

# **The Oxbow Writing Project Anthology**



**Summer 2013**

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# **Our Literary Leaders**

Wilma Kuhlman, Amy Lovely

## **My PhT**

*by Wilma Kuhlman*

Once upon a time, so goes the popular opening, I was a secretary. Yep, I was a secretary for several men in a manufacturing plant where they made auto-body-repair equipment. You know, after your car is in an accident, all the way from a fender bender to a major collision, you take it to a body shop, and voila, a couple of weeks later, it's as good as new – well, almost. The company, Kansas Jack, was fairly new in the market, but the reputation for solidly built frame straightening equipment was gaining note across the nation, and the small company was on the move. And I was truly their girl Friday. I did a little of everything from correspondence to bookkeeping, to making coffee and cleaning up. Since I'd never even heard of body shops, let alone equipment for straightening frames and car bodies, I'm not at all sure how I got the job. At the time I was, as some said, getting my PHT (putting hubby through), and maybe they felt sorry for me? My learning curve was deep and wide.

First, I had to learn how to write business letters for the company. Yes, I'd had some high school training, and even a college class, about business writing. And I'd been secretary in the athletic director's and coaches' offices at Bethany College. Ah, that was probably it, I'd been a secretary before, and all men like athletics, right? Not that I would ever stereotype. As I grew to know this diverse group of workers, I'd have to say that was probably not the reason I was hired. But back to the work I needed to do, and do well, to be successful in this endeavor. . . Well, in order to write a comprehensible business letter that wasn't a form letter, I really needed to know a little more about the product. So I did some studying about auto-body repairs. Today I would just Google it and read. In fact, I recently Googled "Kansas Jack" to see if the company is still producing equipment. They are, and the company is much larger than the tiny plant where I worked.

My learning also required going to an actual body shop and watching Jack work with our equipment to straighten a body frame on a car (yes, another interesting coincidence – the main repair shop that demoed, utilized, and tested new equipment – was **Jack's Body Shop**). Hmm, I wondered if I felt better or worse about a repaired car after that experience. Then I had to venture into the "back" to the actual factory portion of the business. This factory was not an assembly line, as such, although the equipment was put together in specified orders. But no one stayed in the same place day after day welding the same spot on a piece of equipment. Everyone specialized on a certain kind of weld or a certain piece of equipment, but they all seemed very cognizant of the final product and how valuable their work was on each part. They could also fill in for one another when someone was ill. I appreciated seeing what they were doing, and I was a bit wiser about the whole process. I didn't really "get it" you understand, but I could sort of talk the talk after that.

Then there's the whole bookkeeping thing (now much more sophisticatedly called accounting). Seth was my boss and general manager, and he did most of that work, but I often needed to enter the credits and debits, al la paper of course, and use the adding machine (which did more than add) to get accounts balanced. Thus occurred one of my worst faux pas. Seth was out of town on business for a couple of weeks, and I was responsible for balancing the books for the end of the month report to stockholders. I labored over those figures for a couple of days, and I continued to be 2¢ off the debit and credit totals. Two cents! Now, I was raised by a perfectionist, who would not have accepted any imbalance, so I knew I had to find those two cents or be in trouble. So, and here's where I blew it, I called the accountant who was the company's auditor. Naïve, naïve, naïve me! He'd been at the office on occasion, and I had no clue that he charged for each minute he spent on our accounts. It seemed he was on our side, so I assumed he would just come out and help me get past this embarrassing error. He came. And he didn't find those nasty two cents quickly. Stupendous tricksters, they hid like shadows on a sunny day. And no, I don't remember where. I just know that the books were balanced for the

report, and Seth was not a happy camper when he got the bill for the auditor's time! At least he didn't take it out of my paltry pay. If he had, I might be there still – working off my debt.

I also learned how to make coffee. Well, I knew how to make coffee, I thought. I'd learned from my mother, and I made some for myself on occasion. So each morning I dutifully filled the pot with water and put ground coffee in the appropriate spot before I plugged in the pot and heard it perk. I thought that was one duty I could competently complete without more training! Yeah, well, I was wrong. One day, I'd been on an errand to deliver a package at the post office (something I could do fairly efficiently), and I came back into the office to find three of the workers pouring coffee into a cup and then pouring it back into the pot through the grounds. I was flabbergasted. What was that all about? It seems I made really weak coffee, in their opinion and they were sweetly finding a way to get the coffee they wanted without confronting me. I've never been big into strong coffee, in fact I've been accused of heating water and waving my hands over the top and chanting, "coffee, coffee," when I make it. But . . . So, after that, I made stronger coffee. I did get a laugh, though, when a Beetle Baily comic strip had Sarge complaining to Beetle about the weak coffee. The frames featured Sarge with a mug and spoon in front of him saying, "Did you make, 2) this coffee, 3) strong, 4) enough" while the spoon in the coffee got smaller and smaller as it seemingly dissolved in the cup. I taped that comic strip to the coffee pot, and we chuckled about it for several months before the tape gave out.

But I learned the most about people and their diverse convictions during that time. I grew up in a rural community in northern Kansas. I was not sheltered and I'd say, even now, that my parents were pretty open-minded. But the people of our community were generally fairly like-minded about honor, responsibility, and hard work. Differences were generally minimal and ignored. The gentlemen with whom I worked all grew up in the factory's vicinity. In regard to religious persuasions, although they all professed Christianity, the expressions varied a great deal. I think most of them even "belonged" to similarly named denominations, but the differences were, to me, quite pronounced and somewhat surprising.

Probably the most obvious expression of beliefs came from a gentleman named Abram, a member of what was then popularly labeled "old-order" Mennonite. With some similarities to Amish communities, members of this affiliation did drive cars and work in jobs outside of their geographic confines. Many farmed, but not all of them. Visible in the public arena by their physical appearances, women always wore similarly designed dresses with small bonnets covering their bunned hair, men had full beards and wore plain pants and shirts. Young children were less obvious, but girls did always wear dresses. People from this community were nonetheless a part of the local communities as they shopped and visited museums, etc. As a worker at Kansas Jack, Abram was noticeable with his beard and quiet manner, but he did not press his beliefs on anyone else. His convictions were most obvious when we had a television crew visit to film for a news piece on this local business. Abram went into the break room and did not come out until the crew was gone. Old-order Mennonites did not approve of nor watch any television. He made no vocal protest, he just told us he would be out of the way during the taping. Abram was always who he was and never tried to convince any of us that he was right and we were wrong.

My direct supervisor/boss, Seth, was another matter. His belief system was very conservative, which I understood. But where we parted ways for understanding was about the privilege and rights of European descendants. I do not know if this theory still has influence, but Seth and others like him were convinced through some person's writing that Europeans were/are the lost tribes of Israel, thus the chosen people of God. Consequently, he was furious when a Black friend of my husband's was student teaching at his daughter's school. These intellectually inferior, soulless people were not to have any authority or influence over White people. He was adamant about this, and although not a good researcher at the time, I found at least one article dismissing that theory. Seth wouldn't accept that and retained his self-justified prejudice against people of color. He protested to the school, but since his daughter was not enrolled in any classes where the young gentleman would be student

teaching, he didn't pursue it, nor did the school comply with his wishes to dismiss that student teacher. This also was Christianity.

The other man I remember fairly well was the foreman, Mark – the gentleman who would pour coffee through several times rather than embarrass me about making coffee that was too weak. Mark was also a regular participant in religious services and his beliefs were a clear part of who he was. His membership as a Mennonite was not “old-order,” and he did watch television and he and his wife wore the same type of clothing most of the rest of us did – in other words a mish-mash of things to fit several settings. Mark was easy-going and a bit of a tease. I could figure that I'd have at least one good laugh each day as he found something odd somewhere to point out or a joke to tell. He generally had a smile on his face, and he worked with the men on the products as well as assumed responsibility for those final pieces leaving the plant to be used in circumstances that could be dangerous if the equipment was not well made. And oh yeah, that equipment had to work to pull hard metal and frames from a crunched-up state to a workable state. I know if I found myself in a bind, Mark would probably be the person I would go to, well, especially if I had car trouble.

In this small company I also worked with a young man who declared himself a conscientious objector who moved to Minnesota to work in a service job that kept him out of the military. (He was the one with a rifle across the back window of his pick-up.) Jack of Jack's Body Shop was pretty much an atheist and was totally comfortable with that. He also made me laugh more than once. These men were all hard working and consistent. The only worker I remember who was not totally reliable worker quit to become a county sheriff's deputy. Go figure!

Thus, at age 20, I learned a lot – about a particular type of equipment, about business procedures, about the value of accuracy in math, about not making assumptions, about how different religious persuasions can be, and of course, how to make stronger coffee. My PhT was completed after two years when Wendell graduated from college, and we prepared to move on to more permanent settings and begin to raise a family. Now with a PhD under my belt where I again learned how much I don't know, I smile as I remember my first degree (maybe it was fake, but it was real) and the non-degreed men who taught me so much.

## **Our Roses**

*by Amy Lovely*

Roses are *feminine, soft, fragrant*

Except our kind

Such a flowing *sweet* name

Stemming from a **strong clan**

Our Roses are **strong-willed**

No one can tell us what to do

Except maybe Grandpa

The king Rose

Our Roses are opinionated!

Arguing over anything just to prove ourselves

Our Roses are HARD-workers

Planting, building, working

in the hot

Mid-West **sun**

But our Roses can be *soft* and *loving* too

Sitting together

Watching storms

Baking cookies

Long hugs

Our Roses are **strong** and *sweet*

## Rocky Ventures

by Wilma Kuhlman

A week in Rockies' Mummy Range,  
civilization abandoned,  
ascensions both gradual and steep,  
corresponding descent, later.  
– Trust your boots.

Breathing labored, forced.  
Steps short and steady,  
rest stops only when necessary.  
Concentrating.  
– Just do it.

Altitude increasing,  
headache pounding,  
legs complaining,  
mountain peaks come closer.  
– Keep climbing.

Strider Jeff, guide extraordinaire,  
“We’re almost there”  
long before we are.  
Psychological inducement,  
– Better than Niké.

Pitching tents,  
cooking outside  
each new eve.  
Sky-scraping altitudes,  
– Stars within reach.



Above the timber line  
flora abounds.  
Columbines proffer gentle  
colors of lavender and white.  
– Bloom where you are planted.

Acclimating to conditions,  
headache disappears.  
Adjusting to unwashed  
bodies and clothes.  
– Accessible mountain peaks

Day hike set for  
trail to Mirror Lakes.  
Intimidating climb  
to way up there.  
– Walking across falls?

Step by step, not looking down  
crossing the falls lead to  
identical lakes sitting blue and clear  
among the peaks  
– Worth the work and worry.

Strenuous physical exertion  
during five people-vacant days,  
providing needed mental break from  
belittling boss, stressful workload,  
– Floating away and leaving.

Coming down, cleansing showers,  
laundered clothes, and comfy shoes  
refreshing in familiar ways.  
Physically tired, mentally refreshed.  
– Civilization reentered.

## **Tough**

*by Amy Lovely*

Today was tough leaving you behind. Rough like a pumice stone. The kind of rough that tugs at you and feels like it would be so much easier to just give in to. It's tough to get up in the morning. It's tough to pull yourself away from a good book in order to finally go to sleep. But this tough was different. More like the tough to breakup with someone after years together. Like the tough of chipping through thick inches of ice on your windshield after a blizzard. The kind of tough that you might as well just let go and let it be.

But tough as it was I had to leave you this morning. You smiled at me and my heart melted. I just had to hold you one more time. Your arms reached and you leaned, trying to escape Grandma's hold. Reached out to me, knowing I would wrap my arms around you and draw you in. The slobbery open-mouthed kiss on my chin. The giggle when I kiss your neck. The glisten in your eye. All of it was wonderful and beautiful.

And then, the moment I dreaded, I handed you back to Grandma. That was tough. My heart might as well have been sewn to your arms as you reached for Grandma's grasp. Your smile faded slightly as you realized what was happening. My smile, which had been genuine and wide, became forced. It was tough to let you lose.

Though I love coming to this place of learning and sharing, I don't love leaving you behind. I want you to have a good day, the same that I want for me too. Don't miss me, though I will miss you more than you can know. Have a good day, it will be ok. Tonight we will reunite and it will be like the sun pushing through dark clouds when your face greets me.

And all will be right again.

## Competitive Kid

*by Wilma Kuhlman*

Snuglas Andrew was our pet name for him. We might still call him that once in a while, although he's now a 6' 4" adult with two sons of his own. His wife, Kim, may occasionally find Snuglas an appropriate name. I'm not even sure how that became a nickname for Douglas, our youngest child and younger of two sons. In many ways it didn't fit him exceedingly well, even as a toddler. He was always too interested in what might be going on around him, too competitive and ready to do mental or physical battle with others to take time for such foolishness as snuggling with Mom and/or Dad. It's harder to remember what specifically sets up perceptions of one's third child, the youngest in the family. I should know; I'm also a third and youngest child.

Third child, less visible child? One horror story still haunts me, but I tell it because it truly was the time in my life that I was most frightened – terrified is more like it. We had driven to visit family in Jacksonville, Florida, and come back through the middle tier of states in order to see some sights that we'd not experienced before. Our last tourist stop was planned for Crown Center in Kansas City, but we needed to refuel our large dark Econoline van before we made that last stop and headed toward home in McPherson, Kansas. Driving home yet that day after Crown Center was a doable trek, and at the gasoline station, we not only filled the van's gasoline tank, we emptied our bladders. Doug was four, which means brother Roger was eight and sister Sheryl was nine. We girls took care of our duties in the women's restroom, and the guys all headed to the men's room. We eagerly jumped back into the van and headed south on Kansas City's Main Street, a very busy street with traffic lights at every single corner. On the way south those lights politely turned green for us as we moved along. Approximately ten blocks down the street, Sheryl exclaimed, "Where's Doug?" And to our absolute horror, he was not in the van. No one had realized he had not come out of the restroom with Dad and brother. No cell phones, remember? But we wouldn't have known whom to call if we had one. We did the only thing in our power, turned the van around and headed back north. Those friendly lights? They were all red this time. At least that's the way I remember it. I am eternally grateful for a man whose name I never knew, who was in charge of that station. He sat down with Doug and assured him we'd be back. He gave him pencil and paper to draw on while they waited. Doug was by far the least traumatized of the whole family. I can still replay those minutes – 10? 20? – in my head and be close to tears. Doug tells us he only remembers this because he's heard the story from me so many times. It seems that he proceeded comfortably with growing up as a third child.

Doug's parents (yes, that's Wendell and I) didn't always recognize the near-genius nature of this young son. Big sister Sheryl was an avid reader at a young age, and being in kindergarten when he was born gave her and him the opportunity to be great reader and listener companions. Doug enjoyed those times and played, usually amicably, with siblings and neighborhood children, and we saw him as developing very "normally" – a term I've come to mistrust coming from anyone.

When Doug entered first grade, we actually told his first-grade teacher, Mrs. McIntyre, that she could have a good time with this one of our children. He was pretty normal (that word again), we suggested, and would be a typical first-grade student. Thank goodness for Mrs. McIntyre! We went for the fall parent-teacher conference and got scolded with, "Boy, do you ever NOT know your son! Just once, I'd like to sit down with my first reading group before he's finished his assignment and is asking what to do next." We smiled and were honestly rather surprised. Had we really not paid any more attention than that? We'd noticed his brother's and sister's academic prowess, but as may be typical of a third child, we just didn't watch as closely. Perhaps it was also true that he was doing many of the same things as his siblings, and it didn't seem unusual to us. I also went back to school to finish my undergraduate degree in teaching the year Doug entered kindergarten. I hope I didn't neglect him.

Card games were often present in our family. Pinochle was one of those card games. Pinochle, ah yes, that game! Maybe the math prowess was enhanced with Doug's proclivity for playing cards. Both sets of grandparents played pinochle with us when families were together, so Doug sat on laps and learned the game. I learned the same way, but unlike me as a third child who played and then ignored the cards when Dad's lap was unavailable, Doug spent hours with card decks, dealing out hands and figuring meld. Melds are points garnered through special combinations of cards. Often Doug would use multiple decks and put hands together in such a way that he'd have the maximum meld possible. If you're a pinochle player, you recognize the amount of math involved in figuring out those sums. And Doug messed with those figures and cards for hours on end. He'd watch some TV while he shuffled and dealt cards, he'd ignore his mother while he shuffled and dealt cards, and he'd ignore great toys to shuffle and deal cards.

Doug and brother Roger played a lot of pinochle together. I have no clue how many decks they used for those games, but they'd have multiple hands dealt out all around the edge of the large coffee table in our living room. They were always concerned about maximum meld, so it might take more than one session to get that all figured out. Those games could go on for days, and we didn't dare disturb the cards on that table. Kneeling on the floor in order to scoot to the next hand of their responsibility, they'd start again where they quit after they finished dinner, roused in the morning, or got home from any outside endeavor. It was quite impressive – unless, of course, one wanted a neat and tidy living room. Together our sons also created a game Called Crazy, Crazy Eights, where they'd make up a new rule after each hand. With multiple decks and/or multiple hands, deciding which rule superseded another was worthy of some major discussions. Math, yeah; creativity, some; communication, definitely; memory work, absolutely; focus, for sure. Maybe it was card games and siblings that helped build our son's brain – much more than we parents did. And, of course, he did always really, really hate to lose, even in school!

Doug's penchant for academia and, by the way, competition, was exemplified early in his educational life when he entered and usually won math contests held yearly in local and surrounding school districts. His first win in primary school got him pumped to find every opportunity he could to experience that winner euphoria. Placing very high in Kansas State Math Counts competition earned him a trip to Washington DC to compete with eighth graders from around the U.S. and provinces. Grueling competition with four rounds of different types of problem solving challenges for all contestants, it was a time when Doug was in his element. With a respectable place, Doug just plain enjoyed being around like-minded people. He even got a television interview that aired locally. That didn't make him a star, but it was fun.

In general, Doug was a winner, and he was not content with any placement other than first. The pressure he placed on himself was immense and intense. As a sixth grader, he'd gotten only second place in the area math contest, and he was devastated. No amount of reasoning would constrain his feelings of frustration and inadequacy (although he waited until we were in the car before he succumbed to tears.) He stayed in that car, too, for quite awhile after we arrived at home, as he berated himself for missing some unknown problem on the test. It broke my heart, even while it frustrated me.

One admirable quality with Doug, though, was his ability to rant and rave and be upset for a short time. Then when he was done, he was finished with that. . . well, OK, ready to move on. He braced himself to make sure that defeat didn't happen again! Study? If so, I didn't see it! His brain worked in such a way that, until college, he rarely needed to study. I don't know if he has a photographic memory, but once he grasped a concept, it was his to keep and use. I'm sure he'd now say that he's forgotten things, but I'm betting those are very few.

Doug's ambitious goals were not limited to math. He started as a "kid" wrestler in second grade (the earliest we would let him compete) and continued that individual sport through high school and a bit in college, since he hoped he could win a few more medals or trophies. He also competently

competed with the high school debate team, as did at least one other wrestler on his team. Doug and Adam frequently wanted to challenge their wrestling opponents to a debate, and their debate opponents to a wrestling match. Never happened, though. Doug was also happy with the challenge to write. When he competed for top scholarships at his small college choice, applicants were required to write an on-the-spot essay. Doug came out of that room rocking. “I nailed it!” he stated proudly. One of the prompts was to write about a favorite teacher, and Doug figured his lead (did we call them that then?) was going to clinch it for him – and perhaps it did. That line was something like, “With a line of chalk on the back of his pants, Mr. Heckethorn, my Calculus teacher, shouted, ‘You yardbirds are ready for some harder stuff and it’s coming today.’” Doug was right; he nailed it and had a full-ride scholarship for his degree in math with three minors. It’s just the way Doug is. He’s always reaching to mentally new ideas and concepts and put those learnings to work

As an adult specializing in the field of encryption, Doug works to meet challenges to develop new ways for our cell phones or other devices to communicate – or something like that. But I think some of his greatest learning has come as a parent. He has two sons, and they both are defiantly imperfect. Great guys with big hearts (like their dad and mom), they just don’t always have the same drive and passions that Doug has. And they can be annoying, as any young person can be. Doug has learned how to cool his quick-to-come-and-go temper and to learn from those young guys, too. They may not call him a yardbird, but they help him continue to learn some hard stuff. I think he’s up for it.



## SAS-C



Alyssa Hanson, Stacy Oberembt, Sara Breetzke, Crystal Sleeman

## **The Power of Middle School Students**

by Stacy Oberembt

Whenever I tell someone that I teach middle school, they usually react with a cringe, a “wow,” or an expression of disbelief; sometimes they even label me as a savior, someone with a special personality, or someone who is amazingly patient. But, in reality, I see myself as simply a teacher who works with adolescents...because, despite the occasional rudeness, immaturity, impulsivity, and insecurity, I believe in the power of middle school students.

Middle school students are incredibly committed individuals. I have taught numerous students who spend hours after school practicing for sports or memorizing lines for a drama club presentation, to then turn around and devote a couple more hours to homework before dinner. Then they often head to bed at 10:30PM or later. And, remember, they are only 11-14 years old.

Last year, I sponsored a book club which consisted of about ten 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys. Most of the boys would complete the assigned book within one day, and the meetings were comprised of a mix of ten pubescent voices vocalizing simultaneously, crunchy snacks, and the playful pushing and shoving that boys often do. Even though we may only talk about the books for one third of the time, those ten boys wouldn't miss that meeting for anything. They are voracious readers, and they do not pass up committing to a literacy related opportunity.

I also believe in middle school students because of their knowledge. They are so tech savvy; don't be surprised if the next iPhone class you attend at the Apple store is administered by a middle school student! Their intelligence is also evident through their questioning. Yes, I realize that some students ask completely unrelated questions to get a laugh out of fellow students, but for the most part I think middle school students are innately curious about themselves and their world.

They desire the use of their own voice but may struggle with the vehicle in which to accomplish this. They may try to rebel against expensive school lunches by bringing sack lunches. They are using their silent voices to promote change. It may be temporary and overall ineffective, but I give them credit for trying. They may use their writing voice to relay the message that the book *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio changed their lives in a relatively profound way, but unfortunately they are too insecure to voice this to their peers.

I believe in middle school students because they can be mature. Yes, you heard correctly. Middle school students have the ability to be mature. And, I know this through my eight years of teaching. Some of the writing samples I have received from students bring me to tears, whether I am engulfed in tears of joy or sorrow. I have read about the power of prayer in healing Alzheimer's, hope of a cure for diabetes, and the importance of a student's parents teaching her to savor the present moment.

Middle school students also have the ability to act socially mature, as difficult as this may be. At my middle school, numerous students eagerly volunteer to join circle of friend groups to help out those in need of a social boost. These volunteers may be incredibly self-sacrificing one moment, and then as they head back to their lockers, they transform into giggly youngsters racing to beat each other back to the classroom.

That is the paradox associated with being a middle school student. They know right from wrong, but sometimes wrong trumps right. They are blinded by their desire to just fit in. Their hearts may tell them not to say something rude about someone's outfit but that yearning to fit into the popular click tells them to say it because it will sound cool. They are truly jaded.

But I know there are little pieces inside each of them, reminding them to make the correct decision, reminding them to please their teachers, and reminding them that they will get through these hardest years of their lives. They will grow up into Eagle Scouts, professional athletes, businessmen, and even teachers. And that is the reason I believe in middle school students.

## A Visitor

by Sara Breetzke

Yesterday Envy dropped in for a visit much like an uninvited in-law.

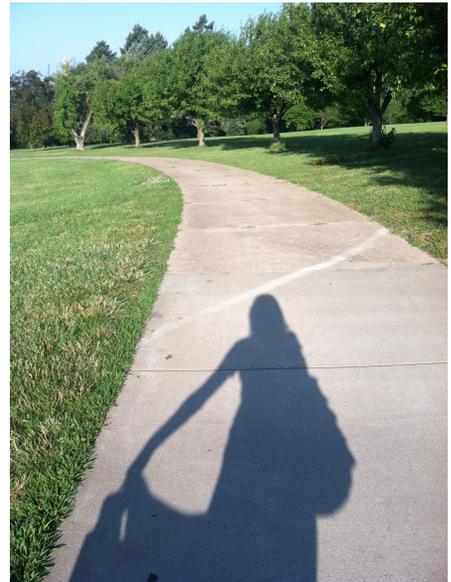
Envy arrives in all shapes and forms – as do in-laws – but you’ll know him by his uninvited questions, probing your inadequacies and reminding you of all the people you might have been but have not yet become. Envy’s questions lingered, forming in me a realization I may never be anything but who I am, and I silently became accustomed to my unwanted guest, as I am wont to do.

I wanted to tell you about him yesterday, but I was afraid he would hear my sobs from his napping spot in the upstairs guest room, and I didn’t want him to know how his presence had affected me.

This morning Envy threatened to linger, but I had class to walk to, you see, and I told him so, emboldened by a bit of sleep and a good cry last night on my husband’s shoulder. He moped and threw a few more insults at me, but I was already out the door, walking down Main Street and humming to cover the echoes of his meanness.

As I walked along I realized something about being a princess (which is what *Sara* means, in case you had forgotten). I suddenly knew princesses must not always *feel* very princess-like. Presumably they sometimes receive visits from Envy, too, but I doubt they let him inside for longer than it takes to sip a cup of tea. While surely they hear his questions, they have acquired an inner strength to insist he must go out! out! out! before his questions stick to the wallpaper and become a daily motif.

I said a prayer as I neared campus, battle scars still throbbing on my heart from Envy’s recent assaults, for lasting inner strength doesn’t just happen overnight, you know. But today is day one, and I picked up my skirt, feeling quite like a princess as I schlep schlep schlepped through the park in my flip flops.



## **Perspectives of a Writing Marathon**

*by Alyssa Hanson*

### **Mother in the downtown Library**

I walk into the downtown branch of the Omaha Public Library. My daughter is intent about getting a book about chickens or wildlife or some such thing. We stroll into the children's section, my hand upon her shoulder, when I see them. Four women, mere girls really, sitting on the chairs in the children's section. Too put together to be homeless or runaways. They simply sit and scratch in notebooks. Surely they must know each other. What are the odds of four people coming to the same place to write? Nothing to worry about, I'm sure. But still, why do they write? Do they feel something extra that normal people do not?

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### **Gardener at the Chamber of Commerce Gardens**

Here I sit, admiring the alyssum grow in its spherical clumps when four ladies approach my hiding spot. I turn more closely to the flowers as the women chatter to one another like squirrels in the fall. I have always felt more comfortable with nature than I have with people. Perhaps that's why I so wanted to become a landscape developer. Plants don't judge.

The women take seats scattered among the tables throughout the plaza and begin to write. Some look around, as if for inspiration, while others slide pen across paper as if they were holding a conversation with the blank sheet.

A pang of jealousy hits me, along with the curiosity of what they are doing. I attempt to casually stride past to see what they are writing. Is it a project? A script? Or are they professionals, writing for their keep? Alas, another day.

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### **Tea Server at Tea Smith**

Work.  
Again.  
Selling tea.  
Again.

Just until my acting career takes off.

Let's be honest. I live in Nebraska.  
Saving up to move to New York.  
Or LA?  
New York?  
Decide later.

Make tea.  
I don't think I've ever seen anyone that excited about bubble tea.

Are they writing?  
"Shot Through the Heart" by Poison?

Yeah, no.  
Change song.

Making tea.  
Being polite.  
OMG I LOVE TEA.

Not.

Still writing? Jeez.

Making tea.  
Talking about tea.  
Tea.

Still writing?  
Maybe I should be a writer...

No. Actor.

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### **Girl in Old Market Passageway Who Obviously Has a Trust Fund.**

Cray. Zee. Pee. Ple.

Seriously. What is it with downtown and “artsy” people? I mean seriously.

I’m walking through the Old Market Passageway. It’s dirty and smells and BIRDS are pecking at the ceiling.  
There are four girls sitting on the stairs and writing.

I mean, come on. Who does that?  
They’re just sitting there.

Am I being punked?

Because really. Who writes?  
...Other than writers, I guess.

## Granddaughters

by Stacy Oberembt

Raised with the wisdom of our grandparents  
But with one complaint:

They don't understand us, our generation

Girls asking out guys

A Master's degree  
A PhD

Rap music  
Reality TV

Oh, but they understand more than we think

Txt lang cant fool 'em

They recall the days of their youth  
Skating rinks, hamburger joints, and skipping  
school  
Drive-in movies, camping trips, and polka dancing  
in the basement

They tell us stories with pieces omitted  
Just like we do

The boozing and the cruising and the stolen kisses

Now the roles have changed

We are the adults  
They are too

But they need us  
In a different way

Shopping for the groceries with a list of Grandma's  
scribbles  
What is pickle loaf anyway?

Lunch dates at Olive Garden and I treat  
"Don't forget your mint," Grandma reminds me.

Suddenly I'm on my knees pulling the weeds  
And lifting the heavy pieces during a move

A layer of dust covers Grandpa's workbench  
Dots of baking flour speckle the kitchen floor while  
Grandma bakes

Grandpa's dizziness  
Grandma's aches

Napping during their soap operas in the recliners

The changes are quite apparent

But no matter what

Grandpa still collects at Horseman's Park  
And grills the filets

Grandma still scans her "books" with foggy, grease  
stained bifocals  
And snuggles with the pup

They still provide their guidance  
And  
They still provide their love

Because

They raised me

And

I'm still their granddaughter

## **My Cat: The Bird**

*by Crystal Sleeman*

My cat: the bird.

She merps.

She chirps.

She investigated with caution as she sticks her fact into anything and everything.

She flies across the room.

She sits at her perch awaiting her friends.

She merps.

She chirps.

She's my cat: the bird.

## **I'd Rather Read**

*by Crystal Sleeman*

I'd rather read.

I'd rather lay in the shade turning pages of cauliflower gold leaf.

As my eyes move from left to right translating minuet symbols of noir.

As my ears drown out all of nature's melodies.

I'd rather spend my day in my sanctuary.

I'd read.

## **Dear Teen Me**

*by Stacy Oberembt*

Dear Teen Me,

I know that you always wanted to be up on the current fashions, but let me tell you a little secret. Bangs, Doc Martens, shirts from The Buckle, Mossimo attire, Banana Republic t-shirts, anything from Gadzook's, and hemp necklaces were just plain goofy! No matter how much time you spent roaming the halls of Oakview Mall looking for the perfect outfit, it wasn't there; it didn't exist.

Of course I'm joking about the clothes, but this all plays in to the way in which you viewed yourself. You were so hard on yourself, and I just want to tell you that you should have lightened up (and probably still need to).

No matter how many A's you earned, how many hours you practiced piano, or how much weight you lost, you were never perfect. You had flaws; everybody does. Unfortunately, that was all you saw in yourself.

I know Grandpa didn't help. The criticism and the constant disapproval ate you alive. I know you preferred to just sob in your room, disgusted with Grandpa and yourself. But, I wish you would have listened to Mom. "You have to just let it roll off your back," she would say. "That is what we Oberembt girls do."

I do want to reassure you that Grandpa has changed in his old age. In fact, I do not think Grandpa knew how much he truly hurt you and the irreparable damage his words caused. I don't want to give too much away though. You will find this out during your 20's. You will learn to forgive Grandpa and yourself.

Do you realize how you had a way of making yourself feel inadequate in numerous situations? For example, you were not an athlete, thus you were inadequate. If you would not have been the best on the team, then you would not have wanted to play. You know you should have listened to Ms. Studnicka when she told you to go out for track your freshman year. I know you finished the mile in the middle of the pack, but she saw something in you. She saw the dedication and drive you possessed that you always brushed off as luck. You do not realize how much that one little decision affected you throughout time. You may have found more success in running as a hobby earlier in life, and you would have had the confidence you are lacking to coach running club.

Oh, wait. I don't want to reveal your future profession. But, I think you have an idea anyway. :)

This inadequacy leaked into your social life too. I know that you thought your life was over when Paloma moved during your crucial high school years, but I want to reassure you that your life went on...AND...Paloma is still in it! See, you have this special way of keeping in touch with extraordinary friends. It is one of many great qualities about you. Accept it.

Oh, and speaking of friends. Pay attention to the new girl in forensics junior year. Her name is Kristin, and you want to hang on to her.

Throughout your life, there will be many times you will think your life is over: like the time you were not invited to homecoming, when you did not get the Alpha Phi mom you preferenced, when you injured your knee from running, when you checked into Research Medical for the third time, and when you found out that the love of your life really belonged to someone else.

No matter how many times you think your life is over; it isn't. Actually, it's only beginning. Everyone has an injury. Everyone is left out a time or two. And everyone suffers a broken heart. Because no one is perfect, including you.

So, recover from those small shortcomings and stand up tall. Because you are smart. You are kind. And you are imperfect.

Stacy

## Unlikely Love

*By Alyssa Hanson*

Tall, graceful

Wet nose

Protector

Loving someone unlikely

Companion needed.

Needed companion

Unlikely someone.

Loving protector.

Nose we

Graceful, tall.



## **Take Me Out to the Ball Game**

*by Crystal Sleeman*

Take me out to the ball game.

Take me out to the temptations of soda, cotton candy, and nachos.

Take me out to the farmer's tans, the beer guts, the back sweat.

Take me out to the shouting, the jeering, the cursing.

Take me out to the wave, the chicken dance, and the mascots.

Take me out to the nose-bleed section with the mini-men running around the bases.

Please take me out to the ball game.

## **Biological Clock**

*by Crystal Sleeman*

Why is everyone moving on but me? Am I not ready? Am I not meant to? Is there something more?

I wait.

I wait.

I move hoping that that will help, only to wait.

Where are you? Why are you waiting? Step up. I don't have time. Everyone else is moving on. I have to too.

## **My Husband Stresses Me Out.**

*by Alyssa Hanson*

My husband stresses me out. Seriously. When you get married, you're under the impression that your spouse will be a refuge from worry, that one part of your life that won't make you want to rip your hair out and run screaming into a dark abyss. But no. I married the single most stressful human being on the planet. He is impulsive. He decided in a matter of three hours that we should buy a house...and get a dog...and refinance my car...and get a line of credit...and change our wedding date two weeks before it happened...and buy a motorcycle...all without any discussions with the person that you normally discuss these big, life changing events with.

It is often impossible to know what he's thinking. A thoughtful face that I think means, "I want to have an open conversation about the future of our lives," really means, "I'm out of cereal." Yet a face that looks like, "HUNGRY," really means, "I should quit my job and become an astronaut!" It's been a year and my ability to read his poker face, or any face for that matter, is still lacking.

He is a child. We have spent hours arguing over the aesthetic merit of a Superman flannel blanket as a wall decoration. His favorite foods come in frozen, frosted, buffet, or O form. I have a Husker shower curtain. I didn't even know those existed. Now I have to plan a bathroom in red and black because God forbid we actually upgrade to something that doesn't represent a college sports team. Oh, excuse me. THE college sports team.

He's argumentative. Whether it's playing Devil's Advocate or just channeling Satan himself, he always finds a way to turn nearly everything into a debate. And I am a TERRIBLE debater.

He's constantly right. I swear his catch phrase is, "You wanna bet?" It doesn't matter the subject. He nearly always knows or guesses the right answer. It's gotten to the point where the few times I do get to be right, he looks confused as to why I'm making such a big deal about if there's mustard in potato salad. But guess what? There is. Nailed it! (In fact, if he ever reads this, he will most likely look at me with one eyebrow raised, or actually say out loud, "That never happened. I know there's mustard in potato salad." Unfortunately, he would be right again. It's called poetic license, dear.)

Normally, people hear me describe my husband and think either, "Wow....psychooooo..." or, "That marriage will last....like a snowman in Arizona during a heat wave." Very few people think, "Wow! What a happy, well-adjusted couple! That's exactly what I want my marriage to be like! Those two should procreate!"

Although the constant refrain of Negative Nancy's judgment of my marriage has become so familiar that it should be my ringtone, I have learned three very valuable lessons from my experience in "the marriage no one wants":

1. It doesn't matter what any one else thinks. Not anyone. Not ever.
2. Love is understanding the good and bad of people. Only those who are extremely delusional think their spouse is perfect. Because they aren't. And neither are you. (I suppose I can't say it was entirely my marriage that taught me this. A good portion of thanks also needs

to go to the Facts of Life theme song. “You take the good, you take the bad, you take them both and then you’ve had the Facts of Life” Thank you, Mrs. Garrison.)

3. My husband is unique. He marches to the beat of his own, off-key drum. He’s creative and hilarious and perfectly imperfect. He is awesome. He loves me and he will love and be an excellent father to our future children. We will hurt each other, accidental and on purpose, we will fight constantly, and we will grow together. That’s what marriage is. And no one gets to tell me otherwise.

So this is it. The love letter to my husband that is exactly what he wants--A book that tells the world just how amazing he is.

Did I mention that he likes to be the center of attention, too?

## **A True Story from Number Ten**

*by Sara Breetzke*

I wish I could say the arrival of a letter was ever a noteworthy occasion at the Breetzke house.

(In fact, as I write this, I will make myself a note to send them more mail, so at least they can receive something worth the pomp and circumstance a letter would seem to deserve.)

As it is, however, Michael and Sara mostly approach the gathering of mail as a brief bit of exercise down the three flights of stairs, intensified by the added weight of the mail on the return trip.

Today was no different. In fact, it was much worse, and if Sara had known what she was unleashing as she did it, she may never have turned the key in mailbox number 10 of the Starford Arms Apartment Complex.

From the box she began to unfold the regular assortment of credit card offers, bills, and ads, nagging requests and stuffing to line her recycling box (which she faithfully uses despite the Ha's insistent refusal to recycle such materials at apartment homes); but at the last moment a plain white envelope caught her eye.

She gasped.

"It simply hasn't any right!" Sara said indignantly, and stuffing the offending letter at the bottom of the pile, she tripped back upstairs to number ten.

Once inside, Sara regained her composure and gingerly placed the mail on the counter, so as not to offend. She picked up a book and buried her nose in it, willing herself far, far from the contents of mailbox ten.

It is perhaps embarrassing to confess that this withdrawal of Sara's was one of her most fascinating qualities. To be most honest, she could disappear at any moment, simply by directing her eyes to a page. Whole crowds have wondered at her ability to vanish from a situation, but today, she could not depart.

It wasn't really her fault, you see, it was that cantankerous letter, which had begun to cause quite a racket from it's new home in the kitchen. To Sara, it sounded a bit like the ringing of a school bell, the clatter of lunch trays, a cacophony of voices bouncing off a chalkboard.

Incensed, she burst from the couch and stomped into the kitchen. As she walked by, she glanced at the envelope. It was a thickish sort of letter, and, much to her dismay, it's flap was open! It had had the impertinence to open itself, as if to mock her very resistance to its contents!

Well, she thought! Two could play at this game!

In the kitchen, Sara began cooking with great gusto, extracting and banging and dirtying and washing all sorts of pots and pans, attempting to cover the letter's irksome sounds. Sara had baked two loaves of zucchini bread and begun constructing Michael's lunch for tomorrow, when Favorite Husband himself came home.

“Hello!” Michael called.

“Welcome home!” Sara replied above the hum of the dishwasher and the *pop* of the toaster.

And Michael began to thumb through the mail mindlessly, as husbands will do.

“What’s this letter addressed to you?” Michael asked.

“What letter?” Sara asked contemptuously. Her eyes dared him to mention the offending white envelope, resting plain as day on the counter between them.

Unfortunately Michael did not see her eyes, quite occupied as he was with the other mail items that he would soon lodge in the wastebasket near this morning’s coffee grounds and yesterday’s banana peel.

“It looks like you’ve already opened it,” Michael commented, and before Sara could lunge across the kitchen to stop him, he had begun to read the first page.

The letter had won, as inanimate objects will do when paired against mortal creatures; and Michael had obliged Sara to confront her future and her fear, as the best husbands will always do in the face of great difficulty.

Sara cringed as Michael handed her the contents of the letter, her schedule for the first days back to school. It wasn’t so bad, really, she required herself to think, and all new beginnings have a certain amount of joy in them.

But she pouted a little as she hung the colorful pages on the refrigerator: even teachers know it’s never easy to begin.

## Year 1

*by Crystal Sleeman*

Interviewing as a first year teacher can be a daunting process. No one wants you because you have no experience. But how are you supposed to get any experience if you can't get hired? I was interviewed 4 times. Twice by my internship principal and twice by unknown principals. I have to say that my internship principal did lead me on. His interview questions consisted of "So, do you think you're ready for this?" Well, the answer to that was of course "Yes!" Naturally, after he gave me the tour and showed me what would be my classroom, I thought I had it in the bag. Nope. District didn't want me because I had no experience. Same with interview #3.

Needless to say, I was definitely in the dumps come interview #4. I guess that was my lucky number though. By the time I got the tour, my spirits lifted. Although, when we went to see my classroom, there was a pile of dog shit on the floor. Definitely memorable. However, when they called to offer me the job, I was elated! I was a teacher!

I began my career at a combination middle/high school in the deep south as the primary 8th grade Language Arts and Reading teacher. The school was located in a town with one stop light and many gang issues. We had one building for middle school and one for high school that were connected by an outdoor walkway. I would teach 6 periods a day with no plan period: 1 period of Reading, 4 of Language Arts and 1 of Advanced Language Arts. When I was shown my first classroom, it was on the second floor and I began moving my boxes in right away. The elevator was really rickety so I decided the stairs would be best to use. Had I remained in that room, it would have been a very tight fit for myself and 32 students though. Needless to say, I was somewhat happy when my principal told me that he had decided to move my room. Unfortunately, that room was downstairs. So down I went with all of my boxes and the Language Arts books from the upstairs room. Down to the dog shit room. The downstairs room had no storage but one of the Social Studies teachers was trying to get rid of some things and gave me some rolling drawers. They definitely came in handy! I spent every spare moment of my teacher preparation days preparing my room. Every lunch hour and any time I had before and after meetings was devoted to my room. Unfortunately, the only places that were air conditioned were the meeting rooms. As my room wasn't one of those, I got pretty sweaty. Eventually it was complete though. Once I had all of my boxes unpacked and all of my things on the wall, it felt like home.

My first day was so very scary like all first days are. No sleep the night before, of course. Just spent the evening wondering who my students would be and would I meet their expectations as well as the school's. I really knew in the back of my mind but don't think I really realized that this would be the most difficult year of my career. My first day was like all first days, the kids just sat and stared at me while I talked at them about the class, what we would be doing, what the expectations were, and what consequences would be. Towards the end of the day, a young lady came up to me to announce that she was pregnant. All I said was "Oh ok. Thank you for letting me know." I wondered if she was telling the truth. She was such a tiny girl. Ultimately, this statement along with the several proposals that I received from my boys, led me to research the ages of my students. Many of them were the average 8th grade age with a small percentage of them between 14 and 16.

Aside from teaching, the first thing I remember doing was being called to a meeting to represent a student I had never met. He took the first week off of school and then came the second week. He was scheduled to be in my 6th period class, but he never made it. He got in a fight in the cafeteria. I guess it was common practice to call the Language Arts teacher to represent the student as the general educator. Unfortunately, I had never met this young man. I felt horrible. He turned out to be a very

nice young man who just had a few bad moments when asked to do something he didn't want to do. For instance, when I asked him to move to his assigned seat and he took the entire desk (at this time the desks and chairs were attached to one another) he was sitting in and threw it at the front of the room and stormed out. He later apologized. Like I said, nice young man with a bad moment or two.

Open house was an experience to be remembered. I had a total of 10 parents come to visit me. I didn't really know what to talk to them about so I just discussed some of the classroom procedures. One of our procedures was to keep up a Language Arts binder. As I explained this to one of my parents, he looked at me with a smile and sarcastically wished me good luck with that. I think it was then that I realized I might be in for an interesting year.

After open house, I was introduced to why teachers did not like to be across from bathrooms. I started to smell some funny smells. I have a lot of family in the Netherlands, so I knew the names of many of these smells. My practice became calling the office to announce the drug of the day and hoping the participant hadn't left the restroom. Black and Mild days were the worst! I had to open the back door and all of the windows of my classroom. Even my students complained of the smell.

Over the next few weeks, the honeymoon ended and the students became rowdy, as they do. When this happened, I felt very unprepared. I used all my tricks in my grad school bag but nothing worked. My last two classes of the day were the largest and loudest so my neighboring teacher lent me her bull horn. This just excited the kids more. They wanted to talk into it. It was pure chaos. I found myself yelling for them to be quiet and slamming my binder onto my desk to get their attention. All of this for naught. Nothing changed.

During this chaotic period, two of my students gave birth. The one who announced it to me at the beginning of the year and one who didn't. The one who didn't tell me wore her pregnancy so naturally that I didn't notice until she was absent for a number of days and I asked the kids. They told me that she was out for her 6 weeks. The young lady who told me, though, I definitely knew about. She was the talk of the class as the uncle of her child happened to be in my classroom with her. To get back at her sister, she got pregnant with her sister's boyfriend's child (after her sister had a baby with this boyfriend). The boyfriend's younger brother was in the same class with the mother...my class. While in class together, he would whisper mean things to her and she ended up exploding by taking a can of pencils from my desk and chucking them at him. When the ladies got back from their maternity leave, the one who wore her pregnancy naturally told me that the other young lady had made plans to go kidnap her own baby from her grandmother who had custody. "Great," I thought, "something else to report." I reported it to the guidance counselor who knew more about who to report what to than I did. I never heard anything more about it.

In addition to the pregnancies, I had a few students I just tore my hair out worrying over. I would go home so exhausted from worrying all day that I would need a nap. In fact, the teacher next door to me began asking me if I was losing weight. Turns out I had lost 7 pounds straight from stress. One of these students was a young lady who just wouldn't work. She would fiddle on her phone but wouldn't do any work whatsoever. Not an unpleasant young lady but a frustrating one. Even her parents expressed desperation when I called asking what to do and they told me they had no idea. I had a young man who would sit in the corner and sleep. I was too nervous to wake him up. He had this presence about him that felt threatening. Hard to describe, but I felt that if I woke him up bad things could happen. I had another young lady who was just, let's say snarky. She would tell me to get control of my class and then turn around and continue talking across the room. For the life of me, I could not get her to understand that she was part of the issue. I had a young man pull a young lady's work out of the turn in bin consistently, erase her name and place his on it. I was heart broken when I discovered how long

that one had been going on. I had two students push me out of the way when I was holding a class after the bell and I had another young man threaten to stab me and smile at me while he did it. That one was definitely creepy. I can take you threatening me and being mad because I know it is coming from anger. But when you smile, that tells me there is something very wrong.

I did have a few students that consistently made me smile though. And not in a creepy way. I had one young man who was very social. He could talk and talk and talk and ignore everything around him. The first time I tried my grad school trick of proximity control with him, I laughed so hard I had to do it again. I would kneel down by his desk so I was at his level and stare at him until he noticed me. It could take a minute or two. Then his head would turn toward me and he would scream. And then we would both laugh with the rest of the class. This was definitely one of my favorite moments, in addition to only one of the proposals. When students would propose to me, I would roll my eyes and let them know how inappropriate it was. Well, one kid I just couldn't reprimand. It was the last period of the day and I was writing something on the board. I turned around to see this young man kneeling on the floor. I just started laughing. I just couldn't help it. He was the only one of my students who proposed who got down on knee. It was too adorable. There was one day when I was feeling particularly down in the dumps because I had had to make so many negative phone calls home. I decided to make a nice one. I called a young lady's home who was quiet in class and regularly did her work. Her mother picked up and told me how she really needed to hear that that day. We both cried together.

I knew very well that I was in need of more help though. I went to everyone I knew of to ask and they really tried to help me the best they could. We tried everything from detentions to rescheduling some kids into different classes. Very little improvement happened until my mentor was able to schedule time to step in. I placed her in a tucked away corner of my classroom so that the kids wouldn't notice her and so she could observe everything. She ended up pulling two kids out for a couple weeks to work with her in the library on their class work and some social skills. She also worked with me to create one of my favorite units. This unit that we created together was centered on the Holocaust and Anne Frank. It really intrigued all students who were involved in it and motivated them to keep going through the unit with positive attitudes. For this unit, I was able to bring in a lot of old photographs and assist them in choosing and researching a topic of their choice. I think the freedom that I was giving them was what they enjoyed the most. I had not trusted them with this freedom before. I thought I had to control everything because if I let them loose on their own they wouldn't do a thing I said. Some students ended up taking their work home on their own accord. This is something I had never encountered before. In fact, I had one student in particular who went out and did additional research during the unit that was outside of her topic because she was so interested in the time period.

While I was trying to conquer my own classroom issues, the school was dealing with theirs as well, but on a much larger scale. During my first year, we had a total of 4 bomb threats. Two of the bomb threats were before school and two were during. I remember arriving at school and attempting to go in the front office and being waved back to my car by the principal, the kids' annoyance at having to leave the school again on another cold morning to go out to the football field, and a co-worker telling me that where we were relocating to during the bomb threats would be the perfect location for a sniper since the football field faced the woods. That was comforting. Turns out one of our local gangs was making the calls on cold mornings as a prank. The gangs also helped out at our sports events. A student had a cell phone stolen at school so that led to a riot at a basketball game in the stands.

Since I had spent a lot of time working with the university softball team in college, our athletic director asked me to assist the softball coach of the high school. I was very excited to get involved! None of the

young ladies who came out to join the team had a great deal of experience with softball but they were out there to have a fun time. We weren't competitive in our district because no one on the team really had enough experience but the girls did have a fun time. Unfortunately, as coaches, we did not. The head coach started going through his divorce a few weeks into the season and began to hit on me pretty heavily. I tried, as politely as possible, to get him to stop. He just kept going. The last straw for me was when I was on the bus with the girls riding home from a game and the head coach was driving his car back. He happened to have one of our parents in the car who was also a good friend of his. He chose this time to call me and ask me how I liked my balls: shaved or hairy. I was in shock. I hung up the phone. The next afternoon, I asked my colleagues at lunch how to get this guy to stop. They told me I had to tell my principal. I didn't get the chance. Before the end of the school day, my vice principal showed up at my classroom door to ask if what he had heard was true. I told him yes and he instructed me I was not to go to practice. I was to go straight home and write down every interaction with him. The next day, the head coach was fired and my principal asked me to take over the rest of the season as head coach.

I was apprehensive at first because it was a small town and images of him coming to terrorize me on the field began to run through my mind. Some wonderful people stepped up to offer me encouragement and security at the softball field, even though that wasn't part of their work responsibilities. It was because of them that I agreed and that I did not want the girls to lose out on the fun they were having. The whole giggling on the bus, sweating together, sticking up for one another during the school day kind of fun. The athletic director came to practice to make the coaching change announcement. The girls were extremely excited. Shouts of "YES!" and "FINALLY!" rang through the air. When we had made a pit stop for dinner the evening of the phone call, he had told some of them what he wanted to do to me. I was fuming!!! But life had to go on. Initially, I didn't have enough help out on the field. My athletic director would not let me get any so I enlisted the help of some parents who were regulars at practice. When the athletic director found out about this, I got my extra help immediately. She came in the form of the town's pastor's wife. She had been asked for awhile to coach softball but had refused because she was not a fan of the coaching staff. I was so grateful for her! She knew what to do when my inexperience failed me. When a student couldn't catch her breath, one of us called the ambulance and one would comfort. When the girls weren't listening too well to one, the other would come down like a hammer and let them know that all the coaches were to be respected.

Despite the craziness of my first year, I learned a TON! I learned I needed to be the rock in the classroom. I should veer away from joking around, or at least keep those instances few and far between. I learned I didn't need to give so many chances and that finding time to keep parents in the loop was so very important!!! I also need to make time to focus on the good. Because no matter where you are or who you are with, there is good. Even though 91% of my students passed the state writing exam, I don't usually think too fondly on my first year of teaching. If I could go back and do it again, I would do so many things differently. I would be tougher, more consistent, and I would ask for help sooner. My biggest regret from my first year is not asking for help sooner. I believe that a lot of the things that occurred, may not have happened had I done that. But, then again, I am a stronger teacher because I have experienced those experiences.

## Northwest Passages



Pamela Rowley, Johnny Kurt, Dawn Lanham, Lana Erickson

## **Time**

*by Dawn Lanham*

How can an intangible concept be so valuable? We can't touch a second, a minute, an hour. We can't wrap up a day and give it as a gift. We can't always depend on a moment to be there when we want it to be. But this intangible concept known as time has a value that is priceless.

On my way home from class I sing along with the radio and think about how to spend the rest of my day. At the top of my list is a much needed nap on the couch. Turning into the neighborhood I contemplate the chances that no one is in the living room. I say a silent prayer that the couch is free. Easing open the front door I see my wish is granted! My book bag slides off my shoulder and hits the floor with a soft thunk. I make a beeline for the couch, plump up a pillow and begin to snuggle in. Before my feet reach the opposite end of the couch I hear footsteps running across the upstairs hallway and down the steps. Over the thunderous excitement of frantic footsteps, muffled words that resemble "Scheels", "gift card" and "driving" interrupt me from drifting into unconsciousness.

My first instinct is to ignore, pretend I don't hear. But a quiet voice inside my head whispers the word time. To my teenager what lies ahead is a chance to practice driving and spend a gift card on a must-have new item. To me, what lies ahead is priceless time with my teen-age son.

## **Dear Mom**

*by Lana Erickson*

Dear Mom,

I was listening to KGBI on the radio this morning and the lady who always visits on Tuesday mornings shared that her uncle was dying and she called and told him how much she loved and appreciated him. She told listeners to not wait until a person is on their death bed to let them know how much they mean to you. Back in high school you wrote me a “I love you when” list/letter that I still cherish. So, here I am, writing to you.

I love you because you chose not to stop at 3 children.

I love you because you chose to finish harvesting and “putting up” apples even though you were having contractions of labor and I would be born in a few short hours after an hour drive in to Omaha.

I love you for choosing Kent and Lorie as my baptismal sponsors. I love you for letting me have so many sleepovers at Grandma Oerman’s.

I love you for doing everything you could to help me feel loved and special as Jill needed and received more attention.

I love you for waiting to send me to kindergarten until I was almost six.

I love you for sending me to Immanuel Lutheran School.

I love you for being the substitute principal the day Michelle Panning and I sprinkled water on the opposing team’s clothes in the locker room and for not letting me get away with it, but instead “humiliating” me and making me apologize.

I love you for preparing casseroles in the freezer for me to make for family supper when you and Jill went up to Shriners for an extended time.

I love you for letting me get contact lenses as a high school sophomore.

I love you for supporting me athletically by going to EVERY game you could.

I love you for supporting me academically by typing some of my assignments for me because you could type faster than I could.

I love you for letting me have “non-traditional” friends. My best friend was Shelli, a 30 year old mother of 3 young boys, when I was 16.

I love you for trusting my driving ability so much that you would read or “rest your eyes.”

I love you for teaching me how to cook, clean, and sew, but also for letting me fish, farm, and get dirty.

I love you for not pushing me to follow your footsteps but were so supportive when I did.

I love that you were and are involved in LWML and that you passed on your love for God, missions, and other Lutheran women, on to me.

I love that you still wear the friendship ring I gave to you and some other friends. You haven't taken it off even if you could.

I love that you trusted me to go on my first big trip without you to Florida with a girl friend I don't think you had ever met.

I love that you scrambled to make it to my first and only college basketball game and that you even attended some college track meets.

I love that you rode with me to my first teaching interview and that they offered me a job - which has been my favorite place to teach so far.

I love that you never told me what to do in important situations as a semi- adult or adult unless I asked for your opinion.

I love that you married Dad and showed me a godly example of marriage so that I am blessed to be married to a godly man of my own.

I love that you took care of 5 month old Paul while I started my Master's studies at Concordia, Seward.

I love that you are a gracious hostess and always have enough food for everyone no matter how many show up, even at the last minute.

I love that you sound proud when you tell people that I have a compound bow and like to hunt. I also love how you sneak in, "Oh, and by the way, have you seen turkeys around your place lately?"

I love that you have helped me raise my children over the years and, literally speaking, still today.

## Mirrored Image

by Pamela Rowley

The holidays, for many families, are often spent rummaging through old photographs and studying the heritage that forms their identity. For me, it's a mom from Czechoslovakian descent, a father from German descent, and two boys that represent their heritage and then... there is me: blonde hair, blue eyes, and absolutely no resemblance to anyone in my family. I'm pretty sure there is a milkman joke in there somewhere. So how do I look so different from my family, but I'm one of them?

The pieces start to fall together as I am back in my hometown. As the weekend carries on, I spend my time lounging on my parent's faded leather rocking chair bored as can be, twiddling my thumbs and watching crap TV because let's be honest...it's Pierce, Nebraska, and there is NOTHING to do in Pierce, Nebraska. Slowly one of my family members meanders over to the built-in cabinet that houses old records, blankets, and endless photographs. It starts with one person and then as in a domino effect everyone is sorting through pictures. As we are scattered around the dining room table, various family members rifle through mounds of snapshots. From birthday parties to family vacations we chuckle at the chubby faces and fashion faux pas. We leisurely pass pictures to each family member and snatch pictures away that are way too embarrassing for even family to witness. There is the picture where we are opening presents at 3 o'clock in the morning on Christmas. There is the picture with my brothers and I standing by Doug and Porkchop at Disney World. There is the picture with my hair in tight curlers because I insisted on having a perm. Then I see *the* picture...

The picture that makes me *me*, the picture that makes me feel like I belong, the picture that makes my genetic make-up start to make a little more sense. My Aunt Becky!! Her sandy blonde hair, vibrant blue eyes, and unmistakable "Becky" nose is me. *That's* me. I have found my identity, and it is so much more special because I'm the ONLY one that carries the "Becky" gene. As my eyes mist over, a rush of euphoria washes over me. I was never able to meet my Aunt...she has only been stories and remember-whens. For me, she was an Aunt that passed away before I could meet her.

From a small child I have lived my life with intuitive glances leading to an all-knowing smile between a grandmother and grandchild, conversations discussing personality similarities, and the astonishment of striking resemblances. I have always been the subtle reminder of the daughter, sister, or friend they lost. They have her childhood memories, first dates, and wedding bells, but I have something much more special...a picture that creates a bond with an Aunt that will last a lifetime.



Left: Aunt Becky with Grandma and Grandpa Pospisil



Right: Me with my mom and dad

## **Naughty Kitty**

*by Johnny Kurt*

“Naughty Kitty” is what we called her. Black, sleek and long-tailed, she roamed the backyard like it was her jungle, jumping six-feet into the air onto the wooden fence that protected her territory from predators but not fencing her in from her exploratory nature. Scaling the fence, Maddy, high-tailed and arched-back, would run across the perimeter of the yard and jump onto a tree branch in her attempt to catch a bird or a squirrel, in her game of hide-and-seek, or “cat-and-mouse,” if you will. Domestic, but wild-at-heart, she lived her privileged life like a lively lion on the loose.

## **Scared**

*by Johnny Kurt*

Baltimore

1972

Raining

Unacquainted

Leaving

Alone

Standing

Alone

Crying

Alone

Wishing

For Home

## **New Mom**

*by Dawn Lanham*

The small living room went completely silent. How could a question I had asked cause four grown-ups to become suddenly speechless? I smiled at the lady in the chair. I was comfortable sitting in her lap. I hoped the answer was yes. My question was simple - "Are you going to be my new mommy?"

## **Boys**

*by Dawn Lanham*

Interesting creatures!

Rough

Tumble

LOUD!

Video games I don't understand

TV shows I can't figure out

One

Word

Answers

To questions I could answer in hundreds of words

Bed time

Hugs and kisses

Stay for another song mom

Please!

I love you mom

## **Of Sons and Daughters**

*by Johnny Kurt*

Your unjust judgment  
Sears the souls  
Of sons and daughters

Like blisters on the brain  
It emanates from your being  
Your utter and complete disdain.

Your puerile pronouncement  
Bears down on bodies  
Of daughters and sons

The weight too much to bare  
It seeps from your sanctimony  
Your position, "I really don't care."

Your reckless rationale  
Interrogates intellect  
Of sons and daughters

Imagination dulled by fear  
It drips from your entity  
"You're not welcomed here."

Your ingenuous infancy  
Wounds the wings  
Of daughters and sons

Flight with broken blades  
It leaks from your own life force  
Your unrepentant rage.

Your aged acumen  
Decries the decency  
Of sons and daughters

Torrents of tears shed  
It merely trickles from your essence  
Your claim "It's in their head."

Your illumination to be achieved  
It must not ravage lives  
Of sons and daughters

## **The Hangover**

*by Pamela Rowley*

Angst, Anger, Agony  
I wish I had seen your warning label

Your friendship was poison  
Destroying me with every drunken rage

While you were hurling insults  
To those you *cherished*

I was dreading my hangover  
From the criticism bottle

The side effects of your stupor  
Impaired my judgment of our friendship

And since responsibility was lethal to you  
Others suffered from your dependence

Being your friend became unbearable,  
Like toxins racing through my veins

So in order to survive,  
I had to detox from our so-called friendship  
and eliminate you from my life

## Viola Joins the Band

by Johnny Kurt

Viola decided to add some pizzazz to her life and join the band. She had had plenty of experience in Orchestra but was becoming bored with her usual inner-voice parts she carried within the strings section. Oh sure, she'd had some moments of glory when a composition featured her voice soloistically or contained the occasional melodic line, but she wanted more.

At one time, she was considered the splendor of the String Family: Her shapely size and curves complementing her contralto voice. Not too small, like her cousin Violin, and not too big like her uncle, Cello, and certainly not so fearsome and foreboding as her grandfather String Bass. Her warm, smoky, and raspy voice, a coveted and celebrated one of not only the String Family, but of the entire Orchestra. Alas, she just was not fulfilled; she craved fame she felt she couldn't find in her String Family at home in Orchestra.

Rather than complain about her lot in life, Viola took a leap of faith and, with *sforzando* and *pizzicato*, jumped neck-long into the mixture of metals of gold and silver that comprised the members of Brasswind and Woodwind Families. It was not a completely foreign land, this place called band; she knew many members of both of these families.

She was accustomed to the rich culture of the clarinets, their African Mozambique roots evident in their massive vocal ranges soaring through the String Family's dense resonance of Orchestra. She was friendly with the Flutes, their velvet, deep purple soprano voices singing the melodies she yearned for comforting her in their work together. She was even fond of the Flutes' youngster, Piccolo. Although she could sometimes be impish and shrill, she also had a sweet and sensitive side. Oboe and Bassoon, too, were old buddies from Orchestra, with their quirky quips and dubious double reed dispositions.

Macho trumpets and groggy trombones were also fixtures Viola was familiar with. They sat in the back of Orchestra, so she didn't have much interaction with those guys. This, however, didn't prevent them from being heard. Their confident and bold – sometimes brash and arrogant – statements of conquest and triumph the usual conversation had by them for all to note.

But this character they call Saxophone! Who was this stranger?

Viola had heard of Saxophone, but she had never personally – or instrumentally, for that matter – known one. She had heard rumors that in some Orchestras, on occasion, Saxophone sat in and was featured for his scintillating voice. Those Orchestras were much more advanced, and Saxophone rarely showed up for Orchestra otherwise. Apparently he was too good for the String Family, often for whom his voice was mistaken for the Violins' own timbre.

Saxophone was an oddity, in Viola's opinion. He had the hue of the trombones and the chops of the clarinets. This didn't make sense to her. She tried to make sense of him but found it difficult because he didn't quite fit either of those families perfectly. After all, what self-respecting member of the Woodwind Family would be made of brass, like the Brasswind Family? And what member of the Brasswind Family would ever use a reed on their mouthpiece to speak? This was nonsense!

In addition to all that, Saxophone often behaved like a clown, with his affinity for vocalizing in the *altissimo*, which made him sound like a screaming, whining, temper-tantrum-throwing child she had often heard in the middle of exquisite Orchestral performances.

It turns out, Viola learned, that Saxophone was a member of its own Family, The Saxophones', but also a member of the larger Woodwind Family. This was confusing for Viola; because Saxophone was made of metal, not wood, it was counterintuitive to her. She learned that Saxophone's voice was created through use of a reed, like the clarinets, and therein laid the family affiliation. There was much to learn in joining the band.

Meanwhile, Violin, Cello, and String Bass notice that Viola had gone missing. They frantically began to *tremolo* in unison, stirring up all of Orchestra. “Where’s Viola? Our chord sounds open without her! We need to find her before the performance tonight!” And so the entire Orchestra Family – Strings Brass, and Woodwinds, all – began the search for the wayward Viola.

She wasn’t too far from home. Down the corridor, in another rehearsal venue, Viola was working hard at fitting into the band. As it happens and despite their differences, she discovered that she had a lot in common with this Alto Saxophone. She sat next to Alto, with whom she shared the same resentment over having boring, inner-voice parts. They became fast friends. Alto Saxophone, however, found that, in Orchestra, he was hailed as a beacon, an exciting, new voice to be celebrated.

Unfortunately, Viola was not able to gain such celebrity status in Band. It appeared there was no use for her, and the members of these Families – except for the Saxophone Family – were not very welcoming to her. In fact, some were downright hostile to what they considered as an invasion of their realm. There had long been a rift between the Winds Families of the Band and the Winds family of Orchestra. Viola had had a vague awareness of this acrimony between the factions of the families but didn’t realize the magnitude of it.

Even though her own conduct betrayed her before getting to know Alto, Saxophones empathized with Viola. They too knew the sting of segregation – from the instruments of Orchestra. In fact, even early in their life, saxophone faced the same exclusionary air from the wind band before becoming fully integrated and accepted as a member of the band. So Alto made a concerted effort to help Viola in whatever way he could.

Alto, although younger, had gained wisdom beyond his years. Chock it up to the experiences of the past that pressed him to persist, he made his way in both the Band, and finally, as a celebrated presence – if not permanently – in Orchestra. Sadly, he knew that Viola would very likely not have a similar experience, no matter how much she desired joining the band, or how hard she worked to fit in. He decided to make it his mission to help her find, in herself, her happiness at home. And so he began.

While some of her friends and family from Orchestra were frantically fiddling about to find Viola, the others were preparing for the upcoming concert that evening. It looked like they were going to have to perform without her, leaving their chords open-sounding and feeling undressed.

Violin, knowing Alto from their experiences of being mistaken for one another, called on him to lend a hand. Alto knew what to do, and together, they conspired to bring Viola home to Orchestra, where she belonged.

Enlisting the aid of Cello and String Bass, Violin talked to the rest of Orchestra about performing that night without Viola – “*The Show Must Go On,*” – as the saying goes, they said. This did not initially go over exceedingly well with the members of Orchestra, particularly the Strings Family, all of whom protested with the familiar complaint, “Our voices will sound open and incomplete. We can’t play without Viola.” After much string-strumming, belly-polishing, and twisting of tuning pegs, Violin, Cello, String Bass, and Alto were able to convince all of Orchestra to perform that one night without Viola...Alto, Violin, Cello, and String Bass had a plan...

Under the pretenses of taking Viola to a Band rehearsal, they plunked her and her bow in her case, took a detour, and headed out to that night’s performance. They wanted her to hear for herself what Orchestra sounded like without her. Surely the String Family’s lamenting performance of open chords without Viola’s voice would convince her to return to her Orchestral Family.

Upon their arrival, the sounds of warm-up from the rehearsal hall wafted into the Foyer. The romantic and melodious flutes singing above reedy clarinets and double reeds, amidst the brassy and raucous trumpets and trombones. The sounds sent shivers from Viola’s tailpiece across her bridge and waist all the way up her neck to her scroll. Then she heard her own Family’s voices calling to her. The arrogant Concertmaster’s leading Violin voice, the shy and demure second and third Violins, the confident and sensible Cellos, and the abrasive and comical String Bases.

When Concertmaster began tuning Orchestra, it was time for all to be quiet. Then began the show. The performance included symphonic works by two of Viola's favorite composers, Mahler and Prokofiev. Through very different harmonies and textures, they each manage to cast a spell on both the musicians and the audience.

But there was something missing in those harmonies and textures. What was it? "A-Ha!" she exclaimed aloud. It was she! Her voice was missing in this music. It did not sound the way she knew Mahler and Prokofiev had written it. Violin, Cello, String Bass, and Alto knew then that their plan had worked. It was a poignant moment for all, but most importantly for her, because it was at this moment she realized she was homesick for Orchestra. The sights and sounds of it all were bringing back to life for her what she was looking for all along. This is where she belonged. This was her home. Orchestra.



### Woodwind Family



### BRASS Family



## Works in Progress



Jennifer Carey, Adam Klepper, Jacqui Carnes, Becky Swanigan

## The “Other” Inbox

by Becky Swanigan

In September of 2011 I was perusing Facebook and came upon a wall post from the group Momaha.com. In it they stated that they were looking for two new bloggers. I hadn't written, much less published, anything in years and as a writing teacher I thought I should probably walk the talk. I had experience being a mom and, as I thought about it, a sample blog post composed itself in my head. I couldn't get the sample out of my mind, so at 11:30 pm on a school night I logged on to my computer, typed the whole thing out, and sent it off to the Momaha.com editor. The deadline for submissions was only a week away, and although I was pleased with my writing I wasn't sure how a professional editor with a critical eye for publication would feel about it. I waited anxiously for a response – any response, positive or negative. And waited. And waited. The day of the big announcement came and the two new Momaha bloggers were introduced – I was not one of them. I waited to receive a message thanking me for my attempt or giving me suggestions for improvement or telling me how the piece I wrote was not right for their publication. I received dead silence. Embarrassed at the rejection and humiliated by the attempt, I tried to put the occasion out of my mind, but every so often, at unexpected moments, it would creep back into my memory, whispering reminders of my insecurities and my failure.

Flash forward to spring of 2013. I was chatting online with my son who was away at college. He asked me about a link he had sent me and I said I hadn't received it. He said, “Check your ‘other’ inbox on Facebook. It's probably there.” I had no idea what he was talking about with the “other” inbox. He explained that clicking on the message icon on Facebook will bring up two options – one titled “Inbox” (the default) and one titled “Other.” I clicked the “other” inbox and there was a message – actually three messages – from the editor of Momaha.com. The first one said that she liked my writing and asked for another sample. The second one, dated 10 days later, asked if I had received the first message, asked me again for another sample blog post and asked if I was still interested. The final message, sent one month after the first, said simply, “Becky, are you still out there????”

I sat in shock, staring at the computer screen. I didn't know whether to cry, scream, or curl up in the fetal position. Here was the evidence that my self-assessment of my writing was correct; here it was validated by a professional editor. My opportunity to be published for a large local audience had been taken away by Facebook's “other” inbox. The editor had since resigned from Momaha.com so there was no way I could have a do-over, but I did send her a message explaining what had happened with the “other” inbox and apologizing if she thought I was ignoring her. I did not receive a response.

.....  
Here is my sample blog:

My ob-gyn used the term “advanced maternal age.” In other words, at age 41, I was an old lady having a baby.

My husband and I already had a teenage son and daughter. For years we had tried to expand our family without success. During my 30s I set and reached many goals: going back to school for a second bachelor's degree, becoming a high school English teacher, earning a master's degree. I spent my 40th birthday letting go of my final, unreached goal: having another baby. Six months later I was pregnant.

My older children were seventeen and thirteen when the baby was born. I've noticed that my parenting style has changed drastically since they were little. For example:

Talking: at 19 months old the baby is one of few words. My son was the same way. I was afraid he'd never be able to communicate verbally. Now he is majoring in sports broadcasting and announcing the pregame, halftime, and postgame for Husker football on UNL campus radio. I know that eventually the baby will speak in clear, complete sentences.

Teething: the baby's teeth are not coming in on a "normal" schedule. At age one she cut her first tooth. She's still teething. If I was a first time parent I would probably be thinking that she was doomed to have the jack-o-lantern look for life, but the older two spent many years (and several thousand dollars of my money) in orthodontia. In fact, they are both still wearing retainers. Those baby teeth can take their own sweet time.

Dressing: When my teenagers were babies, I spent money on name-brand clothing for them. My current line of thinking is to save that money for when the teenage daughter wants an \$80 pair of running shoes or a couple of pairs of designer jeans. The baby doesn't care what the tag on her shirt says. Much of the time she doesn't even care to wear clothing, and when she does, the object is to get it as dirty as possible.

Correcting: I have not forgotten the days of being a young parent and feeling like the day would never arrive when my child would be able to control his own behavior and I could focus on getting the groceries into the cart or finish whatever task was at hand. Now I know that day does arrive. My little boy's bedroom is empty; he's living in a college dorm. I keep his door shut so I can pretend that he's actually in there studying or watching tv. I used to be the center of my daughter's universe; now her time is divided among studying, socializing, and school activities. I'm grateful for the few minutes of conversation we share on the five-minute drive to school each morning. I dote on the baby. She has taught me to truly live in the moment and appreciate both the challenges and the joys.

It's all about patience.



## Children of privilege

by Adam Klepper

Children of license

Lost in the process of finding ourselves

Did we?

Have we ever really had to...?

Manual labor

Discover

Who am I? (Zim Zimma)

Pulsing

with the future and the present intertwined

Energizing Possibilities of

Endless

Careless and Purposeful Money, Status, Sex,

Love, and parties

SUGAR

PLEASURE

Looking for something (everything?) in sensory  
pleasure.

Rum&Coke

chicken and close dancing

smoke and vomit

Oblivious educated children of allowance and  
freedom

Now

Spouses, celebrants, Mothers, Fathers,  
alcoholics, lassoed lovers, Bankers, Lawyers,  
victims, vagabonds, Schoolteachers, members  
of civic society, venereal disease carriers,  
researchers, operatives, adulterers, moral  
supporters, victimizers, drug addicts,  
counselors, mourners

travelers

In every circumstance posterity tightly reigns

Wailers' Reggae rhythms emanate from grit  
encrusted cassette-tape boomboxes on concrete  
block front porch

Robert Nesta Marley's earnest absolute truths  
move us, wash over us, are lost on us, and  
reveal their love

Affirm God and God's creation of humanity

The unattached men of the village

Lanky sinewy dreadlocked undersexed strong

black dis-placed African banana harvesters

Slaves' progeny

Lives determined by violent legacies

Barbarity for luxury

Humans

Wielding machetes

in the name of Dole and Chiquita

Explicit requests for vicarious love and lust

Implicitly desirous

of women hidden from view

Locals longing to leave

A paradisiacal prison

The wise and compassionate and the sad

Say we are all connected

You wanted to stay  
together

On the island

In the village

Where rain drops and torrents

clang then pound The tin roof

Sheltering a single bed

Our impossible escape

To paradise

## **The Red Dress**

*by Adam Klepper*

“Where were you last night?”

“You don’t remember?”

“No,” he said ashamedly.

“Jesus, I had on my red dress and everything. Doesn’t anything clue you in anymore?”

“Of course, I’m sorry, we were dancing,” he recalled as if by survival instinct.

“We danced to our old song,” she regretfully reminisced.

“I need to stop drinking.”

## **Pupils**

*by Adam Klepper*

All humans have in common

Black pupils

Absorptive eye tissues reflect nothing while  
soaking in light

A long developed and refined selective evolutionary trait

Connectedness with the vast blackness of the universe

Representative of our state of unknowing

All humans have in common

## **Diary of a Mole**

*by Amy Lovely*

July 10, 2013

The pale giants above are being awfully annoying. The lady giant keeps trying to undo all my hard work. She comes to my area that I have worked so hard to tunnel around and puts the extra dirt back down the holes! What nerve! I don't plug up her front door. This relationship is going to be strained I think.

July 15, 2013

The lady giant is really getting on my nerves. She seems to think that my tunnels are no good. Can't she see they are fantastic tunnels? I can get all over the place in a flash. My food stores are down one fun, my bed down another, and I can go visit my mother using the highway tunnel that we have perfected. I will just have to move some dirt around until she sees the beauty of my work.

July 16, 2013

I woke up from a nap today to the worst smell! Heavens, I didn't think I would make it next door it was so strong. I was able to escape to the neighbor's place, only to feel the vibrations of her walking around near my tunnels! I suppose I will have to stay here until it is safe to go back home. This place though, had crummy dirt and hardly any worms to eat. Maybe Uncle Mo will let me stay over in his den.

July 17, 2013

The bad smell is diminishing. I think by tonight I will be able to go back home. How did the pale giants stand the stench? They must not be able to smell things like I can. However do they find their food if they cannot smell? Hmmm... interesting.

July 18, 2013

The pale giants are at it again. I've only been back home a short time and already they lady giant is stomping around above my head! She obviously has no respect for personal space. I think I will go over to Cousin Walt's place. Maybe he can give me some pointers on educating the giants.

July 20, 2013

Cousin Walt wasn't very helpful. He said that his den isn't usually bothered by pale giants. But I would rather have the giants for neighbors instead of the flying hunter with the deep voice who is always asking "Who? Who?" Walt has to stay away from.

July 23, 2013

I have decided that maybe the pale giant lady is just confused. Perhaps she does not understand what my tunnels are for. Tonight when I look for food I will take her a gift of the biggest juiciest grub I can find. Surely then she will see her mistake and we can be friends.

## Dear Lovely Mrs. Lovely

by Jacqui Carnes

Dear Lovely Mrs. Lovely,

You have been swindled. Regrettably you fell victim to a scam by one of the ten most notorious rodents on the L.B.I. (Landscape Bureau of Investigation) list. You may know him as Joe-Mole journalist, one of his many alias' –he is in fact - Mickey “The Mole” Jones.

Under the alias Joe-Mole Journalist, his M.O. involves employing the skills of a ghostwriter to pen heart-tugging descriptions of his life as an innocent mole attempting to live in harmony with gardeners and horticulturists alike. In reality, Mickey “The Mole” Jones is methodically sucking you in to his evil tunnel of earthly destruction. He particularly enjoys terrorizing teachers – specifically at the end of summer when they are stressing over a mile-long to-do list; and have less time to tend to their landscaping. I am **quite certain** you will be disturbed to know Mickey “The Mole” also takes depraved pleasure in terrorizing teachers who love to craft. He was most recently implicated in a hit on a crafter’s house where he allegedly burrowed under the foundation, broke through the concrete, and utterly annihilated her scrapbooks containing precious pictures of her children. The miserable, brokenhearted woman had to be so deeply sedated that her husband thought it best to have his mother move into their home permanently.

We are currently allocating all of our resources at the L.B.I. to capture this loathsome creature. Due to his grub-inflated body, his pointy-mucus nose, poisoned-slobbery saliva, minute-beady eyes, razor-sharp claws, and his propensity to reek havoc in the middle of the night when our agents are seeking their beauty sleep – he has, so far, successfully evaded us.

Mickey “The Mole’s” family members *were* his travel companions up until last year – when he literally threw them under the bus while escaping an L.B.I. roadblock.

His accomplices include all living creatures categorized as annoying, disgusting varmints that never should have been created, including – but not limited to - mosquitos, locusts, flies, junebugs, slugs, and sometimes brothers.

In closing, please do not feel embarrassed at being duped by Mickey “The Mole” Jones – he is a career criminal, and an extremely skilled destructor. We advise you to cease any future communication with this villain for the well-being of all humanity.

Sincerely,  
J. Edgar DirtMover  
Director of the L.B.I.

## **Lyric Essay**

*by Jennifer Carey*

Warm embrace. Soft and sweet. Kisses too. Smiling face. Giving advice. Asking questions. Great listener. Always there for me. Smells like heaven in the kitchen. Basil, oregano, garlic, olive oil combine to create a euphoric aroma. Working hard. Never complaining. Taking care of everyone. Laughing together. Food is love. Nana is Love.

## **Commuter Sun**

*by Becky Swanigan*

Blinded by the dazzle  
of sunrise  
I navigate my travel by memory and luck.  
Glare conceals curves in the road  
and oncoming traffic.  
I drive onward  
to classrooms filled with potential  
  
To students commencing life's journey  
Who often don't realize  
That they are simply navigating days by luck  
Unable to see the road ahead  
Through the glare of today  
Seeking promises for the future  
And blinded by the dazzle  
Of possibilities

## **Marathon – ConAgra Plaza**

*by Becky Swanigan*

Water does not hold a shape yet it takes forms.  
Smooth sheets of liquid slate sliding down  
the sides of a fountain  
then dropping, breaking  
yet not broken because  
water does not hold a shape

## **A Letter to First Year Teacher Me**

*by Jacqui Carnes*

Dear First Year Teacher Me,

Wow! You can't imagine how much you are going to love being a teacher! Yes, this year will be the most trying. You may even contemplate quitting the teaching profession at the end of May. Don't. Prepare to be tired. There is no tired like "first year teacher tired". Look for mentors – be sure to find someone that shares your sense of humor, like that Lori girl you will meet on your first day of teaching. One day you will be doing cartwheels, in a skirt, outside her door, while she is being observed - you both will still be laughing about it 29 years later. Ask questions – all of them – especially the ones that will ease your mind of worries like, "Where's the staff bathroom?" "What day is jean day?" There will be endless work – know when to call it a day. Prioritize. Some of your students will come home with you in your heart every night. You **will** make a difference in their lives by being there consistently, showing you care, having high expectations, and accepting them unconditionally. You're going to have a *few* days when all the planets are in alignment with your planning, teaching, and students – Hallelujah – Hallelujah! Many more of those days will happen in the years to come. Laugh often with your students and colleagues. Don't stress over the curriculum too much, it is constantly going to be changing. Your teaching methods, classroom management, and relationship with your students will be the most important factors for your success as a teacher. Snow days will be even more blissful than when you were a student. Join committees – network – know what is going on in your district. Start working on your graduate degree now - that cute guy you met last Saturday is going to be a part of your life forever, along with two beautiful daughters in the years to come – life is going to get even busier. Don't be afraid of change – it is going to keep you fresh and enthusiastic about teaching. It's good that you already know how to eat really fast and multitask – those skills will serve you well. Every August will be an opportunity to begin again. Take advantage of that – always change, improve, try something different with each new school year. Last, but not least, have a little chocolate in your desk drawer.

Love and Hugs,  
29 Year Teacher Me

## **Free Verse Poetry**

*by Jennifer Carey*

Waiting and waiting for results

Shocking to all

No warning or thought

Did

you

know?

Prognosis not good

Cause unknown  
abnormalities in genes  
genetically programmed

rapidly growing

**Evil**

**Malicious**

**Aggressive**

glioblastoma multiforme

I don't want these words to be part of my vocabulary

Treatment is surgical resection with the perilous goal of not impairing brain function

Awake craniotomy at Mayo Clinic or MD Anderson or the Med Center?

Microscopic tumor cells remain

You are my friend. I love you.

## **Farewell**

*by Adam Klepper*

We lingered in the attic room and cried in each other's arms. The future uncertain, the distance great, the participants young, and the love palpable but untested. Mother yelled from the floor below, "Abbie is going to miss her flight!" We grudgingly headed down stairs. Your eyes were puffy and nose red from the tears. I unsuccessfully hid my watery eyes behind big but too bright and transparent aviator glasses.

As we walked out the door to the enormous Ford Crown Victoria that habitually blared rap music which would be silenced for this ride, mother said, "You are going to be late! Do you want me to drive?"

"No!" I responded forcefully and definitively feeling totally like a child. I sped, parked, then we ran. It was late August 2001. We both went all the way to the gate. You checked in still crying. "I know what it's like, honey" the airline deskclerk empathized while offering a much needed tissue.

After a final embrace and kiss and 'I love you' you walked to the jetway and we waved. I watched you disappear down the tunnel. We are sick with love.