





FORUM 1999
VOLUME XX

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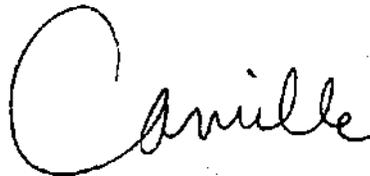
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As my last year doing *Forum*, this year was by far more challenging as we struggled to produce the best magazine ever. Being the 20th volume, this year's *Forum* demonstrates the progression of a Loyola tradition. It acts as a landmark to which future editors will look back.

I thank everyone who has contributed to making *Forum* an important part of my life at Loyola: the writers and artists, Dr. McGuiness, Lou, Tom, our staff, and especially Camille (I will miss you.) I would also like to wish good luck to next year's editor (you know who you are)--I know you will do an awesome job! Enjoy *Forum* 1999: it is a testimony to Loyola from all of us who are moving on.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Camille', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Without the help of several people, this year's *Forum* would have been impossible to produce. Dr. McGuiness, Janet Maher, Tom Panarese and especially Jaime Fischbach were all necessary puzzle pieces. Much thanks to them. They say all's well that ends well, and that certainly does apply to this year's *Forum*, which was produced in between bouts of inclement weather and senioritis. So, voila--without further ado, please enjoy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Camille'.

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A Question of Genius

Katie McHugh

I sat patiently as the old Chinese woman lectured in her broken English: "You will play better if you understand the music. Look! Look at the last line. You see? Da dum, da dum, daaa, dum da dum..." She hummed along, and her fingers quickly jumped across the notes in a way that made me wonder if I could ever do the same.

I was learning the 2nd movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. Not extremely difficult, although note-learning is often tedious. My teacher continued: "Now look, the Trio. Daa, dumm, daa, dumm...look at this! Same thing as previous line, only in reverse. And it's all fifths!" She exclaimed this brightly, as though Beethoven had invented the interval of the fifth. "Fifths! Look at the octaves, he goes F, D, E, C, D, B." And then she turned to me, with a triumphant smile, "Now. Isn't that genius?"

That particular lesson lingered with me for a long time. She was right, of course, about having to understand the music in order to learn it. Realizing the patterns she pointed out indeed helped my practice. Yet her last question is what kept the memory of the lesson in my mind: "Isn't it genius?" She had posed it cunningly, so that I would be forced to agree- and I did. However, as I reflected on it further, I was not sure if I should have.

Listen! If you listen, you can hear sounds everywhere-- different pitches and tones, harsh and softened, intense and faint. Even in quiet, you can imagine a sound. A single sound, with one

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pitch, one tone, one intensity. Now imagine another. Put the two together, and you have a chord.

See how easy it is? Just like that, a chord is born. From this chord a larger one grows, then it changes to another form, then it divides into notes once again, which can be played in any combination. And there you have music.

Music is patterns, Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata is filled with patterns: simple phrases compounded and repeated to produce a gorgeous harmony. The entire first movement is based on a mere four chords: F#, C#, G#, and D#. But from these few notes an entire movement is created: the chords are broken down to single notes, built up again, transposed into alternate forms, and repeated in themes. Is Beethoven a genius because he so skillfully maneuvers and manipulates notes into a series of harmonies? Are his transposed fifths in his second movement themselves a sign of genius? I would say musical genius is an art form, and interval pattern is not art. It is merely mathematics disguised.

Those who create music are artists. And what makes an artist a genius? The word "genius" tends to have dangerous connotations, usually involving intelligence. The recent influx of Intelligence Quotient tests, especially on the Internet, has identified "genius" as scores above 145. At www.iqtest.com, "anyone with a general IQ score this high is considered to be a genius. All known occupations can be comprehended with a General IQ this high." But musical genius transcends intelligence. According to a survey of genius by Hans Eysenek, Emeritus Professor at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, genius is not inherited, nor is it a sign of a high IQ. "Many individuals now recognized as geniuses were only average academic achievers. Creativity relies on a different cognitive factor than does intelligence."

"Creativity" is taking a recognized form and then molding it into something new. In the acoustic sense of the word, rearrang-

ing the tones of a scale creates new music. However, there are other means of "creating." Composer Edward MacDowell wrote six pieces for the piano based on poems by Heinrich Heine. One such poem was "Scotch Poem" (translated from the German):

Far away on the rock-coast of Scotland
 Where the old grey castle projecteth
 Over the wild raging sea,
 There at the lofty and arched window,
 Standeth a woman, beauteous, but ill,
 And she's playing her harp and she's singing,
 And the wind through her long locks forceth its way,
 And beareth her gloomy song
 Over the wide and tempest-toss'd sea.

MacDowell recreates Heine's poem in musical form. MacDowell's piece, written in F minor, opens with quick, deep, broken chords to evoke a rolling, thunderous background. The music crescendos and decrescendos, speeding, then slowing, to create a churning sea. Heine's maiden sings in MacDowell's middle *andante* section. It is composed of a series of diminished 7th chords, which bring about tension, and the chords are subsequently resolved in their minor forms, creating a gloomy moan. Then the music returns to the original theme of the "tempest toss'd sea," until the last line: MacDowell reverts to the *andante* section: a slow, sad wail. The brilliance of the piece is in the emotion created; MacDowell succeeds in evoking the poem's passion, so much so that one could guess the images from the music alone, with no previous knowledge of Heine's work. Popular music does a similar thing, except the "poem," the lyrics, are performed concurrently with the music.

The conjunction here is an exciting form, as a composer's combination of words and song can either perfect the intended image or undermine it. Herein lies the difference between an artist and a genius, But what exactly is that difference? What makes a genius?

Intelligent people are regarded as adept, but actual intelligence is only a capacity for achieving. Creation, on the other hand, is an achievement of a sort: beginning with the familiar and fashioning it into the original. The ability to create, however, does not completely encompass the sense of musical genius; on a higher level, there is discipline. What is the ability to create worth if one is not dedicated to creation? It is hard enough to learn to play music accurately, let alone to write it well.

In his essay "A Lesson from Michelangelo," James Fenton writes: "If I aspire to musicianship, I am at once set on a journey through a series of immensely complicated disciplines. It is extremely improbable that I will get anywhere without training. And it therefore does not happen that even a precocious musician seems pretentious. We feel, however much we envy the success, that it must have been earned." Beethoven was driven by his father to practice at an early age, and he continued this devotion when he began to compose. He was a perfectionist, consistently rewriting and revising his works. Certainly, we acknowledge the success, the dedication of those composers whom we consider geniuses. A few months ago, I attended the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra featuring pianist Misha Dichter. The piece, Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor by Johannes Brahms, was performed well, and the pianist was given a standing ovation at the end of the performance. Actually, the audience applauded twice: before Dichter began, and of course, at the conclusion. But I, at least, was not praising Dichter alone. He did play beautifully, and I am sure that can be attributed to years of study. Nevertheless, I feel that most of the credit for the success of the concerto belongs to Brahms; after all,

he wrote it. As I relaxed in my chair, I closed my eyes and enjoyed the flood of sound that Brahms had so kindly commanded for me, as though he were Moses, ordering an ocean to part. When I applauded, I was not only in awe of Dichter's discipline, but Brahms' as well.

Still, even discipline does not complete the idea of human "genius." "Artificial intelligence" (computers) has proven to have the intelligence, the creativity, and the dedication to produce music. Recently, scientists have built a computer capable of writing "new" works by Mozart and Beethoven. The program, called "Experiments in Musical Intelligence," arranges and reassembles random fragments of music to create new works. By applying knowledge of the syntax of music, EMI avoids producing gibberish. To emulate past composers, a "pattern matcher" in the program diligently searches for similar musical sequences found in most of the composer's works. Then, these "musical signatures" are included in the computerized compositions, thereby producing a new piece.

Is Beethoven, then, while widely regarded as a genius of the romantic period, merely an artist? In light of this information, one might perhaps think less of him. Yet, critic David Cope asserts, "EMI's works, while impressive, sound like the efforts of lesser composers trying to emulate the great masters." The computer cannot think for itself; while it can create new musical passages through its knowledge of scales, intervals and harmonies, it does so randomly. In addition, it must be programmed to organize notes; it is in no way self-initiated to "compose music." Perhaps the great composers have stumbled upon a sequence of notes here and there, but far more often they first heard the music in their heads, in a "musical vision." Yet, what is the vision that an artist maintains, to bring him over the threshold of "genius"? From where did his initiative to create arise? Beethoven continued to write great sym-

phonies even as he lost his hearing at an early age. He once said, "But how humiliating it was when one standing close to me heard a distant flute, and I heard nothing, or a shepherd's singing, and I heard nothing. Such incidents almost drive me to despair; at times I was on the point of putting an end to my life. Art alone restrained my hand." The sheer enjoyment he obtained from writing music, from inventing new phrases in the depths of his mind, gave him a purpose in living. Computers have a purpose too, yet they are completely ignorant of it. They create without personal reason; they unwittingly attempt to be human, to live, and they fail every time.

Computers do not rival Beethoven, for a genius such as he possesses an additional quality that no computer can ever imitate: imagination. The ability to imagine is a uniquely human concept, inherently linked to memory. We remember that which has meaning to us, and the strongest memories are either those immersed in emotional significance, or those which are repeated constantly and consistently. That is, we recall in detail events like our wedding day, but we also remember frequently used concepts, such as how to read and write. (This latter form of memory often transcends to "knowledge")

I contend that music can incorporate memory in both these forms. Emotions evoked in some pieces are so complex that they become a part of you, integrated into your life forever. Whenever I hear the Beatles' song "Eight Days A Week," I remember when I used to listen to the song as a child. An energetic beat combines with cheerful lyrics: "eight days a week/I love you/eight days a week/is not enough to show I care!" I am a seven year old girl with messy hair, barefoot and running around my living room with my sister, laughing, dancing on the burgundy carpet and bumping into cumbersome armchairs. To this day, I feel like dancing when I hear the song, just as I used to when I was young. On another level, I can "hear" the song play in my mind, just by thinking of the title.

Because I have a childhood memory associated with the song, and have since listened to the song numerous times, I can replay it again and again in my head: words, instruments, the beat, the melody.

Imagination also combines the emotional and routine aspects of memory, but in an opposite way. The composer possesses knowledge of music theory, as in notes, harmonies, and structure. The artist can recall sounds; he can hear a melody in his mind before he begins to write the key signature down. But the musical genius has pre-associated this melody with a moment of meaning. He is inspired, provoked, to create, perhaps based on a turn of events in his life, a particular mood, a sight in nature. Novelist Annie Dillard writes in her autobiography *An American Childhood*, "...we think in pictures, not in words." I believe that her term 'pictures' is not restricted to visual imagery, but can include auditory perception as well. Despite his deafness, Beethoven was still able to produce music, based on his strong memory of sound, combined with his inspiration. The genius captures his thoughts or memories within the careful trap of music.

A computer could never be a genius; as I mentioned earlier, the EMI computer has to hunt through hundreds of Beethoven's works to find similar patterns, which it would use to generate new compositions. But Beethoven was self-inspired: his mind transformed his feelings into music, in a way no one else could have done. "Art alone restrained my hand:" Beethoven's desire to create overwhelmed his sorrow, and so he was able to channel his sadness through his works. Susan K. Langer writes in her essay "The Cultural Importance of Art," "We speak of the feeling of, or the feeling in, a work of art, not the feeling it means... [it] presents something like a direct vision of vitality, emotion, subjective reality." The characteristic of "genius" is not merely the result of accuracy in harmony, or even the dedication to creation; it owes itself most importantly to the imagination-memory exchange. The

genius composer is able to interact with the listener through the means of his music. When you listen to Moonlight Sonata, you are to hear more than the sonata. You need to hear moonlight. Listen! The first movement has an eerie glow to it, a calming repetition of notes brought alive by the treble melody. The second movement is flightier, like tiny moonbeams bouncing on water. The third movement rushes to dizzying heights; moonlight refracted into a million pieces, spinning across the sky.

That is how I picture it, anyway. Possibly, Beethoven had other images in mind, but the beauty of music is the room for interpretation within the measures. Recently at a piano lesson, my teacher had me play a section of a piece repeatedly. "Do it again," she commanded. "What do you hear?" I was unsure of the response she was looking for. Finally, she said, exasperated, "What about a butterfly? Tell me what it's doing. Make up a story." Then suddenly, I could picture the scene as I played the rapid notes. In these lines it's fluttering around, then it hovers over a flower, then it begins to fly again. In her essay "Conversations With the Artist," Kristen Sundell discusses painting her own version of Georgia O'Keeffe's "Calla Lilies." She writes of her new work, "My interpretation communicates a desire for loveliness and perfection that seems almost agonizing in its rendering... I am struck by its foreignness: next to the glaring primitive paintings nearby, it resembles a portal... into a different world." As I listen to Beethoven's Sonata, I hear the music and try to interpret it in my own way. I have not looked up at any critics' interpretations of the piece, nor am I certain that I want to, for my impression will always be in my mind; in this way, I have taken his piece and made it my own.

We need to take possession of the music, make use of our egocentric selves and claim works as our own. I do not mean that any copyright infringements are in order, but I do mean that we as listeners need to actively listen to music, try to understand it, and

try to find an image or idea lurking inside. Beethoven is commonly considered a genius, but we take him for granted. How many of us have heard his music aside from the first few bars of his fifth symphony? How many of us have really listened, and attempted to judge for ourselves if he is really a genius, or if his notes are simply flung together? I think back to the second movement of Moonlight Sonata, and to my teacher's knowing smile. "Isn't that genius?" That combination of notes, so deliberately arranged? Yes and no. The order of the notes themselves does reflect careful planning, but I argue that Beethoven is a genius because of his effort, his musical capacity, and his wonderful imagination. "Genius" has many components: it is not an extreme, but a balance. Musical geniuses are a select group of people, but the group is larger than one might think. A genius is one who can skillfully combine within his soul the motivation, dedication, and imagination for the creation of music, but any artist whose music is both inspired and inspires others is a genius. What allows Beethoven to fall into this category is that he was inspired enough to write that music down; we see the "genius" in the piece because, upon listening, we understand a feeling he was trying to create. The term 'sublimity' has been debated as to its true meaning; some argue that it is the most powerful emotion that one is capable of feeling. Following this is logic. It is also argued that pain is a more intense emotion than pleasure, and therefore sublimity refers to pain or fear. However, I disagree; rather, I believe that 'sublime' refers to a quality above all other things wholly related to beauty, a passion. In his novel *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville wrote, "there [was] a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it." This passage describes that quality-it is something you hear in the music, maybe only a single phrase, which takes your mind and carries it away. You hear it, and it is like a minor explosion: your body remains transfixed, yet inside your mind works frantically, trying to

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recall the particular stunning element that so moved you. The notes of Beethoven's second movement dance up and down, up and down, in a placating way... and what is it about them that make me feel this way? A genius sits before his instrument, a quiet structure, and in a blaze of invisible energy makes the intangible emerge from the tangible, and from the intangible arise the sublime. He is a demigod of aesthetic wonder, who composes like the Lord, contemplating butterflies as He forms the lowly caterpillar.



Auschwitz

Joanne Kacperski

I awoke to the sun's bright rays streaming in through the back windows of my cousin's old gray Toyota Camry. I sat up and rubbed the sleep from my eyes. I used my sleeve to wipe away the sweat beads that had formed on my forehead. My father sat quietly in the front seat, comfortable despite the sweltering heat, while my cousin, Mark, ten years older than I, drove in silence and grunted only when another car tried to pass us. I looked out into the road ahead of us. The narrow two-lane highway cut through an expansive countryside. Vast fields of golden yellow wheat and cabbage, as rich a green I had ever seen, formed a giant quilt of alternating color. The other side of the seemingly interminable road was a bare and near-desolate potato field.

We finally came upon a road sign that read: Oswiecim, Next Right; we were on our way to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau, a Nazi concentration camp that had existed during World War II. The previous year I had read a book for my English class entitled *Night* by Eliezer Weisel, a survivor of Auschwitz. My teacher, Ms. Zuccaro, a short and stout woman, had often gotten quite emotional when we had read passages from the book aloud in class. The class had always laughed at her, including myself, but I soon began to think that maybe there was a reason behind her tears, so I stopped myself from joining in the chorus of giggling and snickering every time she began to cry. I can remember one such occurrence in class when she had excused herself and run out of the classroom in tears

after reading a passage from the book to us, when Weisel and his family arrived at the camp. She read, her voice cracking, "Bela Katz, son of a big tradesman from our town, had arrived in Auschwitz with the first transport, a week before us. When he heard of our arrival, he managed to get word to us that, having been chosen for his strength, he had himself put his father's body into the crematory oven." I began to listen more closely to the words that she read aloud about the horrors of the death camps and the atrocities that had occurred within the perimeters of the barbed-wire fences. I soon discovered that such death factories actually existed. They were real.

I was eager to get out of the car and stretch my poor and restless legs. As I stepped into the camp and beyond the tall iron gates, I felt as if I had entered into an entirely different world. I had traveled back in time to 1942, and I myself was a prisoner at Auschwitz, the main extermination center during the war. I imagined the innocent prisoners emerging from the barracks in the distance, walking in rows of three, with an odd and embarrassed step, their heads dangling in front and their arms rigid at their sides. On their heads, they wore berets, and their thin and bony bodies were dressed in long striped overcoats, which even from a distance looked filthy.

We soon joined a tour group for a full day's tour of the entire camp. The group was mostly composed of older people; each person knew someone who had either died in one of the many horror-filled camps created during the war, or survived its many atrocities. Every dirt road of the camp was lined with rows of dark brick and concrete buildings, no more than three stories high. To the right of the entrance there appeared to be a field of weeds, which separated the many rows of buildings from the run-down barracks. The railroad that was often used to transport the unfortunate prisoners crossed through the field and ran straight away into

a vast dark forest for a hundred yards, and then curving, was lost to view. We began our tour in Block 20. The once-smooth cement walls were now beginning to crack, and the floorboards proved to be old and loose, creaking beneath our feet as we slowly and cautiously walked through the facility, it seemed as if each individual in the group shared the same fear of evoking the spirits of those who lost their lives within these very walls. We entered a large dark square-shaped room, once known as the shower room. It was equipped with eight showerheads that once spat scalding hot water onto the prisoner's frail bodies, but now hung rusty and limp upon the sullied walls.

The group slowly entered another room, which was equipped with twice as many rusty and tarnished showerheads as the room before. But this room was used for a different purpose. I was suddenly seated in my tenth grade English class and I remembered reading about this very room where thousands of people had died. Though this room resembled the shower room that we had previously seen, I knew that its purpose had served to exterminate those who were considered not strong enough or not well enough to complete the work and tasks that the officers of the camp had assigned to them. Water did not flow from these showerheads. Instead, a gas called Zyklon B had been released through the showerheads and the rusted vents that hung above us. I stood in the doorway, afraid to walk in, but was soon nudged in by my father who stood close behind me. Upon entering, goosebumps had formed on my arms and legs. The room was dark and cold. I envisioned it being packed from wall to wall with innocent screaming victims, the door quickly screwed up tight and the gas being discharged by the waiting disinfectors through the shower heads and the vents in the ceilings, which insured the rapid distribution of the gas and the death of the poor and innocent victims. The screaming, however, soon transformed into a chilling death rattle, and in a few

minutes all lay still. After a few moments, the ventilation was switched on and the bodies were discharged by the emotionless camp officers. The doors open, and I quickly rushed out to escape the terror that took place within the room.

The blazing sun was beating down onto my bare arms; it felt refreshing after being trapped in those dark musty rooms. My cousin lit a cigarette and seemed indifferent to what he had just seen. I sighed with annoyance.

"You are so insensitive!" I shouted. "Don't you feel any remorse for the millions of people who died here?"

He just shrugged and took another drag of his cigarette.

"Calm down, Joanne," my dad advised. He patted the empty seat beside him on the wooden bench. "Sit down. I have something to tell you."

Reluctantly, I sat down. I struggled to fix my gaze upon my father's face.

"Joanne, do you remember the last time that you saw your grandfather, and he told you about how he had housed those Jewish families in the cellar of our house during the war?"

"Yeah?" I answered.

"Someone in the village had reported your grandfather to the officers that were stationed nearby. It was illegal to hide Jewish families from the officers during the war. And if you were caught, you were killed. They had been planning to attack the house one night. Your grandfather was fortunately able to get us out of there in time, but didn't have enough time to go back to the house and evacuate the families that were hiding within the cellar. When he finally got back to the house some hours later, the house lay in ruins. The windows had been broken, doors had been pulled out of their frames, and the house had been turned upside-down. Word had gotten back to him many years later that they had all been deported to Auschwitz. Not one of them survived."

My father was silent for a moment. His black hair shined in the sun and long deep creases had formed along his forehead as he squinted to keep his gaze on me.

"One of the couples that your grandfather kept hidden in the cellar had one daughter," he continued, "their only child. Your grandfather was very fond of her. He would often take her out into the fields to help him. Twice a week he gave her lessons in reading and writing. She was only six years old, but he often commented on how bright she was for her age. Knowing that your grandfather was very fond of his daughter, the girl's father had asked him to watch after the little girl and to take her in as his own if anything ever happened to himself and his wife. Until the day that your grandfather died, he regretted not taking the little girl with him when he rushed all of us out of the house that night that the officers attacked our house. He regretted not making it back in time to save them."

He paused again.

"My father made me promise him," he continued, "that I name you, his first American-born granddaughter, after the little girl. Her name was Joanna."

I sat in silence. I wondered if this was why he had brought me to the camp that day. I suddenly felt some kind of connection to those families. I felt as if I had know those families at one time or as if they were actually part of my family. I felt a deep connection to the little girl that my grandfather had admired so much. It was as if I had lost someone close to me at Auschwitz.

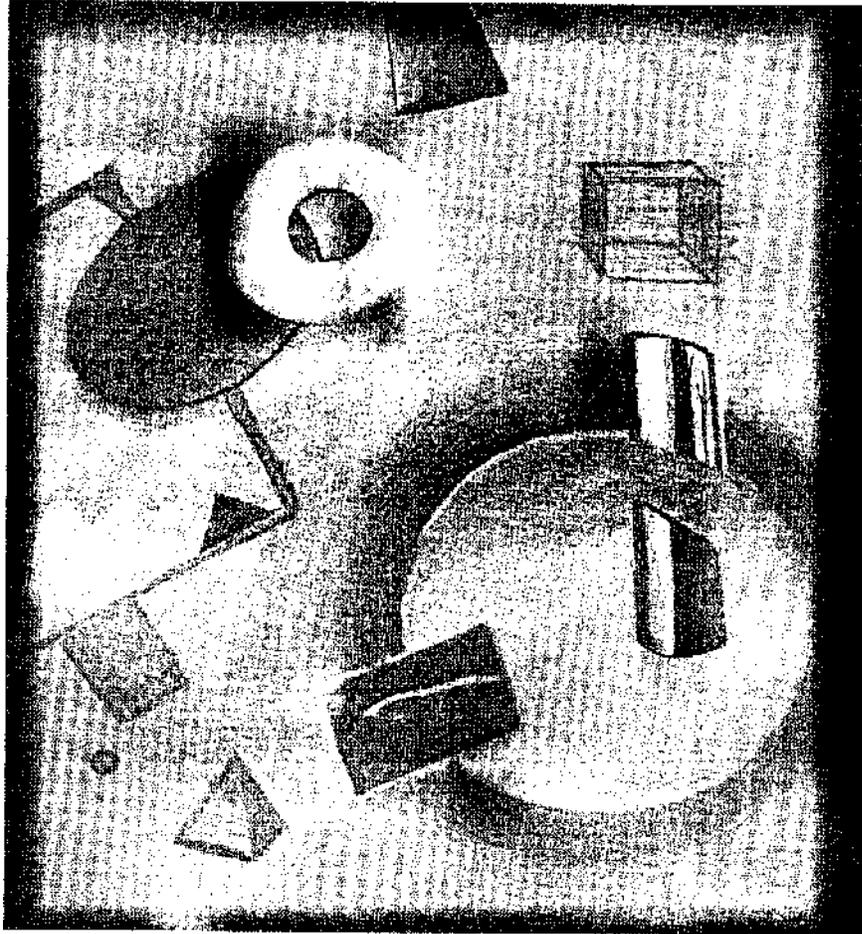
The group had gathered once again after a short break in a building that was located further up the road. The rooms in this building had been restored and it was turned into a mini museum. The halls were brightly lit and inscribed into the marble walls were the names of millions of people who had died at Auschwitz. My father ran his fingers over the names of the families that my grand-

father had risked his life to protect. I read the little girl's name, "Joanna Rubinsky." My father lit a candle, and we both stood beside one another in silence.

We learned of the many terrible artifacts that were saved and displayed behind large glass windows. The first room we had entered contained a pile of gold tooth-fillings, rings and earrings that the prisoners were forced to give up upon their arrival to the camp. Once again I thought back to Ms. Zuccaro's tenth grade English class. I immediately made a connection between this horrific site and Weisel's own experience with the camp's dentist. "The dentist ordered us to open our mouths wide. He was not looking for decayed teeth, but gold ones..." The dentist had had his life taken away because of the sympathy he had felt for the prisoners leading him to let some of them keep their gold crowns. Weisel was one of those who went on to keep his gold crown.

We continued to walk from room to room; as we did, the piles of artifacts grew. Suitcases, blankets, coats, handbags, coins, spectacles, artificial limbs, and watches were thrown into large heaps and filled each display. The suitcases were labeled with names of victims. I read the names of each country aloud, "Poland, Hungary, Poland..." again. The list went on and on. One display was filled with dolls, stuffed animals, and other toys that belonged to the children of Auschwitz. I wondered if any of them had belonged to the little girl. There was one particular display that had frightened me most. Tall rolls of what looked like brown-colored cloth stood against the wall in one display. But this was not cloth. After being gassed or murdered, the hair of the women had been shaved off and spun into cloth. I was sickened upon seeing this. I felt the goosebumps forming on my arms and the cold chill creeping down my spine.

I really didn't think that it could get any worse, but it did. After a short lunch break, we were led on a long dirt trail to the



edge of the camp where a building stood all alone. It was made from stone and three chimneys rose from behind the building. This was a crematory. We entered slowly and quietly. The walls of the crematory were blackened from smoke and it smelled of death. Three ovens were positioned in the middle of the dark room and we soon discovered that they were capable of incinerating fourteen hundred bodies in less than twenty-four hours. The largest interior space on the ground floor of the crematorium was the furnace room, where five furnaces and two large generators had tunneled the smoke from within and released it through the chimneys outside. After we had exited the crematory, I stopped and turned around to look back. I could almost see great columns of smoke rise from the crematory chimneys and merge up above into a huge black river of smoke that very slowly floated across the sky over Auschwitz. By this time, tears had formed in my eyes, and as I quickly blinked, the smoke disappeared.

As we had entered Auschwitz earlier that afternoon through the tall black iron gates, my cousin read aloud, "Arbeit Macht Frei." I had struggled to lift my head up to get a glimpse of what he was looking at and fought to keep my eyelids open against the sharp brightness of the sun, at that time positioned directly overhead. The black iron sign hung above our heads at the main entrance to the camp where millions of prisoners had once walked through on their way to work. The sign meant Work Brings Freedom. I stood there for a moment, forgetting about the heat and the sweat dripping down my face. The sign's message was a false promise: those who worked to exhaustion would eventually be released. Instead, they were condemned to slow extermination by hunger, exhausting work, criminal experiments, and individual and mass executions. Millions of innocent people had been deceived and lost their lives as a result.

As I walked out of the camp, I turned to take one last look

at Auschwitz. I stood silently, my sweaty palms gripping the iron bars of the gates. I closed my eyes and said a silent prayer for the little girl who my grandfather admired so much. I prayed for the families that he risked his life to protect. As I opened my eyes and raised my head, the innocent prisoners had once again emerged from the barracks and continued to walk in rows of three. They no longer walked with their arms rigid at their sides, but worked together to support one another with whatever energy they could find within their frail bodies. They looked like walking corpses, unable to even carry the weight of their emaciated and hungry bodies. They entered the crematory, never to emerge again.

Reborn on the shores of Sicily

Michelle Sarro

I awoke but lay still in the darkness of the small Italian hotel room. The gentle sound of the sea just beyond the open terrace door promised to lull me back into slumber if I did not get out of bed immediately. I had always felt the need to begin my day before the rising of the sun and if on occasion I chanced to open my eyes and discover the day was already begun, I would instantly feel panic. There has always been a need to wake in the dark where I feel most comfortable and could prepare alone for another day before others besieged me. As I crossed quietly to the other side of the room, I felt another awakening was in store for me; I was overwhelmed with the wish to begin my life again.

It was a cold February morning and although there were still several hours before breakfast, I was determined to make the most of each day. The end of our school was fast approaching and the rhythmic breathing of my sister and friend, still asleep, afforded me a last opportunity to enjoy a few private moments. Searching in the darkness for my coat, I at last found it in a ball beneath the tapestry chair and slipping my arms inside, relished its warmth. The sliding door, left ajar all evening so that I could listen to the music of the ocean, had left the room smelling more than a little of the sweet and pungent aroma of sea salt. Moving between the glass panels, I stepped onto the balcony, shivering as my bare feet touched the cold cement. It was breathtaking; a canvas of black velvet decorated with a thousand tiny diamonds stretched

above me. An enormous disk of yellow gold, perfectly centered, reflected itself in the shimmering sea below.

I stood motionless for perhaps three-quarters of an hour, held captive by the enchantment of the landscape. Only the promise of a glorious sunrise and my wish to view it from the shore could tear me away from the spectacular scene displayed before me. Inside our hotel room I quickly washed and dressed, choosing blue jeans and a knit sweater from my wardrobe. Then quietly I made my way around back, fumbling in the dark for a wall or some other structure to guide my way along the unfamiliar path. At last the narrow valley opened to reveal a vast panorama of the seascape and seven broken steps leading to the sand below.

Several enormous concrete slabs rose up from the pebbled sand at random intervals along the shore, the cement blocks, some four feet across, were the only remains of a wall that once bordered the sea but had been destroyed in a storm two years earlier. I hoisted myself upon the closest stone and tucked my legs beneath me in an attempt to ward off the chill of the cold morning air. The wind tugged at my hair, releasing it strand by strand from the ponytail at the base of my neck, until at last I pulled off the rubber band and allowed it to dance freely with the breeze.

It occurred to me in that moment that I had always lived my life in a sort of perpetual twilight, suspended in darkness, awaiting the promise of the sunrise. The previous ten years of my life had been characterized by the tragedies of divorce, depression, loneliness and eating disorders. Each night I hoped that the arrival of the next day would bring a new warmth and light to my life. Each day I was disappointed. My parents had divorced a few months prior to my tenth birthday and I had done everything possible to deny the hurt and anger left in the wake of my shattered family. I instilled in myself the belief that to cry and admit was a sign of weakness. I thought that if I could lock away my emotions it would somehow

be as though those feelings did not exist at all.

Living a life of chosen seclusion, on the assumption that that which I did not care about could not hurt me, became the prescription for mending my broken heart. I withdrew from all events and activities that involved my family and friends. Holidays, a particularly hard time for most people, were the worst of all. Even now, six years later, I can hear their voices downstairs; the laughter blended in with the clang of pots and pans and the Christmas music in the background. The gleeful squeals of my young cousins as they examine new toys and then discard them in favor of the next brightly colored package still ring in my ears. I can almost taste the honey ham and baked ziti that I know from experience are resting on snowman trivets in the kitchen. I see myself, alone, the room dark save for the light afforded by my small Christmas tree. An empty dish of cookies sits beside the bed. Hunger, not for food, but companionship gnaws at me. The empty, hollow feelings would stay with me long after the holidays had passed. I stopped feeling anger, sadness, boredom, disappointment, etc., until even the ability to know the simplest joy had escaped me. I was a living, breathing human strangely devoid of thought or feeling. Rather than heal the pain inside, as was intended, this method of pushing things away had begun to destroy me at the core.

In the seven years following the divorce I watched, as an outsider, the deterioration of my heart, my mind and my body. I stepped off the scale one morning and dragged myself back to my bedroom. Seventy pounds. I had gained seventy pounds. I would beg myself not to eat even as I reached for the stash of junk food kept beneath my bed. I would shovel food into my mouth, desperately trying to alleviate the emptiness inside; most times not even tasting what it was I chewed. Next I would discard the packaging into the wastebasket already overflowing with wrappers and empty containers. Then I would eat again; always wondering why, even

after finishing, I never felt full. In retrospect, I realize that there was no amount of food that could fill the void left by the loneliness of my self-inflicted exile. My appetite was never sated; hunger became the only and constant thing I felt. As a result, my weight increased, my self-esteem plummeted and eight months of depression set in.

When I couldn't rid myself of the worthless feeling inside and the voice within cried for release, I began to cut myself on my hands and arms. The first time was the hardest; after that it became easy. I had held the small silver key in my palm for half an hour, rolling it subconsciously between my fingers. Slowly I dragged it down the back of my hand; a faint pink line appeared then grew deeper and longer. A crimson river soon flowed from the top of my knuckle to the base of my wrist, saturating the cuff of my sweat-shirt. The pain, excruciating at first, lessened with each passing of the key until the sensation became almost pleasurable. The initial catalyst, whatever it was that had driven me to such an extreme measure, was soon forgotten. There was my anger, my hurt, my rage spelled out in a jagged line for all to see. It was a challenge for those who usually ignored me to look past what I had done. The physical pain was a welcome and bearable reprieve from the emotional torture. This hurt was real; I could see it and touch it and I understood why it caused me pain whereas I could not justify the invisible wounds of my heart.

In a short amount of time, however, this method no longer helped to alleviate the dull, throbbing pain inside and I even gave up that pursuit. The scars that remained, a testament to my otherwise unnoticeable pain, became a source of strife in themselves. They meant I could never forgive, never forget and never move on because there would always be this permanent reminder of what I had suffered.

It was then, with a disturbing ease, that I began to starve

myself. It was a torture that left no scars; a wound that did not bleed. At first I just skipped a meal or two and avoided anything high in calories and fat. I learned to love the feeling of deprivation, the strength and control afforded by resistance. The power of starvation is overwhelming and addictive. For those who feel they have little or no control over their own lives, this provides a dizzying sense of responsibility. NO ONE could make me eat. It was a superficial liberation that freed me from the suffocation I felt every day of my life. Eventually I could eat almost nothing; dividing a stick of gum between breakfast and lunch, splurging on a whole piece for dinner. For a treat I allowed myself a rice cake or sugar free jello. Within a few months I had rid myself of the previously gained seventy pounds and was on the way to becoming a "new me." Although four sizes smaller and considerably more attractive, I could not muster up enough energy to enjoy my "improved life." Hunger made me weak and irritable, making it an effort just to get out of bed in the morning. Fear of gaining back even a single pound rendered me more self-conscious than I had ever been. The weight loss initially serves to bolster confidence, but it is never enough. Every anorexic is afflicted with the "I need to lose five more pounds" syndrome. On my "fat days," convinced I was too big to leave the house, I wore sweats and skipped school. For three years I was in danger of failing all my courses because of extensive absence and yet I didn't care. The only thing that mattered was that I would never be fat again. A dozen Sweet Sixteen parties were missed because they broke two of my cardinal rules: having to wear clothes that fit and staring at plates of food I would not dare to touch. Ironically, the thin and improved me had failed to shed the mental and emotional baggage, which in retrospect, was the most important weight I needed to lose. Believe it or not, I thought that I was handling my problems well because at least I never cried. I would rather have died than allow a single tear to fall. To prevent



this, I would invite my friends over for the holidays and against their protests insist that they stay until two or three in the morning out of fear that any time alone might prompt tears. My friend Jill had the Christmas shift each year. For distraction on Christmas Eve we would eat cookies, play video games, look at pictures and reread every outdated copy of *YM* on my bookshelf. Jill would sit with her eyes half closed, on the verge of sleep, waiting for my assurance that it was okay to leave. Sometimes she would stay for eight hours or however long it took before fatigue overcame me and sleep promised to block out any sadness that threatened to break me down. I would walk her outside just as the horizon was beginning to brighten and wish her a Merry Christmas. She would promise to return early the next day, knowing that Christmas Day was going to be even worse.

Two months later I was off to Italy for a ten day excursion. I had wanted the trip as an escape from the constrictions of my life; the four walls of my bedroom were closing in. I was running out of options and quickly losing faith in the promise of a better tomorrow. I needed change and to somehow find the happiness that had eluded me for so long. So I returned to yesterday, the homeland of my family and the place that held all of the culture, tradition and richness my own life lacked. I went to Italy in search of something better.

When the first break of light appeared at the edge of the horizon, I was reminded of the slow rising of a theatre curtain before the performance can begin. The sun appeared, center stage, and stole the show from the moon and the stars. Quickly the midnight sky softened into hues of rose, peach and lilac. A medieval castle, worn down by age and weather, seemed restored to its original glory in the early morning light. Two hundred yards from shore, a lone fisherman waited contentedly for the first catch of the day, I could not help but envy the serenity of his lifestyle as it

appeared to me.

It took a sunrise in the secluded spot on the northern shore of Sicily to open my eyes. It was as though the rising of the sun, the promise of a new day (one in which all things were possible) brought forth a change in me. I have never felt so alone in all my life and yet, at the same time, I have never felt quite so much a part of everything around me. It was not a feeling of seclusion that weighs heavy on the heart, like the Christmases passed in the confinement of my room, but rather the peaceful existence of solitude that makes one thankful that the moment is yours alone. I was, as they say, "A stranger in a strange land," and yet it was the only time I have ever really felt at home. Instinctively my heartbeat slowed to match the rhythmic rise and fall of the waves and each intake of breath brought a little more peace to my weary soul.

For the first time I began to see that my life had remained stagnant for the previous seven years. Physically I was just two months shy of my seventeenth birthday, but I had ceased to grow emotionally since the age of ten. While my friends looked excitedly toward college and the future, I still mourned for my lost childhood. I had sacrificed birthdays, holidays, family gatherings and friends. I'd passed on experiences which I would never be given a second chance to experience. I had forgotten how to love and how to be loved. My trip to Italy awakened a joy and life within me that I had never known to exist. Her beauty gave me pride in my heritage and a sense of belonging, two things I'd never had before. I decided, in those moments, that I had no choice but to change my life. I became determined to live and love and experience all that life had to offer, even if it meant that I had to cry. And I did. For at least two hours I sat there and let tear after tear roll down my cheeks. From the place where I sat it seemed that like the moon and the stars, my tears slipped beneath the surface of the sea with the rising of the sun.

I remained in that spot until someone from our tour group came to inform me that the bus would soon be leaving. With that first step away from the shoreline I felt free of the shackles that had weighed me down for so long. I was no longer a slave to my past. It was our last day in Sicily and I headed back to the hotel to pack my suitcase. Just before it was time to board the bus, I walked back down to the beach for one last glimpse. Amazingly I felt lighter and more content than I had ever felt before. I stood there until my name was called and even then I hesitated to leave. In just a few hours that beach had, in a way, become my home; at last I had found my place in the world. I had been reborn and given a second chance at life.

A year later my friends and I got together to celebrate the anniversary of our trip to Italy. I wore my favorite skirt and sweater to dinner at a new Italian restaurant. For two hours we ate pasta, poured over pictures and reminisced on the time we'd spent together. The evening grew later, I regretted having to leave, but early morning softball practice required a good night's sleep. As I walked out into the parking lot, I held the photo album beneath my arm. It was as though each picture was a building block and collectively they made up the foundation of my new life; a life that was both strong and beautiful.



My Cup of Tea

Toy Jackson

My grandmothers have an expression (they actually have quite a few-but that's another discussion); it goes: "talkin', and ain't sayin' nothin'." Perhaps these thoughts will appear that way to some, myself included.

We'll pray for rain...

I began writing. I stop. It's impossible. Like a 1960s teenager, I can't seem to commit myself to anything. Fragments of thoughts pass by the eyes of my mind. I rise abruptly and go into the living room. I stand in front of my bookshelf, as if it were suddenly my mother calling, "Toy. Come here a minute, dear." I look at my books. I touch them with my eyes.

They are all here for me. Iyanla. Alice. Zora. California Cooper. Cornell West. Susan. "Look at us," they seem to say. "We did it. So can you, girl!"

I go back to bed. I'm sitting in my faded terry-cloth bathrobe, waiting for inspiration. (Hope it doesn't mind my informal attire.) I put down my tea and search out the big green case I keep stored under my bed, the one that contains old stories, poems, and other "great works". It's more than simple nostalgia. I know what I'm doing. I'm looking for my self. Writing makes me do that. Says, "Hello, Toy. Who are you?" This happens each and every time I pick up the pen. It's like a good friend you see only once every ten years- a reacquaintance.

Writing focuses my energy. Aligns my thoughts. Bestows

on me the paint brush of the pen. The canvas, my paper. I can create anything. I can be guide or renegade; taking the readers affably along or ignoring them all together for an audience of one.

From where is this coming? Have I always been aware of the power in my words, my voice, myself?

One of my earliest and fondest memories is of my mother, curled in a chair, reading. I would totter over on my fleshy baby legs, grab onto her skirt and watch her. What was she doing with that thing full of paper? Did she scribble with crayons, like me? And was she going to let me color, too? "Book. Can you say, b-o-o-k," she would coo at me. I would imagine I smiled and tottered off in another direction- probably to find my crayons. And so, at an early age, words became a part of my life. My mother even tells me that in her womb, I would get especially still when she sat down to read. In that fluid silence, I wonder how could I have known this. But if my mother provided my first introduction to words, it certainly didn't end with her. Growing up I was blessed with not only a house full of Barbies (and their many outfits), but also the verbal offerings of my family.

Swathed in my faded terry-cloth bathrobe, I sip my now-warm tea. Inspiration is still around here, somewhere. Hiding.

Sweet potato pie. Roasted chicken. Honey iced tea. Neckbones and green beans. The words of my cousins, aunts and uncles are as familiar to me as these foods-and twice as seasoned! Often intertwining together into a rich gumbo of love.

I would hear tales of romance gone sour over Sunday dinner. My aunts would pass out advice to each other as they passed the buttered corn. Uncle Wayne would make us all laugh when he spun out these long stories about his wife's culinary abilities, or should I say, lack thereof. Where did the paprika in the meatloaf end and the spicy talk begin? Many of the memories of my grandparent's house are sprinkled with the storytelling I heard all around

me.

I grew up in L.A. in a house that contained no less than thirteen people at any given time. That made for cramped corners, but good times—at least for us kids. We would make go-carts, which was usually a week-long endeavor because it took so long to find wheels around the neighborhood. Other times we would break out some rope and play double-dutch, reciting cheers universally known by just about every seven-year-old. It was a special project of my cousin Laurence and me to dissect flies. Granny's wash-room was our laboratory. We would take plastic forks and safety pins and operate on the dead flies we found in window sills. Sometimes we even caught fresh specimens! But the most favorite pastime of all was playing 'chech'. Pronounced exactly like the pastor and everyone else at our apostolic church said it.

We would take the chairs from the dining room table and line them up into pews. After grabbing one of the many Bibles Granny had around the house and fashioning an altar, we were ready to entertain the Holy Ghost!

True to form, the first thing we did before ne'er a word was 'preached', was to pass around a plate for the offering. We would throw in little pieces of paper as dollars and change. Then my cousin Rayjon would pick up his sticks and play the drums while we sang an 'A' and 'B' selection. (Church talk for one or two hymns.) Only after someone "caught the Holy Ghost," did we settle down for the "preaching of the word."

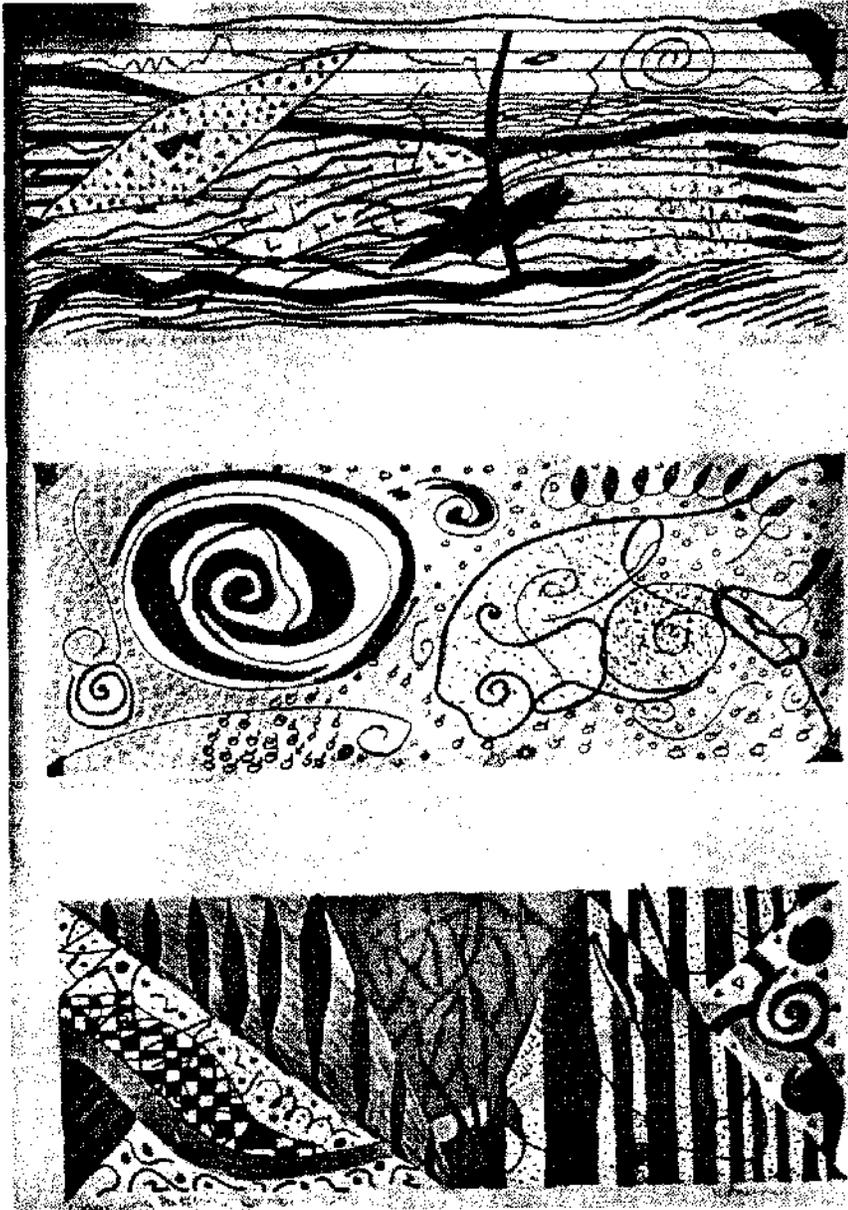
Tamika would begin by having us turn to a certain chapter and verse in our books. She would read from the Bible, hitting her hands on the podium every so often for emphasis. One of us would stand up and 'testify'. With a hand on her back, and another one raised dramatically in the air, my cousin Gladys would out-testify all of us. Then, Tamika would really break it down. She came around the altar and stood in front of us, shouting and shaking the

Bible in our faces. Wiping the sweat off with a dish rag, she pleaded with us to "choose the Lord over eternal damnation." (The girl probably couldn't even spell damnation, then.) We knew church was winding down when Tamika motioned for me to go to the kitchen. I got up to get a glass of ice water to refresh our pastor, and some cooking oil.

The oil was so she could pray for our sins and put little crosses on our foreheads, just like the ministers at St. Peter's. And also, like at St. Peter's, she did not fail to pass around the plate for a second offering. We were too much!

I understand now. My family. My memories. My favorite books and stories. These are my inspiration. They call me to remember. To search for the members, the parts of my being that form and nourish my voice. I need only to recall that I have the history, ability, the spices to cook-up good tales. It's a family recipe!

Inspiration has come and left, with promises to return. I wash and put away my tea cup, snuggle into my faded terry-cloth bathrobe and fall asleep...



Mount Saint Misery

Erin K. Dowd

Often, when we look back on high school, it is with vision clouded by fond memories and softened by the warm rosy glow of affection. For some, myself included, "fond" might not be the word to describe the memories that have captured such an important chunk of teenage life. From my current point of view as a college freshman, it is with a slight sense of envy that I listen to my friends chat about the past four years over a box of Domino's. The aspects of high school they miss the most: homecoming, parties, football games, I've never experienced, and in this case, I feel robbed. Part of me resents the people that stole the stereotypical fantasy of teenage existence I always dreamed I would embody. One reminisces about her relationship with a devoted teacher, another about Friday night dances with the whole gang, another about the simplicity of the school building itself. It's these little things that jog my memory; that cause me to reflect on everything I've missed out on. I'm jealous of the fact that my friends actually enjoy recounting their high school days and of the ease with which they can revisit such a beloved chapter of their lives. A dewy spring morning or a crisp fall afternoon might by its very scent, pulse, or feeling transport one spiritually back to the sun splashed, bucolic setting of a beloved campus. Mt. St. Mercy Academy left its imprint on my delicate psyche in a slightly different manner.

My dear old alma mater is at first glimpsed through a copse of trees after a swooping turn onto a private road. Still in the dis-

tance it exudes a subtle charm of antiquity. There is an undisturbed hush about the grounds; the buzzing of bees and the sharp snap of a twig can be heard without straining. Here and there pallid statues of various dead martyrs and other sacred heroes stand in relief to the verdant backdrop. Once past the playing fields and halfway around the grassy oval, one is confronted by the striking facade of the Academy. What had appeared as subtle charm from a remote view now could be realized as a ghastly architectural nightmare. It is entirely possible to picture scenes of pitiable orphans, high-pitched screams and lamentable liaisons between the ill-fated.

The buildings, constructed sometime after the death of Christ and before the birth of the blues, daily housed two hundred and fifty unfortunates condemned to toil unceasingly under the jaundiced eye of the reviled Mother Superior. With the exception of a few very old out-to-pasture nuns who wandered the campus in full nun regalia, these ladies had given up the outfits of yesteryear in favor of an updated, though still not fashionable, style of dress. It was apparent, however, that the clothing worn was of good quality and probably costly. Where it was purchased is one of the great mysteries of my young life. I assumed that an industry had secretly grown up around the nuns' need to acquire very dowdy articles of clothing to replace the medieval garb that had been tossed aside during the mass molting season following the Ecumenical Council.

As frumpy as they appeared in their various ensembles, compared to the required uniform of the students, they dazzled. Even to the hopelessly optimistic, it soon became obvious that we were engaged in a battle of fashion survival. Dressed in elephant gray and navy pleated skirts, white blouses, boxy wool blazers, knee socks and loafers, it would seem that we had already lost the first round. If the intention of the design of our uniforms was, as had been aloofly stated, "to set us apart," it had succeeded smashingly. Uniform infractions were dealt with harshly, as were myriad

other offenses punishable by detention. It is with a sharpened sense of discomfort and disbelief that I manage to piece together fragments of memories gathered during a random Tuesday afternoon detention period: Sr. Josephine's lumpy form waddling up and down the aisles with a rusty crayola tin, soliciting five dollar bills from the gum-chewing sinners, or Sr. Agnes's goofy appearance in the doorway, ten chins and all, commissioning a band of evil-doers to construct a bulletin board for Catholic School's Week as their sentence.

Yet another distinguishing factor that set us apart even from the other, more modern, Catholic schools we interacted with through sports was the bewildering layout of the inside of the school. A century ago, Mt. St. Mercy was a boarding school. The ghosts of that period still remained in rather concrete ways that served to embarrass us in front of opposing teams who attended more up-to-date schools. Most of the bathrooms in the building contained not only stalls, but also showers, rows of sinks and also bath tubs. Many classrooms had obviously been dormitory rooms for the inmates and were equipped with an old, cracked sink. There even existed an underground passage that went from the bowels of the school to the subbasement of the Mother House- a scary place in its own right. In an effort to avoid contact with the outside world at all costs, we were herded through the school basement on our monthly treks to mass under the shepherding of Sr. Carola. A single light bulb swinging overhead revealed a network of small hanging buckets set up to catch the monotonous drips that leaked from the primitive plumbing. The dim light led us towards the chapel, but failed to hide the age of the passageway, as its subdued nature actually drew attention to the ever-growing gap that separated the cracked tile floor from the walls. Perhaps in my declining years I will look back on this and remember it as charming, but I don't think so.

Delightful as the edifice and accoutrements of the school were, they were mere trappings. Set against this backdrop a daily struggle for individual freedom was occurring which pitted the administration and staff against the student body (and a few disenfranchised faculty members) in a classic face off with the expected lamentable results. My fellow students and I were endeavoring to thrive in an atmosphere that in no way could be perceived as benign. The smallest details of our school lives were controlled by our elders, and we had little or no say in any decision. Although the administration will whole-heartedly deny this charge, I can clearly remember several instances when the student body unanimously voted in favor of one thing, but was given another. Of course, every Mount student knew the rumor that Sr. Carola, the student council moderator, hand picked the next year's student council, but no one could be sure, since after all she was the only one permitted to see the election results.

The rules and regulations which governed our dress, conduct, academic performance, spiritual growth and almost every aspect of our lives during the school year were numerous, inhibiting and, many times, unduly strict. Ever mindful that we were being monitored, we went about our daily lives trying to eke out some semblance of a normal high school experience. If that meant breaking a few ridiculous rules, then so be it. The irony is that the majority of the grievous infractions committed would have been considered acceptable behavior in a school where the guidelines for proper conduct had been revised after the advent of indoor plumbing. It was considered reckless to appear in public with any uniform abnormality, save, perhaps, the pinning up of a sleeve after the loss of a limb. The chewing of gum was so heinous as to command a severe detention sentence. It was also imparted to us that gum chewing was a social abomination and, if one had to do it, it should only be done in the privacy of one's bedroom. The vending

machine rules were so involved and complicated that lowly Freshmen required extensive advisement by upper classmen before they could approach a snack machine with any degree of confidence. Abuse of a privilege, such as dressing normally one day every two months, was a double-edged sword. If your outfit was deemed inappropriate, you, of course, received detention for the disgrace you brought upon yourself and your entire family but also suffered a second shame for endangering the future granting of the privilege. Had that been lost because of one's faulty fashion sense, the balance of one's high school career would be spent in inglorious ignominy. Narrow was the path one had to tread to avoid the certain punishment that even a minor violation could bring.

Repression begets insurrection and, admittedly, we rebelled in ways which would be considered laughable elsewhere, but we did rebel. What might have been considered sedition by our oppressors was considered righteous by us because we were under tyrannical rule. Sneaking into chapel to talk out loud and irreverently, playing solitaire on a school computer, using the faculty elevator, using a vending machine after the lunch period had ended, chewing forbidden gum with open-mouthed abandon and disgracing ourselves, our families, our school and, yes, even our nation by shortening uniform skirts to obscene lengths all helped to ease the tension that might otherwise have erupted into a more violent end. Still, the pretense existed that we had a voice, as did the idea that change could be brought about in an open forum. After working in this school's student government, and serving as its head, I realized the regrettable truth: we were there merely to perform the routine tasks assigned to us by the principal and usually they were janitorial or decorative in nature. We were not even empowered to meet without permission. For a school that espoused the theory that today's young women are tomorrow's leaders, this was certainly a contradiction. If we couldn't be trusted to make a few trivial deci-

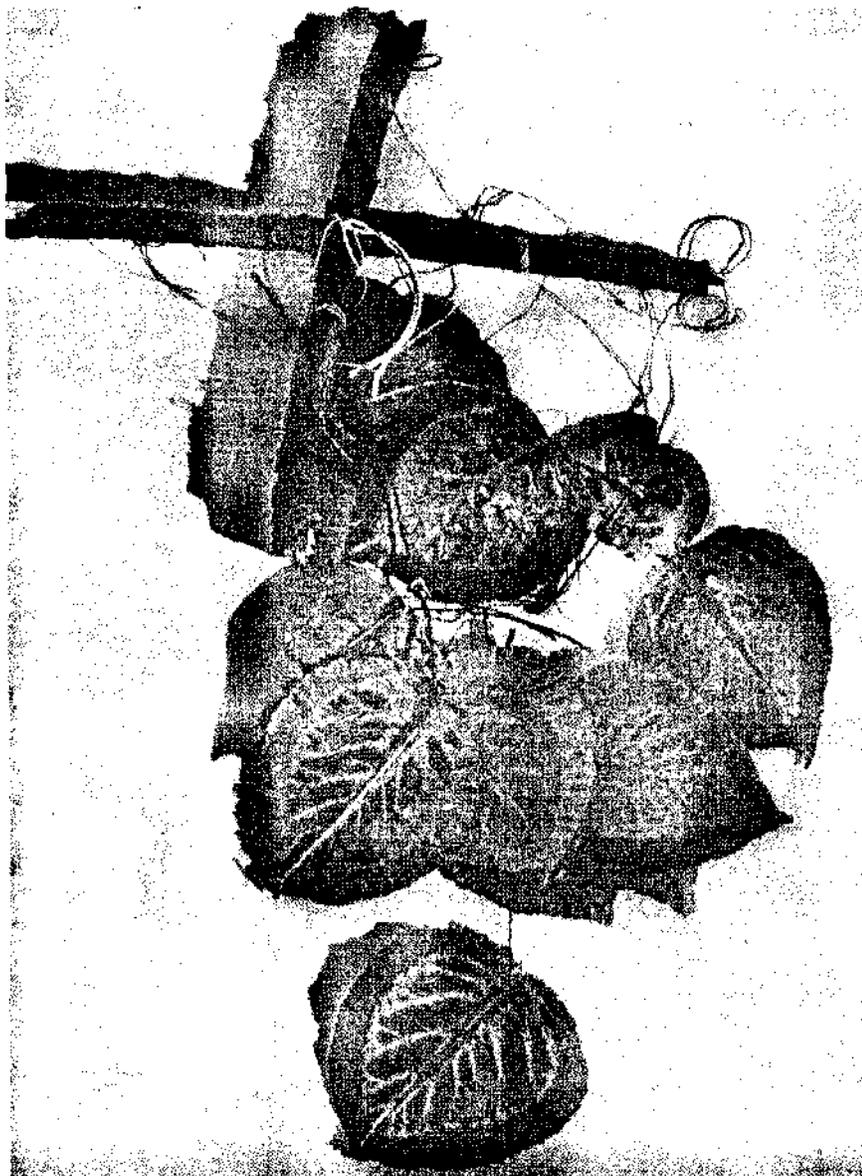
sions, even about prom songs and field day events, how would we learn to be independent intellectuals and educated consumers? I've come to the conclusion that a school proud of the motto "Excellence makes the difference," obviously doesn't see a point in messing with perfection, or in this case, an out-dated mind frame.

Thanks to the newly acquired and ever-changing wisdom I've developed as a college student, I can almost understand and maybe even agree with the Mount's basic principles of discipline. Although I still hold many of their repressive rules and restrictions to be highly unnecessary and un-called for, in theory, many of them have the potential to actually prove beneficial. I've come to the conclusion that the administration's purpose was to prepare us for the future and mold us into cookie-cutter role models with feminist points of view. It was more important that we aggressively took hold of the fact that it would take more than just our biological sex to keep us down and that we understood the necessity of the disposal of any remnants of the lingering stench of 1950's social roles assigned to women. However, the rules of Mt. St. Mercy, by their nature, prepared us for just the contrary. They hoped their unceasing demands and high expectations would lessen the blow of reality once we entered the real world. Unfortunately, their attempts proved unsuccessful. My classmates and I were branded with the impression that the outside world would be as accepting of women as our high school was. On career days and formal assemblies, we were bombarded with Mount graduate success stories, but we never learned of their struggles or failures. Their ideas that we would and could do anything certainly contradicted their stuffy guidelines for our conduct. They tried to impart to us that we could all be successful, but did not teach us how to accept the rejection one is bound to face in life.

At the time, I thought if I had it to do over again, I would attend another school. To this day, I can not say that I am grateful

for my experiences at the Mount, but as time passes, I can gradually appreciate the faculty's efforts. In social situations and class room discussions, I find that I am more at ease than some of my peers from coed schools, because of the confidence I obtained in an all-girls setting. I also think that going to the Mount provided me with an edge to take advantage of several opportunities I may not have been eligible for or confident enough to try elsewhere. For example, I was able to play volleyball, softball and golf, while maintaining my position of student council president, year book business editor and news paper reporter. Our sports teams never lacked the attention that girls sports do at a coed school, and there *were* no preconceived male egos to get in the way of whatever we did.

It was with some satisfaction that I drove out of the parking lot after a graduation ceremony that was halted several times by the stern countenance of the beloved Mother Superior staring down hapless guests who had become improperly exuberant at the mention of a family member's name. The breeze from the open sunroof tantalized the blue and gold tassel which dangled from my rear view mirror. I glanced back to see the pride of the nuns, the precious statue of Mary, standing in her usual graceful pose but with a not so subtle difference. Fingernails painted a vivid red hue, blue shadow accenting downcast eyes, cigarette dangling from an outstretched hand and graduation cap slightly askew, she appeared a silent salute to the tenacity of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the wretched refuse. For the first time, this model woman looked real, like someone I could hang with.



Forest of Rain

Jerome Graber

There is a steady pelting of light rain from above, but only fat drops coalesce from the canopy above to drip down below. They fall like hail from seventy feet up and crash recklessly to the moist ground, becoming part of the brown runoff. Rain falls here perpetually, and when it doesn't rain the forest is in want of it. In the temperate rainforest of Olympic National Park as much as fourteen feet fall each year on the western side of the mountain range, most of it from Pacific wind currents sweeping up the coast. In the rainshadow of the mountains, the air has been wrung of its baggage, and less than 20 inches of rain fall in most years. As the air passes over Mount Olympus, the stubborn, glacier-capped troll demands payment for passage, and his tribute comes in the form of rain, that clothes the valleys in verdant green at his rocky feet.

Everywhere here water is easily visible as the source of life. The Hoh, Bogachiel, Quinalt, Elwha, and Queets rivers penetrate the interior, returning the excess rain and melted mountain snow to their source. Every night a dense fog creeps slowly up each creek and stream, fresh with the salty smell of the ocean as much as thirty miles away. Every coast and common trillium (*Trilliion ovatum* and *sessile*), every moss, and every fern, growing in silence on the shaded forest floor, breathes heavily the dank perfume that caresses it. As morning comes on bright, clear days, sunlight spills in long pools of gold over the rolling ridges of tree-covered land. In response the ghosts recede, gathering once again out at sea among

the rising and falling waves. On most days however, the sun does not grace in its full glory the slopes here, and the mist retreats from the river valleys only with reluctance. The forest is left laden with dew from its nightly visitor.

In the moist soil, a Banana slug (*Ariolimax columbianus*) slinks its way leisurely over dead and rotting leaves. The largest land mollusk at up to twelve inches, its skin is a dull yellow with mottled blotches (thus the name) that creates the perfect camouflage for it among the derelict leaves of autumn upon which it feasts. In other seasons, the slug eats moss that grows in abundance on the leftover trunks and branches of fallen trees. When the slug is dead, ants will gorge themselves on its soft flesh while a passerby turns in revulsion from the sight, and looks instead to the majestic trees above.

With the rich soil and abundant supply of water here, normal species grow to heights that defy imagination. A western hemlock (*Tsugo heterophylla*) here is 270 inches around, 241 feet tall, and has sixty-seven foot spread at its widest point. Douglas fir (*Pseudotsugo menziesii* var. *menziesii*), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), and western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) dominate the landscape alongside the hemlock. Their trunks rise in majestic testament to the virtue of patience. Robed in epiphytes the giant trees create microecosystems of their own. Their roots spread farther and deeper than their branches, supporting populations of microorganisms. Mosses and lichens tenderly grace their trunks and branches, gaining their sustenance from the nightly fog. These giant trees are not rainforest species at all, but the unique conditions that exist here have allowed normal species to break free of their usual constraints.

Most of the seeds that fall to the forest floor are eaten by foragers, like the Olympic chipmunk (*Eutamias amoenus*) and northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*). Those that aren't

devoured may germinate in the rich, humus soil, but will be crowded out easily by competing shrubs and ferns. Only if the seeds happen to come to rest on the side of a toppled tree do they have a chance for success. When each tree falls, it is quickly covered by a host of mosses, lichens and ferns. The tree's bark is eaten away by various foraging insects, but the heartwood remains. In the Alaskan cedars (*Chamaecyparis nootkatenis*) especially, the rich and pungent sap discourages insects and rotting produced by moisture. The trees may lie for twenty years on the forest floor, slowly disappearing under a carpet of green. The space they abandoned in the canopy produces a proliferation of opportunists immediately. A seedling that chances on such a fallen tree, often referred to as a nursery, grows quickly. Its roots plunge into the flesh of its forefather, tapping their nutrients, and the moist, slowly-rotting wood provides a comfortable bed. The seedling may bolt with the light from above, growing quickly, and soon it becomes a race for the space. Several seedlings, lined up in a row along the nursery's length, compete with one another for the spot in the canopy above. Older, faster-growing seedlings shade out those that lag behind. As they grow taller, their roots spread over the massive circumference of the fallen mighty, and these buttress roots, produced not by genes as in most rainforest plants, but by environment, will support the tree in its eventual glorious height. Eventually two or three seedlings gain dominance, and now the race will turn into a grudge match through the centuries. The trees, hundreds of years old, push their branches against one another in the canopy above and crowd out each other's roots below the soil. Trees here everywhere announce their relationship by growing in straight lines of three or four, each from the same nursery tree. One day, these trees will tumble, having seen the rise and fall of presidents, of empires, of ideologies, with only the annual growth of ring around ring to note the passing of time. And they too will be nurseries to the next gen-

eration of giants.

So the seedling feeds upon the old, and the ancient trees of the past again in the seedlings, to fall once more and complete the cycle. How many trees have risen in this way over the millennia? Here in the Olympic rainforests, the first tree that ever rose above its brethren in the valleys of the mist still thrives today in the heartwood of every other tree. Each is linked to the others in the cycle of life and death, passing genes, passing nutrients, and passing along a history of its own unique beginnings to the tiny seeds of those that will follow and continue the tradition. The land provided the ideal environment, rich in cycling water, to continually support this growth and regrowth throughout the years.

And we, following a winding trail through the magical wilderness, look in awe upon the towering hemlock, while we make our difficult way around and over the toppled cedars. Turning our heads without amazement from the tiny seedlings growing on its dead expanse, passing humans ignore the evidence of death as a sign of continuity. Here, the crashing demise of one tree heralds us so because it reminds us of our own mortality. Instead of rejoining the cycle of life, we bury ourselves in concrete boxes, or give our bodies to fire and ash. This is the dread of death. We have no promise of a handful of seedlings. No moist soil crowds eagerly against our cold skin. There is only isolation and silence awaiting our last day, and a slow, dry decay unlike the wet, green joint that links every Olympic life to a limitless eternity.

Summer Soulstice*Maureen Traverse*

"April is the cruelest month," or so we thought as it taunted us by springing forward and showering us in the earliest days of summer and then dropping back down below forty degrees, even dusting the grass with frost. How could one month be so inconstant? We stood for Easter pictures, topped like ice cream sundaes in frilly white, with gloves and hats, carrying shiny purses with which we had nothing to fill. My mother lined the three of us up on the lawn in front of three sapling evergreen trees. I can measure time in photos by the height of those three trees. Behind us, three stories of a white suburban house rose into the china blue sky, which, to my four feet, seemed a daunting height. Five years old, in one photo my mother snapped too early, I am caught face turned upward, gawking at the house as if at an animal much taller than me. I think of our house now as a different place than the house in which we grew up, although we have never moved.

I. Suburban Waste Land, 1987

I watch the cars slip by, glimmering in the June sun like strange water beetles skidding across a slick, black stream of blacktop. Standing on the corner of Cedar and Cranston, I am waiting for the first glimpse of my father's car returning, and this was the safest position I could assume. To my right lay countless more suburbs while to my left three skyscrapers puncture the haze of smog and distance like three, tiny, warning fingers. I know if you fol-

lowed Cedar, all the way down hill in that direction, you would plunge into the thriving heart of the city, museums and the concert hall blooming like ancient Greek temples on both sides of the street. Lining Cedar for as far as I could see in both directions, box houses perched on the edge of lawns, now olive green in the summer heat. Far down, near the first intersection, I can see the street ripple like water, from the temperature. I turn back toward the city as the cars stream straight toward me and I revel in the precarious excitement of being this close to speed on such a lazy summer afternoon. The breeze provided by the flashing cars is far more generous than any natural wind. My skin is pink and sticky from playing outside nearly the entire afternoon, and I can already taste the sooty, tingly smell of a neighbor's barbecue.

I stoop down on a tree lawn, just beside the curb, propping my chin on my knees, and examine a discarded hubcap turned upward like a satellite dish receiving celestial messages. The grimy silver attracts me, and I suppress the desire to pick it up and bring it back to the garage. "What are you going to do with that?" my father might ask and I would be forced to admit that I had absolutely no idea what I planned to do with it. With my father's car still nowhere in sight, I stand, instead, and turn around to face my street, Cranston.

Cranston emerges from Cedar like a tiny tributary off a mammoth, pulsing river. Almost none of the traffic is diverted, and Cranston remains hushed except for the slow rustling of leaves and the occasional throng of car horns. From where I stand, I can clearly see its start and finish, two points on one straight and even line, parallel to at least half a dozen other streets like it. But Cranston is my street, and I know the topography of every piece of sidewalk lining it. Above my head, an arching network of tree limbs form a cavernous tunnel all the way down like the coffered ceiling of a cavernous cathedral. Plumes of green leaves ruffle in the winking

sunlight and paint the street with varying strokes of light like layers of stained glass. My own skin is dotted with the warm, white light, and I fold my arms as if the entire cave and all of its inhabitants belonged to me.

Both sides of Cranston are bordered with a perfect row of three-story houses like half-gallon milk cartons. However, no two houses are exactly the same. A pea green home points skyward with tall triangle gables like church spires while a brick, squat house folds its sturdy arms in a sinking porch. This street grew slowly, Mr. Mitchell's home old enough to still have a carriage house instead of a garage while some of the smaller, aluminum-sided homes, built after the television, completely lack front porches. I walk from Cedar to my house as if I am a tightrope walker, placing one foot neatly in front of the other until I reach the apron of my driveway and extend my arms in a triumphant V. I look up at my house.

The front of my house is a face with a brown roof of hair. Two windows with decorative blue shutters on the second story open like a pair of glass eyes. A second, burgundy roof slopes like the upper lip above a gaping porch, the toothy smile. A beard of pine and greenery flanks his chin. Bushes of Queen Anne's Lace have snowed, flecking the ground with tiny white petals. Up the short driveway, my sisters are playing "seven-up" against the side of the house with an old tennis ball that thuds repetitively against the white wood. I continue past them to our two backyards separated by a rusty, skeletal wire fence and a swinging gate that always becomes an elevator in our games. In the far back corner of our yard, below an evergreen tree whose branches seem to drip with the weight of its needles, stands our swing set, already starting to rust from all the spring rain. One of my favorite pastimes is the eternal contest to see if I can touch my bare toes to the lowest branch of the tree as I swing.



I climb onto the plastic seat and stare at the sky, which has begun to churn with yellow-tinted clouds. The wind has picked up gradually and I know that it will start to rain before the sun sets. Kicking my sandals into the path worn away under the swings, I extend my legs and start the instinctual action of swinging, and I watch the green around me melt and freeze with the dizzying motion.

This is the land that I grew up on, as it remains, pinned in my memory. Yet one cannot forget that a house, too, is a kind of organic creature that will evolve on its own. Maybe, the land will bloom, the vines and trees germinate, the house remain alive. At its worst, the house will decay and the land will deteriorate into a faceless waste land.

II. Stages, 1996

T.J. and Marcus are five and six years old and have no idea that I could possibly be much older than they are. Time fails to make much of an impression on either one since it seems so boundless. They measure time in trips to their grandparents' house, the couple who have lived next door to us for as long as I can remember. Teasingly, I promise them that I am one hundred and twenty-two years old, which as far as they know, I could very well be. Actually, I am eighteen, and my friend and I have been on my front porch teasing them for close to an hour. "A hundred and twenty-two?!" T.J. exclaims with his fists planted on his hips, "You'd be older than my mom!"

"Well, guess how old I am," I challenge.

"Are you nine?" Marcus asks. I may as well be.

Dusk has set in and the air thickens from translucent illumination to a cloudy violet. Their grandmother has soon stuck her head around the screen door across our driveway and shouted, "Boys, you get in here and leave those girls alone!" With a promise

that they will most definitely see us tomorrow, they bolt across the lawn and into their own house. Lucia goes inside also, and only I remain, in the cool air, watching the growing darkness pricked by the occasional yellow glimmer of a firefly. My best friend at nine used to squash lightening bugs at dusk in to a single glowing smear on her front stoop that would fade in minutes, even before we were called inside. Not much entertainment in the suburbs. I don't think she did it to be cruel; I think she was fascinated by it. I was too, though I wouldn't do it myself. Now I am amazed that such a creature could die and still glow, even just for a few minutes afterward.

Squinting through the dark, now, I see the same street I've always lived on cynically. Boxy houses, neatly-trimmed lawns, cars parked in driveways that once seemed unusual as the particular aspects of my street now seem monotonous, even sinister as the confinements of a homogenous, pre-fabricated landscape. The front porches that once grinned now yawn, and the patchwork of lawns and tree lawns has eroded into a cryptic grid. Where I smelled barbecue I now smell car exhaust. The glimmer of fireflies that I used to pretend were evidence of tiny fairies now pierce the dark like the brief illumination of cigarettes being lit and smoked by someone just out of my view. The Cleveland streets murmur in the distance, once mystically, now just like one more unreal city.

The front door is locked so I hop off the side of the porch and stroll, hands in the pockets of my denim shorts, to the back of the house where the screen door has been propped ajar to allow air in. June, once warm and invigorating, now stifling and suffocating, creeps to a close. When I was six, I pounded so hard on this door, to be let in, that I threw my fist straight through the pane, shattering it in a tinkle of falling glass like a million white stars. This image rises to the surface of my crowded thoughts, and I have nearly the same impulse to break the glass, one I ignore like the impulse to steal the hubcap. Just as well. The pane was replaced with shat-

terproof glass just days after I broke it.

Inside, I tiptoe across the kitchen tile and peer through the dining room and into the living room. My father, naturally, sits in front of the television, his face at least animated by laughter while the blue glow deepens the creases around his mouth and eyes. Lucia, at the dining room table, leans so far over a magazine I think she may plunge into it like a scuba diver tipping off the side of a raft. Standing, unseen, on the threshold between the kitchen and dining room, I stare through the clutter of armchairs and end tables, out of the front window into the darkening street. My own suburban waste land stretches out beyond the porch that I used to pretend was a stage. We turned my jump rope into a microphone and performed for passing squirrels and cars.

III. A Game of Chess in the Kitchen, 1998

The June when I was nine years old, the strangest idea came over my thirteen-year-old sister. She began staying up all night to watch the sun rise. She described it for me, perfectly. Color began to creep over the horizon, first cornflower blue, then violet, next purple, and finally pink. If the sky remained cloudless, you could glimpse the first few rays of sun from behind the garage like strands of fine hair that might reach as far as to touch your own skin while you sat on the back steps. Jenni, then six, and I began defying sleep with her, and I count that as the summer that we actually became friends.

I don't remember that we spent those nights doing anything spectacular. Usually we listened to music, quietly so as to remain covert and giggled at almost anything as sleeplessness set in. When morning finally dawned, we would eat Rice Krispies in the kitchen, illuminated in hazy yellow light, and play chess. We rarely finished a game. We ended up on the back steps feeding a jittery flock of chickadees, which were our only other companions that early in the

morning.

I don't remember why Mary decided to begin this ritual. I only remember my own excitement because I had never seen the sun rise before. It had merely appeared outside of my window every morning, spilling in and painting shapes all over the carpet as it slipped through the eyelet curtains. Even more excitement seemed to come from my newfound ability to withstand sleep. Seeking independence, we had managed to carve out our own little sliver of time that belonged only to us. Everyone else in the world drifted off to sleep and we alone kept the planet turning by remaining conscious. I found a whole other space in time almost as if I had discovered a secret room in the furthest corner of our house that had been kept locked to me before, that no one had entered in years.

At this time of night, the house seemed to take on an otherworldly glow. If departed souls wanted to return, I was sure they would have chosen these hours to appear. Sometimes, they did. The stairs creaked lightly under their weight; the curtains gently danced in the draft from their movement. Shadows were sculpted along the walls by orange streetlight like intricate relief patterns on the walls of the church. The carpet seemed to seethe in the dark and, most spectacularly, the floor nearly rose and fell when car headlights passed outside as if the wood were breathing. From under all the layers of paint and wallpaper seeped the murmurs of every person who had grown in the house where we lived.

When I come home from college in the summer, I may not see Jenni all day. She and I will stay up late some nights, seated cross-legged on the kitchen floor, talking, I can't help but look cynically at the cluttered house, piles of mail on the table and school papers shuffled from room to room until, finally, they wind up in the trash. Dying flowers hang limply over the side of a vase perched on the windowsill. My father's tennis racket remains propped in the corner of the room beside a bag of laundry from that

day's lunchtime match. As the night wanes and morning waxes, she and I laugh and I begin watching the room expectantly, waiting for that moment when I will see the space transformed, when we will transcend time and I will be revived.

I wanted to re-cultivate my waste land. I wanted to sculpt time so as to reform the perspective I had developed of the land I had grown from. Still struggling to change myself, I found a piece of the land that I had lost, belonging to the generations that had grown here, when I found that slice of time I had forgotten. I found my sister in a moment, sitting across from me on the kitchen floor, still connected to me as during that summer when we first became friends.

Keeping the Greenpeace

Tom Panarese

I never kept track of how many weekends I ruined that summer. I'm not some sort of sadistic freak or anything, but I do have to admit that T did have a tendency to annoy a few people while at work. It's not like I could help it or anything, I was just doing my job. So what if a bunch of Long Islanders felt the need to hurl obscenities at me as if they were major league fastballs? Okay, maybe I did have a little mean streak and did instigate some confrontations, but I didn't enjoy ticking people off.

Long Islanders get uptight over the smallest incidents. Something minor, such as a splinter, can set one of them off on rants that last for hours. Usually laden with the f-word, they degrade to mere pouting by day's end that is an attempt to ruin everyone's day. If someone becomes upset, everyone has to repeatedly hear why, and cannot enjoy their day for fear that they will upset him further. It ruins everyone's day. My job at Robert Moses State Park was to prevent this phenomenon. Most of the time that meant quietly cleaning the bathroom, renting out umbrellas, checking fishing permits, or cleaning the Atlantic shoreline; however, occasional conversations with patron could have ended in violence had I not been in uniform. Issues over my field's permanent residents, a family of deer, often led to such frustrating confrontations with beach patrons. The deer weren't much of a nuisance; the nuisance was the hundreds of complaints from patrons about the deer walking around the patio and parking lot.

I hated these complaints. They were distracting. I would

spend most of the day in the umbrella shack reading comic books, carrying on conversations with co-workers, and occasionally peering out at the beach to get a peek at a good-looking girl. I did not want to have to deal with customers, especially annoyed ones. Nevertheless, it was my duty, reading Superman wasn't. (By the way, I've tried reading everything from Shakespeare to Salinger at the beach. It's just not possible) So, as I flipped through my comic book, I would casually notice that the mama deer had journeyed onto the patio; naturally, I expected a complaint. Often within seconds, the following exchange would take place: "You know there's a deer over there."

"Yes, I know."

"Can't you do anything about it?"

"Not really, ma'am. This is their natural habitat."

"But did you see the ticks on that thing? Aren't you afraid someone's gonna get hurt?"

"Yes, that's why we tell people to stay away from them."

"You can't shoo it away?"

"No, ma'am. It's their natural habitat. They have every right to be here."

"Aren't they usually afraid of people?"

"I have no clue. Probably."

"Then why do they just come up to people like that and let them feed them?"

Now, mind you, that up until this point, I've been reading the comic book. So, I have to take the extra effort to look up at the deer, look at the patron, and say: "Well, ma'am, if you ate grass your entire life and someone offered you a French fry, wouldn't you want to see if you could get more fries?"

"I guess. Is there someone else I could talk to about this?"

"Sure. Kaaaaaaarrrreeeeennnnn!"

My foreman, Karen, having heard my bellow, would come

scurrying up to the umbrella shack and ask me what the problem was. I'd explain, and she would politely turn to the patron, saying, "Well ma'am, if you at grass your entire life and someone offered you a French fry, wouldn't you want to see if you could get more fries?"

Many patrons didn't like this response, even though it was the truth. They thought that the deer were violating their space, infringing upon a wonderful day at the beach. I never deviated from my response, always explaining why Robert Moses deer were so friendly. After all, who am I to tell a deer that she can't roam around her home? Still, some people would attempt to take the matter to a higher authority. Then, I'd gesture to the concession-mooching State Park Policemen that normally parked their ATV's ten feet to my left.

I guess going over my head eventually worked, too, because one day in August, the deer showed up on the patio with an orange "X" on its right side. When asked what it was, I calmly replied, "Apparently, too many people have been bothered by the deer's presence, so we've had to mark it for execution." Some were sympathetic to the animal's plight, others were glad to see it go. They thought the deer was a nuisance, that it had no right causing them problems when they were simply trying to have a good time at the beach. I guess that they were sick of yelling at their kids to stop feeding the deer French fries. I can see why-fries at Robert Moses cost something like \$2.50.

* * *

My friends had a blast in Cancun during last year's spring break. They had a run of good luck; their hotel flooded, so they were upgraded to a beautiful ocean resort with no extra charge. I've seen some of the pictures, and the place looked fantastic. Right on

the ocean, the building was about twenty stories tall and provided visitors with enough beach to make their stay definitely relaxing. They did not have to travel anywhere if they wanted to spend a day at the beach. All they had to do was get out of bed, pull on a bathing suit, gather together a towel, a book, sunglasses and lotion, and take the elevator to the ground floor. That's about twenty feet of walking for a few hours of lying out on the beach and reading a trashy Harlequin romance novel.

I've never been one to prefer the whole "resort" concept. I grew up with the Atlantic being a five dollar ferry ride away. Lying in the sun and reading a bad science fiction novel on Fire Island seems less artificial. The resort in Cancun that my friends described sounded like a twenty floor Marriott that happened to be on the crisp blue Pacific coast. The beach I've been going to since I was five has a few buildings made of wood that just sell concessions. The sounds coming from the area away from the shore are not the sounds of cheesy night shows and kids laughing at pool side, but the sounds of the five o'clock ferry departing and the clomping of bare feet on a time-beaten boardwalk. The Atlantic is a murky navy color and the sun chooses to hide behind the occasional cloud, sending chills up sunbathers' spines.

Fire Island, of course, has many communities that have permanent and seasonal residences, as well as a fair share of nightclubs and bars. Most of the island falls under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Service, who make sure that its history is maintained by keeping open such landmarks as the Fire Island Lighthouse. Sixteen years ago, the 130 year old structure was set for destruction, but that plan was stopped when an interest group banded together and collected money needed for a restoration. Since then, a preservation society has been set up to keep Fire Island's history alive, to make sure that the lighthouse remains a historic structure.

* * *

The lighthouse was always the last thing I saw when I walked off the beach after nightly cleanup. It wasn't hard to miss, being at the other end of the park and shining a bright light in my eyes every ten seconds. I never gave much consideration to the lighthouse. It let me know where Robert Moses ended and the National Seashore began. It had been there for over a hundred years and would be there long after I hung up my pick stick.

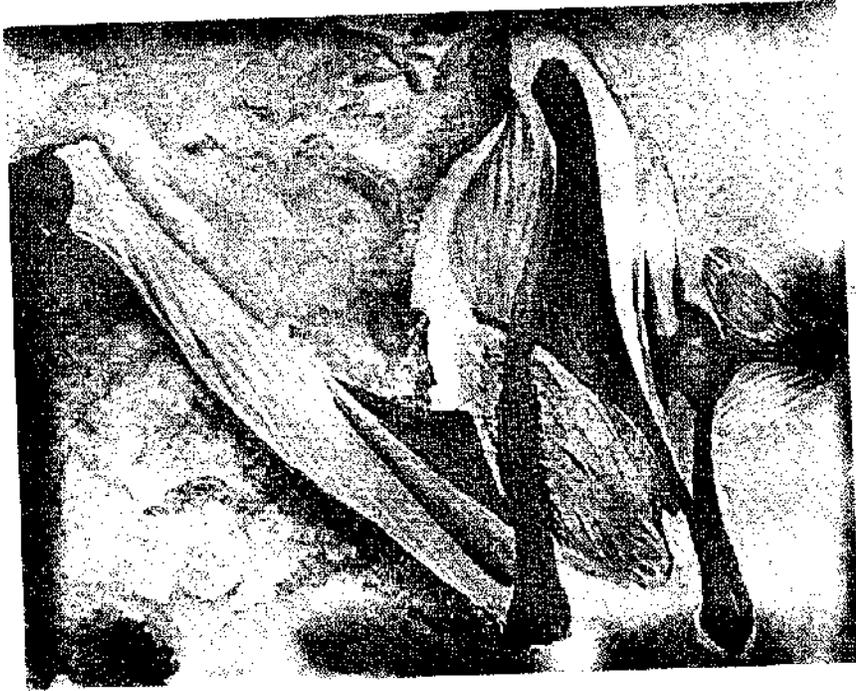
The pick stick is the weapon of a park employee, the key instrument to nightly cleanup. At most summer jobs, nightly clean up means washing a few dishes, sweeping the floors, and putting the chairs on top of a restaurant's tables before locking up. It is impossible to lock up a beach, but it is not impossible to sweep its floors. Three of us would trudge onto the shore at about six o'clock, pick sticks in our right hands and garbage bags in the other. My friend Jen and I would take the north and center parts of the beach while Dave, a behemoth nicknamed "Jurassic," brought up the rear out on the shoreline. Our mission was to comb for the hundreds of miscellaneous items left behind by beachgoers. Most trash that we picked up was from food: beer bottles, soda cans, potato chip bags, candy bar wrappers, and French fry containers were always in abundance on the shore. The five or six bags we filled demonstrated the slovenly nature of Long Islanders. Sometimes, the tide would be a contributor to our labor; medical waste always washed up following the Fourth of July weekend, an annual event comparable to the red tide phenomenon involving algae.

That's not to say that our work was never rewarding. There were many occasions where Jen and I would sit on a sand dune, drinking beers provided by lifeguards and watch Jurassic labor to finish his job. While enjoying the moment, we'd admire the beach

behind us. Once, Jen commented that as hard as we tried, the beach was always going to look damaged. "Let's face it," she said, "it probably looked a lot better before we all came along and made it a state park." I don't know why Miller Lite turns 20-year olds into philosophers, but I guess she was right. The beach was nowhere near pristine. A fenceline delineated where the dunes began and the beach ended, and empty garbage cans and lifeguard chairs pimped the coast. But considering the two hours of labor and five or six garbage bags we had put into that view, it was as pristine as it was going to get. Still, my satisfaction often led to frustration. People who spend millions of dollars to preserve a lighthouse receive praise from the surrounding community, while I make minimum wage and get cursed at on a daily basis so that I can help preserve nature. Or at least make patrons' weekends less crummy.

* * *

The Montauk Historical Society, intent on preserving a part of Long Island history, saved the two-hundred-year-old Montauk Point lighthouse and museum from being turned into a bed and breakfast. Meanwhile, erosion is taking its toll on the coast. Despite people's best efforts, the lighthouse is fated to eventually fall into the ocean.



Thrown into Table Talk

Kristin Hagert

After holiday dinners, when my relatives began to tell stories or bring up funny memories, it was a green light for me to annoy my parents into allowing me to leave the table. My enormous meal became an obstacle to that dismissal. "You're not going anywhere until your plate is licked clean," my father would tease me.

In response, I developed a "quick eating strategy." The peas and mashed potatoes dripping with gravy slid easily down my throat. The turkey, cut into large triangles, was popped rapidly one by one, like popcorn, into my mouth. To soften my food and speed process along, a swig of apple cider was gulped down. Chewing was my last priority. As fast as it was laid on my plate, it was gone. Molly, our thirteen year old lhasa apso and table scrap veteran, increased my time by catching those unfortunate pieces of turkey that fell onto the floor. After sitting patiently, eyeing my empty plate for a moment, I would proceed with repeated requests to be set free. My mother would eventually give in. However, not without saying, "Make sure that you rinse that plate off and put it in the dishwasher."

As to why my parents used to cherish the after dinner talks, I paid no attention. The scene was always the same. Grandma and Grandpa sat at either end of the cherry-stained oak table. Mom and Dad were on the left side of the table mirroring Uncle Allen and Aunt Diane. Scattered between the adults were myself, my broth-

er Chris and our cousins, Eric and David. The large oval shaped table separated and connected us at the same time. Thanks to David, last year's Christmas dinner was the very first time that I became the topic of conversation.

Outside, before dinner, David was showing off his brand new dirt bike. Attempting the "no hands" trick, his front wheel slanted awkwardly and he fell face first to the pavement. A large gash was evident in the center of his forehead, as he sat across from me. Talking about the wreck during dessert, my father decided to bring up my own infamous childhood bike wreck. "Tell your story Kristin," he urged, "Everyone will get a laugh out of that one." It's funny now. I thought to myself, but it was not funny at the time. As I told the story, my stomach began to twist into knots.

At eight years old, I was more of a tomboy than anything else. Hanging out at my brother's soccer and lacrosse practices, I wanted so badly to be able to play with them. "Kristin, for the last time, you can't play with the boys. They are bigger than you and I can't afford for you to get hurt," my dad always told me. My hair, a bowl cut, made me look like a mushroom. A frown on my face, dressed in Levi jeans and an oversized He-Man t-shirt, I looked identical to my older brother.

To expand my horizons, my parents enrolled me in dance classes, thinking that they would make me a bit more graceful. Claire, my best friend at the time, was in those classes with me. Every Tuesday and Thursday, we would go to ballet, tap and jazz together. At first, I did not like the idea of dancing, but after awhile I learned to enjoy those afternoons.

One afternoon, we were given white tights, shiny, black tap shoes and a new zebra striped leotard. During that class, we practiced profusely for the upcoming weekend recital. Coming home and prancing all over the living room, I was so proud to show off all of my new clothes to my parents. On the way home, Claire had

asked me to go bike riding to the creek with her where she was meeting her father. The thought of riding through the streets in my newly polished shoes and lightening white tights made my young heart skip a beat. I remember my mother's exact words when I asked her if I could go: "You can go but no matter what you do, you better not rip those new tights, young lady."

At this point in the story, I paused. My father gave my mother a knowing look. I was often allowed to do things, but there was always some sort of string attached. I was allowed to go play with my older brother and his friends, but not contact sports. When allowed to lay out on the beach, I was plastered in a body armor of coconut-smelling sun tan lotion. My mother caught my father's subtle look from across the table and conveyed it to me. As blood began to invade my embarrassed cheeks, I stared intently at the blue, floral embroidered table cloth as I continued.

Like an excited puppy finally allowed to play in the big backyard alone, I ran out of the house. Hopping onto my bike, Claire and I met on the corner. She and I rode furiously, shouting and screaming so that the neighbors would look out of their windows and see our new outfits.

Soon we arrived at the top of the hill that led to the creek. That is, if you could call this a hill. It was more like a small mountain and, being an eight year old, standing at the top was petrifying. It was a steep incline of about eight hundred feet. The path led straight into the river so that there was nowhere else to go if, say, your brakes were to fail you.

Wondering if she had seen the black diamond ski slope in front of us, I stood at the top as Claire raced down the hill without a care in the world. I remember her looking back curiously, as if wondering why I had not moved yet. With a burst of competitive energy, I took off thinking if Claire could do it, then so could I.

I glanced around the table and my father let out a chuckle.

Not only did I think I was invincible as a child, but I was also very competitive. As I looked further, I observed that everyone had smirks on their faces. Eric and I had played a ruthless game of basketball the year before and he was still bitter about my victory. Chris was still getting over the fact that I beat him at ping-pong before dinner. They were all aware of my competitive nature. I was surprised to see that they were really listening to my story and enjoying it as well. Feeling more comfortable, I continued.

In the beginning of my decline, everything was fine. I was picking up good speed and my new tights made it easy for me to maneuver. Soon, however, the handle bars began to shake. The pedals were moving swiftly without my help and it was at that moment that I spotted a rock in my path. I completely lost control of the bike and could not turn or step on the brakes.

I hit the boulder, that was masquerading as a small rock, and the bike buckled forward. Lurching over the handle bars, I left my bike behind. From the docks, Claire's parents witnessed my two flips in the mid-air. While I soared through the air, the water, Claire, the clubhouse, and the boats, interchanged like a moving kaleidoscope. Scraping every single inch of my body, after sliding fifteen feet on the pavement, I landed flat on my back.

The wind was knocked out of me, it seemed, for an eternity. In my dizzy state, I stared upwards into the sky, choking for air. When I finally caught my breath the tears began to fall. Turning my strained neck towards the hill, I saw my mangled bike looking much like my crumpled eight year old body.

The blood was seeping slowly through my brand new tights, presenting patches of white and red all over my legs. My leotard was torn in numerous places. Barely able to see my distorted reflection anymore, my tap shoes were ruined. Claire's mother drove me home as I laid in her father's arms like a frightened kitten. They did not want to get blood on the car seats, so I rode home

in his lap, wishing it was my own father who was holding me. All I could think about were my mother's last words to me: "You better not rip those tights, young lady."

Trembling on the front step, I stood shaking, looking a mess as Claire rang the doorbell. My mom came running out asking what had happened and Claire's parents explained what they had seen. I could see my mom struggling to recognize her daughter under a mask of blood and gravel. "Please don't be mad at me Mom, I didn't mean to hit that rock," I mumbled through tears. "I'm sorry I ripped my new tights. I will pay for a new pair with my allowance."

"Oh, honey don't worry. It will be just fine," she said as she took me up to her bathroom and cleaned my wounds with a smile on her face.

I looked over at my mom and her blue eyes were smiling just like they were that day in the bathroom. She had said that everything would be fine and it had been. I was surprised at the effect that my story had had on everyone. My grandfather had a grin on his face. My grandmother was shaking her head. My father was laughing hysterically. He could not get over the fact that I was more worried about ripping my tights than my own physical condition. David was bugging Aunt Diane to be excused from the table. Maybe next year he would be asked to talk about his own bike wreck and then he would understand the importance of this storytelling time.

I saw small tears forming in the corners of his aging eyes as my father laughed. Everyone else was laughing and did not notice the shiny gloss of his eyes. It is true that he could have been teary because he was laughing so hard. However, I think there was more to it. As I told the story, he was reminiscing and caught a few glimpses of his little girl. Looking at me now, he found it wonderful that I had grown into a successful young woman before his eyes.

At the same time, however, he found it hard to let those "daddy's little girl" memories go.

The holiday was not only to get together and begin new stories, but to become closer by reminiscing about old memories. My story, and others, were puzzle pieces that when fit together revealed who we were. Until that point I had never realized it. Leaning on the sturdy table, instead of devouring Grandma's infamous apple pie, I chewed slowly, digested properly, and intently listened to the familiar story about Uncle Harry putting French Fries up his nose.



Floating
S.T. Daley

The sun beat down on my head as I walked over to the refreshment stand. It stood in front of the restaurant where we ate lunch the day before and my eyes scanned the rusty tin walls in search of a vendor. After squinting a bit they came to rest on a girl, about 12 years old, wearing a white tank top smeared with dirt and trying to pick something out from between her teeth with her left index finger. About to ask her where her mother was, I hesitated, figuring that she probably wouldn't understand English. Standing still for about a minute, I paused, my command of the Thai language was then only a week old. While I assessed my approach, the young girl looked up and said, "Hello!"

I blushed; embarrassed that I couldn't address her in the native tongue in her own country. I wasn't even in a tourist trap, like Bangkok's Siam Square or a resort locale such as Ko Samet. About to reply, I stopped myself and answered, "Sawadee Khrap."

She smiled, and I pointed down to the bottled water resting on top of the counter. The hike through Erawan Falls National Park took two hours, and we had run out of water after an hour and fifteen minutes. Luckily, we immersed ourselves in the waterfalls soon after. On the return back to the trail's beginning, the four of us considered drinking falls water by purifying it with iodine. At that point, our throats aching, the attempt seemed logical. Our failure could only result in some time on the toilet. Matt, who still had the "shits" from the day before, proved to be a significant deterrent, noting his experience on the "squatter" a few hours earlier. We chose to thirst for a short while rather than inflict undo anguish

upon ourselves.

That's easy to do on any trip at home, but the return through a rain forest in Southeast Asia is not a regular hike. When we reached the end of our trek, we headed for the row of tin shacks that housed the park concessions. Small stalls and big metal-roofed "cafes," the livelihoods of 100 area natives, waited for our American wallets to be pried open for a liter or two of bottled water, or naam. Parched, my throat allowed this one word to spill out to the girl.

She then picked up the water bottle and began putting it in a bag with a straw. Then she stopped. She pointed to the freezer sitting behind her. Quite thirsty, I found her pause agitating. Turning, she tapped on the freezer, speaking something quickly in Thai. I guess that my Thai greeting made her assume that I knew more than I did. Seeing the stumped expression on my face, she pointed again, her hand slamming against the freezer and questioning, "Cold?"

Embarrassed again by my inability to comprehend, I could only nod. She took the first bottle out of the bag, ripped open the freezer and grabbed the chilled container resting on the shelf. She stuffed the new bottle in the bag and handed it to me. Appearing slightly irritated, she said, "Seven-TEEN baht."

Pulling out a twenty-baht note, I repeated to her, in Thai, "Sip-jet?"

She grabbed the bill, handed me three coins, smiled, and said, "Thank you."

* * *

Naam is everywhere. In Thailand, save a few parts, naam is in overabundance. In bottles, canals (klongs), rain forests, waterfalls, oceans, bays, rivers, and perpetual downpours, naam is a fre-

quent feature. Even the amount of sweat produced in this small nation of 60 million could replenish the reservoirs of several Midwestern US states. Coming from the United States, I thought I had my share of water. In Baltimore, for those ten months I studied at Loyola College, it rained constantly. One streak lasted about 14 days, which prompted one of my friends to theorize that the sun finally dried up and disappeared.

So in what we deemed as the East Coast's answer to Seattle, I felt I had received enough practical preparation for my six-month voyage overseas. When we arrived in Bangkok in the waning days of Thai summer, dry heat greeted my group. Some humidity lingered, but no precipitation dared drop from above. After a sprinkling the first night, each day seemed merciless, the sun hovering above, casting rays that always tended to burn my skin, even when shielded with lotions. Although sore, I was pleased not be under a rain cloud for once. Wanting to take advantage of the warm weather, I joined three friend trekking north to the province of Kanchanaburi, home of the River Kwai (of novel and cinema fame) and several scenic cascades.

In the early goings of our travel, we got soaked, but still not from rainfall. Sweat became our intimate companion on the trails. Our shirts and Dockers meshed to our flesh from the sheer volume of perspiration, as we hiked with fairly sizable packs for about two days. The most dreadful feeling in the world came as we journeyed through the town of Kanchanaburi, searching for a suitable guesthouse. On several occasions, after Rich announced that we were only a few minutes away, we groaned when he discovered that we were much more distant from our destination.

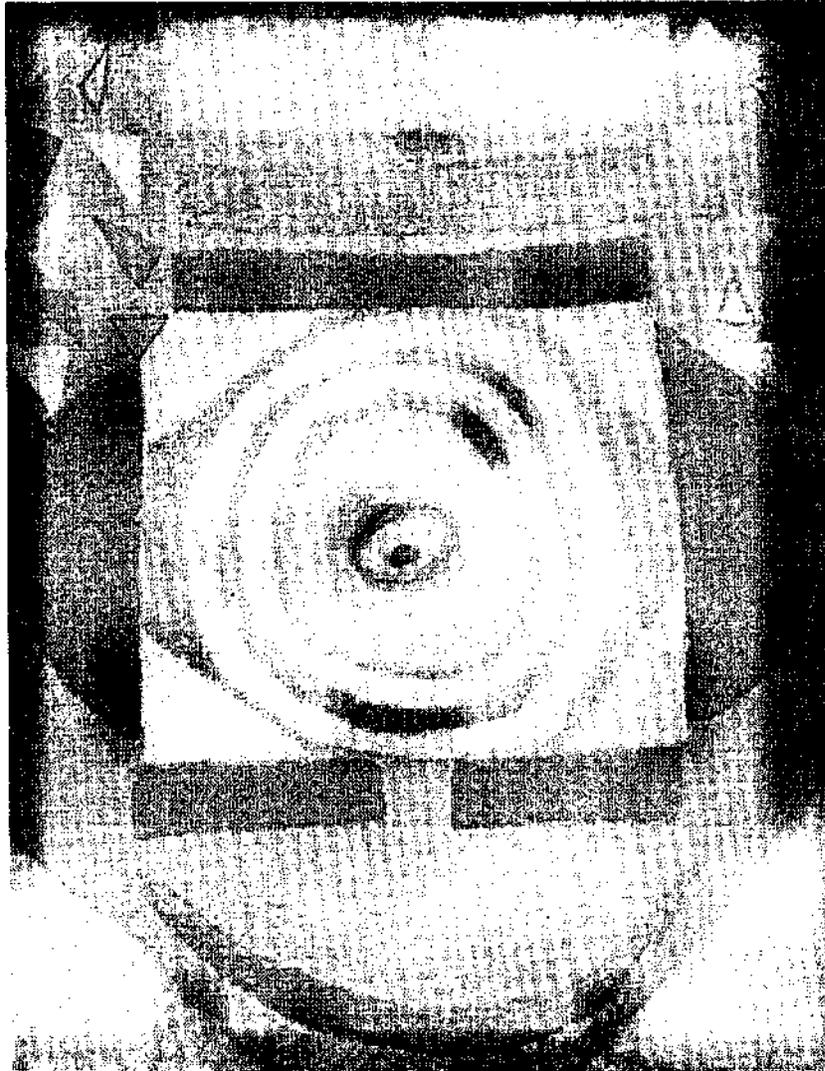
As we walked, the sweat stayed with us. Our backs soon became reservoirs that the sun and our packs helped fill. If we paused and placed our packs down, local folk laughed at the imprints of perspiration on our shirts. Every so often I gazed at the

sky, a beautiful blue morning (and afternoon), without a single cloud in sight. It pained me to think that the "monsoons" of this part of Asia decided to skip town this year. Our lack of orientation landed us one night in Kanchanaburi before we finally reached the Erawan Falls Guesthouse. We shelled out 300 baht each, (about 6 US dollars) for our rooms, doubles with private bath and a fan, for one night.

Our tardiness caused us to delay our hike up the falls. The waterfalls rise for 7 tiers, or as they were called in Erawan, "steps." Each step rested approximately 300 meters apart, for a grand total of 2.2 kilometers. Tired, we opted to return to the guesthouse, planning to venture back to Erawan in the morning.

Dusk settled in while we sat on the piers near the guesthouse, directly on the river Kwai Yai. To relax I dipped my legs into the water, clear all the way down to my knees. A tad chilly, the water helped cool a body overheated after two days of traveling in the heat. The sun faded behind the mountains, giving the sky a pink and purple hue with like-colored clouds to the east. As I wrote in my journal, I became aware of where I sat and shuddered. Sitting miles from home, in the middle of a province in Thailand, knee deep in the River Kwai. For a "responsible" student from Loyola College, whose only adventure in the past year had been a weekend at a lake in New Jersey, it was startling. I closed my journal to better drink in the scenery. My eyes took clearer notice of the mountains around the river, the greenery in full bloom and the sky now tinted grey-white. A rainstorm approached.

Even though I saw those clouds, I continued to let my legs rest in the water. The currents brushed them, sometimes strongly, but mostly with a gentle stroke, and I felt at ease with my surroundings, and my life. At home my days rushed by, the ridiculously rapid pace of college life: classes, exams, and term papers, coupled with the world of summer employment. After scrambling



to and fro in one 19-year old's struggle for history, I paused at the banks of a river. And my life became as calm as the downstream current.

* * *

June and Irene led us from the songthaew stop to the klong dock. Early on in our stay in Thailand, the International Student Organization on campus gave a brief tour of the city. Excited to leave campus for a while, we were unnerved by the thought of being on the klongs. Once these canals had been the centerpiece of the city of Krung Thep, known to the outside world as Bangkok. When Ayutthaya was the capital of the kingdom of Siam between approximately 1300 and 1767, Krung Thep had been a small village comprised of mainly Chinese settlers. King Chai Racha (1534-1546), who wanted better access for Ayutthaya to the Gulf of Thailand, ordered the construction of the first klong.

After Krung Thep became the capital, in 1782, further klongs were constructed, originally to create a defensive island for the king's palace, uniting a canal with the Chao Phraya River. Soon more klongs appeared, and as Krung Thep grew, workers dug and filled klongs in order to provide transportation and a source of trade. In addition, since Krung Thep sits only about 1 or 2 meters above sea-level, it made life easier for everyone during frequent flooding. Soon, as more European foreigners, or farang, came from the West, the capital became known as the "Venice of the East." Therefore the merchants, drifting on their boats through the city, hoped to catch the eyes of the farang and entice them to buy a piece of Siam to take home to Portugal, Holland, or France.

History and modernization brought a heavy burden to the klongs. Foreigners soon advised that roads would make the city more accessible, especially to those who came for a glimpse of the

Emerald Buddha, rescued from Laos by King Rama I. He placed this revered image of the "Enlightened" one within the city limits (the real title for Krung Thep, which is actually the longest city name in the world, includes the title "home of the Emerald Buddha"). Klongs remained prominent until recently, the final blow being the introduction of the car. Since the automobiles that flood the city nowadays can't float, the government filled in many klongs in favor of paved roads.

A handful of larger klongs still exist today, a combination of sewage dumps and home to a small number of fruit-selling merchants, who only appear on weekends. My roommate noted his dissatisfaction with how much the marketplace on one klong simply caters to westerners, like a tourist attraction.

The city also began to install sewage pipes ending in the klongs. My school director told me that it was a result of the city's poor planning. When you look at the water these days, it's shocking. Thick, black, and polluted, it appears solid. Our group joked that you could never fall into a klong, because you'd stand on the sheer amount of sewage. We also took precautions never to let water splash in our faces. Irene warned that droplets burned eyes and turned skin black.

The klong's most particular characteristic, however, is not the sight, but the smell. Constant dumping (the pipes are exposed, above water and usually gushing green and brown goo in the mid-afternoon) bestowed upon these, canals a stench that reaches your nostrils half a block away and makes you wish you had never bathed. Your least hygienic day provides a more pleasing aroma. During a later travel, a friend told me that the government produced an effort to sanitize the muck, and actually succeeded in making the water cleaner. My eyes widened when she mentioned that it once smelled worse.

Today the klongs are used for rapid transit throughout the

city, fairly cheap and efficient. Each boat is about 30 feet long and carries around 100 passengers. Like the New York City subway, there is no schedule for their arrival, and also like the subway, it is your responsibility to hop on; the boat slows but doesn't stop. If you're not hasty and don't sink into your seat, the boat keeps going and you're either still on the dock, or wading in waste. Few people miss the jump.

When Irene and June took us to the dock that first day, I did not know what to expect. The boat rushed from the west, ripping the water to both sides of the canal, a strange scene to behold actually, because the boat seemed more to churn the water, like black butter; there were no real ripples. Before long the boat pulled to shore, and a man with a helmet and an army fatigue vest jumped onto the dock and pulled a rope around a large bar, drawing the boat closer. Irene told us to jump. Following Zig and Frankie, I leapt as the helmet man released the rope and reboarded. I wasn't sitting when the boat sped away, and I shuffled along a four-inch wooden step to locate a seat.

I crunched into a spot on the left side, next to a blue tarp. As I peered off the side of the boat, another ship shot past, cutting the water in our direction. A wave splashed against the boat, sending a few drops into my eyes, searing them instantly. As I rubbed them, the stench of water grew denser, my senses completely inundated with the presence of the klong. Grabbing a cord attached to the tarp, I pulled it up as I made a mental note to myself to always wear glasses on board.

* * *

Humming along, the boat passed an old oil tanker resting in the water. Clouds covered the mainland, making the Gulf of Thailand appear as if it extended into the heavens. Matt and Rich

slept as we passed the rig, a floating fossil. I was perplexed, because here in the midst of the islands and the coast, a tropical oasis at its definition, a reminder of decay loomed at sea. Rust had started its wear on the sides, now an auburn color, and the decks were barren, devoid of any crew that once swabbed the decks, battened the hatches, or tossed anchor.

It unnerved me slightly, but I settled back into my seat. About twelve passengers boarded when we pulled out from Ko Samet, a small touristy island near the coastal town of Rayong. Our weekend proved relaxing, save that storms the night before kept us awake later than expected, and a bout of insomnia made me tour the shoreline in the wee hours. I did catch a view of nature's might, as waves smashed the rocks on the shoreline. When I returned to our bungalow: a small, thatched-roof hut, the sparse lighting provided by a kerosene lantern alerted me to a dripping ceiling. As I tried to sleep, my mind could only envision a rain-soaked pack, my ears bombarded with the pattering of rain against the hut floor.

We survived that evening's rainfall, and although our clothes and knapsacks were damp, we salvaged the experience by complaining to the owner, who gave us a discount on our bill. Now we sat on the ferry home, slightly saddened, for ahead lay yet another week of uniforms and books at our temporary school, Assumption University. It also meant that we sacrificed the clean air of a tropical island for the polluted atmosphere of Hua Mark, Bangkok.

When I realized that Matt and Rich were slumbering, I peered over the front of the boat, with my eyes set on the gulf ahead. Against our boat it appeared not the normal dark blue of the ocean, but a pure white, probably because of the daunting cloud cover. It shook back and forth, slowly. The sea acted on its own, almost like a host, gracious enough to let boats drift through. In turn it lent comfort to the boat, an easy voyage along the crystalline

water. Every ripple of the sea, each single wave and ebb, worked its way to the boat, albeit slowly, with the same care that a weary mother takes as she rocks her infant child to sleep. Calmly and gently.

* * *

We taunted the rain. Sitting on that pier we were fed up with the on and off drizzle. Ink stains covered our journals, the result of closing our books prematurely. Every new droplet smudged our script. Whenever the sprinkling appeared to let up, I'd open my gray marble journal (a gift from a writing professor) to my last entry. Then another drop would land. Cursing, I again closed the book smearing the words I had just inscribed. We all experienced similar problems, so Matt, Rich, Richard and I (mainly me), complained to the clouds:

"This rainy season is full of shit."

"You're all bark and no bite clouds."

Continuing intermittently for the next five minutes, we felt that we were entitled to a few jabs at Mother Nature. She nearly caused sunstroke for our two days of travel, sent millions of mosquitos to suck every drop of plasma from us, and tried to single-handedly ruin our "quiet" time on the pier. Our unique "manly" humor, the jokefest of four usually sensitive males, peaked when I noted:

"This rain is so gay."

Apparently that comment irked Mother Nature, because minutes after I said it, Richard noticed mists descending upon the hills about two miles north. He first thought it was fog. From our position on the river, all of us minus glasses or contacts, it was an honest mistake. Matt soon realized that the "mist" was rain falling in the distance. We sat astounded, for we had never witnessed such

a sight. The clouds ahead showered the land by themselves, and slowly crept our way.

Clearer than any photograph I had seen of the region, I watched the simplistic beauty of the advancing puffs. Every second that passed forced my pulse to shoot faster. Here, in Thailand, beauty and power coupled in one giant rain-cloud. Trees quickly saturated with droplets sometimes bent over in the ensuing breezes. Beneath us, the current of the river picked up, and we watched a man on raft upstream frantically paddle to shore. Rushing to our rooms, we put our journals under an awning and returned to the river. The rain closed in, and I thought that if I had my glasses, I could have actually seen the individual streaks of water descending from above.

Then a droplet fell.

Soon a few more followed and then the clouds opened up completely, rushing a downpour onto my scalp. Soon precipitation soaked me, and I shuddered from the cold rain. On a pier on the River Kwai, standing in a monsoon in Southeast Asia, my only worry was that the water would stop beating on my sweaty Metropolitan Home t-shirt. I held my arms out like a magician, as if to summon even more clouds to join in and flood the riverside pier. Still laughing, I sat down, drenched and alive.

* * *

I walked over to the benches where we had hung our clothes. The trip through the park was much quicker than we originally expected. Having left at 6:30 a.m., we hiked the 6 kilometers to the park, arriving at the entrance as the sun began to rise and a park loud speaker blared the Thai national anthem to start the day. For a moment I thought of morning assembly at Onteora Scout Camp in upstate New York. Every Thai in sight stood straight and



faced the flag, most motionless. We paused as well.

Within the park we trekked the entire trail, reaching the top of the falls early in the morning. Our ascent had been tedious, myself almost blundering to my doom. We reached the sixth step from a different route, a fact I had not realized. Rich and Richard, who were leading, decided for the more "adventurous" approach and chose to climb up the face of the waterfall rather than use the wooden plank steps on the side (I discovered their existence when I led on the way back). Calling down to Matt and me, they persuaded us to take the same route. Two-thirds of the way up the cliff, I lost my footing, as some dirt proved less than sturdy. Dangling, I called to Rich and Richard to grab me, but they had moved ahead and did not hear my cries. Luckily, Matt gave me a push and I averted a plummet.

We reached the pinnacle 20 minutes later, and doused ourselves in the cascades. My body covered in sweat, I simply fell back against the rock and let the falls shower me. From where I stood, I saw the pools the falls created. Small yet crystal clear rays of sunlight gave them a pale blue tint, almost turquoise. After letting ourselves plunge into the cascades for an hour or so, we started our return, arriving back at the park entrance about 45 minutes later.

Having bought my water for 17 baht, I went back to my seat with my journal and offered my naam to the guys. I told them it was cold. Rich accepted and after a sip, noted:

"You know, I never realized how much water there is here."

Stopping my writing for a moment, I watched as he took a few more gulps from the bottle before resting it next to me on the bench. I picked it up, took a swig, and as I wiped the remaining drops from my mouth I wrote, "There is nothing here quite like water."

On Learning to See

Alyssa Milletti

"Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Mark 8:22-26

Darkness

I had gone to Europe with the intention of seeing every great work of art, every ancient building, every church with its piece of Christ's cross or body part of a venerated Saint. I spent one week in Seville and more than half of it was spent in the Museo Taurino, Reales Sitios, and the Cathedral of Seville. I even took the Cruceros Turisticos. In London I rode the Underground to the Picture Gallery, Madame Tousseau's, The Tower of London, and the Globe Theater. I spent five days in Paris, four inside museums. Austria: Mozart and Beethoven's houses, The Sound of Music Tour (I still have my Edelweiss Seeds), two palaces, one castle. Bruges: one bike tour, two museums, two churches. Amsterdam: countless coffee shops. The Van Gogh museum, of course. Germany: one bike tour, three beer gardens, and one Glockenspiel. Poland: six churches, one concentration camp, one town hall, two castles.

Halfway through my three months of backpacking, howev-

er, I began feeling defeated, broken. I wrote in my journal on the train to Venice, "Speed walking through life. Always giving myself something to do, somewhere to be isn't healthy."

I was seeing all the wonderful things that Europe had to offer.

I wasn't really seeing Europe at all.

Then: Venice.

Walking Trees

How it began.

I want to say I got lost. Though this may be misleading, because, by definition, lost means to be unable to find the way. To be lost is to lack assurance or self-confidence. It's when something isn't appreciated or understood. Yet, I never felt lost in Venice. At least, not the kind of lost you get in America. Nervous. Tense. Frightened of what will happen next. Walking briskly down a New York City street, acknowledging other people's presence but not giving them full eye contact. In Venice, I knew I was always surrounded by a lagoon; that eventually I'd find water (no matter how badly it smelled). I went out into the backstreets of Venice with the intention of not knowing where I was going. To say I got lost by my own free will is a contradiction of terms.

Yet, I didn't wander, either. I never lacked aim or direction. In fact, I'd never felt so determined, so clear about anything before. In essence, I began walking with the intent that I would not walk anywhere specific; that I would cross any bridge or venture down any alley that intrigued me. If anything, I wandered purposefully.

I did not pull my map from my backpack.

I did not refer to my Eyewitness guide of Italy.

And I did not look at my watch.

Miracle in Progress

"Quanto costa questa borsa arancia?"

Marie, an old high school friend, had eyed a suede hand bag decorated with exceptionally thick, long fringes. I bargained with the ten-year-old girl who was selling it in front of a marble fountain. After haggling for a few minutes, I realized she wouldn't sell for anything less than venti-cinque mille lire. She was dirty, this girl, with tiny hands and feet, and the eyes of a forty year old woman. She was in training, as her older, silent, and equally dirty counterpart attested. She would be doing this for the rest of her life. We quit arguing and bought the bag.

I took a picture of a woman with a sharp, short hair cut. She wore a tailored white v-neck with short sleeves. Simple. Classic. She donned a black skirt that fell directly below her knees; a slit on both left and right. Her shoes: sling back, leather heels. She was talking on her cell phone as she paced up and down the road, gesturing wildly with her right hand, in front of the cafe I was sitting at. I smiled, embarrassed for this woman who was making a complete fool of herself in public. Wasn't she? Maybe not. Women with groceries and bread vendors brushed by, never smirking or staring over their shoulders once they had past her. So, this is Italy I thought to myself and snapped a shot.

Turning a corner, I found myself in an empty courtyard, I walked into a church with its own scent, its own personality and feel. Silver hearts, pictures, and a lone teddy bear adorned an altar displaying a Saint's larynx. Or was it a tongue? Every wall was painted or frescoed. Sculptures adorned aisles and side chapels. Incense burned inside my nose and light streamed, fragmented, through stained glass. An intense warmth filled me and I felt it necessary to sit down in a pew and silently recall my bedtime prayers. I wanted so badly to take a picture, to somehow capture the power I was feeling on film. I began to sweat, afraid I would forget, not

just this moment, but every moment. I stared at my camera. Poised in my hands, ready for action, it was begging to be used. A handful of Italians were praying. Some said the rosary, one held his head in his hands, and another lit a thin, tapered candle and placed it among hundreds of other hopeful flames. I argued with myself. Slipping the camera back into my bag unused, I slid out of my rock of a pew and left the darkness of the church, squinting violently as I was blinded by the hot sun.

After buying a bottle of Chianti for the American equivalent of a dollar fifty and a ball of wet mozzarella (the way it should be eaten), I found a not-so-busy alley and plopped down on an unused dock. I stared at clothes hanging out of windows. At the buildings whose pastel plaster exteriors had fallen away, revealing pale, brick walls underneath. Green shutters were flung open. The sun was bouncing off orange terra cotta roofs. A gondola floated silently underneath the bridge, farther down the canal. Instead of whistling at me or pestering me about taking a ride, the gondolier simply smiled and wished me a happy meal. All in Italian. I pinched myself — it hurt.

I hate cats. Kittens are, at best, tolerable. I disregarded this old self and played with a tabby lounging in front of green, peeling church doors. She rubbed her head against the white marble step. *Que carina*. I noticed the scratched graffiti on the bottom of the doors: *Benedetta ti amo — Paolo and Punk Lives On!*

Sipping Coca Cola light with lemon, I sat in Piazza San Marco for two hours, writing. Sometimes watching. The people, the water, the waiters in their formal black and white. I laughed to myself as I watched lines of tourists weave around bird seed vendors and lamp posts, melting in the hot sun as they waited to see inside St. Mark's. I wrote, "There is a warm breeze, sticky but not hot. It smells of salt and fish. Venice is the city with pink glass in its street lamps. It makes me feel beautiful and loved."

Light

"My kind of town," Sinatra sang. Venice is.

I saw Venice. Really saw it.

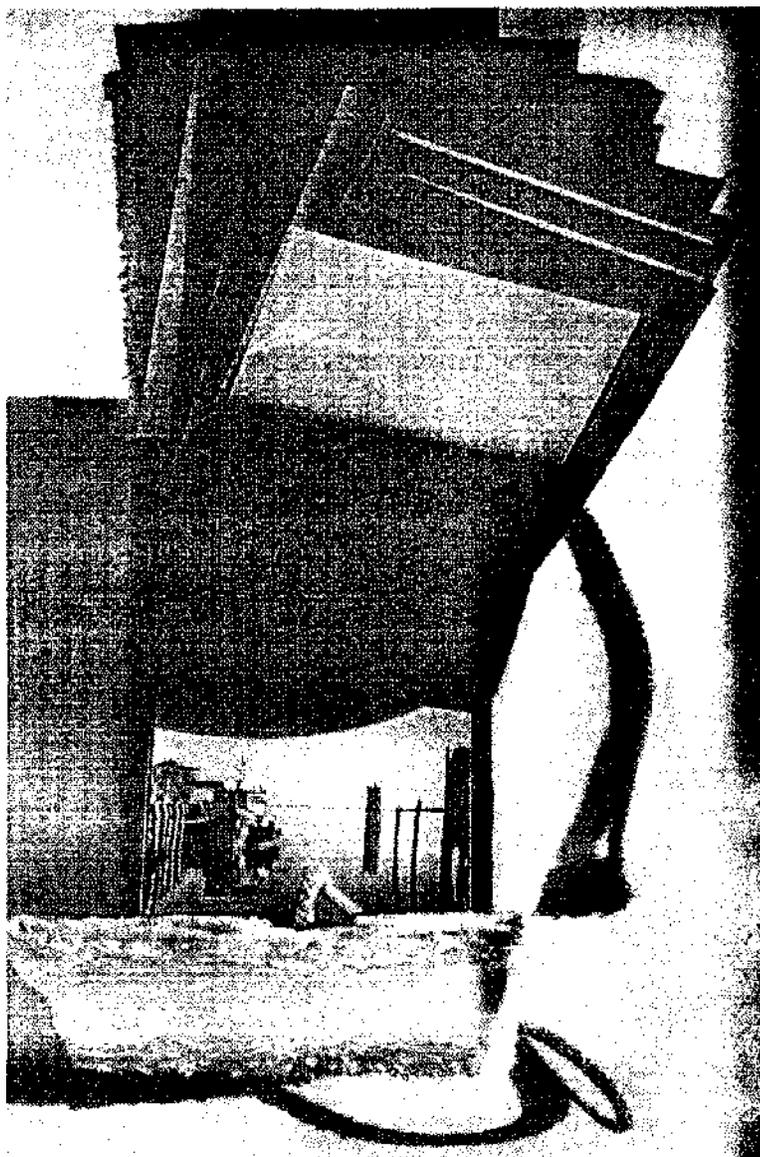
Before this city of canals, I had no idea that life could be lived outside of lists scrawled on napkins, tiny Post-It notes taped to bathroom mirrors, and messages written in ink on my hand. I thought that if I let go of these lists, I'd be letting go of my life, a plane shot down, smoking. That if I slowed down for a moment, I'd be swallowed up by all the fast-pace people behind me. I'd be vulnerable. I'd be missing out. Missing what?

I wrote in my journal after three days, "Getting lost here and rambling through its streets is somehow like seeing God." I have no special calling. I don't even go to church that frequently any more. But if I had to guess — I would choose Venice.

I still see trees sometimes, instead of people. I'm in remission. Sometimes I feel as if I have 20/20 vision. Other times I feel as if I'm groping for my way, forgetting in my haste as I scurry from home
to school
to work
to the library
to the gym
that the shortest distance between two points isn't always the most scenic or fun. Today, the difference is that I catch myself when I begin seeing shadows or my vision gets a bit fuzzy and I take off my watch and unplug my alarm clock.

And as I struggle and squint my eyes, I become very much aware of how many others are still in the dark. Some wait for someone else to slap mud on their eyes and tell them they're cured. Others don't even realize they're blind. To see them reminds me how I could've never learned this. How I could've blown through Venice never having sat at a cafe with Marie for three hours,

sipping cappuccinos and nibbling on biscotti from Franco, our waiter. I feel a warm rush in my face when I see these other people. As I once was. As I still am in some ways. They remind me why I'm trying to change. And I wonder, when will they begin healing themselves? When will we all begin to leave our caves and look into the light without flinching? Separating shadows from the truth and men from trees.



Higher Learning

Tyauna Bruce

Most people begin their formal education in school at about the age of five. They feel accomplished when they learn their ABC's, 123's and shapes. I was always one that was different. Learning those things was trivial. I wanted bigger and better things. I wanted to know more about the world than the alphabet, numbers and shapes. Who knew that I would get my wish?

I guess my education began at the age of five. I, a young and noisy busybody, squirmed and wiggled around on a church bench and wondered why everything was so quiet where I was. There was no happiness in the room, only crying and sniffing...shouting and weeping...sobbing and people blowing their noses. What was going on? I did not realize what I was learning until I walked to the front of the church and saw my favorite aunt lying in some sort of quilted box and smiling. She was not moving, breathing or blinking. She was ice cold and clammy. She was pale and stiff, but one thing that I knew was that she was happy because she was smiling. I smiled back and kept on busying myself around the church.

That day was the first time I had ever ridden in a "limo." I looked out of the front window at the car that was carrying my aunt and I thought: "She must be so special to have a car to herself and people carrying her wherever we were going." We arrived at a huge park, the preacher said his piece, and everyone took flowers to go. As my mother pulled me in the direction of the car, I can

remember wondering why we were leaving my aunt there. I guessed that she knew what was best, so I blew a kiss and waved goodbye, thinking that she would be home soon. I waited up all night and she never came home. I began to remember a word I heard outside of the church...dead. My Aunt Linda was not ever coming back. I had a sudden realization and before it completely hit me, I screamed, kicked and cried. I wanted to be dead too, as long as I could be with my aunt. That very day began my education. I realized that we are not invincible. We all must go through life with pain and hardships among the happiness and we all must die. Sometimes, God sees fit to take the young ones, so we should never take anyone for granted. Of course, that did not hit me so easily when I was five. All I remember thinking was: "I want to be dead too! I want Lupus! I want to go to Heaven!" After a year, when nothing happened, there was only silence left and a dreadful misunderstanding of why we were born to die.

Time passed and I still did not understand "God's logic." Why are we born to die? The result of this unanswered question was a melancholy adolescence eleven years later, I was a sixteen year old with the weight of the world on my shoulders and I had no idea why. At least seven more members of my family had "fallen asleep" since my aunt and no one bothered to explain anything to me. I thought that I would be all right though. I had survived three entire years of high school and had been successful the entire way. I dealt with the dissatisfaction that teenagers often experience, finally realizing that I could only be myself and I had loved and lost. I felt that my senior year should have been my best year. Why worry about death? I had not been to a funeral in about two years. Why worry?

I must have spoken too proudly and too soon for God. I received a call at 1:00 AM on August 27, 1997. My brother, DaVonne Wooten, was shot and killed in front of my grandmother's

apartment. Why did it have to be him? I became a more pensive and stoic person, if that was possible. I was an emotional wreck on the inside.

I was sixteen years old, sitting in a funeral home, upset and confused. No longer a squirming busybody, I sat on a hard bench and wished for quiet. All I needed was complete silence. Crying, shouting, sniffing, weeping, sobbing and the blowing of noses haunted me. Of course there was no happiness, but there was anger inside of me. I knew exactly what was going on. One by one, different people came up to me to tell me how "sorry" they were. I think that I actually frightened a few of them. When they spoke to me, I did not respond. I looked directly into their eyes, so that they would have no choice but to look into mine. I did not speak. They saw emptiness, anger, and misunderstanding in my eyes. Some were actually moved to tears while standing there. They felt my pain, but not totally. I managed to position my face into a horrifyingly fake smile and responded: "Yeah, thanks. Me too." I walked up to the front of the church and stared at my only brother. He was not smiling and neither was I. I felt that we bonded at that moment.

It was my second time in a limousine and there was no excitement. I followed my brother's body into the same memorial park we entered eleven years ago. A familiar feeling came over me and it was then that I realized that I remembered every detail that I thought I had lost about my aunt's funeral. I was angry and confused. I wanted to go home. After the procession at the cemetery, I stood there, looking at the casket in a daze. I was interrupted by my four year old niece, pulling on my skirt.

"Is my daddy in there?" she yelled. "Is he gonna sit up soon?"

I saw myself in her, in more ways than one. Not only did she look like me, she was curious like me. God gave me the answer to my burning question right then. We die because God is in con-

trol of our destiny, not ourselves. We die, not as punishment, but as a blessing. It is the people that are left behind that suffer. My brother was hurting from Sickle Cell. God relieved his pain. My aunt was suffering from Lupus. God gave her the ultimate medicine. The true experience of death is not for me to understand. I am supposed to make the best of life and let nature take its course. My shoulders were no longer burdened by the world. The tears that I cried that day were not only of sadness, but of joy. I was no longer confused.

These events took me to my present education. Here I am at Loyola College, an institution of higher learning. When I arrived here, I thought I would be receiving a strictly formal education. I was wrong and I found that out the first weekend that I stayed here. God was offering me an extended life lesson.

The first weekend that I stayed, I saw people drunk and loving it. The elevators of some buildings reeked of alcohol and vomit. At one point the person that was responsible was there too, looking up at me with a stupid, drunk smile. Fortunately, someone came and dragged him out. It was a girl that I was sure that he did not know and I'm almost sure that they engaged in something that he did not remember the next morning. This was real. This was life. Things only became worse. There were more beer cans, hard liquor bottles, vomit and urine stained steps. I was in hell.

Higher learning. The only lessons that I have learned here so far is not to let someone who is drunk fall asleep on his/her back. Never leave an intoxicated friend alone. Use condoms when having sex with someone that you really do not know. Never walk home alone because you could get raped. Higher learning.

The true lesson is that people do not value their lives. Every shot and unplanned sexual encounter is potentially detrimental. People do not value life as much as I do. With the help of God, I know that I have something more that most of the people here have.

This is an understanding of the pain that occurs when a loved one is lost. I'm glad that my loved ones are in peace instead of facing the fear that I do every day. The students here need to be taught that God is in charge. A horrible moment of revelation may be necessary to begin this lesson, but the result will ultimately be higher learning.



The Sibun Valley

Janelle Chanona

My family home is bordered on the south by the Sibun Nature Valley Reserve. A river, the Sibun River, serves as the actual border. Every summer, my family and I go exploring in our backyard, the nature reserve. The summer before I left for college, we packed up our tents, sleeping bags and other camping essentials and headed for the mountains. My father named our farm "The Blue Mountain Ranch" because of the blue haze that settles over the trees on the mountains.

The rainforest here consists of the classical tall trees that cannot be found in other parts of the region. Hurricanes and nearly a hundred years of selective, high-grade timbering have destroyed the primary forest. The forest is teeming with wildlife, but so little is seen and heard if you just walk through it. My dad says the quiet, green darkness is deceiving. "Listen! Voices!" So I listened and it spoke to me. A nibbled twig tells me a red brocket deer has been feeding. A muddy wallow says a tapir has been by. Locally known as a mountain cow, the tapir has the height and body structure of a Shetland pony but has a shorter neck and an elephant-like nose or trunk. Chewed nuts from the cohune palm tree indicate that a paca has fed the night before. A paca is a member of the rodent family, looking like a guinea pig but with a darker fur and parallel rows of white spots along the sides of the body. A musky smell warns me that a group of peccaries may be closer than I would like. A peccary or warrie is known for its rancid smell and

the horrifying sound of its clamping jaws. They are notorious for travelling in herds, stampeding through the forest, killing anything that cannot climb or run to safety. They are a staple for jaguars.

We continued to hike slowly up the bank sides. Every now and then, a light breeze broke the wall of heat trapped in the understory and teased of more to come. I could almost smell the forthcoming rain. Soon large, dark clouds assembled overhead. The air gained a chill as the shadows, silent as ships, crept upon the disappearing sunlight. With little warning, the rainforest became a forest of rain. The rain impinged upon the earth; the incessant needles of water seeming to pierce our skin. It was a thunderous introduction of water to flora. We stood and let the sheets of water wash across us. Within a few minutes, the storm gave way to an eerie silence. The air was heavy and still amid the now motionless vegetation: it was as if each plant were posing for a still life painting.

Having been washed clean of dust and debris and warmed by the heat of the sun, the foliage became a steaming emerald. The rain had refreshed us as well, but the toil of the hike had been exhausting. We set up camp in a clearing as a particularly beautiful sunset, in dazzling orange and violet pastels, filled the sky. Night falls very quickly in "the bush" and the silent dark forest engulfed us as quickly as we had consumed our dinner. We sat around the dying embers of our cooking fire, sipping hot chocolate as a cold wind blew among us. Left unattended, the fire had shrunk. Instead of the blazing redness of a sea at sunset, with hundreds of golden sparks sailing off with the wind, the fire now looked like a small nest of phoenixes, framed by a purple haze, mumbling and crackling to itself.

Hunched over, visible through a transparent column of heat emanating from the fire, my dad turned and looked into the darkness as if seeing something. We followed his gaze but there was nothing. For some inexplicable reason, I felt frightened, unsure of

the darkness. As a child, we had always been told stories to keep us out of trouble. One of them is known as Tata Duende or Duende for short. Duende is a little Spanish man about four feet tall with a white sombrero and wearing a white shirt and pants. He does not have thumbs and his feet are turned backwards. (His toes are where his heel should be). Duende searches the bushes for followers. If you see him, you are to quickly hide your thumbs and run away. However, if you don't hide your thumbs, legend says the Duende breaks them off and forces the person to live in the jungle, never to be seen again. I'd always believed this was just an adult's way of keeping children out of the forest alone, so I did not fear the Duende. What I did fear were the Spirits.

As a little girl, my grandmother continually warned me that my Mayan ancestors were to be respected, and feared. Watching the flames lick at the blue fog that had settled over the camp, it was hard not to be struck, yet again, by the mystery of the Maya. What happened to them? Some speculate that it was the fault of natural disasters, hurricanes, and nearby volcanic eruptions. Others contend that the diseases the white man brought were to blame. Something destroyed the hundreds of thousands of people that once inhabited this region. This time when I looked at the ghost green of the shrubbery framed by the black sky and the trunks of trees, I saw an ancient Mayan. He is striking and confident, standing tall and proud. He was wearing a white tunic that barely brushed the tops of his knees. A robe is gathered at the waist with a belt dripping with regal strips of animal skins, glorious remnants of the revered jaguar. The Mayan wore moccasins, a simple foot covering of rubber soles and straps coming between the toes to fasten around the ankle. In the middle of his bare chest dangled a sparkling jade pendant, and crowning his head was a feathery head-dress of large, brightly colored plumes. These were a devout people, worshipping many gods in different ways.

One way was sacrifice. The king performed a ritual blood-letting by stabbing his penis with a stingray spine to obtain kind favors and power from the gods. The queen was expected to pull a thorn-embedded rope through a hole cut in her tongue. They also killed jaguars and howler monkeys to exercise their beliefs. This night the spirits were worshipping Chac, the god of rain and lightning. We fell asleep to the drumming of light rain with an occasional rumbling of thunder.

In the damp, cold morning, I wake to find the space of sky an ever-changing violet. The forest is still hugged by a foggy friend, almost like lovers entwined in the soft white light that steals upon half-sleep near morning. We are still a half-day's hike from the ruins. Already the mosquitoes have descended. During the day, the mosquitoes are not as bad as the insect known as the bottlass or bottle ass fry. It is a tiny black insect that leaves a small blood blister on the victim's flesh. After feasting, their abdomens swell, giving the appearance of little bottles, hence the name.

The dense green world is awakening. The leaf-cutter ants are among the first to start the day's work. Called wee-wee ants by Belizeans, they carry leaf fragments many times their weight and size in their seemingly unending columns. Their colonies are enormous, comprising one of the most complex societies on earth. Size differences among the ants help socialize them for various functions. The ultimate purpose is to bring leaves and other vegetable matter underground, where in a dark moist environment, they cultivate it into fungal gardens. The fungi growth on the masticated leaf fragments produce fruiting bodies, which the ants use for food. Many years ago, there was a legend that this species of ants had multiplied well into the billions. They fanned out in a three-mile line, eating everything in sight. Thousands of animals, trees and even humans were destroyed by the ants' need to survive. The villagers knew something was wrong when they were woken in the

middle of the night. They couldn't figure out why and realized what it was...the silence. The animals had seen the ants and fled, taking their sounds with them. The villagers called it Mara Bunta: Deathly Silence.

On this day, the forest was anything but silent. The sensory highlight of the day was the loud raucous calls from fifteen to twenty scarlet macaws flying overhead. Their colorful crimson, banana yellow and royal blue plumage is in stark contrast to the partly cloudy sky and green setting of the forest. One of the largest neotropical parrots, these birds are considered an endangered species in Belize. They reside in areas of tall deciduous trees and along watercourses. The Mayan shot these birds on sight, eating the body and using the feathers for religious headdresses and body decorations.

We passed a beautiful virgin boy between two large streams that meet somewhere downstream. A mist hung beneath the canopy and vines pulled at our arms as the dark sulphurous mud gripped at our boots. Finally we reached the river. It was darker than normal, probably because rain had taken last night. The steep mountain creates a shallow, rapid flowing river, but because the water level was higher than normal, it ran quickly yet calmly. The water had a strange appearance. It seemed to have a thin film covering it, but in the center ran a flat, thin, twisted column of a more transparent nature. Small dots of foam, produced by the falls further up river, travel like little floating islands downstream.

My mother interrupted my thoughts to point out an area of matted grass. Stooping down to inspect the grass, I realized what she was showing us. The grass, locally known as cutting grass, has a sharp blade that cuts the skin, instantly making the wound swell and burn as if on fire. Very few animals can tolerate it. My dad believes a jaguar has been resting here since its thick coat would protect it from the dangers of the grass. The jaguar was originally

known as "yaguara," a word in a South American language meaning "the wild beast that can kill its prey in a single bound." Five sets of squinted eyes searched the green horizon, convinced that by the fetid smell of its breath, still heavy in the air, that the animal was close by, watching us. The low hoarse coughing sounds of the jaguar startled us. It was so close that we could hear it breathing heavily. After a while, a frond shook and a twig cracked and we knew it was gone. It was a spectacular iridescent blue morpho butterfly that then broke the color scheme we had been scanning. The morpho sat drinking water in the banana-like leaves of the colorful heliconia plant. We moved on.

Suddenly, in a tiny valley below us, in the sweeping panorama of the forest, we saw the ruins. The Mayans built their temples so high in order that even a lowly commoner could be close to the gods. The ghostly gray temples, once covered in natural dyes and lived in, now lay dormant and shimmering in the heat. They hold the secrets and treasures of the past. My family and I hardly ever go down to the temple. We prefer to stay far away but close enough to imagine for ourselves what life must have been like in those days. Despite the fact that nature has struggled to reclaim the area, it still stands as it did when it was inhabited so many years ago - magnificent, prestigious and powerful.

As I packed for my trip to college, I thought about the forest. Those trees have nourished the people and animals for centuries, watching them live and die. Now they and some of the species that have always grown beneath their canopy are endangered. There is no terrestrial habitat on earth as dynamic and rich as the lowland tropical rainforest. If we lose this, our lives will be much poorer.

In the small hours of the next day, I drove away looking at the blue mountains in the rearview mirror. I was on route to the iron bird and a new life. I turned on the windshield wipers to clear

the early morning mist from the windows. It wouldn't clear.
I realized it wasn't the windows.

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