reading teacher at Windham High School and mentor of The Young Poets has had the privilege of sharing her love of reading and writing with amazing Windham students for 30 years.

Ray Kasper (SI '11) earned his M.A. in Education from the University of St. Francis in Illinois and went on to teach just about every grade and subject except high school as a substitute teacher in Hartford. Ray currently teaches fifth grade students at Putnam Middle School. Ray lives in Glastonbury.

Alice Kuzel (SI '11) grew up in Alaska with interests in history, social sciences and reading before moving on to earn her M.A. in teaching from Sacred Heart University. Alice teaches

Language Arts and Writing to grades four through six at Oak Grove Montessori School. She currently lives in Lebanon.

Alexa Mannheim (SI '11) earned her B.A. in English and a M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction from UConn. She has co-authored a research papers on how to address homophobia in public schools, built a curriculum for the congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, and won an award for the most innovative program because of it. She currently teaches Developmental English at Capital Community College in Hartford. Alexa lives in West Hartford.

Eric Maroney (SI '11) is a ninth grade English teacher at the Engineering and Science University Magnet School in New Haven. Prior to his teaching career, Eric published an essay and two short stories. He earned a B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Women's Studies from Southern Connecticut State University and went on to earn his M.F.A, in fiction from Sarah Lawrence College. Eric currently lives in North Haven.

Jessica Mueller (SI '11) inspired by a high school English teacher, is currently on her way to earning her M.A. from the Neag School of Education at UConn while also serving as the Graduate Assistant for the UConn Writing Center outreach program. She is currently interning in Hartford at Bulkeley High School. She lives in Southbury.

Sheila A. Murphy (SI '85) taught in Glastonbury, and served CWP as Co-Director and Co-Editor of two CWP teacher research publications. She co-edited *Fair Warning: Leo Connellan and His Poetry* (2011). Besides her chapbook, *View from a Kayak in Autumn* (2008), her poems have appeared in literary journals. She also teaches memoir writing.

Bernie Schreiber (SI '11) was born in Germany and spent the first twelve years of his life moving from Israel, Sweden and Germany before moving to Hartford with his family. He taught Language Arts for 32 years at the Ashford School before retiring in 2010. He will spend his time writing, playing his violin and perhaps teaching part-time at a local community college.

Jenna Senft (SI '11) used the enthusiasm from a high school Social Studies teacher to motivate her to pursue her own career in teaching. She graduated from UConn in 2008 with a B.A. in English and went on to earn her M.A. from the University of New Haven in 2010. Jenna currently teaches first grade at Conte West Hills. She lives in Cheshire.

Violet Sims (SI '11) is a Spanish and ESL teacher at New Britain High School. She grew up in Higüey, the Dominican Republic, New York City and New Britain before graduating from UConn in 2008 with a B.A. in Theater and a M.A. in Student Affairs. Violet took the Alternative Route to Certification and now, when not teaching, is the co-advisor of the African American Club at New Britain High School. She currently lives in New Britain.

Tiffany Smith (SI '10) teaches English-Language Arts at Parish Hill Middle High School in Chaplin, CT. She participated in the 2010 CWP Summer Institute and is currently a CWP Teacher Consultant.

Kisha Tracy (SI '10) is an Assistant Professor of English Studies at Fitchburg State University where she teaches early British and world literatures. She recently graduated from the University of Connecticut with her Ph.D. in Medieval Studies and is a 2010 Fellow of the CWP Summer Institute.

Readers

Christiana Betts is a Virginia native who received her B.A. in English Art from Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. She is currently a second year M.A./PhD student in UConn's English department with a concentration in Asian American and African Literature. Outside of the classroom, she enjoys cooking, singing and creative writing. Christiana currently lives in Willington.

Sean Forbes is an adjunct professor of English at UConn. His poems have been published in *Sargasso*, *A Journal of Caribbean Literature, Language, Culture*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Long River Review*. Recently, his book of poems *Providencia* was a semi-finalist in the 2011 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award competition. He lives in Thompson.

Zara Rix is the graduate assistant director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Connecticut, where she studies postcolonial and children's literature and spends her days reading and reading and reading with brief moments in which she writes. She currently lives in Storrs-Mansfield.

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