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editor

kate barker

associate editor

emily phillips

faculty advisor

dr. daniel mcguinness

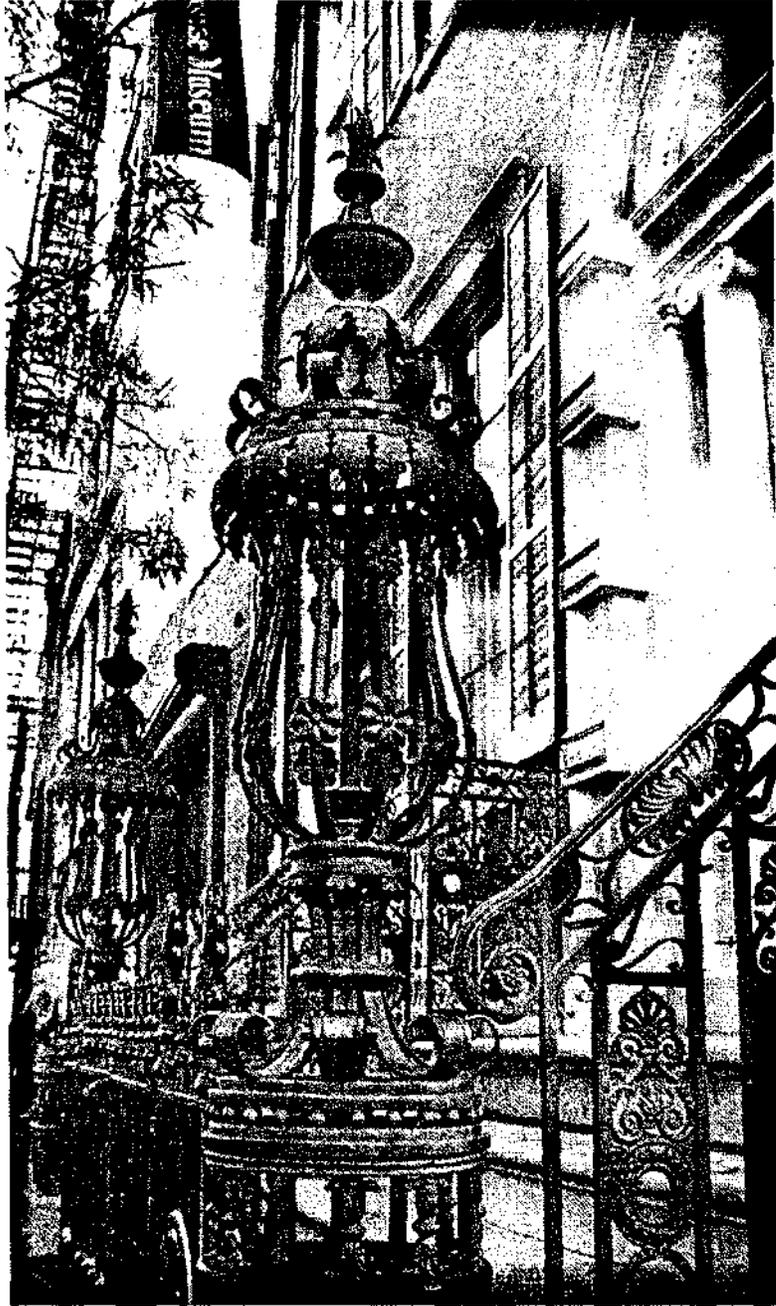
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c/o Department of Communication
Loyola College
4501 North Charles Street
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GINGER COLAMUSSI

editor's note

This magazine would not be possible without the generous guidance of Dr. Daniel McGuiness. His patience and support deserve, of course, more thanks than this brief note can express. Nevertheless, his leadership so poignantly demonstrates a genuine, unselfish concern for students that his aid cannot go without mention.

Please enjoy this edition of *Forum*; the contributions are diverse and promise an enjoyable, if not thoughtful and provoking, read.

-kate barker

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DAYNA HILL

Birds are flying outside my kitchen window, and I am reading. These are the glorious days of James Joyce and his portrait. There he is, James Joyce himself, standing in between the lines. His hands are outstretched before me, offering color and emotion, a world of "bird-like girls" and villanelles. I am taking these as my own, putting them in my pocket to walk with through the rest of my day.

Suddenly, the world is vibrant with its cerulean skies, its emerald grasses, and its bursts of flight from my white kitchen-birds. Everything is words, words, words! My walk is no longer an action, but it is a description. A bird on the stone ledge is a poem. I am sitting on a ledge weeping, and I see myself as a girl on a beach of glittering sand, coming out of the ocean like a bird. This is what he meant, I think to myself.

Then there are the days of Virginia Woolf and her *Mrs. Dalloway*. I try to stare at her through the window of her words, but she is somewhere else, far away from her text. Somewhere, her eyes are turned toward the sky, and she is contemplating whether or not she should carry a yellow parasol today. She is wondering, perhaps, why there are so many roses out on display today. These days of Woolf appear a little bit darker outside my kitchen window. The sky outside is ominous, dark, and the black

eyes of the birds flying by seem haunting, deathly. I wonder if Septimus fell out of a window like this, a sky like this, a world as lonely as this? The birds outside move like thoughts. They must be thinking the same thing as I. Things will never be as they once were back in that Glorious Past of James Joyce. "Tintern Abby," they seem to be thinking.

My day is thoughts. I pass strangers on the street, and I can see the New Roman Text floating above their heads, evaporating into the sky effortlessly. Everyone is murmuring and thinking, but I am the only one listening. The rocks feel heavy in my pockets as I wade through this thick water-mass of people. On these days it feels as if everyone is drowning and I am the only one able to see the mouths gasping for air.

Finally, there are my much-anticipated Sundays with Billy Collins, my choice, my favorite, and my soul mate. Together, we walk hand-in-hand through the poetry of the day. We are in the galleries, and we talk about the possibility of fishing on the Susquehanna. I envision our little whip-like fishing poles, a reflection of the painting before us. The night turns to candlelight, and I fix his favorite for dinner (Osso Bucco). He smiles demurely at me, saying he felt as if he had just swallowed the whole world. Together we crawl into bed, what he lovingly calls "the bookmark of sleep," and we fade deep into the heart of the world, rock and bone, the beginning. In the morning I wake up to see him reading my copy of *Catcher in the Rye*. It is the one where I scrawled along the side in soft pencil, "pardon the egg salad stains, but I think I'm in love." He smiles, recognizing my handwriting, even though the soft pencil has been smeared through time.

These days of reading I think I can see it all, in a flash of text, a burst of flight, a moment of imaginary impersonation. These words are changing me, molding me like clay. They are creating ideas, and forming the words that I am thinking, the things that I am writing. The world is many shades, each waiting to be discovered. With each new book, each new writer, the world is unveiled as a new shade, as a morning of unpredictability, as a beginning, rather than an end.

MAGGIE DOUGHERTY

: -p

Park car, hit "open" on the garage door opener; walk up the creaky wooden steps; close the garage door; turn on hallway light as alarm beeps incessantly; punch 5-6-7 into the alarm keypad to silence the ring; go to the computer room, turn on the computer; double click the AOL icon; wait for it to connect; begin communication. My nightly ritual during the weeknights the summer following senior year in high school. Normal-- to me and my friends at least. It was at this time, at 12:00 or 1:00 a.m., that the majority of my "buddies" logged on to share the events of their night with each other. These buddies all signed on at the same time most nights, mainly because these buddies were all coming from the same place, the same party, the same concert, the same movie. These buddies had just seen each other 20 minutes ago, in the flesh. But that didn't stop me, or any of the other regulars on my buddy list, from signing on. Every night I would walk into the house, enter the sophisticated alarm code, possibly get a glass of cold milk, then end up sitting in front of a computer screen speckled with six or seven Instant Message boxes. With my friends' voices and laughs and mannerisms and smiles still fresh in my mind, the Internet was the perfect way to hang out together even after we all had to go home to

get some sleep for work the next day.

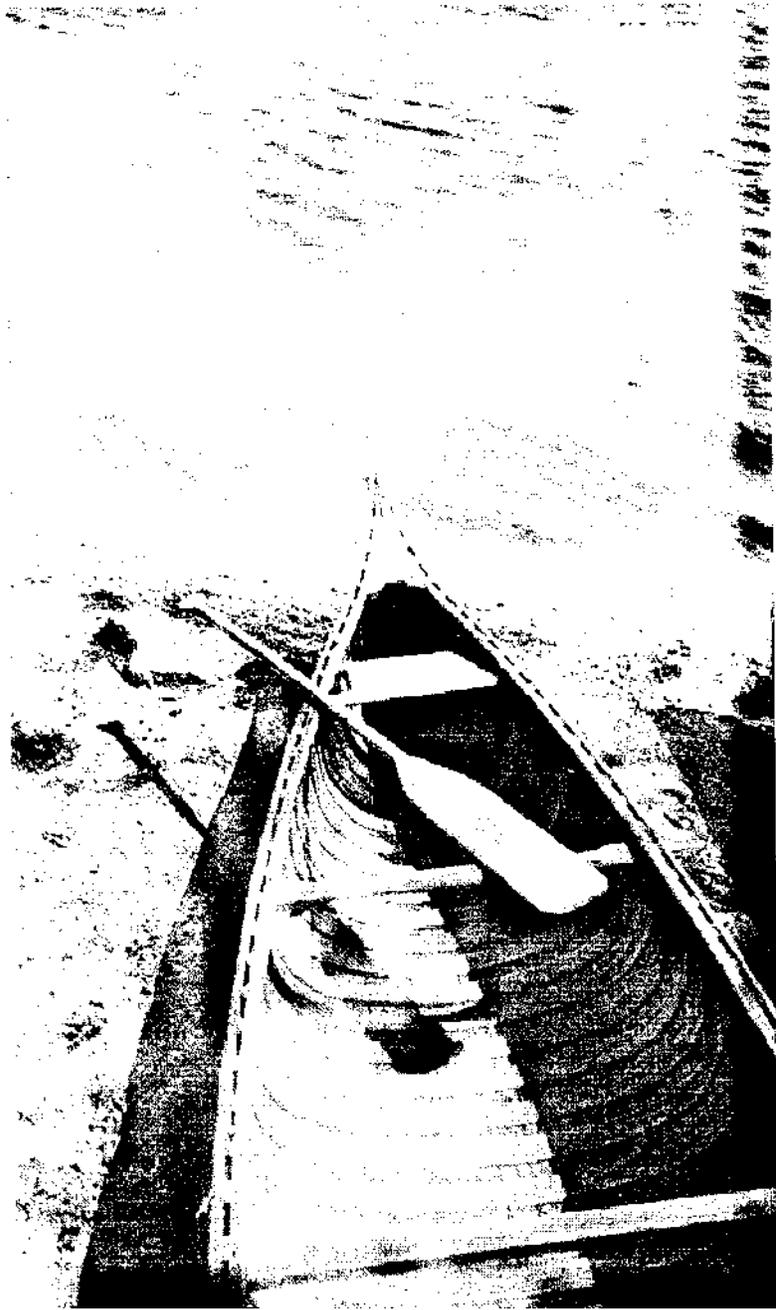
What is the Internet? Technically speaking, it is a "vast computer network of computer networks" ("What is the Internet?" 1). But that doesn't mean too much to me. What do people do on the Internet that is so great? They can shop, they can make travel plans, check weather, check stocks, check train schedules, get tickets to anything, compare prices, bid on anything they want, download any song imaginable. You can do practically anything. But what is the Internet to me? I do research in my pajamas. I wrote the interview questions for this essay, and then sent them out to friends in a variety of states. I logged into the Loyola/Notre Dame Library from my room, again in my pajamas, and researched this topic. You could argue that I'm lazy— but I'm just using what's available. For me, though, the Internet is synonymous with communication. That is its primary function. I e-mail people. I IM people. I am in contact. The Internet makes life easy.

So easy, that you can talk to people across the United States or even across the Atlantic— for the same price it costs to talk to your roommate sitting three feet away. Lisa Farrell, my roommate, sitting three feet away from me, is able to talk with her "Irish cousins more than [she] normally would...and this makes [her] feel like [she] knows them better" and is more connected. In cases of extreme long distance relationships, the Internet saves money and time, while increasing communication and closeness. Also, consider the elderly and the homebound. If they know how to use this technology, they can shop, e-mail grandkids, check news. It may offer their only link to the outside world. Josephine Brenaman, a ninety-six-year-old grandmother, just recently learned how to use a computer, and although she still sees typewriters as being "better for typing, because computers make it more complicated," she's learning, and slowly beginning to embrace the idea of the word processor. For her, access to the Internet is access to her children in California, to her grandkids, to her friends. As her hearing fails and the use of the phone becomes more and more tedious, the concept of e-mail (she hasn't learned how to do IM's yet) makes her life a lot easier, and keeps her connected. Old people with declining hearing

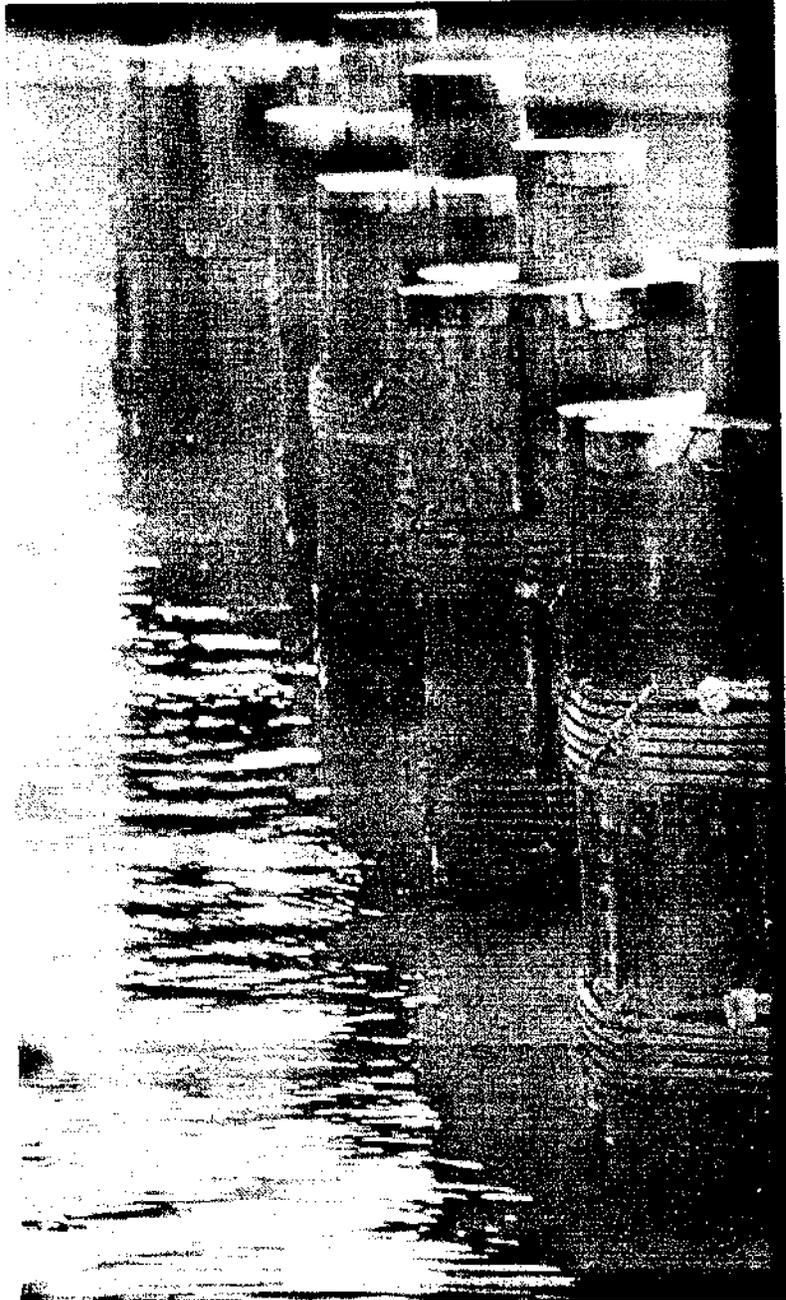
aren't the only ones who would have a problem with telephone use. Deaf people, people with disabilities, or even someone with a really bad speech impediment- they benefit from the Internet. One example of this would be Dan Keplinger, a young man with Cerebral Palsy. Dan speaks, but needs an interpreter to be fully understood. The telephone is not an option. For him, the Internet offers the opportunity to converse with people without a translator and without being asked, "What? Can you spell that" over and over again in a conversation. The function of the Internet communication in our modern society— does it unify, does it connect, does it bring people together?

Hear loud incessant beeping; force body to move; turn head towards clock; note time; hit snooze; let head drop back onto pillow; hear loud incessant beeping; untangle arm from fleece blanket; hit snooze; hear loud incessant beeping; note time; hit snooze; hear roommate arrive home from first class; roll over; hear roommate preparing to leave for second class; force body to sitting position; allow body to adjust to the morning; descend ladder; stumble to desk; turn on computer; check Group Wise mail; check AOL mail; initiate AOL Instant Messenger (AIM); select one of over 100 away messages; get shower; do homework; go to class. My morning ritual September and half of October, my first fall of college. Normal, to my friends and me, at least. It is at this time, at 12:00 or 1:00 p.m., that the majority of my buddies are online— in theory, at least. While they are at class or practice, while they are studying or reading— their computer is connected to AIM and an away message tells the stories of their lives, their whereabouts, or an insightful or humorous quote. Some are lame, some are amusing, some are confusing, some are perceptive. All are interesting enough to distract me from reading that next chapter in Dickens' *Hard Times*, or from writing that essay about Putman's *Bowling Alone*. I don't want to talk to anyone at that time-- that's not why I sign on. I sign on to see who else is on- to see if Lisa is on, to see if Liz is on, to see if Jocelyn or Lindsay or Emily are on. I sign on to read their away messages-- I sign on to feel like I still see them everyday.

But I don't. I haven't seen them in months. And without the Internet, would I get to talk to them everyday? No. The



RYAN CREEEL



GINGER COLAMUSSI

Internet allows communication between long-distance friends. It's direct. It's cheap. Now, obviously, something is lost. You can't hear or see each other. But consider what is gained. Jessica Hook, an active IMer and a Loyola freshman, admits that while the Internet is "a little more impersonal," that impersonality can be overcome when supplemented with personal contact, such as "letters or calls." The point is that the Internet "enables you to talk more." You don't have to call someone just to say "hi." You can send free cards for any holiday, even ones you never knew existed or ones that you would normally never acknowledge, such as "Guy Fawkes Day" on November 5. Internet communication connects.

Nadine Gutierrez, a Loyola freshman who uses the Internet daily for research, e-mails, Instant Messages, and Napster, sees it as a beneficial means of connecting with people. Using her Logitech camera, Nadine can transmit her image over the Web to any friends at any college who might be interested in seeing her. Now maybe they don't want to see her, but the option is there. And this option reduces the impersonality. She gets to "find out what everyone is doing" through a medium that is "about the same as talking in person." She uses the Internet to communicate with friends in different states when it is just "too expensive" to use the phone. Many people share Nadine's opinion. My brother, Bill, a junior at the University of Delaware, is not a frequent IM user, but does rely on e-mail daily. To him, "the Internet can often substitute for a phone conversation." But does it replace it? Bill, an English major, expresses his opinion rather astutely when he states that "communication may be slightly more impersonal, yet the frequency of communication increases drastically, and nullifies the impersonality of the communication." Well said. The positives of more regular contact far outweigh the negatives of impersonality. Bill does go on to note that the majority of his internet communication is with more distant friends than with close friends. It would seem that internet users benefit from access to other people, as well as an infinite amount of information.

Communication. Exchange of ideas. Contact.
Interaction. What a concept. Research and shopping and every-

thing else that the Internet entails would still make it intriguing. But the concept of communication transcending time and space even more efficiently than the telephone fascinates me. E-mails can be sent anytime. They are far more efficient than letters. Sure, they take less time, less effort. And it is still a great feeling to open a real mailbox, tear open a real letter, and see someone's real trademark handwriting, rather than hearing "You've Got Mail" and looking at a screen and seeing someone's trademark font. Sure, e-mails may be efficient, quick, expedient, convenient. But are they genuine? Is communication about efficiency or is it about genuine contact with other individuals? IMs are even more fascinating. You talk to someone directly; you converse, without physical contact, without even seeing them, without saying anything. You converse without actually verbalizing. You can't hear who you are talking to, and they can't hear you. You may not catch their anger-- you just think they're being funny. They might not understand that you are upset about something-- it goes right over their head. But that is the price we pay-- a small price at that-- in order to have the ability to talk to anyone. The benefits? You say things you wouldn't normally say; you gain guts in situations in which you might normally remain quiet. You can truly think about what you are going to say, and then edit it if it doesn't sound right. Misunderstandings are common even in verbal conversations. So you might be misunderstood online-- but it's better than not talking at all. Isn't it?

Mid October. Home from class and sitting at my desk, I look at my computer to see who is online. Hoopla3, lizzyoak5, JosKixs, SrtDust332, Uniq3120-- the list goes on. Hoopla3 is at rugby practice. Lizzyoak5 is studying for a bio test. JosKixs doesn't have an away message up, but her screen name is yellow, as opposed to black, showing that she has been idle for some time now. StrDust332 went home for a home-cooked meal. Uniq3120 is simply "working." It strikes me suddenly-- I call my best friend Hoopla3. Hoopla3. It's so impersonal-- it's not her name, it's not even her nickname-- it's her screen name, I don't know the last time I thought of Lisa as Lisa, and not Hoopla3. I don't use my friend's names anymore. I call them by their screen names. I call them by their screen names?

Does a person's screen name begin to overshadow the person? The impersonality of that thought is striking. Some sociologists have begun to explore this impersonality and its effects. Robert Putnam discusses the Internet as a separating factor, rather than a unifying factor. His book, *Bowling Alone*, is a poignant picture of the declining spirit of community in America. In it, he illustrates the concept of decreasing social capital and the effect of that decrease on every aspect of society. Everything is declining; all participation is going down-- civic, political, and social. Putnam looks to television and the Internet as being inhibitors to social capital. Social capital means the general feeling of community and social connectedness. Television is an obvious culprit, but the Internet, the World Wide Web, which gives access to nearly everything-- how can that be bad?

Although both media can be used to pass news, information, and anything else efficiently-- both media are extremely individualized. The use of the Internet may be positive in that it increases the frequency of communication with others, but it may actually decrease the amount of time they spend as active members of the community. The Internet has that effect in other areas too, because it allows us to receive "hand-tailored entertainment in private, even utterly alone" (Putnam 217).

Putnam draws on a study done by Norman Nie to substantiate his claims. According to Nie, the Internet decreases social cohesion and a spirit of community, or social capital. The guiding question for the study is whether the Internet will create a "better informed and connected, more engaged and participatory society" or if it will turn our society into one of "lonely ex-couch potatoes glued to computer screens, whose human contacts are impersonal and whose political beliefs are easily manipulated" (Nie 1). Although Nie is "an Internet-aholic," he can't help but wonder what the effect will be on future generations, as they become more and more dependent on the Internet (Blackstone 1). Nie states that "the Internet is an individual activity" which is drawing people towards their computers and away from each other (9). His studies have shown that the longer you have access to the Internet, the more hours you spend on it for various reasons. The Internet has decreased the use of television and

other traditional media. It has increased the frequency of bringing work home from the office. It has decreased the number of people who go out to go shopping, and thus it has also decreased the time spent stuck in traffic. But what does this mean? To Nie, the Internet could come to be the "ultimate isolating technology" (3). Frequent users spend less time with their families, they talk less on the phone, and they participate in fewer social activities and events. The Internet is one contributor to the declining spirit of community in America.

But we can all survive without community, can't we? Putnam and Nie both say no. According to their research, social capital, a sense of community, is key. The most important, and perhaps most interesting, benefit of social capital is personal health and happiness. Studies throughout the country have repeatedly shown that "social connectedness is one of the most powerful determinations of our well being" (Putnam 326). But it seems that the Internet draws us away from that. Overall, the evidence says that if we join clubs, if we visit people, if we volunteer, if we are close to our family, and if we have a network of friends and community members to depend on-- we will be healthier and happier. Today there is less social capital than ever before. And "people who are socially disconnected are between two and five times more likely to die from all causes, compared with matched individuals who have close ties with family, friends, and community" (327). Could internet usage really decrease health, happiness, and even life expectancy? And if so, will we-- should we-- stop using it so often? Would this knowledge have stopped us from becoming so computer and internet dependent in the first place?

I remember my family's first computer. It was a little box-like thing, yellowish and very 80's looking. Which was fitting enough, since this was somewhere around 1988. The black and white screen of this Apple Macintosh was, at most, 12 inches. It was old, clunky, and the coolest thing we owned besides Atari. I remember the four of us crowded around the little screen the first night we had it. We had our own computer. We were technologically advanced; we were high-tech. This was long before the Internet was even a concept to us. Long before computers were

fast. That little computer was great though. I learned how to type, I learned the Apple version of Windows. I learned how to master the double-click and how to get the little arrow to go where I wanted it to go. The computer was cool, but I had friends outside and a game of whiffle ball waiting for me.

Twelve years since 1988. And now most first graders know how to do a lot more than I did. And they have access to much more- games, puzzles, and cartoons are all over the Internet. Nickelodeon.com-- Jigzone.com-- Uproar.com. All their friends are online. If I could have been on my computer finding out anything about New Kids On The Block, like these kids can do for N'SYNC or Backstreet Boys, maybe that whiffle ball game wouldn't have seemed so enticing. Maybe a bike ride would have seemed boring compared to chatting online. Maybe I just wouldn't be interested in going to the park. I don't know. And I don't know if that's how kids are today-- but as the Internet becomes more and more accessible to younger kids-- what will happen? Of course, the Internet offers many educational opportunities for the next generations. So the kids will be learning. But alone. They'll become masters of engaging in multiple IM conversations. Alone. Those whiffle ball games are an important part of growing up. You learn to deal with other kids, and you get some exercise. You make some friends, some social connections.

The topic of Internet communication can be looked at under a lens of theories it didn't originally provoke. Jean Baudrillard expresses concern with the "real" and the "hyperreal." The Internet is "not real and more real than real" at the same time (Kivisto 142). That's an odd statement. But think of it this way- everything we see on the Internet is "real" in the sense that we actually see it on the screen. But when we "Ask Jeeves," we aren't actually asking a person something, but yet we are- and we get an answer. It's real, but at the same time it's not. This concept of the existence of "hyperreal social worlds that do not rely on a 'real' referent" leads Baudrillard to the conclusion that the individual in our society has been "reduced to the roles of playing mall rats in a quest of objects of desire and excitement, couch potatoes playing with the remote control, and

voyeurs peering into the private lives of the rich and famous" (Kivisto 143). Baudrillard's theory was formulated with virtual reality and Disney Land in mind-- but the Internet fits right into his thesis. We can't totally regulate the Internet. In essence, we are "thoroughly enmeshed in our social worlds but incapable of controlling them" (Kivisto 143). We click into the sites we want, we IM the people we want to talk to, we e-mail whomever we feel like e-mailing. But we're not in control of the Internet. It's too vast, too expansive. We depend on it for everyday activity, but we can't regulate it. We're at the mercy of the Internet.

Anthony Giddens' theories can be used to further the concept of the Internet as a social barrier rather than a uniting factor. This concept of internet isolation reflects Giddens' theory of "distanciation." Giddens observed, "Relationships that are not physically present become more and more characteristic of the modern world" (Kivisto 149). These relationships do not have the same benefits that physical relationships have. There is no physical touch, no hugs-- you can't even see the other person in most cases. You can meet strangers on the Internet— people in chat rooms who share a similar interest. But this too pales in comparison to a physical human relationship. As Nie says of e-mail and IMs, they're "a way to stay in touch, but you can't share a coffee or a beer with someone...or give them a hug" (3). But can we really accuse the Internet, with its numerous benefits, of being a primary evil in our society? Is that a reasonable assumption? Where did these guys get their data anyway? What do they know? Don't they know you can e-mail anybody, you can research anytime, you can talk to anyone without ever having to actually look someone in the eye? You can interact with the world-- in complete and utter isolation. The Internet-- a medium creating a greater sense of individualism rather than unity?

It's November now. The November of my first fall at college. My morning ritual has been modified. AIM doesn't get turned on in the morning. AIM doesn't get left on all day. My collection of away messages-- over 100, built over the past two months-- sit idle. I didn't sign on in the morning to talk to people. I signed on because it was a weak attempt to keep a connection. Many "conversations" occur on AIM between my friends

and me, but with their voices and laughs and mannerisms and smiles not fresh in my mind, it's far from the ideal way to keep in touch.

It's true-- calling everyone would be too expensive, too time consuming. But does that make the Internet the only option? What is so good about typing back and forth to your friends? Yes, it does keep you in touch; it does let you communicate. But maybe-- and I don't know- maybe it would be better to have a real conversation once a week-- no, once every two weeks even. A conversation where you can hear the other person's voice, and you know they can hear yours too. Even though my Dad wishes he could rely on the Internet as a primary source of communication, "some people [my mom and I] insist on using the phone." My Mom, despite the cost of telephone calls, still feels that "nothing replaces the sound of a loved one's voice." Of course we still communicate with e-mail and sometimes IMs, but these conversations just complement the more personal telephone conversations. Now, I assume my Dad was being somewhat sarcastic when he mentioned Internet communication being more favorable than the telephone. However, I asked him through e-mail, so who knows? To some, like Loyola freshman Julia Isabella, the Internet is "very impersonal and [makes] you feel lazy about keeping in touch with close ties...you can type anything down and not mean one thing." It's so easy-- is it too easy? And yet others, like Alex Kelly, a freshman at Haverford College, still feel that the Internet "is not as close and personal as it could be, but it is definitely a means of keeping in touch that isn't entirely artificial." Alex calls her close friends on the phone. The Internet supplements their conversations, but it does not dominate them. Tricia Hines, a student at Catholic University, doesn't need to call her friends as often "since [she] knows what they are up to" because of Internet communication. She does admit, however, that you "miss out on the full effect of the other person" when you talk to them online. But couldn't you argue the miss-out-on-the-full-effect-theory in regards to the telephone? You can't see each other on the phone. And seeing is a big part of communicating. When the telephone hit the mainstream, it probably reduced the frequency of visiting.

Telephones are faster than letters and more efficient. And even now they are still great. Convenient, fast, easy, simple. The Internet is the next step-- but in what direction? Are we stepping towards the most efficient means of communication possible? And if so, why? Isn't communication about connecting with someone else on a personal level? Maybe I'm wrong, maybe it is about efficiency-- maybe it is about making it simple and putting as little effort out as possible.

With that in mind, perhaps IM's could replace telephone conversations. They are efficient; they are easy. So easy, that half the time, people don't even write in complete phrases. They use emoticons and "internet lingo" ("Internet Lingo" 1). That's efficiency for you. And I hate it. Actually, I can stomach the emoticons. I don't use them, but they are bearable when they aren't added at the end of every single sentence. They are effective in that they can be used to denote a joke- "...to get to the other side ;-)" (meaning "wink"). In this situation, a smile, :-), would also be appropriate. You can give a kiss, :-*, show shock, :-o, and even express sadness, :-(. The possibilities are endless.

As for the "internet lingo," I'm not as sympathetic. People type "brb" (be right back) or "tfn" (ta-ta for now). I know - it's easier and it does make sense- like an Internet shorthand or something. But realistically, does anyone speak in shorthand? I thought IM's were supposed to be like conversations. "Hey, I'll b-r-b." "I'm leaving, t-t-f-n." Who talks like that? Apparently, Tigger says "tfn," but since he's a cartoon tiger, I'm going to strip him of his credibility. How much effort does it take to say, "be right back?" Similarly, how much effort does it take to type it? Of course, you might be talking to five people at once, so you don't have time to write out "be right back" or "ta-ta for now." My point is, if you don't have time to write to me in sentences, then don't talk to me at all. What about Internet laughter? "LOL" means your laughing really hard, while "lol" means you're just chuckling. "Haha" is what I use for laughter. It seems most conversational. And if something's really funny, I go with the expanded "hahahahaha." But I admit it's pretty lame, and pretty unrealistic. If the Internet is substituting for real conversations, then getting a "gtg" (got to go) or "brb" is like being

rudely cut off in mid sentence and left standing in silence. Would we ever just get preoccupied with something else while talking to someone in person, and abruptly say "gtg b-b ttyl" (got to go, bye-bye, talk to you later)?

IM's say a lot about the Internet as being impersonal. Most of the time people are having multiple conversations. When someone you don't want to talk to IM's you, you can easily ignore them, sign off, or tell them-- politely or rudely-- that you're busy doing research. So how can it come close to a real conversation-- who talks to more than five people about five different subjects at once? The emoticons are a sorry substitute for a real smile, a real laugh, a real kiss, or even a real frown. The abbreviations are lazy and insincere. Now I know people don't use them to be rude or childish-- they use them to be efficient. But it's annoying when someone types "gtg" or any other abbreviation. Four more letters? How long can it take to type four more letters and hit the space bar twice? Got to go. That time took about 1.5 seconds. Got to go. That time it only took a second...

The Internet-- good or bad? Impersonal or personal? Does it "promote community or undercut it" (Kraut et al., pars. 10-12)? What about social connectedness? The Internet makes us less involved-- it makes us loners in an era when we are more technologically connected than ever. Is that possible? That's my dilemma-- our dilemma-- and I don't know the answer, do you? I know the Internet is far from an angelic unifying force. It's filled with porno sites, sites about how to make bombs, racist sites, sites promoting violence. Obviously, that stuff is going to have a negative effect on society. But here, we're talking about innocent Internet use. Internet communication. Legal. Encouraged. Normal. Is this what's starting to hurt us?

And what about this Internet communication-- what about e-mail and IMs? A few months ago, they represented the beauty of technology, to me at least. I was connected to people and I could talk to anyone. But as the phone calls became less frequent, and the Internet turned into the primary source of communication, I began to see some holes. I began to feel more distance than connection. It was as if the impersonality of the Internet was making my relationships less meaningful. E-mails

work. They are less personal. They take less effort, but like a "real" letter, you write it and send it. With real letters you don't hear the person's voice or see the person's face. If e-mails are supposed to be the more efficient version of regular mail, they are effective. But why are we so obsessed with efficiency? To my Mom and others, "as nice as the voice saying 'You've Got Mail' is, it doesn't take the place of a pretty envelope in the mailbox." So e-mails work if we want efficiency. But what ever happened to letters written with tender loving care that arrive a day or two after being sent? For businesses and urgent messages e-mails are great. But it's a lot harder to send a little bit of "you" to someone else through a server, than it is to do so through the United States Postal Service.

And then there's IMs. They are seen as conversations. You can't hear the person, you can't see the person, and you can't feel a genuine connection with the person. But, hey, it's efficient, it's simple-it's the best. Why is that our mindset? I will be one of the first to praise the Internet. It was the Internet that allowed me to do my research for this essay in my pajamas. It was the Internet that allowed me to conduct the interviews for this essay at 1:00 a.m. It is the Internet that enables me to find places to get reasonably priced tickets to sold-out concerts. It is the Internet that lets me e-mail everyday. It is the Internet that lets me have 433 songs in my Napster library. The Internet is a beautiful thing. Research, communication, music, anything you want-- you can have it if you're connected. You can have anything if you're connected. But do I need to research in my pajamas, e-mail everyday, or have 433 songs at my disposal?

One of my major complaints about Internet communication is that you can't see or hear the person you are talking to. We can't have personal contact via the Internet...yet. The advances in technology are amazing. It won't be long before we all have Logitech cameras (mine came with my computer) and can double click the NetMeeting icon, letting us talk to and see our friends. Technically speaking, I could do this now if any of my friends had a camera. Would this make it all ok? Would this change everything? Then, Internet communication would be better than a phone-- it would be totally comparable to face-to-face

actual human contact. Right? No more of this "lack of community" talk-- we'll be back on the right track again. We'll see and hear each other when we're having a conversation, and wasn't that the cause of the whole problem?

I don't know what to think. The facts are simple- our generation is less active and involved. Our generation uses the Internet. We e-mail, we IM, we build fewer personal relationships. We rely on the Internet to keep our old friendships going. It works, apparently. But at what cost? Have we become less human-- less personal-- because of the Internet? And if we haven't yet, how long will it be before we do? Before I do? Before you do? Before the six-year-olds growing up with the Internet do? What will happen to this generation of kids who are being brought up on the Internet? And what about new technology-- will that make it all better? The facts are simple. But what do they mean? The Internet is bad. The Internet is good. Does it have to be either? Positives. Negatives. Benefits. Drawbacks. All meshed together to shape our image of the Internet.

Honestly, I talk more to my friends than I would without AOL Instant Messenger. But it's not really "talking." When I get an IM from Lisa-- Hoopla3-- it's not the same as getting a phone call or a letter from her. It's real communication but, at the same time, it's not genuine.

On the CBS News web page, I began reading the article about Norman Nie. It discussed the fact that the Internet has the "tendency to diminish real human relationships." It talked about the good and the bad-- isolating and unifying. It talked about how Nie's study suggests, "The Internet is isolating people from each other." The article concluded by summarizing that "people who spend a few or more hours a week online grew slightly more depressed and lonely as they used the Internet." At the bottom of the page, a simple click of the mouse would allow you to "e-mail this story to a friend." The irony. All the studies would have you believe that Internet users don't have any friends. The hypocrisy. Nie spends hours a day on the Internet. The irony and the hypocrisy. I myself just signed on.

As I've slowly weaned myself off my Internet dependency

MAGGIE DOUGHERTY

over the last few months, I've found myself calling people more often. Without my Buddy List constantly in my face, I find myself more inclined to write people letters. Now when I do go online for a quick puff of Internet communication-- it doesn't seem so carcinogenic. It seems that one IM every so often isn't as impersonal as a pack a day.

Ms. Dougherty's essay received First Place in the CM100 Effective Writing Competition.

DANA MOSS

the ghosts of growing up

Puzzle's ghost lingered -- there was never any doubt in my mind about that. Her tail would disappear around corners, her bark would echo from outside, and her sigh would resonate in empty rooms. She woke us at night by running in and out of dreams. There was a sadness present that we did not create, a feeling of emptiness that jabbed me on the inside like a splinter, and neither my parents nor a smiley-faced band aid could relieve it. The house was wrong without her, our family was suddenly incomplete. I could practically feel her at my heels, nuzzling me gently and begging for attention. All I wanted to do was put my arms around her neck and bury my head in her fur. She was the ideal companion -- always available to give me a kiss or a smile when I needed one, the only one who didn't mind when I threw a tantrum or complained about my baby brother. Maybe her ghost listened to me cry in the shadows, but it was hardly the same. I wanted my real Puzzle back.

The house next door was up for rent about once a year, so I rarely got a chance to know the people who lived there. And despite the constant movement of people in and out, back and-

forth, I never remembered seeing a single moving van, or hearing any other expected commotion. They simply disappeared, one after the other, replacing and being replaced. None of the residents found the time to attend to the property, so the yard was usually in a state of quiet chaos, while the house remained a gloomy shade of peeling gray. As they came and went, most of our next door neighbors stopped having names or faces-- only a few left a lasting impression. The daughter of the owner, the first person I remembered living there, would invite me over for tea and cookies, and sometimes I would help her pull out the weeds in her yard. It was a futile effort, however, seeing as the more I picked, the more grew back. I enjoyed it while it lasted, but then she left, vanished, and I never heard from her again.

Next came a couple of guys who spent most of their time practicing Led Zeppelin covers, at full volume, in the middle of the night. Eventually, my father, whose eyes literally pulse and bulge out of their sockets when he's tired and angry, stormed over in his bathrobe and pounded on the door until they stopped, and hid. Not surprisingly, they moved shortly after that. So many others followed that I stopped caring about who they were or what they looked like-- they had no impact on my young life whatsoever. However, the neighbors I saw the least are the ones I will always remember most. I got a glimpse of the husband once in a while, and he seemed reserved and innocent enough, in his converse sneakers and old t-shirts, glasses and trendy goatee. Nor did he appear peculiar or particularly threatening in his manner, but I did think it odd that I never saw his wife once. (At first, I thought it a disappointment that they did not have any children, but this later turned out to be a blessing.) Where was she, what did she do all day? Maybe she just worked all the time, like mom did. They kept the window facing our house shut with the limp gray shade drawn. I never saw anyone come over to visit, or heard the sounds of lively conversation and laughter coming from in or out of the place-- something about it was just too still, and it made me uneasy. After all, my house was in a constant state of motion and energy, whether my brother and I were wrestling and knocking over lamps, or my mother was blasting her records while she vacuumed. The only thing that seemed

to move next door was the jungle that took over their front yard. My mom, an avid gardener, complained that their neglect was letting the weeds and ivy engulf the rest of the garden, ferociously preying on the other plants and flowers, and it was beginning to creep over onto our side. The ground was being smothered, living and dying at the same time.

One afternoon, while I was throwing the wiffle ball up in the air and swinging at it with a tennis racket, I accidentally swung it over the line of shrubs that divided our houses. After hesitating, and glancing around several times to make sure no one was watching, I walked slowly up their steps, and spotted the ball amidst the ivy. I crept through it gingerly, wincing at the *crunch, crunch* my sneakers made in the growth. The clouds had just moved over the sun, and the shadows stretched out before me, making everything look dark and hostile. I trembled, and right as I was about to grab my prize and get out of there, I stopped and held my breath. Someone was watching me. I whirled around, just in time to see the front window shade slap up against the window pane, as if someone had pulled it up to look at me and let it go in a panic. Eyes wide and utterly terrified, I ran back down the steps and into my own house as fast as my little legs could take me. It must have been the woman, her husband was definitely at work. What was she looking at me for, and why didn't she want me to see her? Had I done something wrong? I felt like I had trespassed, and violated something secret, but none of my other neighbors minded when I rescued toys from their yards. From the split in the living room curtain, I breathlessly peeked out of our window onto theirs, searching for some movement, an answer to my questions, but I saw nothing. It was just as it had been five minutes before.

"Are you okay?" my mom asked quizzically. The clouds passed, and the sun came back out. I nodded, took one more look, and wondered if things were okay with her, in there.

Puzzle got so old she couldn't walk, see, or get up to go to the bathroom without great difficulty. My dad became so frustrated at cleaning up after her messes everyday that he would yell "NO!" as loudly as he could. I would watch through a cracked doorway,

sneak out after he had gone, and stroke her head, even if it smelled. She would gulp, pant sheepishly, and turn her big brown eyes up at me. "It's ok," I would whisper, as scared as she was of my dad's anger. "You're a good dog, no matter what." And when she stared into my eyes, I just knew that she understood, because when we got in trouble, we always had each other. Nothing was going to happen to her as long as I was around.

Puzzle had to go to the vet so often I stopped noticing her lengthy weekly visits. Even though I worried about her, I was not prepared for anything to happen. As far as I could see, she always had and always would be with us. There was no such thing as leaving forever, so I didn't bother to think about death. Death did not affect me, my family, the things I loved. It existed only in the papers I saw lying on the coffee table, or in movies, but even then it was never the good guys or the people I cared about. Death happened to people who didn't follow the rules, like holding hands while crossing the street, or wearing seat belts in the car. Since my family always did what we were supposed to do, death was an idle threat. I had never been forced to reckon with it, and as far as I could tell, I never would.

It normally started around story time in the late evenings. My brother and I would be snuggled with our favorite stuffed animals, listening to the soothing tone of my mother's voice reading *The Adventures of the Bearnstein Bears* or *Stuart Little*. Our sleepy dreams would be interrupted by the cracks of rolling thunder coming in from next door, steadily increasing, growing louder and louder. Mom and dad would usher me into my bedroom, even though I would be dying to stay and hear what was going on. To my dismay, I could never make it out clearly, no matter how I stretched my neck or strained my ears. But I could tell that our neighbor was yelling at his wife, calling her very mean things, and using words that we were forbidden to say. It made me scared for this woman I had never seen. I would look up at dad expectantly, waiting for him to go next door and make the noise stop as he had done in the past, but he did his best to ignore it, like the rest of the neighborhood. Mom and dad could make anything better, whether it was sewing up my torn blankie,

or curing my cold with popsicles and bubble-gum flavored goop. So why couldn't they make the man be nice to his wife? "I don't know them well enough to do anything," Dad tried to explain. "That's their business to take care of." Defeated, I was resigned once again to listening and wondering. I just didn't understand-- if they were adults, why were they fighting like my brother and I did? Mom and dad hardly ever disagreed about anything, but our neighbors got into screaming fights almost every night. I did not dare try and rescue my wiffle balls now, but was forced to let the garden bury and devour them. The shrubs between our houses grew higher, and thicker, until I imagined that they had twisted into a barbed wire fence. Hope for the lady trapped inside grew dimmer as the days became shorter, and colder.

It's not only people who feel invisible weight crushing them down, making them sink down deeper. Even a dog's will to be can be changed and crushed.

As I came home from school each day, I found myself gazing at their house, searching in vain for clues to the mysterious things that must have been happening in there. I tried to imagine how she coped, and what she was like. Did she squeeze her feet into high heels every morning, sit in rush hour traffic like everyone else, rest her head on her fist while staring blankly into the depths of a computer screen? Or, did she layer on makeup to disguise the dark circles underneath her drooping eyelids, hand clutching a quivering coffee cup, vision blurring the front page headlines that she really didn't care about anyway? Did she twirl the fork in her spaghetti plate until it was one jumbled knot, too big to swallow? Did she have hobbies, or any color in her face? Did her eyes flash at you, or look down and away? Was she swollen with anger, seething from internal burns, quiet about her pain? Passive in deciding her fate? Did she cry all the time or hardly at all? I wish I had discovered what she thought of other people and herself. What was it like to live like that? For the first time, I began to feel grateful for the little things that made me feel loved, such as sleeping next to my mom when there was a big storm outside, or dancing to music with my broth-



GINGER COLAMUSSI

er and dad until we collapsed with cramps and giggles.

I remember the last time her eyes looked up at me longingly, those beautiful black pools of exhaustion. She was being dragged to the vet once again, her limbs aching and creaking with silent gnawing pain. I waved at her and my mother as she turned back to look at me one last time. And then they walked out the door together, off the cliff, with a gentle coax and tug. It might have been a good idea that I didn't know, I would not have let her go easily. She was better than any stuffed animal I had ever had, my friend, and when I spoke, she always seemed to understand. So in my ignorance, I turned away cheerfully, and went back into my room to occupy myself with Barbie. I felt no warning, no sense of the impending, no fear. She must have known, but I did not entertain the possibility that the end could be now. I realized later that I had failed to protect her like I thought I could, I had broken our pact. I had thought that we two were invincible, immortal, and the fact that I was wrong is what hurt me most of all.

I slept contentedly that night through the blaring sirens of the ambulance and police cars. Those who had seen the flashing lights in the night came over the next morning to talk with my parents, and so my brother and I were shooed off to play. As we romped along the side of our house to the back yard, little did we know that the crime scene was only a few feet away, hidden by the same old paint, drawn shade, and choking foliage. I stopped to look at the window that never got any sunlight, concealed by shadows at all angles, without so much as a dandelion growing on the ground beneath it. It was as if a coldness was leaking out from the window frame, spreading out over our heads. I shivered, grabbed my brother's hand, and walked on.

Several days later, as I bounded up the steps, threw my back pack on the floor, and hugged my father, I sensed that something was not right. His face looked tired and lined more deeply than usual. Dad sighed, and asked me to please sit down.

"Honey, you know the woman who lives next door?" he asked slowly.

"Yeah, uh-huh," I nodded, eyebrows raised.

"Well. . ." he began, trailing off. "She did something bad. She. . ."

She had killed herself, is what she had done. The woman was dead. Dead. The sound of the word was so flat, so hard. I did not know what to say, a lump of pity and rage had stopped up my voice. I turned and gazed at the window that had concealed so much pain, never before thinking that anything could feel so bad as to make someone do that. And even though dad never told me how she did it, or any other details about the situation, I always felt that the room behind that window had been the place. So, every time I had to walk around my house, I would feel the coolness escaping through the window, creeping over me, as if she was still trapped in there. I would run from the feelings she left me there.

I didn't think to ask my parents where my dog was until several days later. I understood why she was gone, I had just wanted to say goodbye, get one more wet lick on my hand, look into her eyes and say what I didn't need to out loud. My mother held me and cried. "It had to happen," she said, stricken with guilt for having to make the decision. Mom had found Puzzle abandoned as a puppy, thrown out of a car window like a piece of trash. And now mom had been the one forced to abandon her, except this time, it was the end, it was for forever. Puzzle had been a permanent part of our family for fifteen years, so it was no wonder why everyone was having trouble letting go.

Months later, after careful planning, my mother brought a new brown bundle of fuzz home on New Years Day. It seemed like the only option we had left. For some time, she did not like me to touch her, but then one evening while I was crying, she patiently let me hold her until I stopped and dried my cheeks. I looked closely into her eyes, and she gave my nose a kiss. So I knew that my old dog was in there somewhere, and that the old understanding between us had been reborn. Puzzle's ghost must have accepted this, for she completely disappeared with this new arrival. It was only her loving memory that remained with us now.

Time passed, and the husband moved away, as we all

knew he would. I wondered what it had been like for him to have walked through, or slept in, the actual room where his wife had chosen death over living with him, her own husband. He must have been the one who had discovered her that night. Did he take off his glasses slowly, stroke her limp hand and weep? Did he fall on her and kiss her face, begging her to wake up? Did he freeze, numbly stare at her and regret everything? Or did he just pick up the phone and dial 911, half knowing that this was going to happen all along? If I could feel her presence from outside, what must it have been like on the inside? To fold up her dresses and place them into boxes . . . smell her perfume on a pillow when laying down to sleep . . . see her picture in a frame in the hallway . . . hear her footsteps bend the floorboards in the hallway ... or her voice fade in and out of doorways? I was not the only one who was shaken and disturbed by this violent and unnatural act. "What did he expect," I overheard my father say angrily to Mom, "after he verbally abused her, and who knows what else? It's just so sad ..." So sad. I began to wonder, how many others suffered secretly behind locked doors, not discovered until it was too late?

Years have gone by, and the window still makes my veins cool and my throat freeze. Every now and then, workers come to stop the weeds and vines from taking over completely, but they are still as relentless as ever, hiding whatever lies inside.

Ms. Moss' essay received Second Place in the CM100 Effective Writing Competition.

MEGAN POMIANEK

jacob a. riis: progressive reformer

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, American society was divided over the issue of the influx of the so-called "new immigrants" that began crowding city streets and tenements. Public opinion was split between two major social philosophies: Social Darwinism and the Social Gospel. Those of a Darwinist mindset believed that these new immigrant poor were genetically inferior to the established "American" race. Such nativists both detested and feared the different cultures and idiosyncrasies of these peoples. Conversely, believers in the Social Gospel maintained that these people were materially disadvantaged only, and that they themselves were not to blame for their deplorable living conditions. In his book entitled *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis expresses the viewpoints of both these contrasting ideologies, for in many ways he is a product of his times. An exploration into the lives of New York City's poor, *How the Other Half Lives* is an intimate portrait of life in the tenements. In his narrative, Riis delves into the lives of the poor and down-trodden of the city of New York, incorporating his own opinions and suggestions with indisputable evidence as he investigates the causes and consequences of the terrible tenement lifestyle. Although some of his views do display characteristics of the

nativist Social Darwinist mindset, Jacob Riis draws both from ideas of the Social Gospel and experiences from his own life to develop and express what he sees as the true potential of these impoverished immigrants and become a fighter for progressive reform.

The philosophy of Social Darwinism relates the tenet of "survival of the fittest" usually used in connection with Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution to the development of human societies. One of the best-known Social Darwinists of Riis' time is Herbert Spencer, who claims "a creature not energetic enough to maintain itself must die." From this "universal law of nature" follows the opinion that those he calls "good-for-nothings," the poor and destitute, should be left to fend for themselves, and ultimately perish, rather than be kept alive by charity ("What is Social Darwinism?"). Riis expresses his own version of this notion when he speaks of the predominance of tramps in the 'Bend' section of New York as being perpetuated by "ill-applied charity and idleness." According to Riis, such people lack the energy Spencer considers a necessary part of survival. "Once started on the career of a tramp," Riis says, "the man keeps to it because it is the laziest" (Riis 111). In accordance with Social Darwinist philosophy here, Riis is suggesting that these vagrant men deserve to be poor because they are unfit for any other place in society. Continuing his description of the 'Bend' area, Riis also expresses the concept of "survival of the fittest." He speaks of the police stations as "the sieve that sifts out the chaff from the wheat, if there be any wheat there" (Riis 113), for they provide a night's lodging to vagabonds and easy access to a recruiting office to find honest work. Some men, the "wheat," take advantage of this opportunity; most do not.

Another Social Darwinist principle that Riis advocates is the concept of assimilation. In nature, the species that most often survive are the ones that have the best genetic adaptations for their particular environment. In the same way, Social Darwinists felt that the best course of action for surviving in a particular society would be to "adapt" to that society's culture ("Social Darwinism"). Riis supports such assimilation when he proposes that the individual ethnic groups that comprise city tenements

integrate themselves more into American culture. Key to such assimilation would be learning English and losing their native accents. "They must be taught the language of the country they have chosen as their home, as the first and most necessary step," he says. "Whatever may follow, that is essential, absolutely vital" (Riis 147). Riis also suggests that immigrants Anglicize their names, attend public schools, and convert to Christianity. To his dismay however, very few, if any, of the immigrants he encounters aspire enough towards the principle of assimilation.

Riis' nativist tendencies are expressed through his disappointment in this lack of thorough assimilation. At times, he resents the existence of an immigrant society in New York much like the nativists of this time period did, lamenting that American society is not more standardized. "The one thing you shall vainly ask for in the chief city of America is a distinctly American community. There is none; certainly not among the tenements" (Riis 73). Unfortunately to Riis, a "queer conglomerate mass of heterogeneous elements" has replaced the old inhabitants of the city (Riis 73). In his opinion, the worst parts of this mass of people are the Chinese, whom he derides in a decisively nativist tone. Riis claims that the Chinese "are a constant and terrible menace to society" and "in no sense a desirable element of the population" (Riis 127). They refuse to assimilate and "are governed by a law of their own," doing anything in their power to avoid following American customs (Riis 126). One of the biggest difficulties he has with the Chinese immigrants is their refusal to convert from their pagan religion. "All attempts to make an effective Christian out of John Chinaman will remain abortive in this generation; of the next I have, if anything, less hope" (Riis 120). This quotation not only includes the racist slang term of 'John Chinaman,' but it also communicates the nativist opinion that immigrants will never assimilate to American culture and will be a perpetual threat to established American society. However, Riis separates himself somewhat from the nativist population in that he does not support the prohibition of Chinese settlers. Instead, he actually proposes that more be allowed to immigrate, suggesting that the presence of Chinese women might somehow reform the men (Riis 127). This apparent contradiction in atti-

tude, injury on one hand and assistance on the other, occurs frequently in *How the Other Half Lives*, demonstrating how two different factions of public opinion influence Riis.

Riis' proposal that Chinese women be encouraged to emigrate and settle in the United States for the good of Chinese men is a sympathetic suggestion consistent with the principles of the Social Gospel. Followers of the Social Gospel movement sought to apply Christian ethics to urban problems, especially those caused by mass immigration and industrialization. Their principles were based on a belief in social progress and the fundamental goodness of man ("Social Gospel"). Riis often expresses concurrence with the ideals of the Social Gospel in *How the Other Half Lives*. For example, Riis demonstrates that he too believes in the essential goodness of humankind when he describes an impoverished child as "a sweet, human little baby despite its dirt and tatters" (Riis 148). Riis also includes a compassionate display by a police officer during a stale-beer dive raid in his book. The officer provides words of wisdom to a young man beginning to be drawn into a stale-beer habit. "'Come down early,' commented the officer. 'There is need of it. They don't last long at this. That stuff is brewed to kill at long range'" (Riis 108). Riis' decision to include this account shows that he, too, has concern for these people, especially the young. He also shows his own belief in the ability of immigrants to progress socially and that external situations and not internal deficiencies are what hold them down at the present. "See how much of the blame [for inequality] is borne by the prejudice and greed that have kept him [the immigrant] from rising ..." (Riis 162). By acknowledging the existence of unjust prejudice, Riis separates himself from a nativist or Social Darwinist association and demonstrates his own tendencies toward sympathy for immigrants and a desire for progressive reform.

The efforts of Social Gospel reformers resulted in a wide variety of improvements during Riis' time. One of the largest reform movements they worked toward concerned housing. A well-known leader of the Social Gospel movement, Walter Rauschenbusch, gave much emphasis to the "ugly, depressing, and coarsening" surroundings of the tenements and sought to

bring about positive change in housing and the workplace ("Walter Rauschenbusch: The Social Gospel"). Many of Riis' comments on tenement lifestyle throughout *How the Other Half Lives* show how he shares Rauschenbusch's sentiments. For example, at the very beginning of his book Riis states that "the wonder is that they are not all corrupted, and speedily, by their surroundings" (Riis 74). Here, Riis shows that he recognizes the depravity of tenement conditions and the effect they have on the people forced to live there. Riis shows his agreement with housing reformers when he gives his own opinions on attempted reforms that don't go far enough. "To herd them into model tenements," for example, "though it relieve the physical suffering in a measure, would be to treat a symptom of the disease rather than strike its root" (Riis 147). Riis praises Social Gospel initiatives such as the free reading-room, lectures, and settlement houses, and regrets that shoddy institutions such as cheap ten-cent lodging houses undo many of the good promoted by such agencies (Riis 113). Riis also believes, in accordance with the tenets of the Social Gospel, that education is key to the progress of immigrants (Riis 155) and also makes positive mention of other social-improvement programs, such as the United Hebrew Charities and the Fresh Air Fund, advocated by followers of the Social Gospel.

Riis' support of the Social Gospel movement and progressive reform efforts was not solely a result of outside influences and enlightened public opinion, however. Many of his personal experiences as an immigrant himself helped him to shape his sentiments and sympathies toward the poor subjects of *How the Other Half Lives* on his own. Riis emigrated from Denmark in October 1870 at the age of twenty-one. He lived hand-to-mouth for seven years, homeless, unemployed, and wretchedly poor until he secured a position at a New York City newspaper ("Collection Description"). In an autobiographical story written for the New York *Tribune* later in his career, Riis describes personal experiences not unlike those of the people whose desperate cause he would later promote through his photography and literature. For example, he himself was forced to spend nights on the bare wooden floor of a police station in order to simply have a roof over his head until the next morning (Goddard 1). Fortunately,

Riis turned out to be part of what he would later term the "wheat" that sifts out through the "sieve" of the police station (Riis 113) and lived to become, in his own words, "a useful man" (Goddard 1). Riis served as a living example to himself that factors of environment and chance are what hold the poor down and not genes or inherited deficiencies, for although he could have been a subject of a book like *How the Other Half Lives* once himself, Riis' personal characteristics and motivations helped him to rise above his impoverished situation. Riis had a chance and took advantage of it; he has sympathies for those who haven't been as fortunate.

Through his descriptions of the poor tenement-dwellers of New York City in *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis expresses his support of progressive reform efforts and his belief in the fundamental equality of all persons. Although some of his accounts are tainted with Social Darwinist or nativist opinions and terminologies, Riis is able to separate himself from these mentalities by interspersing throughout his narrative support of the values and initiatives of the Social Gospel and his own sympathetic views towards these poor immigrants. He sees these immigrants as real people with problems beyond their control living in conditions that strip them of much of their dignity, not as people inherently worthless or of no benefit to society. Because Riis speaks of and describes his subjects in such a human fashion, his book sparked public consciousness and sentiment and spurred on civic reforms, imprinting Riis' mark on history as not only a journalist and photographer but also a key progressive reformer.

Ms. Pomianek's essay received Third Place in the CM100 Effective Writing Competition.

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SUSANNAH WETZEL

crossing the bridge

"That math test was so hard!," John, the new kid in my geometry class, said as we walked out the door of room 217.

"Yeah, hopefully all my guesses will be right," I replied, smiling at this new boy who was nice, funny, and good-looking. We sat next to each other in class and I had been helping him find his way around the school for the past week. Junior year was beginning to look a lot more interesting than it had a week ago.

"Hey, so what are you doing this weekend? Because I-" John was cut off as a group of rowdy seniors, late for class, ran by us, knocking me into him. His hand grabbed my side, attempting to steady me, and made contact with the hard, plastic back brace hidden under my school uniform. I saw the all too familiar look of surprise and confusion in his eyes, the one that asked "What's wrong with you?" silently.

"I'm sorry- it's a brace," I explained. "I have scoliosis. I wear it to keep my spine from getting worse."

And then, there it was. The surprise in his eyes replaced by a mix of fear and pity, that confused contradiction of "I'm so sorry" and "I'm glad it's not me." I had grown used to this look; I saw it every time I told someone about my condition or they found out for themselves by bumping into my brace or noticing

my uneven shoulders and lopsided posture. It was the look of someone who sees a person with a facial disfigurement for the first time or realizes that someone is limping not because they have a sprained ankle but because they have a prosthetic leg.

"Oh. Are-are you okay?," John asked, looking at me like I had just grown a third eye in the middle of my forehead.

"Yup, I'm fine. It's just a brace. I'll see you around." I left John standing there in the hallway with the expression still on his face. I knew the look well, and not just from seeing it on other people. I recognized it because I remembered making it, time and again, whenever I had encountered someone with a disability before I developed one myself.

In the fourth grade, there was a girl in my class named Samantha who suffered from cerebral palsy. She sat in the back of the classroom in a wheelchair. She couldn't control the movement of her arms and hands, she couldn't hold her head up in a normal position, and sometimes she drooled. She was the best math student in the class and highly intelligent, but all of the kids taunted her with nicknames like "Special Ed Sam" and "Drool Queen." She never said a word in reply, simply stared straight ahead, seemingly ignoring them, but as I watched from a distance I could see the hurt in her eyes, her jaw clenched to ward off tears that I knew she wouldn't let them see. I respected her for it, but I never tried to stop the other kids' cruelty.

Samantha's disability, her otherness, frightened me. It was the fear of the unknown which resides deep within all of us, the fear that causes parents to steer their children away from the crippled man hobbling down the street, that makes someone instinctively turn away, eyes lowered, from a burn victim with skin grafts. It is the fear rooted in the belief that, "If I don't look at it, if I pretend not to see it, it will never happen to me." That otherness threatens everything we know, and in the search for safety, we use fear as a shield. This fear separated Samantha and me, placed us into two distinct worlds: one for those with disabilities, and one for us "normal" people. I couldn't associate with Samantha because I would be crossing into that world of wheelchairs and limbs and amputations, of the hunchbacked lady in the park or the paralyzed little boy in the mall. I didn't belong

there; I was a soccer-player, the best jump-roper on the playground, and famous for beating all the boys in dodgeball.

But that all changed two weeks after my fourteenth birthday, when my mom noticed that I was holding my right shoulder higher than my left. After being poked and prodded by three different doctors, and then having x-rays of my spine taken for an hour, an orthopedist diagnosed me as having adolescent idiopathic scoliosis, a disease which causes the spine to curve sideways for no known reason. It can progress rapidly within a matter of months, often resulting in severe deformities, chronic pain, and a high-risk surgery known as spinal fusion, in which two metal rods are bolted to the spine while the vertebrae are fused together. The specialist, Dr. Bow, explained that my condition had caused a 45 degree curvature and a 25 degree curvature, twisting my spine into the shape of an S. My condition was likely to get much worse as I got older, and I would probably need to undergo spinal surgery in the next ten years to prevent complications with my heart and lungs. But for the time being, Dr. Bow wanted to treat my condition with a back brace, which I would need to wear for 23 hours everyday, removing it only to shower.

Everything that Dr. Bow said sort of floated through my ears, swimming around in my brain, a jumbled mess that I did not want to accept or understand. But whenever he referred to my condition, it stung, as though someone kept pricking me with a needle, and even though I knew the needle was coming, and I knew that it was going to hurt, I was still surprised every time. After all, a day before I had been a normal, healthy teenager, active and energetic, not worrying about anything more serious than what I was going to do that night. The day before I still could have had the chance to be the next Mia Hamm or the next woman to walk on the moon. The day before I still could have checked the "No" next to the question "Any serious medical conditions?" on my school physical form and not thought twice about it. But now, out of nowhere, I had a disease, a condition, that would affect me for the rest of my life.

Was I to be the sickly child, the girl who people saw, smiled at with pity, and remarked on "what a trooper" she is? When my parents' friends asked about my siblings and me,

would they now save me for last and murmur quietly, "And how is that poor little dear with the back problem?" Was I to be the spectator now as my friends played soccer, the cheerleader on the sidelines, the watcher from afar? Why did it suddenly seem that I was outside of the world, looking in through one-way glass, no one seeing me but forced to watch everything that I couldn't be a part of? Was that my future?

I stood in front of my bedroom mirror the first time I put on my brace. It was a hot, August day, and the hard, white plastic molded tightly to my body and left little breathing room. It came up under my arms, around my stomach, and went from my shoulders to my thighs. I looked in the mirror and had a hard time finding myself. All I could see was a strange, white, tube-like case covering my body. It made me stand up so straight that at first I thought I would fall backward. I realized how much I was sucking in, taking short little breaths of air, and I felt like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, Mammy pulling my corset as tight as she could so that I could fit into beautiful gowns and be the belle of every ball. I laughed as I thought of this, but then I looked in the mirror again and realized that I was further than I had ever been from being the belle of any ball. I felt huge and awkward and ugly. I lifted my face to the mirror, and instead of Vivian Leigh's porcelain complexion and emerald eyes, I saw the face of the old, hunchbacked lady who walked in the park with a shopping cart. She caught my eye and seemed to say, "I know you. You're going to look like me one day." And then I was that old hunchback; there I was, an old lady in the mirror, deformed and hideous. I looked at myself, wrinkled and shriveled, lonely and embittered. Was this the person the brace was going to mold me into? As it attempted to reshape my curved spine, was it also going to shape me? Was I destined to be an outcast, someone who walked alone in a park, someone who little children would run away from? Would people be able to see under the brace and still recognize me, or would they just see the thick plaster and forget about the person inside, trying desperately to get out from under it?

I took the easy way out. Instead of dealing with all the anger and sadness and pain that I felt, I just started to let the

brace hide it all, and me with it. I shoved all of the "Why me?"s and the sleepless, pain-wracked nights under that trusty plastic and kept them there. And with them, I started to hide the pieces of myself. I no longer felt comfortable around my friends or even my family. I couldn't walk correctly, I couldn't sit down without looking like a freak, I had to wear big, baggy clothes to conceal the bulkiness of it. I kept lying to myself, thinking the clothes could hide it, thinking that keeping everything locked up and silent would somehow make it not real. I wasn't just hiding the brace, I was hiding all of the hurt, anger and confusion that kept building inside of me, like a tumultuous ocean, getting ready for a hurricane. I figured that as long as I denied the limitations scoliosis imposed on me, I would remain far from being that hunch-backed lady in the park or that paralyzed little boy in the mall. I would remain far from being Samantha.

As a child, I had a horrible habit of staring, especially at handicapped people. I can still hear my mother say, "Don't stare, Susannah," whenever she caught me watching a deaf person using sign language or a child with Down Syndrome playing in the park. There was something that fascinated me about them, their differences were so obvious and outward, whereas we "normal" people kept our differences within us, hidden under layers of personality and individual quirks. The disability of a person could easily become their distinguishing characteristic, their essence in a way, because it was the most obvious thing about them, the trait that readily separated them from other people. That was why a girl named Samantha in a wheelchair with cerebral palsy was called Special Ed Sam. And that was why I hid my brace, and pretended I didn't really have scoliosis. I didn't want to be known as Crooked Spine Sue. I didn't want to be Scoliosis Girl. Now, instead of being the naughty child who always stared inappropriately, I was the one being stared at. Everywhere I went, I felt as though all eyes were on me, looking at that brace, wondering what was wrong with me.

One day in March of my sophomore year, I asked to be excused to go to the bathroom during my math class. As I

walked down the quiet, empty hall, I noticed my shoe was untied, the laces flopping on the floor. My immediate instinct was to bend over and tie them. I started to bend and remembered that the brace made it impossible. I tried to kneel but couldn't. I couldn't get to my shoe. I kept trying to bend, trying to get that damned brace to move, to no avail. I wanted for once to be able to control it instead of having it control me, for once to be able to turn or bend or jump or run without remembering that I couldn't because I had this big, heavy, hot, restricting thing on my body. I wanted to go play soccer or jump rope on the playground or win dodgeball again, without worrying about whether or not the snake I had for a spine was going to curve itself any further. And after struggling to reach my shoe one last time, I gave up and collapsed on the floor, worn out, and the ocean that had been steadily rising inside of me became a tidal wave, ripping through my body, carrying all of the pain and anger that had been building for too long, and I let myself cry for the first time since I had found out I had a disease.

I cried for that girl I used to be, running and jumping without a care in the world. I cried for that old, hobbling lady with a hump, wondering if one day I would be just like her. And I cried because suddenly the world no longer seemed huge and limitless and ready for the taking. There were some things I couldn't do anymore, and this realization, however disconcerting, felt good, like a wave of warm water. I had admitted that I did indeed have a problem. My life had changed and was going to continue to change. And as I sat there in the hallway, drying my tears on the soft wool of my sweater, everything seemed less impossible. I knew there was a challenge in my life, but now it was time to get up off the floor, brace and all, and start to deal with it.

Having scoliosis,, and having had to wear a debilitating brace for two years, gives me a unique perspective. Before I came to terms with scoliosis and what it means for me, I was scared of that unfamiliar world that belongs to people who are physically or mentally handicapped. I felt uncomfortable around people in wheelchairs or people with disfigurements or amputations. I didn't believe our two worlds should interact. I belonged

to the world of "normal" people. But when I was diagnosed with scoliosis and made to wear a brace that severely restricted normal activity, I was scared that I was being pushed to cross that bridge between our two worlds. I was afraid of being stigmatized as a disabled person, someone to be pitied and treated differently than the rest of the world. And because my disability was easier to hide than most others, I was an outsider in both worlds. It was as if I was on a bridge, standing in the middle, knowing that if I crossed into the handicapped side, I could be accepted, but if I took the brace off, I could still go back to the normal people world and fit in.

"Well, it looks like things are stable for now. The curvatures will most likely continue to progress gradually, but I don't think I'll need to see you for about a year. Good luck, Susannah," said Dr. Bow. It had been a year since I stopped wearing the brace, and things weren't looking too bad. I will need to make follow-up appointments for the rest of my life, but for now my spine is stable. That last day in Dr. Bow's office, as my mom and I walked down the hallway to make my next appointment, I passed one of the examination rooms and saw a girl of about thirteen or fourteen, facing me as another orthopedist showed her how to put on her back brace for the first time. She was shaking and nervous, biting her lower lip as if willing herself not to cry, as the doctor wrapped the hard plastic around her and began to fasten the straps in the back. She stood up straight suddenly and her eyes met mine. I recognized her, a fellow bridge dweller. We didn't know which side of the future was going to push us over into, but for now we remained onlookers, watching the little girls playing soccer and the hunchbacked ladies walking on the park, recognizing both but uncertain as to who to join. I smiled before I kept going, perhaps to encourage her on this path that would certainly be difficult, but perhaps for myself, because things looked more hopeful knowing that I am not alone.

Ms. Wetzel's essay received Fourth Place in the CM100 Effective Writing Competition.



GINGER COLAMUSSI

CRAIG LINDEMANN

the new look of success

As I stood, looking at myself in the mirror, the night before the biggest race of my life, I could only think of one thought: in the immortal words of Shania Twain, "Man, I feel like a woman." I had just finished shaving, because that's what swimmers are supposed to do. Legs, arms, and chest — it was all shaved except the forearms. You never, ever touch the forearms. That's where you grab the water. If you shave your forearms, you'll lose all feel for the water and the whole exercise will be in vain. After you shave, you squeeze yourself into a suit that would make a four-year-old uncomfortable. We do this for our sport. We do this for speed.

The next night the routine continued. I was shaved, tapered (a fancy swimming word for nicely rested), and ready to go. I had been through the pre-meet warm up about forty-five minutes prior and had felt great. Now it was time for my race. I had my headphones on, listening to Prodigy on my CD player as I had before all big races the last four years. I was stretching, getting myself loose, breathing deeply, all the things I was supposed to be doing and had been trained to do since I was seven. I was seeded third in this race, the 200 IM (that's two laps of each of the four main strokes: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle).

As the third seed, I was swimming in lane two, in between the first and fifth seeds. As usual, I turned to wish the other swimmers luck, only this time I froze. The swimmer in lane one next to me wasn't shaved or wearing a suit tighter than OJ's leather glove; he was wearing a full body suit. I didn't know what to think. I had heard a lot about these new suits, but this was the first time I had ever swum against someone wearing one, and to be honest, I was quite nervous about the prospects. So after a moment of silence, I shook my opponent's hand and stepped onto the blocks to start the race.

Once on the blocks, I was aware of nothing but the pool. The apparent silence was broken by the sounds of the official: "Event six, Men's 200 yard, Individual Medley. Swimmers, take your marks!" *Beeeeeeep!* I dove in and flew through the water as I had previously envisioned. Butterfly, which usually wears me out, was a breeze. Backstroke, my personal nightmare, passed with minimal damage as I reached the halfway mark in fourth place. I hit the wall and turned hard to begin the breaststroke leg. The full body suit was just a little ahead of me, but that didn't matter: Breaststroke is my specialty and it showed. I pulled into third place during the breaststroke leg. Finally, I brought it home strong with the freestyle, finishing in third place with a personal best time, ahead of the body suit and its swimmer, who placed fourth.

After the race, I was glad my first encounter with the new bodysuit had gone successfully, but I was curious to see where the new suits would take us in the future. I didn't realize the future would arrive so soon.

For the record, let it be said that in September 2000 in Sydney, Australia, the world of swimming changed forever. The world was introduced to the new generation of full body suits, the Speedo Fastskin. The suit that is known as the "shark-skin" suit, or the "long john suit," has finally reached fruition. It wasn't quite the same as the suit I had swum against the year before. The suit I had seen was just like a normal Speedo suit, except that it covered the swimmer's entire body. What I saw on television was made of a new material and was covered in countless seams and stitches. To be honest, it looked more like the skele-

ton costumes I used to wear for Halloween than a swimsuit (as I soon found out, the skeleton concept was all part of the plan).

The Fastskin suits have been developed to achieve many distinct goals. The fabric is modeled after the skin of a shark. It guides water around and away from the body, decreasing resistance in the water. The uniquely paneled and stitched design is intended to mimic the action of muscles and tendons (hence the skeletal appearance) on a swimmer's body. By preventing muscle vibration, the suit is able to decrease fatigue. It even helps to keep the swimmer's body properly in line while he or she swims. These suits are a true technological breakthrough.

I turned on the television early one morning to try to catch Tom Malchow and Michael Phelps swimming in the 200m Butterfly. What I saw resembled the images of the future, as seen in movies and on television. The Fastskin suits were everywhere, especially among the medallists. Of fourteen world records broken in Sydney, swimmers wearing Fastskin suits broke eleven. Twenty-seven of the thirty-three gold medals that were awarded were presented to athletes in Fastskin. Lenny Krazelburg, who won three of those gold medals, says, "The Speedo Fastskin suit is definitely the best suit I've ever worn." In one fell swoop, the folks at Speedo have eliminated the days of shaving and squeezing.

Unfortunately, as Arnold Bennett said, "Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts." The Fastskin suit is no different. For all the praise it has received, there are still many who feel that the suit should not be allowed. Some fear it will become a simple substitute for hard work. Others fear a loss of swimming's past history if suits like the Fastskin continue to help swimmers shatter existing world records. At first, I was one such critic of the suit. I have always prided myself on my work ethic and team spirit. I was none too thrilled with the thought of all my hard work being defeated on the strength of a new suit. I also was wary of losing my idols, the people who taught me what it means to be a swimmer.

I didn't want to forget the Otremba twins, my summer coaches when I was twelve. Lou and Larry were tri-athletes.

What I remember best was seeing them race and being amazed that they wore smaller suits than I did: imagine, two college students wearing smaller suits than the one I had on my twelve-year-old body.

I wanted to remember Mike Raley, the fastest swimmer I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Mike was one of my club swimming coaches, but he was really more like a teacher. Mike honed my strokes until they were nearly perfect. He also taught me a lot about hard work and dedication through his personal example. Mike swam Olympic qualifying times, but his biggest accomplishment was in overcoming diabetes. Mike often had to take breaks from practice to take insulin shots. He also had to drop out of several big races because of his condition. Even with his diabetes working against him, and often causing him a great deal of discomfort, Mike never quit and never gave up.

I was afraid that the introduction of the Fastskin suits would wipe out my memory of these personal heroes, not to mention the great swimmers of the past. Is this a legitimate fear? What will happen to their memories once the new breed wipes out their records? Look no farther than such legendary athletes as Johnny Weissmuller and Mark Spitz. Even having never seen them swim, I respect them for their greatness, long after their last world records were wiped from the boards. I can tell you that Spitz won eleven Olympic medals in the 1972 and 1976 Olympics, nine of which were gold. I know that Weissmuller, who is probably better known in many circles for saying, "Me Tarzan, you Jane," won five gold medals in the 1924 and 1928 Olympics, and set 51 world records during his career. Johann von Schiller said, "He who has done his best for his own time has lived for all times." As the world records previously held by cultural icons are shattered in swimming's modern era remember this: we do not need world records to keep track of the elite; we have legends for that.

Fastskin suits have already begun to help shape the next generation of legends. Ian Thorpe, an Australian teenager, has set world records in several events, all while wearing the new "shark-skin." What makes it memorable is the fashion in which he wins. The "Thorpe-do" is among the first swimmers to

accomplish negative splits in distance freestyle, meaning that the second half of his race is faster than the beginning, a previously unheard of feat. Jenny Thompson, a swimmer of legendary ability even before the suit, has adopted it and has continued to amaze the world with her performances. Lenny Krazelburg, who does not wear the full body suit, but a smaller, shorts length version, is well on his way to becoming the greatest backstroker of all time. What makes his story special is his flight from Russia to the US and his development here over the past twelve years.

At a local hotbed for swimming, NBAC, my friend Drew practices twice a day. He practices hard and loves what he does. That's probably why Drew is constantly chasing state-age group records that were set by past Olympians. In one meet recently, Drew was swimming with a strained groin muscle in an event that he'd tell you is one of his worst. He finished that race almost five seconds ahead of his nearest competitor and only one tenth of a second behind a state-age group record held by Olympian and world record holder Michael Phelps.

Right now, Drew is faster than I could ever dream of being and appears to be on a steady course for Olympic glory. Here's the catch: Drew is only 13. Last summer, when Drew and I swam together on our summer swim team, he used to ask our coach to be put on my relay team. Little did Drew know I was also begging our coach for a chance to swim with *him*.

I was recently looking through old time cards from summer meets. I noticed that Drew first surpassed me in one event about two years ago. Since then, he has improved tremendously and now beats me in nearly every event. When I see Drew swim, I see the past, present and future of swimming coming together. Drew is the rare combination of natural talent, dedication, a passion for the sport, and a love of his fellow teammates that makes him a dead-on favorite to make it big in the swimming universe, whether he wears a Fastskin suit or an old style Speedo.

I realized that even though the suits may help to re-write the record books, only our memories contribute to legends. We don't remember the times or the records, we remember the stories and the people. This was quite a relief for me, but my worries about the suit ran deeper than that. Even though the suits

will leave our memories and our legends intact, what will happen to our recipe for success? Will the suits change the way we approach our sport? Has the Fastskin suit, or similar innovations in other sports, caused the death of true sport and competition in the modern era? This is actually far from the truth. Technology and innovative training techniques have helped to make today's athletes stronger, faster, and more fundamentally sound than athletes of the past, but technology is useless if the technique is wrong. The emphasis on technique is inherent in the word "technology." Traced back to Greek, technology means "the systematic treatment of a skill." Skill and technique must therefore come before the technology. Speedo made the point upon releasing their suits that they could only enhance the talents that a swimmer already has. So if the suits and technology alone can't make a swimmer faster, what else has contributed to the record-breaking trend of late?

The training methods available for swimmers today are far superior to those used by athletes of the past. Modern athletes swim more yardage and spend more time in the pool than swimmers of the past. Having two and three practices a day is typical for world-class swimmers nowadays. Weight training, dry land exercises, and varied in-pool training routines put athletes on a level far beyond those of even the recent past. Swimmers have a life dedicated to swimming alone, which delineates them from athletes of the past, such as Johnny Weissmuller, who left swimming to find his place on the silver screen.

Not only has the training changed, but also the rules have changed. As new techniques have been discovered to make a particular stroke more efficient, they have been adopted into the rulebook. Breaststroke and butterfly were not recognized as separate events until the 1956 Olympics. Freestyle was previously swum competitively without using flip turns. The backstroke start has changed significantly in current years, growing closer and closer to a dive than the traditional "push start." Using butterfly kicks after pushing off walls has also been found to be much faster than flutter kick in the freestyle. The sport of swimming has continually evolved, making swimmers faster and technique more efficient.

Proper technique in the pool is, and always will be, a key feature in the success of a swimmer. My former coach Keith Schertle used to say, "Practice makes permanent. Only perfect practice makes perfect." No suit, even the Fastskin, will ever be a substitute for hard work and proper technique. I recently talked with Keith, who now coaches the number one ranked boys swim team in the country. He told me that several of his swimmers wear the suits and have fallen in love with them. His main job as the coach is to ensure that his swimmers understand that the suits will help them but will not work on their own. He makes sure his swimmers understand that hard work is as important as ever, with or without the sharkskin suits. Darcy E. Gibbons said, "success is just a matter of attitude," and she was right. Only the hardest working and most talented swimmers make it to the world-class level, with or without new suits or other technology.

What started out as my personal witch-hunt against these suits resulted in my conversion. My doubts and my fears have been erased and replaced with anticipation for the future. The Fastskin suit has revolutionized the sport of swimming without changing the recipe for greatness. The designers at Speedo should be applauded for what they have accomplished. They have created a new way for athletes to improve upon their skills and rise to a new level. May the future of swimming be as rich as its past, and may innovation and improvement continue as long as sport continues with them. In the words of Baltasar Gracian: "Great ability develops and reveals itself increasingly with every new assignment." Here's to great ability and new assignments. These are our new memories. This is the stuff legends are made of.

Mr. Lindemann's essay received Fifth Place in the CM100 Effective Writing Competition.

NATANIA BARRON

even the garden

I fell desperately in love with Paul McCartney when I was fourteen years old. Of course, this was highly common in 1964, it was all the rage. But, in suburban Massachusetts in 1995, it was quite out of the ordinary. I was supposed to be mourning the death of Kurt Cobain. I was supposed to be dedicating myself to Pearl Jam and Alice in Chains. But I missed the Grunge Train and opted for a Yellow Submarine.

It was his voice. I remember listening to Rubber Soul over and over again, feeling something profound stir in me when Paul sang. His voice was so smooth, so flawless, so pure. And he sang with such creative fervor. Combined with John Lennon, he wrote the songs that defined my life. I can remember cruising around in the parking lot of a local grocery store, my mother and sister chiming in, everyone singing "Drive My Car."

My father remained on the couch or in his bed the entire winter of 1987, as I recall. He had been stricken with a mystery disease made him hyper-allergic to a gamut of things. From apples to shrimp, from flour to oranges, his body was marked with painful rashes, and his joints flared with arthritic fire. He

became sensitive to sound, to light. Shots of pain coursed down his legs and arms, and frequently, he'd cry out in pain as he lay still.

I was a child. The house was quiet, all but the buzzing of the television in the living room, as the late winter chill still held its grasp on the landscape. Drifts of snow snuggled next to the house, and yet, there, beneath the storm drains, where enough water and light had crept through, delicate little green shoots poked their way through the snow and dirt. Crocuses. In the bleak sunlight, still, some of them opened their lavender petals, and cut their own path through the gloom.

It was that winter, as well, that I saw my parents fail. My mother came home late one evening, I recall it was a Monday, and I was supposed to be sleeping. After endless hours of work at the real estate agency, my mother had to start her second shift. She was still in her high heels as she stumbled down the hallway, with my father's arm around her, supporting him. I had a direct view of the hallway, and I sat up in bed, pulling my downy comforters up under my chin.

I sat up just in time, to watch my parents both fall, collapsing in the hallway, each from their own exhaustion. They sobbed, my parents, because they could no longer go on. I watched, fear creeping up my arms and legs, short of breath, unsure of what to say, or even of what to think. So, suppressing tears, I squeezed shut my eyes, and buried myself beneath the covers.

That picture has forever been seared into my memory.

Crocus, 'Remembrance': One of the earliest to bloom, flowers are a striking silvery-purple. Crocus often burst through the snow in late winter and provide carpets of color when little else is stirring. Spring- and fall-blooming species extend the variety and season of bloom and deserve to be more widely planted. Leaves are grass-like and appear with, or after, the large flowers. These popular Dutch hybrids come in many varieties, including bicolor and striped selec

*tions. One species, crocus sativus, is the source of saffron.
(Gardening.com)*

As the sun pounded against the back of my neck, I crouched down in the garden, ripping out weeds. My fingers were numb and raw from pulling at the harsh stalks of unwanted plants; dirt was shoved down underneath my fingernails. Red knees, dark dirt clinging to them, were planted in the earth as my lungs labored in the intense heat.

Squinting, I straightened my back, feeling my muscles scream in protest. I turned around, looking across the yard to the house, and saw the apparition-like figure of my mother standing behind the closed sliding door on the deck. Regardless of my exhaustion and frustration, I raised a filthy hand to wave hello to her. Meekly, she raised her fingers, and waved to me; through the glass pane, her expression was a soft sadness. I watched her for a moment as she floated away from the window.

After missing I-95 in Connecticut, Mikey and I finally arrived at my family's home in Hatfield, Massachusetts, late in the evening, two hours late. It had been nearly two months since I had left home to go to college, and as we drove up to my house, I felt a strange sort of attachment. The October foliage was at its peak; the landscape was a palette of fiery reds and oranges, blazing the mountains. Golden mums and rusty marigolds still grew in the garden along the walkway, and I was struck with a deep fondness for my family. I was nervous to see them again, and as the car rolled to a stop, I mentally prepared myself to go inside. Both friends and family had gathered, people whom I loved dearly, and my apprehension began to melt into excitement.

Shutting the car door, I looked up and caught the figure of my sister approaching, and figures in my house walking before the window. There was an eerie chill to the air then, and my stomach went cold. The look on my sister's face spoke of something tragic.

Liana held me in an embrace for a moment, but she was pale. Quickly, she informed me. My uncle Rejean had been

found dead in his apartment in Quebec: a suicide. But she didn't put it that way. She said simply, "Uncle Rejean hung himself." I cursed, and Mikey came up beside me, putting a comforting hand on my shoulder—he had never met my sister, or my family, and I cringed internally with the realization. His first foray into my immensely complex family had to be something like this, another tragedy. It felt as if someone had turned me on my head as I stood there in the street, the calm of an autumn evening descending quietly.

I wanted to cry, but I couldn't. Shock had set in too deep as grotesque pictures flooded my overactive imagination. My uncle had killed himself. I saw Rejean in my mind, a tall sad man, with dark brown eyes, and the face of a Native American. I saw him smoking his cigarettes with the plastic filters, drinking, slurring, crying, lamenting. I heard his voice, thick with a French Canadian accent, "You have wonderful family. Be thankful for that." I could see him stumbling at my cousin Sue's wedding, inebriated beyond coherency. I could see him laughing, or cooking a meal, or dancing. He was a man too complex to understand; all at once frightening and yet so lost, there was always a vestige of pity in my heart for him no matter what I knew he'd done.

Once inside, instead of the tearful welcome I'd imagined, I immediately went to my mother and attempted my best to console her. I hadn't seen her in two months, but it felt as if I'd never left her arms as I embraced her, and she shook with grief. Dinner was being cooked, and voices laughed from the kitchen, but in the hallway my mother and I were in a separate world. I could hear Mikey talking with Jonathan, my godfather, and my sister ordering Matt about the kitchen.

French Marigold, Tagetes patula: Durable, bushy annual with aromatic, deep green leaves. Plentiful small flowers 1 to 2 in. (2.5 to 5 cm) across, in shades of yellow, orange and red in summer to early fall. 12 in. (30 cm) tall and wide. Native to Mexico and Central America, few flowers are as reliable and more widely—and easily—grown than marigolds. Their non-stop flowers bloom in intense

shades and mixtures of orange, yellow, maroon, mahogany red, and creamy white. The pompon-shaped flowers are single, double, or crested. Plants come in dwarf (6 to 8 in. (15 to 20 cm)), medium (9 in. to 3 ft. (22.5 to 90 cm)), and tall (3 to 4 ft. (90 cm to 1.25 m)) sizes. (Gardening.com)

The Berkshires are brutal in the winter. Snow blankets everything and the world becomes an endless expanse of white. Usually, for children, this time of year would be a time of celebration—the prospect of sliding, and fort-building, always with the possibility of hot chocolate and a warm fire afterwards.

But in my house, late in the winter of 1987, things were different. Sitting in the window of our little ranch on Renee Drive in Dalton, Massachusetts, I watched my neighbors, the Kinney kids, enjoy the snow. We had lovely snow that year, and the ski industry was booming up at Berkshire East and Brodie Mountain. The snow was relentless, drifts up to my waist and beyond, branches falling from trees, vision obscured. Yet, it always mildly amused me how, in spite of all the precipitation, the bold Berkshire inhabitants seemed to be able to maneuver and get on with their lives.

Paul McCartney's mother died when he was fourteen years old. She died of breast cancer. Her name was Mary McCartney, and she was a prominent nurse. Some say it was the loss of his mother that gave Paul his drive to succeed, and his perfectionist streak. Right after his mother's death, Paul McCartney met John Lennon.

When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom:
Let it be
And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom



GINGER COLAM USSI

Let it be

I turned my attention back to weeding but my mind wandered to my mother. This was her sacred place, her garden. "I go there to pray," she said to me once, her warm brown eyes alive with a silent reverence. "I feel part of God, when I'm there." And there I was, an intruder in her little cloister. The tidy garden was an explosion of color and shape. Never a professional gardener, really, my mother chose flowers that she found beautiful in her own eyes. She doesn't know the specific names of flowers, nor does she know where they come from. She just finds a flower, notes if it's a shade or a sun plant, and plants it where she wants to.

Every summer, wherever we have lived, our back and front yard would be ablaze with a vivid burst of color. My favorite, the cosmos, turned their heads to the sky in brilliant orange and pink. My mother left behind a trail of gardens wherever she went; our family might move from one house to another, but the flowers would always remain.

Cancer. The word itself seemed a curse. A villain, this disease had rendered my strong, lively, enchanting mother to a ghost. It didn't seem fair. Seeing my mother struggle to just make it from one side of the house to the other, watching her lose all her hair, visiting her in the hospital . . .

This summer, the garden was overgrown, wild. My mother, reduced to a shadow—small, frail, all angles and eyes—could only watch as her beloved creation dwindled. She had spent so much time, lovingly tending her garden, arranging every seedling and plant with care. And now, what use was all the work? To what purpose had it all served? Weeds threatened to choke her beautiful blossoms. It was such a lovely summer, they say, but I don't remember it. I remember painfully vivid images; the burning sun, the green grass, but everything seems shadowed with emotion.

Cosmos bipinnatus, 'Sensation Mixed': Bunches of daisylike flowers and graceful feathery foliage make these annuals a delight in both color and texture. Some varieties of this fast-grower have semi-double flowers, rolled quilled petals or bicolor striped colors. Use 3 to 6 ft. (90 cm to 2 m) tall plants as background, or in wild or naturalistic gardens. Dwarf forms, 1 to 2 ft. (30 to 60 cm) tall, are good for containers. Excellent cut flowers. Considered drought resistant, Cosmos grow best in full sun but will grow well and flower earlier in poor, fairly dry soils. (Gardening.com)

John Lennon, Paul McCartney's best friend, was shot brutally and murdered, assassinated, outside his own home in New York City. He had just released a new album entitled *Double Fantasy* after taking a five year musical hiatus to raise his son Sean with his wife, Yoko Ono. Paul and John had finally patched up years of bickering between them. They nearly reunited one night to play on Saturday Night Live. But now, all hopes of a Beatles reunion were gone, dying with John Lennon's last breaths. Lennon/McCartney would be no more, simply, a memory of what once was.

And when the broken hearted people
Living in the world agree
There will be an answer
Let it be

My mother had informed us all that she didn't want to be home when the one year anniversary of her cancer detection came around. She explained, with her eyes dark and thoughtful, that her summer had already been ruined once. She needed something beautiful to remember in place of it. Now, her hair had grown back thick and curly, dark, with hardly a gray hair to speak of. But, although she looked like herself once more, there

was a softness in her that I never knew. She would cry more easily, now, and there were lines in her face—not wrinkles—but lines of wear that were new.

My mother wanted to see England. And so, we embarked on a family escape to England and Scotland for two weeks.

We never expected the gardens, though. The delicacy of an English garden is something few get to experience in full. In late June, in England, the roses are all in full bloom. And what roses! Their blooms are larger than a hand's width, and come in more vibrant colors than I ever imagined. Not only were the blooms larger, but the plants were higher, and more plentiful.

Hybrid Tea Rose, Rosa 'Sweet Surrender': The full, old-fashioned-looking silvery pink flowers are very fragrant and bloom all season on a low- to medium-sized upright shrub. Long, strong stems. Widely available. Bred to have perfect, exquisitely-formed buds and long cuttable stems, the base of the plants tends to be bare and have somewhat angular top growth. Because of their pruning and maintenance requirements, and for easy viewing, many gardeners grow them informal "rose beds." They're also grown in natural- or casual-style gardens. (Gardening.com)

Paul McCartney finally married in 1969, much to the fury and despair of his legion of female fans. She wasn't rich, or fabulously beautiful. She was a photographer from New York, and an American; her name was Linda Eastman. After a two-year relationship, Linda and Paul married. They were two souls that seemed tailor made for one another. Linda's simple, pretty features smiled wildly in photographs, clinging to the proud and ever-composed Paul McCartney. She had made the catch of the century.

Over the next thirty years, Linda and Paul raised four children—Mary, Stella, James, and Linda's daughter, Heather. They performed together in Paul's post-Beatles band, Wings, and they rallied for vegetarianism. Linda had the privilege of taking the last known photos of the Beatles as a group. In photographs,

their love for one another was apparent. They were a couple like none other, proving that celebrity marriages can last, and that there is hope.

Linda McCartney died in 1998, in her family home in Sussex, England, with Paul at her side. She was a victim of breast cancer. News reports had disclosed she had found a lump in her breast, but other than that, no one knew the true story. Paul suffered alone with his family as Linda's health rapidly declined. It was an end to another part of Paul's life.

And when the night is cloudy
There is still a light that shines on me
Shine until tomorrow
Let it be

I stood back from my afternoon's work, the sweat mingling with dirt on my brow, and my back aching beyond belief. I felt dizzy my body reacted to the prolonged heat of the sun, and with shaky knees, I swayed. There was not a weed left in the garden now. The stone path down the middle of the garden was clear, and the flowers all had more room to breathe in the sun. I wondered, absently, if they could feel the difference now.

Wiping my gritty hands on my shorts, I turned away from the garden, and proceeded to the house. Inside, everything seemed so dark in comparison to the bright sun light. My mother was at the kitchen sink, looking out the window at her garden. Turning to me slowly, there were tears in her eyes. She told me how much it meant to her that I had weeded her garden, and how hard it was to watch the weeds destroy it; and worse, to not be able to do anything about it. It was out of her hands.

There were no flowers at my uncle Rejean's funeral, none that I can remember. Even the priest seemed pale as he gave his sermon, and there was a rigid silence in the church. I sat in the front pew, with my guitar nearby, blinking ahead of me,

dwelling on the sadness of it all. But I did not cry; I was done with crying.

The night before, at another uncle's house, my family had gathered from all parts of Canada. There was laughing, and gossip, as always. They were laughing at my uncle Rejean's death, they were making fun of it. I was horrified, and withdrew with Mikey into the living room. He, understanding neither French nor my family, didn't understand exactly what had made me so upset. I explained that, no matter how horrible Rejean had been, there was a certain level of respect I thought there needed to be. I noticed my mother had disappeared from the scene; she'd been having an attack of acid-reflux that night, and I discovered her in one of the bedrooms, nestled into blankets.

Hoarsely, she told me how her heart had been broken by her brothers and sisters and their attitude toward Rejean's death. Together, we sobbed for a man in the autumn of his life, who'd so tragically given up. I confessed to her that I kept seeing images in my mind, terrifying images of how he'd died, and it frightened me to know how much he'd suffered. We wept, clasped together, that night, until our eyes were sore from it.

Back at the service, the priest nodded to me. With shaky hands, not from nervousness but from emotion, I rose and went to the pulpit. There, I began to sing a song, the only song I knew would be fitting. "Angel" by Sarah McLachlan, a bittersweet love song, I suppose, about someone so caught up in the torrential storm of their own lives, they cannot find escape.

In the arms of the angel,
fly away from here
From this dark cold hotel room
and the emptiness you fear.
You are pulled from the wreckage
of your silent reverie
You're in the arms of the angel
may you find some kind of peace.

I did not weep, but as I sang, I prayed that all my aunts, uncles, and cousins would hear the words, and somehow their hearts would soften for Rejean, in whatever way they could.

My mother says I came out of the womb singing. I figure it was because both of my parents were musicians. I was exposed to all sorts of wonderful music as a child—from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young to Blondie. But most importantly, there were the Beatles. My mother, father, sister, and I are all certified Beatlemaniacs.

So, it was fitting, when we were in London, that we made our pilgrimage to Abbey Road. London was unusually hot that June, right before the turn into summer, and all the gardens were afire with the light of the sun. The sky was clear, and the streets were smoggy, but Abbey Road was an oasis.

And indeed, there was an abbey on Abbey Road, a tiny, red brick abbey. With a cry of joy, my mother rushed ahead of us. "Would you look at that rose?" she cried. We all rushed forward, and peeking over the stone fence in front of the abbey was the largest yellow rose I'd ever seen. It might have been a Breton rose, or a Tamora (David Austen). Reaching out to touch it, my mother smiled brilliantly, feeling the soft petals between her fingers. Her smile was radiant, she stood tall, and I saw her there in all her splendor. Indeed, my mother had endured so much in her life, and yet, she still found beauty in the rose. She had not wilted, in spite of pestilence; she had not rotted in spite of adversity; she had not ceased to bloom in spite of pain.

I wake up to the sound of music
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom
Let it be

Ms. Barron's essay received First Place in the CM200 Creative Eye: Description Writing Competition.

MATTHEW FITZGERALD

the road not rounded

Nature creates rounded shapes and humans create angular objects. Find a picture of the earth from space. What do you see? Curves, wisps, spheres. Now look at the earth in front of you, go outside and find where the earth and sky meet. What do you see? Lines, angles, blocks. On the world we control (the surface) all you can see are rectangular buildings on flat streets with combustion-powered cuboids streaming towards the linear horizon. Since man began to ponder the existence and status of this realm, he has always seen blocks. How could a race of beings surrounded by curves develop such a linear society: we have family lines, production lines, waiting lines, and deadlines. What went wrong? How did we misinterpret the signs that nature gave us? Or perhaps we are an inherently linear, block-headed race. Instead of running on a bumpy forest floor, dodging cylindrical plants we prefer power walking on slabs of civilized concrete. Bounding over hill and dale has given way to the methodical escalation of consecutive planar panels, commonly known as stairs.

c o n t a c t

Four weeks ago, I was walking back from my philosophy class; I had taken the usual route down the stairs into the quad,

up the path to Beatty, and down past the Chapel to breach the towering walls of Knott Hall, using the stairs underneath the three storied fiberglass bridge. A cool spring breeze flipped open the collar of my orange-plaid shirt and rustled my perpetually struggling hair closer to eventual freedom from the strength of my weakening hair wax. My gentle tread along the red-brown brick path was uninterrupted by the simmering electro-chemical pulse running along the outer ring of my chilled right ear. I blankly gazed at an invisible horizon, my head rotating from left to right like an old panoramic camera. The dancing, dazzling world around me is unnoticed, drowned out by my mental symposium between Aristotle and Kant, and I am—as usual—oblivious to the physical world that my body resides in. Panning...panning. "You, good sir, are simply mistaken! Beauty is a function of size and order, not something that activates a cognitive free-play!" Panning...panning...WHAT? Stop, flash, thunder looming, booming. There, at the base of the stone masonry chapel wall: the path roughly falls away from the surface of the earth, breaking its gentle glide. Strike, shock, rocketing away, lost, strange, silence.

Tulips, I can smell tulips drifting along the breeze. I open my eyes to a burning blazing haze all around me; I move toward the shadows. My eyes clear and I am standing under a strange towering tree stretching its twisted tangles toward the remote alien landscape. Where am I? I stand crouched under this gnarled shelter, bewildered, like an astronaut first stepping off of the Lander and onto the dusty red surface of Mars, the massive amount of sensory information flooding my empirical pathways. Logic circuits burst as terrestrial comprehension fails to grasp the magnitude of the world around me. In awe of the beauty and terror of this new world, I cautiously inch toward the precipice beneath the soaring stone façade of the fortress before me; tiny gargoyle heads stare menacingly at me from atop their vaulted tower. Crowning the tower is a shining talisman, the proud symbol of this mighty citadel: two intersecting planes. My attention returns to the canyon before me. As I close in on the phenomenon, I see its depth and breadth expand down and turn sharply to the right. At a distance of 5 feet I stop; there are subordinate ridges rising up from the depths of the pit. These razor

sharp peaks seem to form a linear declination (a ramp), but they sprout cold hard planes and expand horizontally from one another as I get closer. I have reached the object's edge, and slowly I peer down into its expanses and examine its characteristics: strong, adjacent, symmetric, planar. That's it, intersecting planes! This must be a decorative application of the citadel's towering talisman. But what does it do? Always the dedicated adventurer, I must discover the function of these descending planes; I lightly touch the first plane with my foot, half expecting to trigger some horrible defensive system, instantly converting my body mass into a steaming pile of gooey scraps. A skipped heartbeat later, still completely intact, I relax clinched muscles and put some weight on to the hard stone: it is stable. Following the example of the first, my second foot lands solidly on the flat planar surface. Looking around, I notice that I am closer to the ground than I previously was, so I take another step downward. The shimmering green grass glistens as it gently glides closer to my point of view. Intrigued, I bound down the next six planes and stop on the wide landing that separates the two directions of the canyon; all around me are rough stone walls, and the grass has disappeared from sight. Following the path of three more descending planes, I see a large wooden door with iron fastenings. That's it, a device to easily change the level of the user: intersecting planes that provide declining (or ascending) flat stable surfaces to reach an alternate altitude. These intersecting planes are stairs, what marvelous things.

euclid's favorite word

Stairs are all planes. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines a plane as: a) a surface of such nature that a straight line joining two of its points lies wholly in the surface b) a flat or level surface. Every stair is a perpendicular intersecting of parallel planes, otherwise known as squares or rectangles. Planes and stairs are the ultimate expression of our linear intellectual nature and, since we love everything human, we surround ourselves with them.

building a stairway to clichés

It is uncertain when man's love affair with stairs began, but there are examples of them back to pre-historic times. The Encyclopedia Britannica reports 'great flights of ancient granite steps' on Tai Shan Mountain in China, and Egyptian stairs dating back to the second millennium BC. The legendary Cretans adorned their miraculous palaces with stairs just as the Assyrians did with their ninth-century BC ziggurat. Today we use stairs, just like the Romans did, to their penultimate glorious effect: the modern stoop. The stoop, or front entrance stairway, became a symbol of the social American neighborhood; the trend of gathering on a stoop began in the highly populated neighborhoods in urban centers, and spread (away from urban crime and grime) to the suburbs. Baltimore is famous for the marble steps that adorn its endless rows of townhouses, but is just one of many cities that proudly display their stoops as a sign of community. Freeze frame on a stoop gathering: top and right is a father watching his oldest son glide on roller skates down the empty street set aflame by the citrus crimson of the late afternoon sun. He is lacing his youngest son's skates so he can follow his brother. The father is filled with a glowing contentedness, satisfied by the condition and position of his life; Old Tom calls out a salutation from the top of his stoop two houses over. Billowing in the summer breeze, the trees ease to and fro as the streetlights above them begin warming up for their all-night engagement. This is the aura of nostalgia and reverie that surrounds the American stoop.

Outside of the residential areas in cities, municipal architecture widely employs stairs. There are stairs, grand, flowing, sweeping stairs that the city uses for monuments, or stairs that we in turn enshrine as monuments. In the heart of Philadelphia there is a set of stairs that has excited and enlivened an entire generation of men. How could this simple municipal architecture cause such a physical and emotional reaction? In fact, these men lose such control over themselves that they cannot help but bound up these stairs as fast as humanly possible to reach the triumphant victory of their peak, and then spin around to face the world they left behind them, jumping up and down, reveling in their glory. What legendary wonder has this passionate affect on

the hearts of men? The *Rocky* stairs. No other set of stairs can be closer identified with a particular age group and gender as the stairs used in that Sylvester Stallone film. Movies are to modern American society as epic poetry was to the ancient Greeks: they have the power to form and change the passions of our mind and soul. As the Isle of Ithaca was so enshrined in the *Odyssey* so are these Philadelphian stairs by *Rocky*; as the Harpies were feared from Odysseus' encounter with them, so are millions of Americans who happen to glimpse the long, treacherous darkness of the *Exorcist* stairs in northwestern DC.

little shock of horror

I remember, when I was ten, driving back from visiting my brother Ray in northern Virginia. We were just crossing the busy bridge into DC when my mother shrieked and the modular Silverado Suburban jerked slightly to the right.

My father shouted, "What! What is it?"

"Ed...look...," she said as she extended a quivering finger straight ahead.

He searched the direction that she pointed in, but found no sign of the horrible sight that must have caused her such alarm. Frustration grew in his chin—as it always did—until he demanded, "What?"

"It's the...it's the...the STAIRS!" she barely managed to squeak out.

"What sta..." he began, but dropped off suddenly as he saw the stairs and the scene of a Catholic priest meeting his horrifying demise. My father shivered, stiffened his neck, and said firmly, "Keep driving."

In the desperate curiosity of a child, my attention left my parents and raced ahead to discover these mysterious stairs that had precipitously upset them. Soaring, streaming from building to sidewalk, my eyes darted in all directions scrambling to find the stairs like a cartoon cat madly searching for the mouse that escaped its clutches. I had checked every nook, cranny, and mouse hole to no avail, and began to give up hope. My battering stream of questions was quickly and efficiently deflected by parents who—after six children—had perfected their technique.

"Darn, no luck from them," I thought to myself as the Suburban rolled gently onto solid ground and banked to the left. I blankly watched as the seven-storied office building drifted from my view out the back right window. The world looked gloomy through the dark tan tint of the window. "Ugh...two more hours home, I hope I don't get sick this time," I thought as the gloomy tower gave way to a morose stairway set back about one hundred yards from the street—no...not morose...but menacing, dark and twisted. My eyelids disappeared above my eyes, and my pupils dilated to stare in mute fear of these nightmarish stairs. "Note to self: if it scares your parents, do NOT try to see what it is." Having so noted, I turned my gaze and my mind away from that sight and onto the sight (and thought) of something more pleasant.

a stair of a different color

The function of a stair is to provide the user with an easy way to change their personal altitude by stepping onto a stair and using the strength of your legs to bring the rest of your body there. Stairs (plural) allow the user to change their altitude by a greater magnitude through the successive placement of another stair at an increasingly different altitude. Image and features serve no purpose to the functionality of a stairway. Does that mean that Americans utilize stairs just for their function? Not at all. If there is one thing that we do not want, it's pure functionality. Most Americans never buy the base-line model of a car, unless lack of funds restricts them. We want the deluxe, fully loaded SUV with a sunroof and a GPS mapping system; we want extra features, appealing design, high prestige: we crave image. That is the origin of the designer stairway.

Observe the long razor-sharp buttresses slicing the air and supporting the lift of the stairs, melded with the flying silver beams that diffract the sun's rays into a pristine metallic sheen. A succession of shimmering wires soar just below the main railing, always sharp and parallel like the grate of an egg slicer. These modernly whimsical structures are merely additional features added to the stairs of frosted glass bricks and metal grates. Americans have taken stairs and re-created them in our own

image—as we have done with so much of our world—adding to the objects by and through which we express ourselves. Architects combine styles of past and present (and some even of their view of the future) and create, with a dose of their personal flair, a functional tool that is as much art as a sculpture or a painting. The sight of the cold, hard, gray marble stairs beneath the Chapel fills me with a sense of history, and the feeling of a personal foundation that is as sturdy as any stone citadel. Walking up the glass and steel stairs to the Student Center floods my mind with a cascade of hover cars and spaceships exploring deep into our future. For all the wondrous appeal of those stairways, nothing compares to the sheer beauty of stairs in a sweeping, rounded form.

Spiral and curved stairways capture that unfathomable bliss of human imagination, because they break the mold: they resemble nature in their geometric preference. Mathematicians may perpetually profess the wondrous infinite span of a line, but the beauty of a sphere is undeniable. All of life as we know it functions because of spheres. Look around. Don't see any spheres? That's because you are surrounded by the linear, planar creations of man, and because you are looking in the wrong place. Your hands, there right there in your hands, look closer. If you could multiply your eyesight one thousand times its normal strength you would see them: cells. Cells, the foundation of life as we know it, are nothing more than containers for more spheres: the nucleus, molecules, elements, atoms, protons, neutrons, and quarks. All these spheres and many more make nature's wonder possible, and cause us wonderment for their relation to nature. When someone, every so often, breaks the mold and creates a rounded stairway, we revel in its beauty.

e a r t h b o u n d

I smile a contented grin. It is the wonderful moment of revelation and reaffirmation of the glorious mystery of life that makes me smile, a realization. I stand firm, invigorated by the screaming, faster-than-light journey of my liberated mind exploring the entire universe in the blink of an eye just to return with one word: stairs. "Wow...who knew?" I bound up those cold

marble stairs underneath the towering Chapel wall, and slowly walk down the red brick path. I turn back for one last look, I think about the journey I have taken and how it will permanently affect my life, and a solitary laugh escapes my mouth. Stairs, they truly are marvelous things.

Mr. FitzGerald's essay received First Place in the CM200 Creative Eye: Description Writing Competition.

KATIE FOSTER

if only for a moment

It's 2:35 in the morning. The city is lonely, as am I. Everyone drove home hours ago, abandoning these back roads and highways as they now sleep, safe, in their own beds. I, on the other hand, roam these empty roads with my music to keep me company in a desperate search for something, anything, to ease my mind. The street lamps burn into the horizon, appearing like foggy reflections off glass under a melting sun, traveling on and on and on again down a crisp, gray night. The street is not black, just desolate. Closed department stores, restaurants, even abandoned liquor shops keep a glimmer of life alive as their dimmed lights brighten the city. I roll my window down and taste the air through my pores. So fresh. So awakening. And a bit moist from the surrounding ocean. I can't hear the waves, but I know they are crashing. I can't hear the sirens, but I can feel them crying. I can't hear the other cars, but I know they must be out there, somewhere, wasting these dark hours until the sun will rise and lull them to sleep once again, as it always does me.

Silently, a traffic light changes to yellow, then red and I stop. I look around. Not a soul in sight save a single calico cat crossing in front of me followed by an eerie jingle of metal

against metal from his collar. I look around. Right, left, then right and behind. With my elbow, I lock my door and the other three locks follow in unison like one collective shot shooting through the silence. I turn the volume up on my radio allowing Adam Durtz to keep me company; his soulful voice cracking with emotion, his lyrics somehow expressing my own thoughts and his piano crying out a melodic tone that makes me cry myself.

"Asleep in perfect blue buildings/ Beside the green apple sea/ Gonna get me a little oblivion/ Try to keep myself away from myself and me."

I sing along, letting the tears, as well as my grief, be swept away by the wind from the window, and drive.

At school the next day, I am reminded once more of the cruel demands of my teachers, the queer laughter of my peers, and the feeling of being nothing, having nothing, and knowing nothing yet trying desperately to disguise such nothing as something so as to fool everyone. By sixth period, the pressure is too tight and I am gone, driving, alone. The feeling of going on and on, forever and ever free is upon me. The speed, the wind, the rush. In the car, I am able to think, really think, about my life and myself and my future without thinking about anything at all. The CD clicks to the next track and I turn up the volume. It begins with the strong beating of the drums alone, then the piano, then guitar and the lyrics are off. "Doo, doo, doo," I begin to sing in a low baritone to match the beat, "doo, doo doo." With my windows down, I scream out The Black Crowes' "Hard to Handle" lyrics, while my fingers dance along the steering wheel and my head bobs from side to side, for a complete catharsis and return to school refreshed for practice.

On a good day, water polo practice seems flawless, with my body weightless and fast, my arms able to catch every ball, and my mind able to capture every opponent's move before even they could have a chance to attack. Unfortunately, today is not such a day. Fall brings with it cooler temperatures, making it more difficult to find the pool appealing. As I stand on the edge of the deck, shivering and numb from the cold, a rising mist, like a witch's stew, bubbling and brewing green, fogs the figures of coaches and players. It is all shrieks and squirms and splashes

as a few brave girls take the plunge. Somewhere beyond the wailing of teammates, my coach roars to jump and I do. Underneath, I look up in hazy light at the bodies exploding through the water, then bobbing at the surface and I wonder why I am here. Could I possibly enjoy this? The floor is covered with lost hair ties, used gum and leftover plastic rings from summer camps and pool parties held before. An immutable silence is deafening with the exception of the hum of the filter and the swish of the bubbles that float from our bodies to the rim of the pool. My body feels heavy and each stroke an exhausting effort. The next two hours are a blur of endless coach's criticisms, swallowed chlorine, aching muscles, disappointments and self-defeat. Once the agony had ceased, I quickly grab my towel, throw my old goggles and cap in a bag, and sprint to the car. My car. The serenity of being in it alone, locking the doors, turning the music up so loud that even I can't hear my own voice or thoughts or failures and just be off.

Once I return home, however, my once safe haven becomes a battleground for the age gap. My parents could not understand my tardiness, my grades, my failed chores and, God forbid, my gas bill. We argue until there is nothing left to say or do but leave. So I do. I run to Nathan's house next door and tap on his window with my car keys. He opens it, stares at my upset eyes and recognizes, like most kids can at our age, the look of needing or wanting to get away. I hand him my keys and let him drive. This time I want to be a passenger.

"Where do you want to go?" He asks.

"Anywhere," I answer "Anywhere, but here."

So we drive around our neighborhood, then past the high school, and into another town, and beyond and far from anywhere I could recognize. We stop and stall and curve and speed so many times that I can no longer tell if we are miles away or in my own backyard. The wide highways become empty streets and the empty streets become narrow roads winding up, up and up some more. I focus for a moment out my window and admire the city landscape. Distant stars and clusters of activity seem so far removed from the quiet hum of the engine, groaning louder and uneven, as we trek higher into the unknown hills. I can feel

Nathan's eyes upon me, but do not dare turn to meet them. Instead, I keep watching the road curve and narrow against jagged rock formations, darkening forests of towering redwoods and, of course, a dangerous cliff of empty space with no rail or guard or fence to protect us. Somewhere lost in my own musing, I hear the grating crank of a parking brake. We are stopped, high above the world we know, overlooking an ocean on one side and a city on the other.

"God, it's beautiful up here," I comment.

"I know," he replies while reaching over to pet my face. I finally meet his gaze and we begin to kiss. Like the drive, neither of us knows where we want to go or what to do, so we simply explore until it is time to return home.

Tangled and half-naked against the cool, stickiness of the leather seats, we stop. Again, dressed and in our own seats, we stare out upon the empty road and drive home. There is music playing, but faraway and slow. I don't want to leave the safety of the car; knowing that once we step outside, onto the hard concrete of my driveway, the pressures and awkwardness of everyday life will return. And they did.

But the car remained a shiny hiding place, a temple, where we could escape from the need to answer or speak or listen or do or be. Somehow we both knew the magic of the car, of that sacred place, where time was lost, where dreams were a possibility and where fears were quelled. We understood its power, its strength, its ability to take two kids, struggling with stress from family, teachers, coaches and friends and let them forget, if only for a moment, their minuscule problems and realize that a life free of deadlines, chores, reputations, and responsibilities does exist, if only for a moment.

KYLE LANGHAM

golf: a tough lesson in life

In high school everyone is known by something; I was known by my obsession with golf. I played on my high school's team my junior and senior years, and golf quickly became an after school tradition for me. The course we played every fall afternoon was the Links at Challedon, which I became well accustomed to throughout the years. Playing Challedon well over a hundred times helped me know every hill and hazard that encompassed the course. The years on the golf team flew by as quickly as the years of high school, and I soon found myself playing in my final nine holes on the golf team. These nine holes marked the end of my high school golf career, and the beginning of a new discovery.

Standing on the first tee of Challedon, I awaited my turn to tee off. My heart thumped like a bass drum. It was uncommon for me to be this nervous before a round of golf, but today I was starting for the fifth time, and it was my last chance to perform well in a match. In the previous four starts my scores were not good. My inability to perform under pressure showed, and I was not even scheduled to start in this match, but a teammate nobly suggested to the coach that I start in his place. The burden of performing well for the team was compounded by the desire to prove to the coach that he had made a good decision.

As my turn to tee off came, my hands began to shake violently. I tried not to show my anxiety as I performed my pre-shot routine. I teed up my ball, took a few practice swings, and visualized the swing that many golf pros preached to me in lessons. "Go get 'em Kyle," encouraged a teammate as I lined up my stance. How could I "get 'em" when my heart was racing this fast? How could I go through the motions of a golf swing if I can't keep my hands from shaking?

Despite the nerves, or lack of them, I had to hit a good drive. It was important. It was needed. A bad first drive would set the tone for nine bad holes. I analyzed the shot the same as I had the previous hundred times I played the hole: trees to the right, out-of-bounds to the left. The hole was a dogleg right, so the ideal shot was one that rested on the right edge of the fairway, but anywhere in the fairway would do. I aimed for the left edge of the fairway to stay clear of the trees that beckoned to grab my Strata and two strokes, but I had to be mindful of the out-of-bounds that was just as costly. I gathered any nerves I still had to stop my shaking body and attempted the golf swing I worked so hard over the summer to achieve. Following the swing I peered up, hoping to see the ball soaring through the air, but instead I saw nothing. At that instant I knew where to look -- at the ground fifty yards ahead of me. Sure enough there was my ball, hopping its way to the beginning of the fairway. How embarrassing it was... everyone else was able to hit a drive over two hundred yards, and I barely accomplished rolling the ball to the fairway. I slammed the club and my confidence in my bag and started the short stroll to my ball. Thoughts of finishing the match with another bad score filled my head. How was it going to look when I shared my score with the team? What if my score determined which team won? What if I let the team down?

My wandering mind was halted by my quick arrival at my ball. It was time again for me to try to control my nerves. I lined up my next shot, took a deep breath of crisp fall air, and analyzed my shot. Again I had trees on the right and out-of-bounds on the left. I went through my trained swing, but this time with fewer expectations. To my amazement the ball was hit hard and traveling straight down the fairway. Could I have really

hit a good shot despite my lack of confidence? My joy faded as my ball abruptly hooked left. It was a nasty hook that directed my ball to the out-of-bounds stakes. The Strata landed at the white stakes, but with a lucky bounce, stayed in play. Finally, a bit of luck! I began the walk again; at least this would be a walk with a respectful distance.

Despite the distance, the shot was still not good. If not for the lucky bounce I would be accepting the humiliating stroke-and-distance penalty that occurs when you fail to keep your ball in play. My expectations for the next eight holes sank even lower. I could only imagine the disappointment on my coach's face when I handed him the scorecard. Even if my teammates never said it, I was sure they would be upset. The next day at school my score would be laughed at by my classmates, and mocked by those who knew nothing about golf.

My ball was closer to the out-of-bounds stakes than I had originally thought. It was so close that I had to move one of the stakes to take my stance. I was still two hundred yards away from the green; on a short par five it was short of impressive, but I knew I was lucky just to be in play. The green was down a slight hill, and was guarded by three large bunkers, two of them on the right just in front of the hole and another behind the green. Hitting a four iron into a bunker-covered green can be risky, so I aimed to the center of the green like my coach taught. Frustration had replaced my nervousness. I shortened my pre-shot routine, figuring the quicker the nine holes went, the quicker I could get over my humiliation. I short-changed my swing and pushed my ball to the right of the green where it settled about ten yards off.

My lousy game quickly affected my attitude. With every step I took towards my ball, I lost more interest in the game of golf. Golf was no longer a game of hope, but a game of self-pity. I decided to not care about my score, or my game. I knew neither was going to be good, so why worry? My thoughts were controlled by my pessimistic attitude.

I reached my ball to find a difficult next shot. The plateau green was well above my ball, and a bunker protected the front of the green, not to mention I had little green between the

hole and the fringe. My ball rested in a dirt patch formed from the lack of lawn care from the maintenance crew (golf courses usually neglect some areas of the course in the fall in order to save money). A normal chip swing was not reliable because it would be easy to chunk or skull the ball. "Why me?" I muttered as I evaluated the different chipping methods that I knew. A thought occurred: could I hit the flop shot? No way, the flop shot is one of golf's toughest shots; it was too risky. So many technical issues arise when hitting the flop shot: keeping the clubface open, not rotating your hips, keeping your hands in front of the club, and about a thousand other important aspects. Failure to respect all these aspects will result in a number of various shots, each one of them embarrassing. I practiced the flop on the chipping green many times before because golfers respect someone who plays a good flop shot, no matter his golf skills. I had faith in my ability to hit it off grass, but I had never tried it off dirt. I did not know if I could get the club under the ball or if my club would ricochet off the dirt and skull my ball across the green. But what did it matter if I did not care about my score anymore? It is worth the risk of an even higher score if I can pull off this one miraculous shot, right? I thought it was. I visualized my swing and carried it out as I had done on the chipping green. As the club struck the ball, I knew I had hit the ball perfectly. I enthusiastically awaited the ball's arrival on the green, and when it landed just fifteen feet from the green the feeling of success rushed through my body. I had done it! "Nice shot" blessed my climb to the green.

If only the coach and my other teammates could have seen the shot. My poor game would be excused if they had only watched that one shot. But then again who cares? I knew I hit the shot. I felt the rush of success. So what if my teammates joked around with me? So what if the coach was disappointed? A week from now no one will remember my score, but I will remember "that shot" for years to come. I will be telling my grandkids about the day when their grandfather hit the best shot in golf. Well, probably not, but it would be a story for the clubhouse. I soon became anxious to finish the golf round to tell my teammates about how despite the odds against me I came

through, and hit a flop shot off a dirt patch, up a good slope, over a bunker, and only five feet from the hole (by the time I told the story a couple times the distance would decrease from fifteen to five).

I approached my upcoming putt cautiously, like I always did. I played Challedon enough times to know how the putt was going to break before I even got on the green, but I checked it twice anyways. I went through the same practice motions I had done a million times before. I lined up the putt and simulated a pendulum with the putter like I was taught. The ball started to the right, but it slowly floated more and more left until it softly sank into the right edge of the hole. "Nice putt, man, what was your score?" my opponent asked. Let's see: the drive, the left hook shot, the approach shot, "the shot," and the putt. I counted out loud, "1-2-3-4-5, I got a five." A five, a par! I made a par out of that mess!

I got my bag and began the walk to the second tee. As I crossed the bridge over the stream that separated the first and second hole, I enjoyed the fresh air and the slight sunshine that showed through the sporadic clouds. I began thinking about how I made a par and only hit two good shots (the chip and the putt). I still did not have my swing and needed to continue to get lucky to record a good score. But if not, and I shot a bad score, then of course I would hear jokes about it and maybe have to live with the fact that I was responsible for the team's loss, but no one will remember next week. No one will remember what I shot in my last high school match, or that I never scored well when I started. Instead, I will have the memory of "the shot." I thought about how disappointments are short-term, but accomplishments can last a lifetime. Life is too short to worry about failure and should be spent reminiscing on successes. With this thought, this discovery, my worries of a bad score disappeared. A sense of accomplishment filled my body. No dissatisfied face or light-humored joke would erase the memory of "the shot."

I stood tall on the second tee and gazed at the beauty the course possessed. I was anxious to tee off, and enjoy the remaining eight holes of my high school golf career. Standing with the sun shining on my face, and the wind gently breezing through my

hair, I watched my Strata disappear into the lake that graced the right edge of the fairway. A smile broke onto my face as I watched the dark blue splash politely secure my ball and my stroke.

MICHAEL WINDER

root for the home team

The man heaved the ball into the steel firmament of the gymnasium, smiling and dancing as he corralled his teammates within his long arms. They called him Showtime, this man who won the West with the vanquishing strides of his long legs and longer feet. Behold, his teeth were the stuff of dental school legend! They shone like sponge-wiped bathroom tiles above his purple and gold uniform. And he was unashamed. Cameras exploded in orgiastic fury as he exhaled a whistle through those big, beautiful teeth, mumbled something genial about his opponent, *and proceeded to shatter the crystalline idealism of a 15-year old boy a thousand miles away, grinding it with his clownish sneaker into the thirsty pavement of a southern California in June, 1991.* Lakers win, Blazers lose; ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

To be a fan of a small market sports franchise requires patience. Determination. Devotion. Masochism. Self-loathing, the knee-jerk ability to punch one's self in the right spot at the sound of a whistle, the impotence of a new-born kitten. The city of Portland and her Trailblazers simply cannot compete, globally, with either yesterday's teeth of "Showtime" Magic Johnson, or today's poetry and personality of Shaquille O'Neal. There is no hope, the experts say. But, alas, the red and black faithful are not swayed! What they, including that angelically sweet boy from

the first paragraph, learned that wretched day many years ago was how comforting it feels, how safe, to be surrounded by other self-loathing, impotent, *angry* fans. Unity in bloodlust for Kobe's jugular! Break bread while sharing fantasies of breaking Phil Jackson in half! A Blazer fan - nay, an Oregonian! — is never alone as long as he or she has friends who equally hate themselves and the Los Angeles Lakers.

Yes, basketball brings us Oregonians together. We are circumscribed by our ability to share the pain of watching someone else win our championship, watching those other players dance merrily with those fans in the so-Cal sun while we try to guess by taste whether the drop on our cheek is rain or a tear. And then, when the crying finally stops, we watch in silence as Californians unpack boxes in our suburbs, jack up home prices, pollute our sovereign airspace with their big cars, and turn our mom-and-pop's into Barnes and Noble's. If only the refs would give us a break...

After a while, it gets to be too much. It really does.

Really.

My family, once emblematic of Blazermania, follows the team at a safer distance now. Where before we shouted incantations at the television screen or radio speaker to stunt the growth of James Worthy's unborn children, now we criticize, sigh, and think about the Drexler years, and how my mother swooned facetiously over his hazel eyes (we didn't need to talk about his teeth). The commemorative glasses from those golden years are still in the cupboard, still in regular use, but the loyal fire that once lit the entire house is only a dull glow. No cousins to come over to re-enact, in nerf, choice scenes from last night's game. No discussions with uncles and aunts about that one pass, that failed blockout, that crotchety ref that had it in for us. We sacrificed our place in the mass after the Lakers broke our fragile hearts in those Western Conference finals of 1991; after that point, we chose not to continue kicking ourselves for being a small media market, a potty break on the way to Seattle. But did we also sacrifice a part of our Oregonity, our Portlanditude, our Northwesternness? Where's the self-loathing, the masochism? Are we empty egg shells, no longer defending our walls against



GINGER COLAMUSSI

the swarms of purple and gold heathens, just loose change in the cracks of the couch that once convulsed under bouncing, yelling, sweating Blazer fans? How can we live with ourselves? Should we move?

"It's just a bunch of sweaty meatheads playing with a ball, you idiots," my grandmother said, bless her soul. Her words, if she even said them, often whistle through my ears as I walk through the glorious Portland rain. And I don't feel the need to punch myself at the sound.

I suppose we aren't true fans anymore, since the posters came down and the dividing line between *us* and *them* was redrawn elsewhere. The house, the family, still stand, open as always for non-basketball related events. But the feverish energies have been redirected toward calmer things, like gatherings, reunions, and other family functions. My uncles from San Diego are even considering making the trip north. I haven't seen them in years.

They're welcome for a visit, so long as they just don't stay.

SARA KLASSEN

c o m m i t t e d

It must have seemed like a perfect greeting card moment: two old friends reminiscing about the old days in a light-filled coffee shop, whispering and laughing about old secrets over coffee. But Lisa and I were only eighteen, and it was actually a cloudy day, and neither one of us spoke while I stirred my frozen mocha frappuccino and she sipped her iced tea.

I was trying to ignore the smells and sounds of the coffee shop. None of this seemed to bother Lisa, who was sitting completely still, smiling slightly. She was—serene. The realization shook me. I had never seen serenity personified before, and here it was in such an unlikely place. Lisa had never been so peaceful.

"When did you decide?" I asked her. I found myself fidgeting uncomfortably in the face of so much calm.

"Just a few weeks ago," she told me. "I don't feel I should waste the next four years when I know that this is where I want to be eventually."

"But I thought you wanted to study philosophy—go to grad school someday... University of Chicago?" I was pulling out fragments of sentences, trying to grasp a single thought for more than a few seconds.

"I'll be able to study, still. And it will be better there—because that's where I'm supposed to be."

I took a long drink of my frappucino, trying not to cringe as the sudden rush of cold hit my brain. Trying not to cringe as the memory of that morning hit my brain, really. Lisa and I had spent a few hours wandering through Ursuline's halls, visiting teachers and talking to friends—reminiscing as though more than three months had passed since graduation. And she had told each of our teachers the same thing she had told me in the car on the way there: instead of starting college at the University of Dallas, instead of getting her degree in philosophy, she would be entering the convent in three days.

Three days. The timing was curiously perfect. In three days, I would get on a plane to Baltimore; in three days, she would begin her life as a Carmelite.

We had met the first day of our freshmen year in our Introduction to Theater class. At fourteen, I already considered myself an experienced actress—from the age of nine, I had spent most of my summers and a great deal of my free time in rehearsals for one play or another. So I got there early, sat in the middle of the front row, and surveyed everyone else who came in to determine what kind of competition I would have in this class.

Lisa came in late and took the only seat left—the one right next to mine.

It was a typical first day of class: Our teacher came in, introduced herself, and decided that we should all take part in an ice-breaker to "get to know each other." I got paired with Lisa, who had spent the first five minutes of class coloring a strand of her long blonde hair pink with a highlighter.

We turned to each other and she smiled at me.

"Can I color your hair?" she said.

I decided immediately that she was going to be one of my best friends.

She had just moved to Texas from Virginia. I had never

met anyone who had moved around more as a child than I had. Together, we traced our childhood moves and realized that we had both lived in Birmingham—she had been born there, but they moved away when she was a year old; our family had moved there when I was almost two. And she had lived in Slidell, Louisiana, until she was four; we had moved there when I was five.

We had laughed about those near misses, thinking about how close we had come to knowing each other as children. Our families had even gone to the same church in Slidell.

"We could have been friends our whole life," I told her once.

"It's okay," she said. "We'll be friends for the whole rest of our lives."

We liked to take pictures of our feet. Looking back, I can't imagine that we ever had a rational explanation for that, even then.

My father was offered a job in Kansas at the end of our freshman year, and Lisa was the only one who knew about it. I hadn't even intended to tell her—I didn't want to talk about it with anyone unless we knew for sure—but my mother had mentioned it in front of Lisa one night when she dropped me off for a sleep-over.

Lisa and I talked about it all night. We were curled up in her queen-sized bed, comforter pulled over our heads, whispering so her parents wouldn't hear us and tell us to go to sleep.

"I don't want to move," I told her. "I mean, Kansas?"

"You should stay here!" she said. "You could live here, and then you wouldn't have to move!"

"Do you think your parents would let me?" I said, as though this was a viable option. "But no—I mean, I don't want to move, but I can't stay here without my family."

"Well, I really don't want you to have to move."

"Me neither." We were both silent. "Don't tell anyone yet, okay?"

She promised.

Two weeks later, my parents decided that we weren't going to Kansas. Lisa was almost as happy as I was. And since the whole story had a happy ending, I decided to call a couple of our close friends and tell them about it.

But they already knew. Lisa had told them. I felt vaguely disappointed—it was supposed to be a surprise to them, a moment when they could come to a realization that they had almost lost me. The actress in me looked forward to moments like that. But more than that, really, was the fact that Lisa had told. She promised she wouldn't, then she did.

That summer, she told me that she was going to be a nun. I don't remember feeling surprised or confused, because it was the sort of stunning announcement that you are never prepared for and can never react to the way you're supposed to.

"Oh, really?" I had said, more curious than anything else. "My godmother is a nun, you should totally meet her."

"I don't think I'm going to be that kind of nun," she said. I had never really been aware that there were "types." My godmother didn't wear a habit, and she taught English at a local high school—but I still associated her with the nuns from elementary school, in their black and white uniforms. Nuns were out in the world, being holy presences among us sinners. It seemed pretty simple to me.

"Yeah? So what kind of nun are you going to be?"

"A Carmelite," she said, with an air of decisiveness. "I'll be cloistered."

"Cloistered?" I searched my mind, wondering if I knew that word.

"Well—I won't be able to leave the convent," she explained.

"Why would you want that?" I asked, now completely

confused.

"It's just—I feel called to."

We met a boy named Vinnie at a mixer sophomore year. For most of the dance, he and I sat in the bleachers, talking about all sorts of things that seem incredibly interesting when you're in high school and have just met someone that you want to impress. He had beautiful blue eyes and spoke quietly, and I thought he was amazing. But I had to go to work early the next morning, so my mother came to pick me up long before the dance ended.

My friend Jacquelyn told me that after I left, Vinnie had danced with Lisa to "Stairway to Heaven" and given her his school ID—pointing out his phone number so she could call him. By Monday, he had told her that he loved her.

They dated for six months, and it took me most of that time to get over the crush I had on him. We would go to parties and hang out in the corner, Vinnie and I, watching Lisa dance to old Beatles and Rolling Stones songs. We would talk about how long her hair was getting and how cute her dog was. Somehow, Vinnie seemed even more interesting than the night we met. I kept wishing that maybe he would ask Lisa to give him his school ID back so that he could give it to me.

Instead, they broke up a week after Valentine's Day, when he had given her an enormous crystal crucifix. The rest of us whispered about it for weeks, trying to understand what could have happened. She loved the crucifix, but she had given it back to him—she thought it was too expensive. And then, she said, they had decided that maybe they shouldn't see each other anymore. A mutual decision, she told me. Maybe they could still be friends.

The next time I saw Vinnie, he looked different, older. He was fine, he told me, although he did miss Lisa. But he understood, he said.

"It makes it a little easier, getting dumped that way," he said.

I had to ask. "What way?" I had been under the impression that it was a mutual break-up, so this mention of getting dumped made me curious.

"For God, you know? It hurts still and everything, but at least—well, at least it's because of the whole nun thing. I think it would have been worse if it was just another guy."

A year later, it was another guy. Steve had pursued Lisa for months—while she claimed they were just friends; while she told our friend Jon that she couldn't get involved in a relationship with anyone because of her spirituality. But on Valentine's Day, she opened her front door and found hundreds of flowers and dozens of balloons. And that was it. Jon bitterly told me that her spirituality must have been worth nothing more than a few hundred dollars worth of Valentine's Day presents. But it hadn't worked that way for Vinnie, I reminded him.

Steve and Lisa had a passionate relationship, which shocked all of us. Once they started dating, we never saw them outside of school—or, if we did, they weren't really with us. They would sit off by themselves, with her always perched on his lap, as they whispered each other secrets and kissed as though no one was around to see.

The question the rest of us kept asking each other, in typical high school fashion: Had they done "it"? How far could she really go and still be a nun? In our heads, it seemed there must be some measure of holiness that a girl would have to live up to if she really wanted to be a nun one day.

She was taking something for granted, I thought. No one our age had the certainty that Lisa had possessed since childhood, the absolute knowledge of where life was going to take her. Even though I had always felt drawn to writing, and had announced as an eight-year-old that I was going to be an author when I grew up, I had my moments of doubt. I would reach the

end of an amazing book and feel despondent as I closed it, wondering if I would ever be able to create something so valuable.

Lisa had been given something so much sturdier than that. At eight years old, she had received her calling to become a nun. That, I thought to myself, was the kind of life-shaping event that I would kill for. Why couldn't she live accordingly? Would it be so hard to behave as though she was really grateful for the certainty God had granted her? Instead, she traipsed around with Steve, apparently unable to keep her hands off him, acting as though her imminent vocation—the rest of her life—had absolutely nothing to do with the life she was living now.

Meanwhile, I lived every second of my life wondering how today was going to effect tomorrow. I jotted down every string of words that came to my mind, hoping that these were going to be the words that began my best-selling, Nobel Prize-winning novel. I met boys, created complex, attractive pictures of them in my mind, and then dropped them when their realities disappointed me. I had never met anyone that I couldn't keep my hands off of, never perched in a boy's lap and whispered in his ear, kissing him as though no one was watching.

It seemed almost as though, in her relationship with Steve, Lisa had stolen something from me, as though she was cheating me out of something that she already had. I was the one who was supposed to be having those experiences; I was the one who was going to need them when I grew up. What did she need Steve for? She already had the rest of her life figured out.

I never admitted how I was furious with Lisa for her relationship with Steve, not even to myself. I felt—as, I realized with something of a shock, I had often felt with her—that she had been lying to me. After all, she was constantly telling me one thing and then doing another, even over the most trivial things. Before now, the lies had been little things: we would ask her to come out to dinner with us and she would say she couldn't because she had plans with her parents—but then we would run into her at the restaurant, eating dinner with other friends. Things

like that had happened regularly since we met, but I never spent much time thinking about it; if I considered it for too long, it made me angry, and I could never really become comfortable with that. Was it a sin to be angry with a nun, even if she wasn't quite a nun yet?

But watching her with Steve brought that same anger to me. And for her to tell me that she was going to be a nun and then get into an (admittedly short) series of serious romantic relationships just made me more certain that she was too dishonest to take a religious vocation. Nuns don't lie, I reasoned. They aren't allowed to.

This was the root of the only fight Lisa and I ever had, the fight that kept us from speaking to each other for most of our senior year of high school. I demanded the truth from her, demanded that she stop answering my questions with stupid lies. I asked her to tell me how she could justify her relationship with Steve if she felt called to a lifelong relationship with God.

And she could not respond to me with the honesty I wanted.

We sat in class together, ate lunch at the same table every day, and I would try to look as though I didn't care. Inside, I was wishing that she could just confess to me that she had not always told me the truth. I was wishing that she would admit it so that we could be friends again.

It never occurred to me to just forgive and forget. I was sure that I was justified in my anger because Lisa was failing to be what she said she was called to be. After all, if her relationship with me was any measure, what kind of relationship could she possibly have with God? And, since I was right, I had to act the part of the betrayed friend, waiting for her to fall on her knees and beg me to take her back. I even had a speech constructed in my head for when she finally broke down.

"I'm glad you finally understand," I would say, head raised high with the pride of being proven right. "But you know, things can never be the way they were before...."

The moment, when it actually did take place, was absolutely anticlimactic. Our whole class was gathered for mass during our last retreat, just a month before graduation. When it came time for the Sign of Peace, Lisa found me in the crowd and said, "I'm sorry. Forgive me."

And, forgetting all my lines, I just hugged her.

Which was what I was remembering as we sat in the coffee shop together, neither of us drinking coffee, neither of us talking about the past four years. We had not shared together the senior year that we had gone through with everyone else in our class. We had not discussed what college we would go to or what we would study. Now seemed the most appropriate time to catch up on what we had managed to deny ourselves.

"Are you scared about going so far away?" she asked me.

"Not at all. I'm so ready to get out of Texas."

"Won't you get homesick?"

"I never get homesick." We laughed. "Won't you?"

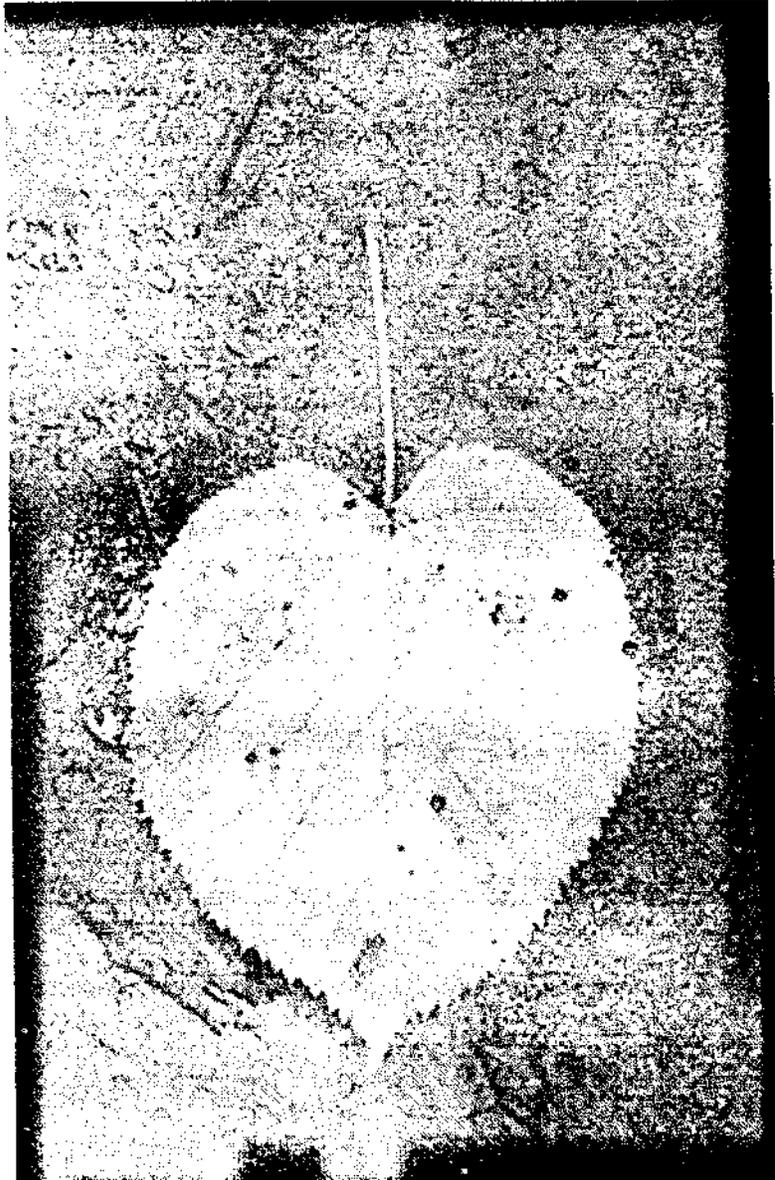
I hadn't meant to ask that. Things were suddenly serious again, but she was still smiling.

"I will be home."

My freshman year of college, I found myself two thousand miles away from home, living with four strangers and spending holidays with other people's families. Even so, it was in many ways exactly what I wanted—and, in a turn of events that I had not expected, I was the center of attention on practically a daily basis when someone new found out that I was from so far away.

When I came home for Christmas, Jacquelyn and I took a trip to the convent to visit Lisa. We got up early and made the hour-long drive to attend seven o'clock mass, expecting to be able to sit down and talk with Lisa afterwards.

We settled into a hard wooden pew in the cold chapel,



JESSICA QUINTO

staring at the wall of bars behind the altar. Both of us gasped quietly when the music started and two rows of nuns filed in to take their places behind those bars—Lisa was at the front of one line, wearing a rough brown robe, her long blonde hair smoothed down under a skull cap. She was easily the youngest woman in either row; most of the nuns looked older than my grandparents.

Mass was a painful experience, as we struggled to keep from shivering and tried not to stare at Lisa. She didn't seem to know that we were there; she wore that same serene look that had been on her face that day at Starbucks. But during communion, she looked through the bars and saw us— and she smiled.

We weren't allowed to talk to her after mass. We were told to set up an appointment, to call ahead next time. But Christmas break was almost over, and we didn't know when we would make that drive again. So we left, barely speaking in the car on the way home.

When I got back to school, I started off the semester by getting into a huge fight with a friend. It was over something so trivial that I tried to pretend we were fighting about some overriding principle. It didn't matter, really, because no matter how mature I wanted to believe I was being, I was basically just giving my friend the silent treatment.

And in the middle of this, I got a letter from Lisa. I opened it carefully, trying not to rush through any of it. By the time I had finished reading it, I was in tears. She thanked me, over and over, for helping her to understand the true value of honesty. She told me that no friend could do more for another person than I had done for her. She asked me to keep her in my prayers, and told me that she prayed for me every night.

I had never felt so guilty. I called my friend that night to apologize, as though Lisa's letter had been my confession and I needed to do penance. But I did not feel absolved.

She became Sister Theresa Agnes a year and three days after our last conversation. I went to see her take her vows, realizing suddenly that she was married, committed to God for the rest of her life. I couldn't even make a long distance relationship last for more than a month. I could barely think about what was at the other end of graduation for me. And Lisa—Sister Theresa Agnes—had already made the biggest decision she would have to make in her life. She was the same, serene Lisa that I would always remember. Her hair was now hidden under her habit, but her smile remained the same.

After the ceremony, I stood in line with the others who had gathered to see her take her first vows. I grasped her hands through the bars and tried to think of something to say, other than "Congratulations," or "I'm so happy for you." She just smiled at me, thanking me without words for coming, promising with her eyes that she would never stop praying for me.

I left with tears in my eyes, wondering how it was that Lisa—Sister Theresa Agnes—could make me feel so much when we had not spoken more than a few words to each other in over a year.

I have not seen her since. I begin letters that I never send, plan trips to the convent that I never take, say prayers that somehow taper off before they reach "Amen."

She took her second vows in October of my senior year, a week after Jeremy and I picked out an engagement ring. The timing, again, seemed curiously perfect—as though these major events in our lives were destined to overlap.

On the flight back to Baltimore, looking at my left hand and imagining the way it would look when we announced our engagement a few months later, it struck me that Lisa would not be at my wedding. That she had not even met the man that I was going to marry. And, in a way, I was finally able to understand her. This was what it felt like to be certain of something.

I caught my reflection in the airplane window and saw an expression of—just for a second, because it disappeared when I noticed it—serenity.

TRACEY GIORDANO

l e a v i n g e a r t h

"Our skin is a kind of space suit in which
we maneuver through an atmosphere
of harsh gases, cosmic rays,
radiation from the sun, and
obstacles of all sorts."

-Diane Ackerman,
A Natural History of the Senses

Sometimes I wonder why we can't fly; why we can't jump from a mountaintop, spread our wings, and soar through the sky, slicing the cool air with each turn. How wonderful it would be to feel the soft wind gently hitting my face and gradually working its way toward the nape of my neck where it sweeps the hair into a single tail. I think I would fly forever. I would just get up one morning and take off, my strong wings steadily grazing on the dry, thin air that rests high in the atmosphere. I would look back once, feeling the wind slap my cheek as I moved my head in a half circle, and then I would continue on—to nowhere at all. I would love to fly.

The first time I ever set foot onto an airplane, I felt a rush I had never experienced before. The anticipation was wonderful, as if a thousand rainbow butterflies had been let loose

throughout my stomach and chest, persisting in their mission to explore every corner and crevice. It was all at once exciting and new, thrilling and unique.

It was a hot August day when I boarded the plane—one of those days that signals the end of summer by throwing a final heat-wave celebration. And what a celebration it was! I could feel the sweat beginning to form at the nape of my neck and slowly trickle its way down to the collar of my turquoise tank top in a tickly motion. The humid air hung around me like a thick blanket, hindering each breath I struggled to take. It was a celebration worth missing, I concluded, as I focused my attention on the flight attendant's boarding instructions.

As I was following the crowd of restless travelers through the narrow hallway, the butterflies took full flight, no longer exploring the nooks and crannies of my stomach and chest but, instead, conducting a peculiar interpretation of the Olympic games. It wasn't until I sat in my assigned seat and fastened the firm seatbelt securely across my thighs that the incessant beating of their wings and their uncontrollable dancing ceased.

I took a deep breath, inhaling the entire experience. The dry air that was circulating throughout the cabin flowed into my lungs, along with the scent of airplane—a smell quite like that of a hotel, though not as flowery. I exhaled and turned toward the window, shivering at the temperature difference inside the plane.

Flight 1477 to Bermuda has been cleared for take off.

The plane slowly inched its way forward, and though it was moving quite quickly down the runway, I felt only a push from the rear. And then it happened. A deafening roar ignited takeoff, and the plane surged forward, shoving all passengers firmly against their seats. I again turned toward the window as the plane rapidly climbed through the atmosphere and into the clouds. The cool air coming from the jets above me hit my face in a continual breeze, as if I were sitting on the wing and experiencing the caress of the cloudy wind from above.

The dry thin air soon became intense, bearing down upon my face as if it were attempting to penetrate my skin. It flooded my ears to near deafness, allowing my sense of sound to surface only as I incessantly swallowed. We leveled out, finally

reaching our destination, and the sudden inability to hear became a natural phenomena. I settled in my seat, taken aback by the amazement of it all. *I was finally flying. I was finally thousands of feet above the Earth's surface, surrounded by thick, bleach-white clouds and blue sky, flying.*

The sharp ups and downs of the plane's encounter with the windy air were not frightening but were, instead, thrilling; I could feel the plane's every move echoing deep within me, as if I were apart from all of the metal and, instead, was freely soaring through the sky, swimming in the soft clouds and drinking the sweet sunshine. The sporadic jolts of the speeding airplane lifted me from my seat, creating a thin space of air between my creased pants and the seat cushion that can be used as a flotation device. I would rise ever so slightly, my insides gracefully ascending in such a motion that they felt apart from the whole body.

We are experiencing a bit of turbulence; please remain seated while the fasten seatbelt' sign is lighted. Turbulence made it *real*, though. With each bump, the rapidly moving plane could actually be felt; I was no longer stationarily sitting within the swift aircraft. I was now experiencing what it was truly like to fly, and I loved every minute of it. I loved the lightheadedness of the quick ascensions; I relished the mild plummet towards the Earth that could only be controlled by the pilot. It was as if the turbulence was the introduction of a roller coaster-like journey that would take me, as all flights do, to my destination of choice in the most thrilling manner.

This turbulence only lasted a few minutes, much to the relief of weary travelers, and before I knew it, I was fastening my seatbelt once again in preparation for our landing. The pilot announced our descent into sunny Bermuda—*it is currently 4:45 p.m. and sunny, with a temperature of 85°.* We then launched into 'landing mode,' performing all of the same rituals necessary for take-off. As the pilot gradually steered the plane to its descent, my partial deafness returned, forcing me to swallow Poland Springs for the small amount of support it could give. I concentrated on popping my ears, hearing and then not hearing, as the force of our decline pressed me into my constricting seat. I could feel the powerful air above me tightening and bearing

down so incredibly hard that my neck felt the weight of a twelve-pound head to be far too heavy to hold. As I bent my head forward, gazing at the cold metal seat belt securing my legs, I could sense the cool air of the vents flowing down my neck and underneath my loose fitting shirt.

With a massive thud, the wheels of the plane greeted the sun-scorched pavement of the runway, grinding the pebbles beneath their great weight and eventually ending their journey in front of the gate. I stood up, feeling my joints, tense from hours of sitting, crack and stretch, as if I were a corpse arising for the first time after years of being dead. As I lugged my bags out of the overhead compartment, I glanced once more out of the peephole window, perhaps hoping to catch a final glimpse of the vast sky dotted with powder-puff clouds. Instead, I was met with the hard, dark pavement and various painted yellow lines.

I missed it. I missed the soaring; I missed the feeling of absolute freedom that comes in leaving Earth for a while. Now grounded, I longed for the ups and downs of the unpredictable air—the way in which my body could never be sure of its next movement. But it was gone, for you can only leave Earth for a while before you have to come back.

Twenty-four days ago, practically a month though it feels much shorter, thousands of people were killed as terrorists crashed American airplanes into the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon. Hundreds of people took to flight that day, September 11, 2001, and never landed. Maybe they were on business; maybe they, like I, wanted to get away—to leave Earth for a while. I guess, when you leave Earth, you don't *have to* come back—and maybe that's the sad part.

Now they say they don't want to fly. They don't want to risk the possibility of death. They're scared that one day they'll walk onto a flight and never walk off. When something happens, something so incredibly tragic, things change. People think about things differently; they do things differently; they can't possibly stay the same.

When I took my first trip on an airplane, leaving Earth

for the first time, even if it was only for a few hours, I was full of anticipation. I could hardly wait to experience hundreds of new sensations unique to flying: the intense pressure, the thin, dry air, and the feeling of near deafness. Sure, I was concerned with my safety, worrying a bit about a potential crash should something go terribly wrong. But I wasn't *that* worried—my excitement and eagerness overwhelmed any fear. "*What if a group of terrorists hijack the plane*" was not a question even worth considering.

Now, weeks before a scheduled flight home, assorted feelings travel throughout my mind. *Should I fly? Is it too dangerous? Am I being irresponsible?* Through all of these doubts, however, a single thought prevails: *I cannot remain nervous*. I cannot allow this tragedy to become a barrier between the world and me. There are times when I feel apprehensive, worrying whether or not I will be one of those people for whom the rule is bent-- those who don't *have to* return to Earth, ever. And then there are times when I know that I need to move on; I know that *we*, as a nation, need to move on.

Forever is a long time—too long a time to waste worrying over things that cannot be controlled. *Will I walk off of this plane today?* And so I have decided to get on that plane, to take that flight, and to enjoy it the way I enjoy flying every time: that light and gentle rising motion that eventually leads into the shocking jolt of a landing, the cool breeze of the cabin air vent, even the firm pressure of the dry atmosphere. My sole escape from this world, this Earth, must be genuine; I won't allow anxiety to taint my experience. When I finally do fly, spreading my wings to the far reaches of the immense sky, I will do it with all of my heart. I will reach up and caress the silky white clouds as the blinding sun strokes my arms. I will soar and tumble, turn and dive. I *will* go on. I will fly again.

GINA PETRIZIO

we think, we are first

*Made up my mind to make a new start
Going to California with an aching in my heart...
-Led Zeppelin*

It was just as I thought-- like the postcards taped to the back of Megan's bureau. Palm trees, like burdened wet mops, blow slowly in the temperate air. They seem to mope like long-haired lovers mourning the loss of their mates. Perhaps it is merely my pathetic fallacy. Perhaps it is all my design. We dropped her off in an apartment adjacent to San Diego State, my mom and I. I am having a hell of a time with the time change. Looking at my wrist, I can't recall if I turned my watch back. My head feels disconnected and, for the first time, I understand the Nyquil commercials- the cartoon man whose head turns into a balloon. This day seems to go on like five-- as if I forgot to go to sleep or have been tripping on a hard drug, losing track of time. However, aside from the physical symptoms, I am going through an emotional hangover in paradise, the effects of which are far worse.

Three and a half hours later I look out of a tiny round window. Actually, I cling to it like a bug on a windshield. The

land has turned to brown and green squares and now resembles a quilt. Worn patches of earth are sewn together with road. The blanket of the earth, an eclectic blend of patterns and shapes, slowly descends as if someone were spreading it to keep the dead warm. The wrinkly, pug-nose-looking woman sitting next to me smells like a cedar closet. She is too large for her seat and, consequently, spills over into mine. The stewardess places an unidentifiable conglomeration before me and I push it around for a while, bulldozing it with my plastic fork. Something was left in that Spanish-looking condo on Aztec Drive- something more than a sister. The fat, cotton-candy clouds hinder my vision but still I squint to see the land. It is no longer a warm blanket, but has unraveled into scraps of fabric. Pushing my face against the chilled glass, I squirm to see one last image. I feel as though I could be sucked through the porthole-sized window at any time. "More?," the stewardess offers in a coarse voice, leaving me embarrassed of my now fetal position. I must seem like one of those plane phobics who twitch just before sinking into a numb trance. I saw a movie about one once but can't recall the name of it. What I'm really annoyed by makes me annoyed by this. I try to look down again but my eyes water from the strain. Everything turns white yet I leave the tiny oval open.

*The sea was red and the sky was gray
I wondered how tomorrow could ever follow today*

"Never again!," I shout through the crowd that has grown as thick as the smoke. I am with Megan, a little less than a month before her departure. We came to see the drummer in the ski hat whom she has been dating. In two weeks, she will leave the man she met in the small music store. John had opened the door to find a tall girl with dirty blond hair fumbling with drumsticks while nervously murmuring something about taking a lesson. The place is a shoebox. Megan's eyes light up as if someone is shining a flashlight directly on her face. Illuminated, she taps the beats on the side of her leg. "Damn it, Meg, it's one thirty. Can't we please go now?" I plead like a child holding a toy. It's futile. It is as if I am speaking a native language. I

must look over-animated and mime-like, stressing my Os and Us so she can hear. I feel for mimes. They must have a massive amount of patience. Still, her first love shouldn't be rushed. Finally, I resign to my former position, one step behind her, staring at the stage- I fall victim to guilt. This is the fifth Tuesday within the last couple of months that she has dragged me here to see the Led Zeppelin cover band. The lead singer sounds like he could be the original band member. I remember thinking that was incredible. Now his voice seems to brush against me, scratching like a wool sweater. One- forty now and I have nothing to show for it but a lot of untouched homework. I can endure it for her though. I want her face to stay next to the flashlight.

I hold it in my hands as long as I can. Then the dam breaks. My apple-red jacket, forever tainted, now lies at the bottom of a shiny black trash bag. I feel like a piece of trash. Megan would later tell me that Mrs. Mason, to the amusement of the entire seventh grade class and the mortification of her, made an announcement. It went something like, "Your sister threw up all over and you need to go take her to your mother's car." It is an elementary school thing. You've seen it, haven't you? Other children cover their noses in disgust and out comes the sawdust. The girl sitting next to me gags and I feel like throwing up again from embarrassment. Soon Megan struts in and gives me the look only a sister can. Her demeanor seems to suggest that she thinks this is somehow my fault- that I planned it by gobbling down six lunchables. Yet she guides me with the tenderness of a mother duck out of the room, keeping me straight. For once, she follows in my footsteps.

*To find a queen without a king
They say she plays guitar and cries and sings*

It broke her heart and mine too. Looking into her glassy eyes, I see my image reflected back. They can't possibly stay together. Distance doesn't always make the heart grow fonder. Sometimes it just complicates things, like rain at a wedding or dog poop on your shoe. The shower coming down her face would be mine in due time; hot, wet salt water I will inevitably

wash my face with. "Are you ok?" I inquire. For the first time, I am scared to hear the response.

"I guess we just march to the beat of the same drum," she jests. I almost know what she means. It is as if I peeked through the weathered window of her dusky lesson room and saw the preposterous rigidity with which she balanced on the black stool, teetering like a tightrope walker, hair falling down as she reached for a stack of notes. Shaky hands over shaky sticks over a shaky heart. He always knows when she doesn't practice. It's what he doesn't know that will surprise him a month later when work ceases to seem like work. He would meet her in that stuffy box every Monday from eight to nine. It was a business transaction really- as professional as cashing a check. Still, it clung to the ceiling like a parasite. It looked down on their heads and, eventually, came down to feed.

*The mountains and the canyons started to tremble and shake
As the children of the sun began to awake*

"Tiny worms- it feels like tiny worms crawling in your belly," she answers when we ask her about love, the romantic kind. She is the first in a long line of love philosophers. Marty squirms anxiously in his chair as if he needs to pee. He alternates between red and white before finally settling for a shade of pink. I sent him a valentine last week- a lopsided makeshift one with pounds of glitter, some of which I still see on the classroom floor. "There really is no one reason," she goes on, "you just feel it." The lunch bell rings and love flies from our minds. "You just begin eating and I'll be right back," she says as we run to the closet. Our chunky teacher waddles down the hall in her blue flowered dress like a heavy Polynesian woman in a muumuu. She will go into the pale pink stall and come out with bloodshot eyes, having inadequately wiped them with toilet paper. She had worms in her stomach once but they crawled away.

*Standing on a hill in my mountain of dreams
Telling myself it's not as hard, hard, hard as it seems*

He presses her like a prom corsage on those August evenings, attempting to hold the moment still and young though it inevitably wilts and fades. Lying beside him, she counts the days on her hand beneath the pillow. The white cotton sheets encase them like snow in the hot night. They are hermetically sealed like tree limbs after a blizzard. They can't stay preserved and know it. It comes to them both at once and they freeze although it is eighty-five outside.

*It seems that the wrath of the gods got a punch in the nose
And it started to flow
I think I might be sinking*

"It's pure hell," the middle-aged woman interrupts. We are sprawled out on the living room floor deciding who is the cutest guy in our high school. "What?" I ask, astonished at her abruptness. "Love, it'll tear you to pieces and leave you for dead," she states matter-of-factly. Cigarette in hand, she sits down beside us. She is one of my mother's college roommates, now a real estate lawyer who was twice divorced and working on completing the trilogy by fall. Megan and I look at one another, rolling our eyes without moving them. "She'll be gone in ten minutes," I whisper to our company. Never the less, the woman, dripping in baubles she acquired in settlement, remains fixed, like the stain on our orange sofa. She stares at the carpet, thinking about publishing "Why Men Should Die (Preferably Slow)."

*Throw me a line if I reach it in time
I'll meet you up there where the path
Runs straight and high*

"Hello?," I try. I can't hear her through the static. Twirling the phone cord I struggle in vain. We have a five-minute conversation of whats and come agains. I hang up feeling hollow. She can't become a stranger now. Forty blocks over and two stories up John is thinking the same thing. Sitting softly on my bed I open a text book. It's best not to think of the distance that the telephone came to remind me of her. Moreover, that pic-

tures are flat and one-dimensional and no matter how hard I try to squeeze into the corner of gray in the photos, I won't fit.

Yet, we must go on. There will be other moments of romantic exuberance for her and other frightened, car crash looks. Generations ago, lives too were burst and put back together. Maybe no one ever clearly sees the fragments of these explosions, but they are out there somewhere, waiting for other innocent young adults to feel like they are the first to discover them.

*Someone told me there's a girl out there
With love in her eyes and flowers in her hair*

I sit in the college library. It has been quite a while since she took off. I have been reading Plato and feel that he wrote esoterically to spite me. Someone carved into the cubical "love hurts." Etched into aging wood with a cheap, black ballpoint pen. I can't study as the words loom in my peripheral vision- what people write when no one can see. What people write when no one is asking them specific, leading questions is a frightening funhouse, a freak show of free play. Amidst the buzzing luminance of yellow lights I fester in the cell. I can only stare at the deep ruts. I feel her heart break and it could have been me who vandalized the clean wood. Typically, heartbreak involves one, maybe two people. In this case there is a third. Thousands of miles away, I see her struggle to keep still the whirlpool of memories from spiraling in her head. Some one carved into the library cubical "love hurts". It's haunting what people proclaim when they're alone. It seems they tell the truth.



JESSICA QUINTO



JESSICA QUINTO

TYAUNA BRUCE

prayer, planning, and patience

"I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in his word I do
hope."
- Psalm 130:5

Contrary to popular opinion, I don't hate men. My main problem with men is their inconsistency. For me, there has been one classic case: everything begins magically - compliments, long conversations and quality time spent together just being ourselves - then the world turns, things change and I become too strong, too good, or just too much. In the end, "he" convinces himself that I deserve more than he is able to give. I've grown to learn that the truth is not about what I deserve, or my feelings at all. A man's inconsistency is about the man himself.

Hindsight has been the best friend of all the inconsistent males in my life. The feelings of fear, inadequacy, confusion, FEAR (it deserves repeating) always look better when the man doesn't think those qualities apply to him any more. Those qualities must be attached to me. When not confronted with my face, phone calls, thoughts about life and the fact that I think about life at all, the world becomes clear and less intimidating. Suddenly,

these men are better able to see what women need to feel loved and they go and give their best to someone else.

With this constantly happening, it's easy to feel like everything is always your fault. It's easy to feel rejected, or like the person that will always lose in the end. Some people choose drinking, drugs, or sex as a way to cope. I chose prayer.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..."
-Romans 8:28

Rain poured steadily on Old San Juan, a welcomed act of nature that relieved the city from its daily 85-degree temperature. Tourists rushed along the streets as if they could remain dry if they walked quickly between the raindrops. A canopy of trees protected Calleta de San Juan (San Juan Street) from the down pour, so the seemingly dry sidewalk overflowed with cats sleeping, stretched out on the cool concrete. They didn't belong to anyone, but everyone in the tiny neighborhood fed them, so they stayed around. I witnessed this all as a stranger standing on an antique balcony in picturesque Puerto Rico. The opportunity was my blessing; my proof that prayer works and helps in mysterious ways (even physical removal from a place).

Of all the things I prayed for, peace was the most prominent. I needed a way to be comfortable in my environment and feel like there was no everyday obstacle that would distract me from positively changing my mind and disposition. Standing in the midst of that tropical shower, protected from the moisture by the canopy above me, I made a plan. I planned on living a life of happy aloneness. I accepted my role as a counselor to others, but decided that what was for me (as far as the opposite sex was concerned) was friendship. I pushed all those dreams of breaking the cycle of single parenthood and participating in an ideal family structure out my head because refusing to entertain the thought of a simple life helped me accept the way I thought my life would be. No matter how much it hurt to see love blossom-

ing all around me, I didn't want to ever desire it again; it just wasn't for me. I thought this was the answer.

"You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail."
- Proverbs 19:21

A friend told me recently that we make plans and God laughs. I believe God laughs at our willfulness. Humans receive a strange comfort in the thought of controlling their own destiny. If my Puerto Rican experience taught me nothing else, it taught me that control only stretches so far. You can do everything right, follow your own advice down to the most minute detail and still find yourself in a terrible predicament. Why?... Because "self-control" only accounts for self, not anyone else in the world. There's only so much that any of us can do. Somewhere in my plan, I lost this basic logic of faith: Belief in a driving force in my life that has nothing to do with my own power.

Because I'd put too much confidence in my own ability to regulate my life by simply praying to God to help me follow through with my plans, I'd forgotten to ask Him if my plan was what He wanted for me. As a result, I attempted to avoid all advances by the male sex. Compliments came my way and I took them for what they were — physical observations by strangers. I never took them seriously and doing so made me content with just being noticed. I thought, *that's all I'm ever going to have*.

My strong will was tested, however, when I realized that one person wasn't like the rest. His compliments were genuine and he seemingly didn't want anything except to know me. I entertained his attention for a while, believing he would lose interest and I could sleep peacefully. When the evening ended with him walking me to my car and his phone number programmed in my cell phone, imagine my confusion.

When I returned home that night, I stared at the phone number for an hour before I dialed it. I wasn't supposed to be interested in any one, so why had I taken this guy's phone number? Why didn't I just tell him I wasn't looking for anything?

Why did I want to continue talking to him? Before I questioned myself to death, I dialed the number. The sound of a masculine voice on the other end of the phone startled me. I knew everything I'd worked for was null and void. I liked this guy.

"Love is patient and kind."
- I Corinthians 13:4

My main problem with men is their inconsistency. For me, there has been one classic case: everything begins magically — compliments, long conversations and quality time spent together just being ourselves — then the world turns, things change and I become too strong, too good, or just too much. In the end, "he" convinces himself that I deserve more than he is able to give.

I felt *déjà vu* smother me as I heard the words, "Tyauna, you are a special woman, but. . ." The rest of his point escaped me as I thought of the five months I gave him, praying that those words would never come out of his mouth. In the past, it always meant, "Tyauna, I just can't do this, any more," but this guy was different. He didn't want to leave me; he wanted to take his time because his past was also filled with failed attempts at union with the opposite sex. He wanted me to be patient. Patience was a reasonable request, but I found it hard to answer. I waited most of my life to be blessed with something of my own. When I thought it was unreachable, I gave up hope and settled for what I thought God had for me. Now that I finally found someone, I was supposed to be sensitive to his situation. How was that fair?

It isn't fair, but there is a great lesson in unfairness. Prayer, planning and patience work together. Prayer relieves the stress of having to control everything, planning should primarily be done through prayer, and patience is an ongoing process that doesn't end when you feel that you've got what you want. Patience is the blessing and reward I looked for all along.

I've given up trying to totally control any situation. It proves to be a huge waste of time and energy that could be spent living the life God gave me. I'm healthy, almost finished with my

college education, all my basic needs are being met and, most importantly, I'm alive. Each day is a gift that I'm learning to treasure. Life is the task with which I'm learning to ask for help. The end result is peace of mind.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

- John 14:27



RYAN CREEL

CONTRIBUTORS

NATANIA BARRON is a native of Massachusetts, and has been writing since as long as she can remember. She studies English and Writing, and is minoring in Medieval Studies. A Catholic Studies Research Grant recipient for 2001, she has painted her own medieval illuminated manuscripts. She also recently won a silver medal in a poetry.com poetry contest. Natania hopes to continue writing, go to graduate school, and perhaps end up a professor herself.

TYAUNA BRUCE is a senior English and Writing major with a minor in Gender Studies. This is her third publication in the *Forum*. After graduation, she'd like to pursue a writing career and teaching career. It's the way she feels she can best impact the world.

MAGGIE DOUGHERTY is a sophomore Communication Major with a Writing Specialization. She enjoys sports, essay writing, and fiction writing. She will be studying abroad next semester in Thailand.

MATTHEW FITZGERALD is a junior Communication major with a concentration in Advertising. He is currently studying abroad in Auckland, New Zealand, and wishes everyone at home well. Writing is a newfound interest for Matthew. He plans to pursue the creative aspect of professional advertising, especially copywriting and design.

KATIE FOSTER is a junior Writing/Psychology major at Loyola College and is currently studying abroad in Leuven, Belgium for the year. Some of her previous work was published in the 2001 edition of the *Forum*.

TRACEY GIORDANO is a sophomore Communication major with a Journalism concentration and a minor in French. Upon graduating, she hopes to either pursue a career in broadcast journalism or write for a newspaper. This is Tracey's first published work.

DAYNA HILL is a sophomore English/Writing major from Buffalo, New York. She is aspiring to teach writing at the college level. Her work can also be found in the previous volume of *Forum* and *Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*, Vol. XII and XIII.

KYLE LANGHAM was born in Los Angeles, CA and has lived in 6 states. In 1995, he moved next to The Links at Challedon in a small town called Mount Airy, MD. Kyle started playing golf regularly and in his junior and senior years of high school when he played on his high school golf team.

DANA MOSS, a sophomore, is a Writing and Sociology major with a minor in Gender Studies. Besides writing personal narrative and fiction, she hopes to become the best female rock drummer in the world one day, and has been torturing her family with music ever since she was seven. Dana is eager to fulfill the role of "starving-artist" that has been passed down to her with love.

EMILY PHILLIPS is a senior English major with a minor in Art History. She loves to read, especially Jane Austen novels, and enjoys visiting art museums. Although a native of North Carolina, she plans to remain in the Baltimore/D.C. area upon graduation and work in the editing/publishing field before attending graduate school. Emily is also a superb cook!

MEGAN POMIANEK is a sophomore Biochemistry major from North Haledon, New Jersey. She would like to thank everyone she works with at the Center for Values and Service for exposing her to the ideals of social justice and reform and Mr. Balbo for encouraging her in her writing. She is honored to have a piece in this year's *Forum*.

JESSICA QUINTO, a New York native, has been active in the Fine Arts since her childhood. While her first love is music performance and instruction, Jessica still finds time to dabble in digital photography. She plays the flute, piccolo, guitar, piano, and studies voice. Jessica is looking forward to pursuing a career in music education beginning this May.

SUSANNAH WETZEL is a sophomore majoring in Writing and Political Science. She loves to read, write, and sing. She will be traveling this fall to Belgium to spend her junior year in Leuven.

MICHAEL WINDER was born and raised in The Dalles, Oregon, one of only two cities on Earth that begin with "The." He is married, with two cats.



RYAN CREEL

NANTANIA BARRON
TYAUNA BRUCE
GINGER COLAMUSSI
RYAN CREEL
MAGGIE DOUGHERTY
MATTHEW FITZGERALD
KATIE FOSTER
TRACEY GIORDANO
DAYNA HILL
SARA KLASSEN
KYLE LANGHAM
CRAIG LINDEMANN
DANA MOSS
GINA PETRIZIO
MEGAN POMIANEK
JESSICA QUINTO
SUSANNAH WETZEL
MICHAEL WINDER

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