

OXBOW WRITING PROJECT 2012



Contents

Acting Like Sheryl

Wilma Kuhlman

Page 6

I'm Angry

Wilma Kuhlman

Page 9

Bicycling the Train Trail

Wilma Kuhlman

Page 10

The Well

Anne M. Lloyd

Page 11

How are You? ... Do You REALLY Want to Know?

Anne M. Lloyd

Page 12

Poetry Slam: I'm Angry

Anne M. Lloyd

Page 14

Letting Your Other Children Live

Anne M. Lloyd

Page 16

When I Met My Father for the First Time

Khalid Al Mashikhi

Page 18

Coach

Jayme Prisbell

Page 20

Phenomenal Woman

Jayme Prisbell

Page 21

Bucket List

Jayne Prisbell

Page 23

El día en que naciste

Cathy Scurlock

Page 24

El día que naciste

Cathy Scurlock

Page 24

I'm a Writer

Jennifer Castello

Page 27

Writer's Block

Kim Gardiner

Page 29

Monday

Kim Gardiner

Page 29

Inspired

Megan Kestel

Page 30

Father Swan: Protector

Traci Glavic Melanson

Page 31

Fortune Cookie

Traci Glavic Melanson

Page 31

What Should I Be?

Devon Ashby

Page 33

Parkinsons

Laura Beeghly

Page 35

Coffee Pot

Laura Beeghly

Page 40

Speed Grieving

Deb Brown

Page 41

The Tupperware Cupboard

Deb Brown

Page 42

The One in the Basement

Pam Vap

Page 43

The Importance of Choosing Dracula

Pam Vap

Page 44

Negritude

Lori Moore

Page 46

Little Man

Lori Moore

Page 47



Group A: Contemplators

*Wilma Kuhlman
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Acting Like Sheryl

Wilma Kuhlman

Our oldest child, daughter Sheryl, was always our actress. Sometimes I wanted the real Sheryl to “please stand up,” yet somehow that actress actually has always been the real Sheryl. Rarely just mellow or neutral, she’s always loved the dramatic. She’d run a little faster or further, climb a little higher, read a little longer book, or cry a little harder and louder than her playmates. And she’d rarely just tell about events – she was the embodiment of “show, don’t tell.”

Sheryl doesn’t act on stage any more. Those opportunities don’t appear much for a mother of grown athletic sons, wife of a high school teacher and coach, and oh yeah, Sheryl just happens to be a physical therapist who not only practices but supervises the physical therapy unit in a small Kansas hospital. Her days are filled to the brim with schedules that can be typical, along with emergency calls that are unpredictable and frequent. So her stage acting days are in the past. But those skills have never deserted her. She just uses them differently these days.

Sheryl first acted on stage as a munchkin in “The Wizard of Oz” in the local community theater. She was probably 8 or 9 at the time. The tryouts were great fun as far as she was concerned. She had a ball as a munchkin. She may even have had one or two lines to say; I can’t remember for sure. But I do remember she sort of fell in love with “da lion” – who was played by a charismatic college student. I don’t remember a lot of specifics of the musical. I do remember our enthusiastic daughter who thrilled with each trip on stage.

The term “munchkin” was first coined by L. Frank Baum in his book *The Wizard of Oz*, and it has subsequently come to refer to small children or anyone cute of small stature. Sheryl isn’t abnormally short, but she can be very cute (when not working too hard) and smaller than the average U.S. woman. I am reminded of this when we shop together for clothes, because it’s often the case that there are no clothes small enough to fit her. Shoes in her size, however, are always the ones on sale, while my regular size shoes are gone before the sales even start. One might not immediately think of it, but because of size, a munchkin can be quite thrifty when buying clothes because when a store carries her size, they don’t sell quickly and Sheryl really takes advantage of those sales. She really is a frugal person as her sons would be glad to point out as they groan while traveling from store to store to find the least expensive item to fit their clothing needs.

Another musical I remember captivating our young actress was “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” adapted for youth theater from the adult musical. During this production, Sheryl actually had some speaking lines and she frequently appeared on stage and sang, all while playing the part of a student – which fit her well. One might even see it as typecasting because Sheryl generally liked to be in school and learn. She’d had her sights set on the lead role of Becky Thatcher, but she really was too young for that part. She may have been a bit disappointed, but she never gave any thought to pulling out of those practices and performances.

Although Sheryl may have seen her assigned part as less than what she felt she deserved, she played her school student role with enthusiasm and commitment,

a characteristic she has displayed since then when she didn't get the highest dollar scholarship, or getting "magna" instead of "summa" cum laude at graduation. Sheryl tackles all life's events with similar enthusiasm and energy, whether or not she gets high recognition by the wider community. Sheryl is enthusiasm and energy personified. Her good friends often need to ask her to slow down so they can keep up. In fact, sometimes I get just a little frustrated when she seems to be showing off and walking backward as fast as I can walk forward – and I'm not a slow walker!

Throughout all her K-12 school years, Sheryl continued acting and singing in musicals, and when she did, she was in her element. During those times – sleep? Unnecessary. School work? "Sure, I can do that." Clean her room. Not so much.

After several different plays and musicals in school and community theaters, Sheryl's young stardom blossomed when she played Charity in the musical "Barnum," based on the life of P.T. Barnum, the showman circus owner. Having heard of Barnum and Baily circuses, but not the person Barnum, I actually learned a lot about the man during this production. And I certainly did not know of Barnum's love of his life, Charity. See, P.T. vowed his love for Charity, as sung in several delightful pieces together, but he wasn't faithful and left Charity for a famous singer. Eventually P.T. came to his senses and returned to Charity's embrace, and with patience and loyalty and forgiveness, Charity accepted him back. It was touching, and when Charity died, P.T. mourned and was never really the same man again.

Never having had to deal with an unfaithful spouse, Sheryl has nonetheless had some bumps in the road with people who have treated her unfairly. Not one to shy away from confrontation when a superior is setting arbitrary regulations that focus only on a profit margin, she has learned to measure her reactions to those unjust regulations if she can still serve her patients effectively. In fact, like Charity, who didn't walk away when she didn't have the support she wanted and needed, Sheryl has fully treated patients without appropriate payment, when the "company policy" sets subjective short patient contact time to keep physical therapists' salaries lower than time frequently needed to thoroughly support patients' necessities. This means that even though the company doesn't reward it, Sheryl is loyal to her patients and comes home exhausted at the end of very long days. Long days are not uncommon for either Sheryl or her husband, Brian, but he'd tell you that she needs prodding to make time for relaxation in her life. She can also be a powerful grouch when she works through lunch and forgets to eat. Brian knows her well enough to stay calm and give her something to fill the gnawing hole in her stomach.

Sheryl's acting "career" continued in college, and she performed in shows that hail from various eras and genres, like the ancient Greek tragedy "Phaedra" (complete with masks), "The Dining Room" (18 scenes with different people around the same dining room table in different eras), "The Foreigner" (a comedy set in a Georgia fishing lodge), and various one-act plays. I've always been grateful that I was able to see almost all of those productions. However, for me, the most memorable of her college dramatic art productions was "Crimes of the Heart," a tragedy with three sisters from a dysfunctional family who meet at their granddaddy's (for whom Sheryl's character, Lenny, has been caring) house after one sister has actually shot her abusive spouse. The plot is complex with sisters who

are very different from one another in their dysfunctional lives. What was fascinating at the time was how very contrary Lenny is/was to Sheryl's outgoing and gregarious personality. In fact, the play's director specifically challenged Sheryl with Lenny's part to move into the space of one very different from herself. It was amazing to watch, and I'd say Sheryl pulled it off. While she was mournfully singing happy birthday to herself with a mangled candle in a crumbling cookie during the first scene, it was clearly not "Sheryl" on that stage. The actors and actresses in that drama pulled it off very well, and I was relieved to talk with Sheryl and not Lenny after the curtain calls.

I can see now that taking on such a different and painful personality as Lenny's helped Sheryl develop empathy for people whose life experiences are very different from hers. While I believe this is a valuable trait for everyone, it seems especially important for one in the medical field. For instance, when I was interviewing a physician after moving, I clearly did not choose a person who was distant, cold, and projected the air of being aloof and divorced from the reality of the real person I am. While maintaining professionalism required for therapist and patients, Sheryl can move far enough outside of herself to recognize how it might feel to be in the situation of her patients. Quite by chance, I met a patient of Sheryl's at a class reunion of my husband's, and when he talked about his work with Sheryl, he marveled at her knowledge of just exactly what particular physical issues he was experiencing with his back. I'm certain much of it was because of her PT training and knowledge, but I also believe her ability to empathize enhanced those skills.

Lest it seem like Sheryl is a perfect person through and enhanced by her acting experiences, I believe it's also valid to share at least one way those dramatic tendencies have been less positive – at least to some people. Both of her sons are basketball players, and the referees who officiate games have been known to make mistakes with calls – at least it seems that way to the fans in the stands. Sheryl does **not** keep her disagreements to herself, and her ability to project her voice, as if on a stage, means that pretty much everyone in the arena knows how she feels about those erroneous calls! Concerned administrators, fellow team fans, and players have directed frowns and urgings to her for less volume, usually to no avail. But I've never known her to be removed from a game, so it could be worse.

The real Sheryl is almost never boring, unless she's asleep. Working on laundry, developing a new patient water treatment swimming pool, or watching a ball game, one doesn't have to wonder about her mood. She exudes it with her actress' zeal. Sheryl now shares the stage with friends and family, and sometimes she's on center stage alone. But I think she prefers it when stage space is diffused among family, friends, colleagues, and patients – each of whom sometimes also end up part of her audience.

I'm Angry: Slam Poetry

Wilma Kuhlman

I'm angry that stupid fill-in-the-bubble tests
rule.

I'm angry that teachers teach limited skills,
"It's not on the test."

I'm angry because students become numb
and shut down
deciding, "I know this stuff," or
"I'll never get it."

I'm angry cause Bill and Arnie and Eli
believe they know what's best
for teachers and kids and have
never taught a diverse group of students every day all day.

I'm angry about publishers' grip
on instruction in schools
selling us on "research-based"
programs that turn off thinking.

It's always all about the bottom line.
Teachers' kids' scores are the bottom line
that feed the important bottom line.
Ticky tacky children must come out the same.

I'm angry because I see both *1984*
and *Brave New World*
in our bottom line education
that ignores real children

I'm angry, but I'm not sitting back silently
and pretending it will go away on its own.

Bicycling the Train Trail

Wilma Kuhlman

Travel with the crunching murmur of
bicycle tires
rolling through crushed
limestone rock.

Bounce rhythmically over
old wooden train bridges.
Loose boards clatter
above streams of bubbling water.

Dust kicks up from tires.
Speedy riders pass us
"On your left," like we
pass joggers and walkers.

Trains powered by steam
utilized this trail on
rails set apart the
width of a horse's rump.

Dumphries, former town of 800
with water and loading options,
now just two park benches and a sign
reminds people of railroad days.

Our first discovery of Wabash trail's
deceptive subtle hills to
accommodate terrain and
steam powered engines.

I
thought
we
were
in
better
condition
than
this!

Steady uphill climb through
surrounding natural beauty.
Legs pump hard,
"I think I can"

U-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-up
then *down* through
canopies of lush green,
cool, refreshing, nature's timber.

Sunlight splashes through leaves
in dapples of glitter.
Riders appear as joggers
bouncing in the dappled sun and
shadow.

Heightened senses invite quiet,
discourage voices and music,
to notice nature's
cacophony of sounds.

Cardinals, mockingbirds, field
sparrows,
meadowlarks, mourning doves, wrens
warble their unique contributions
to the din

of distinctive whistles, chatters,
even forlorn laments
sounding from beside, above,
before and behind.

Cardinals
flash their red quickly across our
vision,
showing off brilliance that
rivals greens and blues and browns.

Rabbit just off the trail
sits and rests with no fear.
Squirrel lopes across
with a tasty nut; maybe lunch?

Butterflies flutter close enough
for corner of eye viewing.
Monarch sits briefly showing beauty,
flutters away soundlessly.

Always the green of trees
and weeds and lavender of wild
flowers,
with the whisper crunch of tires
winding ways on Wabash Trail.

The Well

Anne M. Lloyd

Living life without your child is like falling, quite by accident, into a deep, dark well in the wee hours of the morning. At first your entire body is underwater. You can't breathe. But that's okay, because if you don't breathe, you will die. You're not sure you want to live anyway! After all, dying means that you will be with your child. Then, without willing it, your body's natural buoyancy brings your head above the water. It's your body's survival mode kicking in. You're able to breathe, but treading water is hard work. The water is bone-chilling cold, and you think you it just might be easier to give up and drown. Even that is a scary proposition. Living isn't easy, and it's just too hard to die!

Outside the well, the sun begins to rise, and you catch a glimmer of light. Hope! Hours pass, and now the sun is high in the sky. With the added light, you notice a ladder for which to climb. The only problem is that it is slick with slime. You attempt to scale the ladder multiple times in search of the bright sunshine. Sometimes you make it a few steps and fall. There have been times when you successfully climb nearly to the top, only to make one false move and to plummet into the frigid water once again. Climbing the ladder, like your grief journey, is a long and arduous process. Sometimes it's one step forward and then two backwards. But eventually, you miraculously find your way out of that deep, dark place. Still the memory of falling into the well will forever haunt you.

I wish I could tell you that you will never find yourself in that well again. But sadly, fellow traveler, I can tell you that it does happen. An unexpected event, memory or comment takes you back to the early days of your grief where you miss your child to the depths of your soul. But there is good news. Those days grow less and less. The sun begins to shine more often. When you do fall into that deep well, you have become more adept at crawling out. You are stronger and braver. You find more joy than sorrow in your life, and for that, you are grateful!

How are You? ... Do You REALLY Want to Know?

Anne M. Lloyd

Now, let me set the scene for you ... You are up to your neck in your grief and someone asks, "How are you?" What is your answer? You might respond, "I'm fine." But in reality you and I both know that's a lie. "Okay" might be an honest answer, but certainly not in the early days. Being true to yourself, another option would be to simply not respond to the question and move onto another topic. If that case, if you are lucky, no one will be the wiser!

You could respond by going into a litany of just how you are doing, stating, for example, "Well, on Tuesday, I saw my daughter ride her bike out in front of a car and get killed. On Wednesday, my husband and I did marathon shopping for a funeral home and cemetery, and on Saturday we buried her. Now it's Tuesday again, and it's the one-week anniversary of her death. So you ask me how I am feeling. I'm feeling pretty lousy, but thanks for asking!" You might get away with that in the beginning of your grief journey, but try that response six months or a year out. You can just see the person start backing away, as he gets more than he was emotionally prepared to hear!

But what does the questioner really want to hear? Is this individual simply being polite and expecting typical small talk, "I'm fine, thank-you," or does the person really want to know how you are doing? In your role, as a griever, you become an evaluator of other people's motives. How do you do that? Listen to what they say. Following that brief, "How are you," some people will ask you for more information about your wellbeing. If that is the case, in all likelihood, you've just been given the green light to continue talking. If you decide to unload the honest truth, then be prepared to watch body language. Does the person seem uncomfortable ... glancing away, turning his body away from you? If so, it's time for you to move on to a new topic.

With time, you will know with whom you can bear your soul and to whom you can't. Strangely, you will be surprised that there are a few people who you thought could handle your grief, but they just aren't there for you. Overnight they disappear from your life. A dear friend never calls. Gone are the social occasions that you shared. You wonder why? You strongly believe it has to do with the death of your child, as well as your grief. Perhaps they don't understand. In all likelihood, they are uncomfortable and don't know what to say or do. Not to make excuses, but truly, by the grace of God, they don't understand, and for that, we should be grateful. You could make the move to nurture this lost relationship, but in your state, you simply don't have the energy. Some of those people, in time, may come back to you. And perhaps it just might be you who makes the move to rebuild your lost friendship!

Equally surprising, you will find new people who come into your life who are your best supporters! These are the people who understand you and reach out to you. They are the shoulders on which you can safely and comfortably lean. They pick up the phone and call – not just for the first month, but for years to come, as they remember your child's birthday, as well as the anniversary of the death. These dear

people know that you struggle during the holidays. Intuitively, they realize that at each holiday you mourn the empty dining room chair, as you wish for the impossible. They bring up your child's name in conversation and call her by name. These new people understand your sadness and aren't afraid to deal with your tears. They ... are your new angels.

So fellow travelers in grief, we are unique to the rest of the world's population. Being new in grief influences our relationships. They are scrambled. We lose some friends, and we gain some friends.

And when an outsider asks the simple question, "How are you?" ... Well, it just depends ...

Poetry Slam: I'm Angry

Anne M. Lloyd

I'm angry that we cleaned your room that day in June, when we should have been playing outside and enjoying the world.

I'm angry that I allowed you to call a friend to come over.

And I'm angry, because the two of us were impatient, and I suggested we go down the street to meet your playmate.

I'm angry that I let you ride your bike, even though your helmet on. If only I had simply said, "No, not today."

I'm angry with the seventeen-year-old driver. What on earth was he doing as he drove up the road? Was he fiddling with the radio? Was he looking at his new video rental? He says he saw you in our driveway, so why didn't he keep watching you?

I'm angry that you weren't watching what was going on in the road.

I'm angry that when you saw the car coming up the road, you panicked and used your feet to brake instead of the pedals. I know you could have stopped, if you only had been thinking logically and used the brakes.

Taking it one step further, I'm angry with you for doing something stupid. If you couldn't stop, you could have ridden left or right or even fallen off your bike, but instead you rode your bike out in front of a car!

I'm incredibly angry with myself for being angry that you did something stupid.

And I am angry with myself. At that moment, you were scared and as your mama, I couldn't calm your fears or help you make wise, snap decisions.

And still more anger with myself ... Why didn't I run after you? If I had run after you, would the outcome have been different?

I am angry that I covered my eyes when you were hit. I'm your mom, and it was my responsibility to see what you endured.

And I'm angry with the driver. How could drive past our house and our neighbor's, too before he ever knew he hit you?

I'm angry that your shoe went flying across the road, and that you lay on the street in front of our driveway without being able to utter a word; we never spoke again.

I'm angry that they took you away in the ambulance, and I had to sit up front with the driver instead of with you.

I'm angry that I had to make phone calls over the ambulance's screaming siren, to alert my husband and son. My husband needed to get home from El Paso, and my son needed a safe place to stay.

I'm angry that they didn't let me stay by your side in the hospital. You cried out for me. You were so close, and yet so far away.

I'm angry that I learned you were in critical condition, not from the doctor, himself but because he told the police officer, who stood across the hall from me.

I'm angry that a doctor told me that you probably weren't going to make it. He tried to comfort me saying you were everyone's little girl right then, and he would try his best, but I was hearing the news that no mama should ever hear.

I'm angry that I was taken to a little room where bad news is told.

And now I'm angry that God has another angel.

But I'm still here ... But I'm still here.

Letting Your Other Children Live

Dedicated to John

Anne M. Lloyd

Why don't most of us buy life insurance for our kids? The answer is simple ... what are the chances? Kids don't die, but as adults, we might. That's why we purchase life insurance.

How about this question? Does lightning strike twice? Not typically, but when one of your children dies, you aren't going to take any chances! You will protect surviving children to the ends of the earth.

With the death of our child, we are thrust into situations where we delicately weigh the pros and cons of our decisions. Are we being over protective, or are we just doing what parents are supposed to do ... protecting our children and raising them to be responsible adults?

For me, the fine line between being overprotective and letting my child live was always on my mind, as I raised our son, John. John lost his sister, Shannon, when he was ten years old. As he grew into adolescence and beyond, as all kids do, he began to question his parents' authority. He'd complain we were being too strict and nothing was going to happen to him. After all, he wasn't Shannon!

And of course, since I was already concerned about being over protective, I took to heart what he said. I had to weigh with my mind, more than with my heart. Not an easy task after you lose a child! I often relied on friends who had children his age. What rules were they enforcing? How did they feel about a middle school student going to the movies? What were their children's curfew times? Could they go downtown after school? I have to admit to deferring to my friends' judgments on many occasions. I'd rationalize to our son, "None of your friends' moms are allowing their child to ..."

You can only imagine that didn't sit well with John, as he responded back to me, "Well, your friends are too conservative, and just because they don't let them do.... doesn't mean I shouldn't." But I dare to say, those moms saved John from his overprotective mom on many occasions, even if he never knew it! And no, I didn't always like their advice, but then again, I knew I needed to think with my head, not my heart!

All of us have guilt issues about our child gone too soon. How many of us have thought, "If we knew our child was going to die early, we wouldn't have made them do this, or we would have done that." In my case, I would have purchased the beautiful pricey dress that she really wanted. It wouldn't have been that big of a deal! On the flip side of the coin, I wouldn't have insisted that she drill skip counting by twos to one hundred, each time she towel dried her hair! It all seems so trivial now!

But we have our surviving children. For many of us, these thoughts transfer over to them. Again we experience a balancing issue. Are those math facts really important? Money isn't everything! He really wants that cell phone, the iPod, the car. Do we get it for him? Life is short! But then again, we're supposed to be raising these

children to be responsible adults. Balancing the scale is more difficult when a child has died.

Back to lightning striking twice ... Our daughter, Shannon, was killed when she rode her bike out in front of a car. Fast forward to John being nineteen years old. He wanted to ride his bike to his summer job. Did I really want that? NO! But thinking with my mind, as opposed to my heart, I allowed him to do so, but not without a stern lecture on being careful. So on a regular basis, John would truck off on his bike, traveling bike trails and busy streets. By some freak chance, John too, was hit by a car. Fortunately, the outcome was much different. A bent tire rim, cuts and bruises, but he was fine. Did I make a mistake by agreeing to let him ride that bike? Absolutely not! I was letting him live.

Wrapping him safely in a cocoon is not the answer. Did I make mistakes along the line giving John too much? Should I have been stricter? Should I have let him do more things? Did I give him too much? The answer is, "Yes, to all of the above." But when all is said and done, I have raised a wonderful child, whom I am proud to call my son.

Maybe we should purchase life insurance for our babies. Maybe lightning does strike twice, but the chances are that it won't. So with that in mind, raise your children to be fine upstanding individuals who can go out and conquer the world!

When I Met My Father for the First Time

Khalid Al Mashikhi

It was Thursday September 8, 1994 at around 9 am when I walked into my cousin's living room that was crowded with men. Most of them were strangers. In the middle of the room there was a thin, tall man with grey hair. I knew he was my dad. My father, a stranger. My father, a man who had left when my mother was pregnant with me. I was 14; he was 42 years old.

Meeting him for the first time, a hundred questions jumped to my mind. Why did he leave? Why did he never appear to make contact? And what on earth would we have in common?

When I walked into the room, I knew immediately it was him. He looked older than I'd imagined. The only images I'd had of him were yellowing photos from the late 1970s. He was taller than I thought he would be and looked annoyingly fit (his passion is horses). His jacket was well worn, he was smiling. This was my father.

(Give your mother the credit. Bring

Face-to-face, the questions I had prepared to ask him evaporated. Words truly failed me. Here was a man, charming, funny, and all too human just as my mom had always described him. Not the selfish, cruel, careless guy, I had in mind.

I felt no desire to hug him. I wanted to stand in front of everyone and shout: "Why did you never bother with us?" "Why did you leave us?" "Why did you let my mother face the world a lone" "why didn't you believe in your children like their mother did?" "Why did you believe in war instead?"

The story began in the small town of Salalah in the southern part of Oman. Unlike many of their peers at the time, my mother and father had chosen to get married after years of a love story. The revolution against the dictator started 3 years after the marriage. My dad like most men in the country was part of the war. He wanted freedom, justice and equality for everyone. The new leadership came into power with a new vision for the country. A vision based on education, peace and justice for all. It was 1983 when he gave up on the country and "lost faith" on change as he explained to mom. He tried to convince my mother to move with him to Syria. The wise lady decided not to raise her four kids in a foreign country because schools had started in every town and village around the country. He lived and worked in Syria before he moved to Yemen where he got married to a local woman. In the meantime my mother was responsible for four kids in very difficult circumstances. We lived with my grandmother so she could take care of us when my mother goes out to work and bring food to the house.

Now after 14 tough years for everyone in the family, he decided to show up in my life. I found myself examining him like a laboratory specimen. His hands, the hair, the facial features and mouth that I had been told by family members, were identical to mine.

If I sound somewhat unemotional about meeting him for the first time, the truth is that I was. There was no feeling of anger or relief, no need for tears. I could not recapture something I had never had, and to try to do so would have been futile, if not self-destructive.

.But I liked him and I feel better for at least now knowing him, although in truth I still sometimes don't. What I do know is that when I have children, I could never leave them. Maybe it's a different era, different society. Maybe, although we are father and son, we are different people. But that, perhaps, is a topic for another personal writing time.

Coach

Jayme Prisbell

Attn Getter: English writer Lady Dorothy Nevill once quoted, “The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” For many, this task can be very hard to do, especially for high school students figuring out who they are and what they want in life.

Students fear standing before an audience to give a speech like the plague, yet once a student takes a speech class, they are often impacted in many ways. If you cannot communicate well; you cannot succeed. You may be highly talented, but if you don't have the right attitude when speaking you cannot effectively deliver your points to the audience, then you will surely be left behind irrespective of your position. People assume speech is something related to speakers who talk to a huge audience, debate (not the formal debate format), or a remedial class for students who have a speech disability.

Thesis: In truth, speech courses are intended for three purposes – motivating the audience, educating the audience or entertaining the audience while fine tuning speaking skills and building confidence. At the beginning of each year, I walk into 029 to discover a group of kids who may have never seen each other, who many have never taken a class together, or who may only know that the person sitting next to them attends Central. This year there was even more buzz regarding Speech because it would be the first time in 15 years Central has competed in tournaments. In addition, I learned very shortly before the year began, the administration merged two separate courses into one classroom, thus a class twice the size it should have been. Though I have spent the last 4 years rebuilding a program that was almost a lost cause, I am very proud to say that it is back and fully functioning.

Adding fuel to fire, I am suddenly a coach! By definition a coach tutors, instructs, or provides information to his or her pupil(s).

Restate Thesis

It has been an amazing year that has allowed me to watch each student in this class grow as a speaker. There are days when I have wanted to shake some of you and days when I beam with pride. Though I knew this program would be re-built, never in my wildest dreams did I imagine it would be what it is today. Next year I have 5 sections of Speech. When I look back over the last few years...it still amazes me that it has become what it is today. And for you I am thankful. Your passion, partnership, enthusiasm, and hard work has contributed to the success of this program.

As the year comes to an end, it is important to remember that a chapter is ending for another one to begin.

End with Maya A.

Phenomenal Woman

Jayne Prisbell

I believe that every person in their own unique way creates a legacy in their lifetime by which others can live long after that person has left us. For those of us who remain, Marion Dorothy Timmermier Payton has truly created a legacy to uphold and fulfill in our daily lives. I know she is happy and content with what she left us.

Born before there was such a thing as cell phones, television, and the internet; my grandmother was one of the hardest working women I have ever known. She shared a lot of first-rate memories with my mother and I over the years. We shared lots of things together and she was one of my favorite mentors...in fact a hero to me. A heroine as defined in the Webster Dictionary is a woman of distinguished courage and admired for her brave deeds and noble qualities...and after speaking too many of my gram's family and friends over the last year, it was affirmed these are the qualities my grandmother carried.

My grandmother was a very strong woman who loved knowledge, history, and learning. She was an excellent adviser. Since childhood, I often would seek her advice and even if I didn't finish what I wanted to ask her she already had an answer or a suggestion. She was the kind of person that would think about other people before herself. She never liked asking for help but she was always ready to lend a helping hand to others. She would do everything in her power to help people and animals...including her passion and love for the Wetlands; leading her to volunteer in her time as a book keeper and educator at Heroine Haven.

Marion continues to remain a figure of unconditional love. Love was the major fabric by which she created her tapestry of life. In the raising of her own children, the teachings of her grandchildren, and in how she welcomed in new family and friends, her unconditional strong love is what has made our family what it is today and what will keep us together from this day forward. She truly defined the word family as I have come to learn and live it. Holidays and family gatherings were the celebrations they were because they were surrounded by Gram's love.

Another element of the legacy that Marion has left is that of integrity. She bestowed such a high level of importance to honesty that it made it impossible for her children to act otherwise. "Let's double check with grandma" is an expression that I'm sure we can all relate to whenever we questioned something. Just when I would think that something might pass Grandma by she'd have a quick comeback such as, "I may be old Jaymes, but I'm not an idiot!" And it's true - Grandma always did indeed know.

If all of what I've mentioned is the fabric in the legacy that Marion created then I think all of it is framed by her sense of joy. Grandma's sense of joy for life was enough to make us all smile no matter the circumstance and befriend those she may

have barely known. I know that we all have our own examples of moments when Grandma would make us unexpectedly laugh and laugh and it is her contagious radiant smile that we all will never forget. It might have been the laugh after her letting me beat her for the hundredth time during a game of Go Fish or enjoying her time sitting on her deck drinking coffee while working on her crossword puzzle. One thing is certain and that is that we all will continue to hear her laughter and remember Grandma's joy can maybe help us all to not take life so seriously; as she always taught me.

It is all of these elements love, family, integrity, and joy that are fabrics by which Marion created her tapestry of life. However each us knew her: Marion, Mom, Grandma, Aunt, or Gram she wouldn't want us to be sad...she would want us to remember her and what a great life she had. Amelia Burr once quoted, "Because I have loved life, I shall have no sorrow to die." And this is exactly how my grandmother felt.

Grandma ... you mean more to me than you can possibly imagine. Whatever distance geographically has now come between us, you can look down upon me and know that I personally accept the incredible honor and responsibility of carrying on your heritage. You have created your own dynamic legacy of love, family, integrity, and joy. It is now your time to rest, sit back and see the world. Take that trip to Hawaii you always dreamt about and take care of our loved ones already gone, and know that the world is a better place for the legacy you've created.

My grandma was 93 years of age when she died and really was a remarkable woman. Outspoken, strong, and courageous, she influenced the lives of many, many people over the years and I know when I speak her name and tell her stories....she will live on through me. She is a PHANOMINAL WOMAN!!!

Bucket List

Jayme Prisbell

Over the last few years, I have been exposed to more heartache and loss than I ever thought possible for one person. Losing 6 people that were an intricate part of my world in a span of 4 months not only took a toll, but it also made me realize the physical part of our lives can become very disposable...leaving me...the living with two choices:

1. Wallow in sorrow and depression or
2. Deciding I must preserve and enjoy every experience as if it the last one I would have.

My plan, to live vicariously through my dreams to achieve memories vivid and rich throughout the rest of my living years; thus enters the Bucket List. This clearly isn't a new idea, but it is one everyone can get something out of. Whether its travel, career, personal or a mixture of all three, everyone needs to have a clear list written out of their goals to even begin on the path of reaching them. After all, how are you ever expected to achieve something when you don't even know what it is?!

Setting goals and check lists seem like an endless daunting task that I have decided I am going to make and begin a journey of wonder and amazement. I realize at 32 I have had a wonderful life thus far, but there is so much more to do before I leave this earth...and I asked myself how to I set a life goal and do I really need a goal to if I want to be successful? The more I think about it, the more I know for sure goals are essential in all areas of life. While I often set a lot of mental goals/checklists for myself every year, month or week, I've gotten quite lazy in writing them down and in some cases making them a reality.

In truth, it can be scary to acknowledge the exact things you want from life. You could literally freak yourself out if for one second you believed there was a chance you could never obtain your goals or dreams. Nevertheless, I believe in the power of the mind, and if you are ever going to have a shot at reaching the top...you must put pen to paper (or fingers to keys) and confirm to yourself you are capable of achieving your goals and dreams and believe you do it and we will.

My Bucket List is a mixture of travel, career and other personal goals that once seemed off the wall, but now that they are being written down they have become much more attainable. So, I urge everyone out there if you haven't begun to think about what you want from your life start today. Once you begin to compile your list...you find yourself beginning the journey of your life.

El día en que naciste

Cathy Scurlock

La doctora nos había dicho que nacerías mas rápido que tu hermana, Melina. ¡Melina llegó a la hora de llegar al hospital! Entonces puedes imaginar la emoción cuando rompí fuente a las once de la noche y estaba llamando al hospital diciéndole a la enfermera que estábamos en camino, que tenía que llamar a la doctora en aquel momento porque ibas a venir rapidísimo! Tu papá y yo estuvimos preocupados que no íbamos a poder llegar al hospital con suficiente tiempo. Además teníamos que manejar, solamente unos cinco minutos de la casa – pero, recuerda que ibas a venir con prisa - tuvimos que llamar a “omi” para que recogiera a tu hermana dormida. Gracias a Dios, llegamos a tiempo y tu nos conociste a las ocho de la mañana siguiente...no había nada de que angustiarnos.

Mi hijo sin prisa,
Andreas



El día que naciste

Cathy Scurlock

Era un día normal en el trabajo...pues casi normal. Organizaba la clase y las lecciones para el sustituto en preparación al día en que no podría trabajar debido a tu nacimiento. Era el veinte de septiembre, e ibas a llegar en cualquier momento porque la doctora me dijo que ibas a nacer el veintiuno de septiembre. Las contracciones empezaron al medio día, cuando todavía estaba en la clase, pero no me di cuenta que estabas casi lista para llegar a mi mundo.

Sara estaba conmigo y empezó a ser tu tía aunque no la llamarías “tía” hasta unos años más adelante. A medida que crecías dentro de mi nuestra amistad empezó a crecer. Cuando paré un momento apoyándome en la mesa sin poder respirar un segundo, Sara me dijo “¡Vete a la casa para relajarte; no debes trabajar tanto en tu condición!” Pero fue algo subconsciente. Trabajaba como un pájaro arreglando todo el nido en preparación.

Más tarde, en nuestra casa con tu papá, cociné la cena y después de comer, fuimos a un paseo con “Gus,” nuestro perro grande y “Lily” nuestra perra más activa. También tu tía Sara vino con una amiga a recoger un mueble para su apartamento. Era como todos los otros días. Todavía no nos dábamos cuenta que estabas en camino...y las contracciones no habían parado. Se sentían como unos retortijones en el vientre, pero no eran muy fuertes.

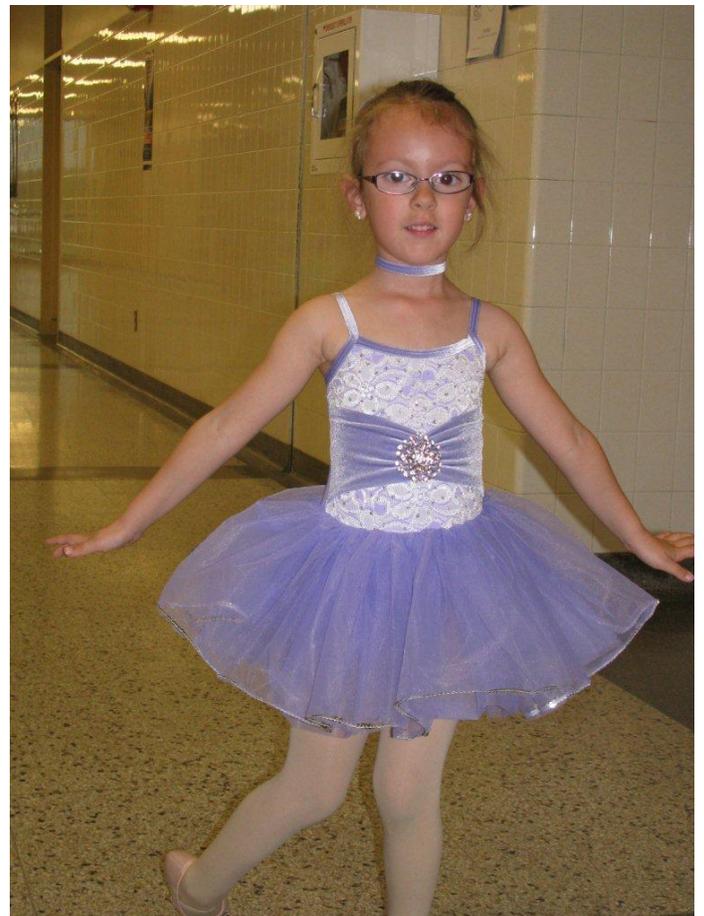
Pasé la noche como las otras, mirando la tele con tu papá...finalmente pensamos que era

algo diferente. Las contracciones continuaron, pero ahora más fuertes. Estábamos preocupados por no saber mucho del proceso de parto, aunque leí el libro “Qué puedes esperar cuando estás esperando” como si fuera la Biblia. Llamé al hospital y pregunté a la enfermera si estábamos en el proceso de parto. Ella me respondió que si tenía que agarrarme de una silla durante las contracciones, estaba lista para tener el bebé y que teníamos que ir al hospital. Pensamos que teníamos tiempo, no íbamos a venir por horas, porque así es como es el proceso de parto y no me estaba agarrando de las sillas.

Eran las once de la noche, nos preparamos para acostarnos. Acabé de ponerme mis pijamas cuando rompí fuente, pero todavía no teníamos prisa. Fue unos momentos más tarde, cuando me pasó una contracción en que ¡yo quise agarrarme de una silla! Todavía pensábamos que el proceso de parto iba a durar horas, pero el dolor era inmenso. Mientras tu papá manejó al hospital, las contracciones continuaron y yo pensaba “¿Cómo podría aguantarme todo eso por horas?!” ¡Pero no tuvimos horas! Después del dolor que me causó la mano de la enfermera porque sentí que estaba casi completamente en mi estomago, ella nos dijo que ¡ya la cerviz estaba nueve centímetros dilatada! Tampoco iban a darme un epidural, al contrario trajeron todo a mi cuarto porque iba a necesitar el doctor para ayudarme a darte a luz.

Allí estaba, con el dolor inmenso de las contracciones, sin el alivio de la medicina, lista para pujar para traerte a mi mundo (¡y fuera de mi cuerpo!), y viendo a tu papá tan nervioso a punto de desmayarse, cuando el doctor entró en el cuarto con su santa paciencia. Él hablaba de una o otra cosa, no recuerdo qué estaba diciendo, sólo lo que yo le dije...” ¡ven acá a agarrar a mi hija...ya está saliendo!” Y solamente pujé tres veces y de sorpresa llegaste a unos minutos antes de la una de la mañana!

Mi linda
hija, mi Melina.





GROUP B: Green Chairs

*Jennifer Castello
Kim Gardiner
Megan Kestel
Traci Glavic Melanson*

I'm a Writer

Jennifer Castello

It's difficult. When people ask me what I am, I think to myself, "I'm a writer." But you can't say that and be totally sure of it unless you're Stephen King or Joan Didion or someone else of equal impressiveness. And don't those guys ever feel unsure of their supposed career, too? I have a writer friend who now has her book out and she's hot stuff and I still can see that she's not sure of her writer status. I heard Steve Almond speak and he said that moment of being sure never really comes. Ever.

Writing isn't like a profession that constantly assures you that it isn't a figment of your imagination. No one ever says, "I'm a lawyer, I think."

"Oh, are you a professional lawyer?"

"Well, I dabble in it, but I can't ever really find the time. I did have that one case, though. Perhaps you've heard of it."

No, writing is not like teaching, where you have an ID with your name prefaced by a Miss or Ms. or Mr. or Mrs. And it's not like your paycheck has a steady insurance policy. There's no boss telling you every day, "You're a writer and you'll darn well act like one!" There are no co-workers to kvetch about that one chapter you can't get through. There is no water cooler, no cubicle. No, nothing but a laptop and a bag of Cheetos you know you should not be consuming.

Writers spend their whole lives in that uncertainty that they are in fact living an elaborate hobby and they are a hack. We have one foot in legitimacy and the other foot in the crazy.

I'm sure one day I'll wake up and say to myself, "Yes, I have proven to myself that I am a writer." But I'm now one book and one anthology in, along with an extensive list of prominent professor buddies and numerous amounts of AWP conferences attended ... and I still know I'm not as cool as some of the other kids.

But honestly, does it really come down to being the coolest? I guess some would answer yes. I've met some writers --- one particular writer on the plane back from DC last year --- who think that talking about journals and trying to impress people with their black framed glasses they stole from the movie theatre when they went to see *Avatar* is the pinnacle of success and proving oneself. And I say this because I in the past have been one of these terrible little trolls. But who are we trying to impress? Do we write to be cool? Do we write to get accolades?

I think the real writers write because they've got a story that they have to share with someone. Think about it. The best stories come from that one guy who bursts into the living room and says to his roommates, "You will not BELIEVE what just happened in the elevator!" Or that mom that is trying to tell her kids just how awesome their grandma was and how sad it is that they won't ever know her. Or what about the "How did you meet?" story every couple has? And more fantastically, what about those people who can't stop thinking about a dream they had and just have to describe every single detail to you? Those are usually the most compelling pieces of literature I've ever heard.

I feel like we should write for the sake of writing. That very same plane ride from DC with McHipster, the plane shook and I thought for a minute we might die

above Kentucky. And I didn't think about Jeff (sorry Jeff), and I didn't think about my parents. My very first thought was, "Well, wonderful. My book didn't get published yet. I hope there's an updated copy somewhere accessible to Paige or Jeff, because that thing really needs to get out."

I think that's what it's all about. Legitimate and crazy, I think that's the heart of writing.

Or what do I know. I might just be a hack.

Writer's Block

Kim Gardiner

What to write, what to write
I think that I have writer's block
I sit on this chair
I stare in the air
Then down on the paper
That is looking quite bare.
The rest of the group is all typing or writing
I wonder how they know what to say.
Maybe I'll know on another day.

Monday

Kim Gardiner

It's the first day of a new week
It's a day full of hope, with surprises, and for others with grief
For some it is time to plug right along
For others, apprehension about what is to come
I heard on the early morning news
A young man was shot dead
What a sad thing to hear at the start of the week
Oh why should I want to get out of bed
There are tasks to accomplish though
To work I must go
People to care for
New memories to share
So much to get up for
Another Monday is here!

Inspired *Megan Kestel*

According to the books
Inspiration is a feeling or a thought...
Inspiration is an exceptional influence something has on your mind or soul.

But to me
It's personal
Inspiration comes from within
It comes from culture
It comes from family
It comes from children
Inspiration comes from every day experiences that have an extraordinary impact on your life

The beauty of a sunrise early in the morning on a perfect day
The joy on the faces of an elderly couple walking through the grocery store holding hands-still so in love
The encouragement shown by a father to his son after he loses his first game
The energy that fills the arena on the day of a big meet
The expression on the face of an athlete that just accomplished the unthinkable
The innocence and simplicity of a child's mind
The sound of children singing their hearts out with all kinds of emotion

I can be inspired by the strangest things
A song on the radio in the morning on my way to school brings back a special memory
gives me motivation and energy to continue my day
Watching normal things occur and actually taking notice of them
That gets me thinking
Challenges....while at the time seem inconvenient....give me inspiration
They make me want to strive to be something better than I already am

Feeling acknowledged and wanted
Books, movies and friends revive me and give me energy everyday
Being surrounded by love and having the ability to give love in return
Thinking outside the box
The hot sun beating on my skin in the summer
Talking to people....and being quiet
Feeling a sense of purpose when I crawl out of bed in the morning
Wearing comfortable clothes and loving it
Going on a long run and letting my mind roam free

Father Swan: Protector

Traci Glavic Melanson

I watch you.

All three of you.

I fear that the chocolaty morsels she feeds you are only to entice you to come closer,
closer to her reach.

Just far enough from me, that I cannot protect you with my muscular wings and my
vicious beak.

Still, she feeds you and all of you gleefully gobble each and every crumb.

You are so trusting and vulnerable.

I remain ever so close to your little tails.

I will not let harm come to you, my dear little cygnets.

Fortune Cookie

Traci Glavic Melanson

Hospital room.

Bed for one, table for three.

Chinese take-out.

Dinner necessary and nourishing.

Fortune cookies divided.

Son's fortune, "Your mind is your greatest asset."

Daughter's fortune, "Good luck is the ability of good planning."

Son's girl, "You are far more influential than you think."

Last, Big Bill. Fortune cookie empty. Breathing stops.



Group C: Anything Goes

*Devon Ashby
Laura Beeghly
Deb Brown
Lori Moore
Pam Vap*

What Should I Be?

Devon Ashby

“What should I do for a job?” I know the answer to this question from other’s points of view is; teacher! Duh! That is what you are, that is that you have wanted to be since you were in fourth grade, that is what you are good at! Well, to me the answer is not so simple anymore. It is true that I wanted to be a teacher since fourth grade, that it is my passion...or so I thought. With year three under my belt and many cases of ‘what is right for the child’ experienced I have been thinking about this off and on for a while. Am I really supposed to be a teacher? The answer is not so clear. The answer is emotional, the thoughts are emotional, the whole ‘issue’ is emotional! WHAT DO I DO? Someone please just tell me, make the decision for me, make whatever is supposed to happen happen already!

Now, with that question out in the open another question arises; what am I supposed to be? This thought has come to my mind many times over the last year or so and all I can come up with is; someone who works with special needs individuals that fights for what is RIGHT for them! Someone that can do more than a teacher can, someone that won’t get told to stop thinking with their heart and to start thinking with their brain! I want to be that person that helps students who have no support, who have no other knowledge, who don’t have the resources make choices for themselves, who gives them ‘tough’ love, who shows themselves and others that they do really have worth.

I think these questions have come to light because in today’s schools a teacher can only do so much. A teacher can take a child abuse issue to the next level and that is about it. A teacher can make sure a student takes classes and courses that will teach them what they need to know to succeed in the world but a teacher can’t show them how to live their lives outside of school. They kind of have their hands tied. I have been told many times by administrators: “This isn’t our place. We can only control what happens to the student when they are inside our building.” And to this I just want to reply: “Or is it because you don’t want to add another thing to your plate? Then this isn’t the place for me. We see that something is wrong and we can’t do anything about it? How right is that?”

How can we just stand back and know that when at home a student is being forced to stay up until 3:00 a.m. to do their siblings laundry? How many times can we let parents make their children with a disability walk to school in freezing rain because they didn’t take the trash out? When do we stop parents from taking food away from their children because they stood up for themselves? When is it right for a child who receives Social Security Benefits to have to write a check for her parent’s new bedroom furniture or for new flooring in the house? When do we call the cops or Child Protective Services or Department of Human Services? When enough enough?

This is a feeling that I don’t want to experience anymore. I don’t think I should have to feel like I am not doing enough when it comes to hard situations dealing what is best for a child. I mean we, as teachers, are the people that student’s should feel like

they can come to, to rescue them from the evils of this world, to make things rights...but right now, where I am and with what my 'job' is I can't, I just can't!

Parkinsons

Laura Beeghly

The alarm clock on the bedside table read 3:23 AM. Arthur lay in bed, closing his eyes against the blue glare from the clock. It was his nemesis, he thought, always beside him at every moment of the night, staring at him relentlessly whenever he awoke. Eleven o'clock. One AM. Two-fifteen. He glanced back at the clock. 3:25. With a great struggle, he rolled to his side, turning his back to the clock. Sleep, he thought, just close your eyes, relax, and...sleep.

He knew it was pointless. Why try to relax? His body was incapable of such a feat. Every tendon, muscle, ligament, and nerve felt taut and rigid. Just rolling over in bed had made his body scream with the injustice of it.

He thought about getting up and walking about for a while. Walking sounded good. Walking could be laborious and often tired him out within ten minutes, but still he preferred it to the aching restlessness he felt while trying to sleep.

He inched his legs over the side of the bed and rocked back and forth on the edge of the mattress, trying to build the momentum he needed to pull himself up. It was ridiculous how much thought and concentration were required for such a simple move. Heave-ho, he thought, as with a final rocking movement, he staggered to his feet. He stood there, murmuring the old, familiar words. *Twinkle, twinkle, little star...* Meredith had told him to sing through the song before taking his first step. "It will give you time to center your body and regain your balance," she'd said. He rebelled against the idea of first; it was so silly. But of course, she'd been right. He'd finally had to admit that last summer after falling against the hearth and spraining his wrist during a day that had been full of stumbles and near-falls.

Damn the woman, he thought, shuffling down the hall. He paused at her bedroom door, grinning at the soft snores that came from within. She'd never believed that she snored, though he'd been trying to prove it to her for years. Once, about fifteen years into their marriage, he'd recorded her snoring on audiotape. Meredith's response to the recording was a calm, "I had a bad cold that week."

The floor creaked loudly beneath his feet, and he hesitated, heart pounding. Meredith was a light sleeper. His nighttime prowls irritated her. "You woke me up last night," she would say accusingly in the morning.

I'm sorry.

"You know I can't fall back asleep after waking up."

I'm sorry.

"Just don't be so loud."

I'll try.

He waited now, uncertain of his next move. He'd planned to go find a snack in the kitchen and then head down to the den to see what was on TV. Maybe that would make too much noise. Maybe he should try going back to bed instead. He pivoted to look back at his bedroom. It seemed a long way off down the hall. The kitchen was closer at this point. And more inviting.

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. The sound of his slippered feet was oddly comforting. It made him think of his children when they were young and still at home. How they

teased him when he came downstairs in the morning, bleary-eyed and still in his bathrobe. “Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle,” they’d chant, and giggle at him over the rim of their juice glasses.

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. His morning shuffle wasn’t confined to the mornings anymore. It was simply the way he walked now, unless he forced all his concentration on the task of lifting each foot off the ground.

He paused in the doorway of the kitchen. As usual, Meredith had left the small light on over the kitchen sink, a beacon to light his way in the darkness. The breakfast things were already laid out upon the counter – the quarter loaf of pumpkin bread Jane had sent from Virginia and a bowl of Clementines. Next to them lay the small stack of white cotton napkins that Meredith insisted on using instead of paper, a pair of blue floral mugs she had picked up in Poland, and the butter crock that Eliza had made for them while she was still in art school. Knives, forks, spoons. Juice glasses. Oh, yes, and there was his pill box set amongst everything else, the one labeled “Wednesday” – with its four labeled compartments: 6 AM, 10 AM, 2 PM, 6 PM.

He stared at the pill box for a moment with the vague sense that something was not right. It did not look as it usually did, and it took him a moment to recognize the fact that all of the compartments were open instead of closed, as they should have been. He flipped on the kitchen light and peered down at them. They were empty.

Someone’s taken my pills, he thought, and then shook his head. Not possible. There was no one in the house other than Meredith and the cat, who despite Arthur’s care of him, stubbornly preferred his wife’s bed to his.

He glanced up at the clock. It was nearly four. In two hours, he would need to take that first pill. What would he do if six o’clock came and Meredith was still asleep? She kept all of his medication in the drawer of her bedside table. She was the one who sorted his meds every evening and filled the different compartments of his pill box for the next day.

Keep calm, he thought, even as he felt the familiar knot form in his stomach. Calm, calm, calm. No need to panic. He tried to breathe deeply and slowly as Jill, his massage therapist, had taught him to do. He wished Jill were here now. She would know how to calm him. She would force his body to relax, she would push back the waves of anxiety that he felt beginning to well up within him. She knew how to do this better than anyone.

He knew, of course, that he should just walk down the hall to his wife’s bedroom, wake her up, and tell her, “Hey, Mer – I think you forgot to set out my meds.” But he couldn’t gauge her reaction; he worried that she would snap at him for waking her up. And even if she didn’t snap, he was fairly certain she wouldn’t be able to go back to sleep, and then she would be unbearable to live with the rest of the day. She’d moan about how tired she was, and snap at him about other things, such as forgetting where the toilet paper was kept or needing to ask which button to push to answer the telephone. “It’s the green button, Arthur,” she’d say, her voice heavy with exasperation. “Green for go. Remember kindergarten? Green means go. Red means stop.”

He sat down at the kitchen table, the pill box clutched in his hand. He would wait, he thought. Just wait until he knew what to do.

At six-ten, the telephone rang. Arthur's head jerked up off his chest. He had fallen asleep, he realized with surprise. Fallen asleep in the kitchen while watching the steady pulse of the clock beat on towards dawn.

He fumbled for the phone and dropped the receiver. It clattered to his feet, but continued to ring. Meredith had set it to ring 8 times before switching to voicemail – a move calculated to give him enough time to walk to the phone and figure out the right buttons to push to answer it. More often than not, Meredith answered it before he had made it halfway across the room. *So really*, he thought as he bent to pick up the phone, *it's her fault I can't remember which button to push. She doesn't let me have enough practice.* He grinned. *I'll have to remember to tell her that.*

Green for go. "Hello?" His voice sounded kind of hoarse and wheezy.

"Dad?"

One of the daughters, he thought. Which daughter was a little more difficult to ascertain. They all sounded alike.

"Hello," he said again. "How are you?" It was a safe thing to say when you didn't know who you were talking to.

"I'm fine. Are *you* alright?"

Jane, he thought. It must be Jane. She was the one who was always concerned about him. She was the one who often held hushed telephone conversations with Meredith about his health.

"Yes, yes," he said "Just fine. Well – except for my disease—you know, that does put a bit of a damper on things." He said this with the jovial air he was accustomed to assuming whenever talking about his health.

In the early years after his diagnosis, he often joked about it, blaming any number of mistakes on his Parkinson's. He forgot to get bread at the grocery store? "It's my PK," he'd say. Didn't put down the toilet seat again? Can't be blamed for that, either. It's just the PK. He'd even exaggerated his tremors. He smiled at the memory of Meredith's face as she watched him pour the wine one Christmas, his trembling grip threatening to splash Merlot over her cream-coloured linen tablecloth.

It was difficult now to make jokes.

"What are you doing up so early?" asked Jane. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"Yes," he said.

"You sound upset."

"Do I?"

"Or worried, maybe."

Worried. Yes, there had been something worrying him. What was it? Something that made him go to the kitchen. No, something that was *in* the kitchen. Yes, in the kitchen. He glanced around the room, searching for a clue. What was it?

"Dad?"

"Hmmm?"

His gaze lit upon the bowl of Clementines on the counter. Something to do with Clementines. Something that was *next to* the Clementines. He squinted at the counter, trying to conjure up the memory of...something. He sighed in frustration. Some days he felt like so many of his thoughts were playing hide-and-seek with him. Now you see me; now you don't.

"Dad, have you taken your pill yet?"

His pill.

Of course.

"Just a minute," he said.

"Dad?"

Where had he put that pillbox? Of course, it wouldn't do him any good. It was empty. He remembered that now.

"Dad, your pill – "

"Yes, yes, my pill. I know. Just a minute."

It wasn't on the counter. Not on the table. Not on the chair. But he *had* been sitting in the chair. He had been sitting there and then the phone had rung.

Arthur was aware that his daughter was still waiting silently on the other end of the phone.

"Sorry," he said. "Sorry. I'm a little fuzzy this morning."

"Did you take your pill?"

"No," he said. "No. I can't find them."

"You can't find your pills?"

"They're missing."

"What do you mean missing?"

Arthur felt his face flush. Why was she questioning every little thing he said?

"Missing!" he said, and he knew that his voice did not sound as he wanted it to. He *felt* impatient and slightly irritated. He *sounded* tired and out-of-spirits. "I came into the kitchen and there were no pills in the box. I don't know where they are. Your mother forgot them, I guess. And she's still in bed so..." he trailed off, hoping Jane would understand his dilemma.

She didn't seem to.

"Wake her up."

"I can't do that," he said.

"Dad, you need your pills. All your meds are in Mom's room. So wake her up." She seemed to sense his hesitation because she added, "Blame me, if you like. Tell her that I need to talk to her, and then, after she's yelled at *me* for waking her up, *you* can let her know about the pills."

"She never yells at you," he said.

"Ha!" laughed Jane. "That's totally not true."

But it was true, for when he woke Meredith and told her that Jane was on the phone, she smiled sleepily at him and said, "Jane? What a nice surprise."

And then, as he walked back into the hall, he heard her say, "Oh Eliza! I'm sorry – your father thought he was talking to Jane."

Later – after he'd had his breakfast and morning cup of coffee and read the paper and showered and dressed – he was able to reflect that he'd made the first part of the morning much more worrisome than it needed to be.

Meredith had come into the kitchen after talking to Eliza, contrite and apologetic. "I'm sorry, Arthur," she said as she gave him his pill and filled the rest of the dispenser. "I was distracted last night when I was getting things together. I was trying to plan out how things were going to work today with Jane, Patrick, and the kids flying in later this morning. I was thinking about getting the sheets washed and the guest room made up and wondering what the kids will be wanting for breakfast this weekend. I should pick up some special cereal for them. My mom and dad always had special cereal for the kids when we visited them. Caroline still talks about that...Anyway, I'm sorry for forgetting your pills."

I'm sorry. In the forty-four years of their marriage, it had always seemed to Arthur that Meredith was determined to have the last word, to be "right" no matter what evidence was against her. It had taken him many years to adjust to the idea that this was simply how she operated and to come to the conclusion that if there was to be any peace in his household, he would have to be the one who offered the proverbial olive branch.

Coffee Pot

Laura Beeghly

My mother doesn't know how to work the coffee pot
My mother doesn't drink coffee
But she figured it out this morning
And made coffee for maybe the first time in her life
Because my mother has a brain that can learn new things
That can problem solve
That understands nuances
That can still make sense of her world
My mother has a brain where the neurons fire strong
And carve new pathways
Making connections
Forging new temples of knowledge
It's a brain that works well,
Allowing her to process new tasks—
Like making coffee.
And my dad whose been making coffee for years and years and years
This morning
Couldn't remember how to work the coffee pot.

Speed Grieving

Deb Brown

As the mother of a special needs son, I have become a pro at speed grieving. You see, each time my son misses a milestone, I have to let a little bit more of my dream for a perfect son, die. Over the years, many little bits of my dream have passed away, each time beginning the grief cycle for me again. As the years pass, however, I have found that the cycle of grief has taken less and less time. I have learned to get through the grief quicker, thus the name “speed grieving.”

I think that “speed grieving” is a positive process for a parent like me. I would not want to be continuously caught up in the cycle of grief. Speeding thorough the cycle is what allows me to move on and notice all of the great skills my son has learned and activities he can participate in.

I’m sure that many special needs parents experience grieving from time-to-time. The best advice I can give them is to surround themselves with others who can help point out the wonderful things their child CAN do!

Here’s an example of speed grieving from my own life. It happened when our second son, Tobin, learned how to tie his shoes. We had practiced and practiced and practiced with Nick; however, he was just never able to get his shoes tied. We finally bought him a pair of Velcro tennis shoes. We figured we’d just keep trying to teach Nick how to tie. Certainly he would learn someday. When Tobin was about five, he too practiced with us to tie his shoes. It took him a couple of weeks to get it down, but he learned to tie, just in time for Kindergarten. It was at this time that I experienced some grief. I realized that our son Tobin had surpassed his brother, who was five years older, in fine motor skills. I felt really disappointed that Nick struggled so much with using his hands to complete tasks. I even felt some anger towards God for allowing Nick to be born with such poor fine motor skills. I was sad for Nick, knowing that he may never learn to tie. While I was busy feeling sorry for myself, and for Nick, my husband was encouraging me by pointing out all of the things that Nick could do with his hands. Mark’s ability to see the positive things in all situations is a great help to me when I experience disappointments about Nick’s abilities. In just a day or so, I was able to move on. In fact, we decided that tying shoes wasn’t really that important. We even decided to discontinue teaching Nick how to tie because it was so frustrating for him and us. Thankfully there are many options for no-tie shoes these days. We also realized that if we tie Nick’s shoes just a bit loose, he can slip them on – no problem!

The Tupperware Cupboard

Deb Brown

Nothing frustrates me more than opening up the dreaded Tupperware cupboard and finding all of the cups, bowls, containers, and lids in disarray. Why can no one, but me, manage to stack the same sized bowls and containers together? Furthermore, why do we have so many different types of bowls, cups and containers? Oh, and incidentally, very few of them are actually Tupperware at all.

There are Ziploc, Rubbermaid, and Sterilite brand containers, not to mention, Cool Whip bowls and sour cream containers. The cups on the bottom shelf, with their varied logos, represent many different sporting events we have attended as well as some of our favorite restaurants. Of course, none of the cups we've collected seem to be the same size.

So yesterday, in an almost violent way, I quickly emptied the entire cabinet onto the, not so clean, kitchen floor. I plopped down on the scatter rug in front of the sink and began to sort. Anything without a matching lid **MUST** go! Next, I began sorting through all those five dollar souvenir cups! Twins, Wild hockey, Storm Chasers, Royals, Lancers, Zorbaz Restaurant, The Grand Prairie Hotel, three matching blue cups to the lost picnic set, and four lavender tumblers purchased last summer for a picnic when we'd forgotten to pack some. In addition to all of the cups, I found at least nine different water bottles. Leap to Lead, Challenger Baseball, Boy Scout Sea Base, Jump Rope for Heart and Mutual of Omaha decals decorated the assortment of various size bottles. Making decisions about which souvenir cups and sports bottles to keep was much more difficult than deciding about the bowls and lids. I found myself recalling pleasant memories associated with all of the cups and bottles. In the end, I ended up keeping all the water bottles, because they all had lids that fit! I kept most of the plastic cups too, unless they looked extremely worn, such that the logo could no longer be deciphered.

Finally, after thirty minutes, with the plastics recycling bin overflowing, I was ready to put everything back in the cabinet. Whew! What a great feeling to have just one little cabinet, one little snippet of life organized. Until tomorrow!

The One in the Basement

Pam Vap

When I was a child my father kept a man locked in our basement. I was always afraid of him. Especially at night. Sometimes he howled like a monster, and then I crawled under the covers on my bed and pressed the blankets tightly over my ears to block out the terrible cries that reverberated through the floorboards. But I couldn't block out the sound of his teeth grinding. That noise was like the growl of something not human. I worried that he would get loose, and then what? But my mother did not seem to be afraid of him. If the knockings became too loud, she would bang crossly on the door and threaten him with the hiss of her voice. This would usually quiet him.

Occasionally my mother would befriend him, but those were brief moments. I wondered if he cried because he was lonely. But I couldn't pity him for his isolated existence; I was too frightened of him for pity.

During the day he was relatively subdued, and I tried hard to pretend that we lived in a normal house. Yet it was impossible to forget he was there, right below us.

Then one night I overheard my parents subdued voices. "He is getting to be too violent," my mother whispered. "I'm afraid the neighbors will hear and suspect something."

My father sighed deeply in reply.

Mother was adamant. "He must go. I'm worried that he might hurt the children."

"It's not that easy," my father replied. "I've tried to get rid of him. He won't go. He refuses. I don't think he will ever leave." He ground his teeth in frustration.

I stood frozen outside their bedroom door as the realization hit me. Although I had believed the man was locked in our basement, now I understood that we were the ones who were trapped.

The Importance of Choosing Dracula

Pam Vap

The summer I turned twelve I took a step into the forbidden world. Let me begin by stating that I was an oldest child—an innocent, obedient, rule-following child. A child from a conservative family with a mother who carefully watched over her children so that they were protected from all the dangers in the world.

So I can't explain what would have led me to do something I knew my mother would not approve of, but there I was in the adult section of the library trying to peek indiscriminately at the books on the shelves. And there it was. A book I was sure my mother would censor into my banned books list. *Dracula*. I glanced both ways to see if anyone was looking, then gingerly slid it off the shelf and shoved it between two innocent-looking books chosen from the children's section.

The contraband *Dracula* was smuggled in through the front door and directly back to my bedroom. I gathered my reading provisions, a bag of sunflower seeds and a glass of Kool-aid, then flopped across my Mary Poppins bedspread. Feeling like Magellan, I opened the first page of the dark and forbidden book.

At first, the vocabulary and sentence structures of this unfamiliar writing confused me; however, determined to read on, I worked my way through the pages until I gradually began to catch on to the rhythm and style of this 19th century gothic writing. And something magical happened. I became a "reader."

Enamored by this wonderfully fascinating language, I couldn't put the book down. Lucy's marriage proposals were so romantic and poignant to my inexperienced heart. The mystery surrounding *Dracula's* castle was spine-chilling. The insane, bug-eating Renfield character horrified me in the most delicious kind of way. Most importantly, the battle of good versus evil became real to me like it never had before.

As soon as I had finished reading Bram Stoker's novel, I headed back to the library for more "forbidden" books. Next I scooped up Shelley's *Frankenstein* and discovered yet another adventure with language, another love story, another monster to abhor. Then, came the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Wuthering Heights*, *Man's Search for Meaning*, and *The Bourne Identity*. If it was in the adult section, I was interested. I had an insatiable desire to encounter the adult world which I would soon be entering through the safety of a novel.

Although I always enjoyed reading as a child, I developed a passion for the adventure of it once I became an independent reader choosing my own titles from everything available. I found that by reading I was able to learn about myself and the world around me, what I believed, and what I valued. I learned about bravery, love, lust, power, envy, and faith. I explored the dangerous gray area between right and wrong. I traveled to places, times, and cultures foreign to me and become intimately familiar with them. I developed empathy and understanding of people vastly different from myself and discovered the fundamental human-ness of us all. Reading made me think deeply. It nourished my hunger for knowledge. And last but certainly not least, I relished the beauty of the various voices of writers whose words echoed in my mind and heart long after I had finished the last page.

Looking back, I realize my mother would have encouraged my reading of *Dracula*. The time was right. But I also realize I needed to make the decision to read *Dracula* on my own. Her guidance and suggestions would have interfered with my right to discover the world of reading on my own terms. Reading is a personal journey. Each of us should have the right to read in their own way, at their own time, books of their own choosing. When the time is right and the book is right, a reader's journey will begin.

Negritude

Lori Moore

"A tiger doesn't proclaim its tigerness; it jumps on its prey." Negritude has remained an influential movement throughout the rest of the twentieth century to the present day. The movement is marked by its rejection of European colonization and its role in the African diaspora, pride in "blackness" and traditional African values and culture, mixed with in The Harlem Renaissance, centered in Harlem in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s, had a significant influence on the Negritude movement. – from Wikipedia

Did you feel me walk into the room?
My hips sway, (subject implied) heads turn.
Can you feel my negritude?
The lights bounce off my caramel skin,
Sweat glistens on me like diamonds.
I shine with 300 hundred years of struggle, defeat,
Emasculation, miscegenation, degradation,
Desperation, separation, and segregation
 And still I stand.
 When we meet,
 I look you in the eyes,
 I will not lower them for you.
 When we speak,
 I say what's on my mind,
 My opinion matters, too.
 My past weighs down on my shoulders,
 I hold them high as I cross the room.
 Pride..... in
 Each.....
 Step....
 I.....
 Take.
 I know what it is to feel inferior,
 Told you can't.
 For you, the sky's the limit
 for me the limits the sky.
 You can't hold me down
 I have negritude.

Little Man

Lori Moore

For James, who was once my little man

On a cool morning as the sun peeked over the trees in the small backyard, His Momma sat at the table sipping a cup of steaming coffee.

The boy climbed up onto his mother's lap.

He looked up into her face and said "Momma, when will I be a man?"

She looked into the trusting eyes of her only son and thought for several long minutes.

"Baby," she began "it takes a lot to be a man. It doesn't come with age, I know a lot of 35 year old boys. It isn't determined by the car you drive, the job you hold or the number of children that bear your name."

The boy asked again, "Momma, when will I be a man?"

"When you take responsibility for your actions.

When raising your child is a commitment not a burden.

When you are able to take care of yourself and those you choose to commit to.

When you realize that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

When you know yourself and are not swayed by others judgments or perceptions of you.

When you rely not on brute strength but strength of character to accomplish what might be impossible.

When the words "I love you" truly comes from your heart with no other motives

When helping around the house is not woman's work but our work.

When you can listen to others wants and needs and sometimes, put them above your own.

When you can respect everyone's opinion.

When you understand that love doesn't hurt or control."

"Then," she said, "My baby you will be a man".



We are teachers. We are writers. We are Oxbowians.