

Best of Freshman Writing

Volume 10

Student Voices

A Commonwealth College Publication

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Best of Freshman Writing

WELCOME to the tenth volume of **Best of** For the past several years we have been publishing student writing with the intention of both celebrating the work that our students do and of sharing it with others for a variety of instructional purposes. Beginning with last year's publication, we began accepting student essays from all twelve Commonwealth College campuses, from students in English 004, 015, and 030. The essays in the current edition are all from students in English 004 and 015 classes.

Many of our readers have asked about our editorial guidelines, which we publish on our web site (www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/bof.htm). We only accept essays produced in

the courses listed above, and the essays must be submitted by faculty members from the campuses. In other words, **Best** is not an "open submissions" publication.

Some faculty have asked if we will accept short stories or poems. The answer is quite simply no. Other Penn State publications are better suited for this purpose, like *The Palimpsest Review*, which serves all non University Park students. Many campuses have student literary publications as well.

At the end of each fall and spring semester, we send out an email call for papers to the various campuses within the Commonwealth College, but our final deadline for papers is May 15 of each year. The papers must be typed and double-spaced, with the student's name on them. All documentation should be in MLA parenthetical style and verified by the student's instructor. (Please see the editorial at the end.) Faculty should gather the students' papers and send them in one envelope from each campus, along with a signed copyright agreement form, which can be downloaded from our web site. (See above.) The student's return address should also be included so that we can send him or her a copy of the publication in which his or her essay appears.

We hope you like this edition of **Best** and that more of you will participate in its production in the future by submitting essays to us. We are all very curious about how students are writing throughout the system. **Best** provides a meaningful link between faculty and students throughout the state. Let us know what you think about it. We want your suggestions and help.

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Adrian Parkes
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The Influence of Work

WORK IS SOMETHING that people view in different way. For some, work may be just a way to make money and nothing else. For my mother, work has been more than just the hours she was on the clock. She always had things to do after work, and while I did not understand her struggles then, it seems clear to me now. When my parents divorced, my mother went through substantial changes. She gained custody of my brother and me and because she had the responsibility of raising us as a single parent, she had to work full time to provide for us. All in all, the one thing that stands out to me about my mother is, although she went through a considerable number of changes in her surroundings, not once did she complain. Instead, she was grateful for what she had.

After the divorce between my parents, my brother and I decided to stay with our mother. My mother had full-time jobs at both work and home, while also going to school part-time at Long Island University. I can recall one day when she told me, "Please, Adrian, Mommy is very busy, please let me concentrate on this paper right now, and I promise I will play with you later" after she had promised me she would take me to the park. Also when *Pocahontas* came out in movie theaters, she promised she would take me to see it after work. I will have to take you another time." My immediate reaction was disbelief. Why was her work so much more important to her than me? Is she just ignoring me now? It was not like when Dad was around, and now that he was gone, she could not spend time with me anymore. Things were really starting to change. Being young made it difficult for me to understand, but now at twenty years of age and after experiencing some of the similar situations she did, I realize it is not easy balancing everything.

The phrase "easier said than done" is well realized here. Now, my mother works for Excel, and while she does not make much money, she always seems to look on the brighter side of things. Last year I brought up the fact that she does not make much money, yet

she works full time. The landlord always pressed her for the rent money, and her health was regressing as well. Although she was sitting at the computer talking to her friends on Yahoo, she stopped what she was doing and came over to the couch where I was sitting and sat next to me. Finally, she smiled at me and said, "Well, Adrian, it is very hard to work and have a social life. The landlord does press me for the rent, and every since me and your father got divorced, I have been single. But life is too short to worry about the little things. I have two sons, Andrew and you. Andrew is going to St. John's University and you are going to college too. It is not about the money, although it is hard for me to provide much. I had to make sacrifices in order for you and Andrew to have a place to live and be successful. For that I am happy and proud of the both of you and love you very much. I may not have much material things, but I am still happy with what I got in the both of you, and that is what counts."

That was one year ago. I thought my mother had buried herself in her work because she did not want anything to do with me? I thought that I was not important anymore? What did she mean she worked because she needed to provide my brother and me a place to live? Everybody who has a job has a place to live, don't they? When I reflect back to when I was eight years old and always pestering my mother for attention, I see the big picture and have drawn my conclusion. Work is a necessity, and I must accept the responsibility of an employee. Unfortunately money is the main form of support in the world and without it there is no way to have a decent living. Money is referred to as "the root of all evil," and it is best to work somewhere that is just as enjoyable as it is beneficial. My mom only makes enough money to pay her bills, and while she may not have what others have, it is her happiness that makes every workday of her life worth it.

Alexandria DeNinno
English 004
Worthington Scranton

The King of Apple Pies

AS THE SMELL OF AUTUMN fills the house, my dad gathers his supplies to bake an apple pie. He smiles and talks animatedly to the political commentator on the radio as his rough hands gather all the ingredients. Although he only stands five foot ten inches, his confidence and the wonderful earthy aroma of apples fill the air. My salt and pepper haired father adds cups of flour and butter and water together, effortlessly spinning the fork in the bowl to form dough. His thick fingers sprinkle flour on the table and then he leans over his built upper body covered in blue and green striped shirt, picks up the dough and tosses it onto the splattered white table. His upper arm muscles rhythmically move in sequence with his fingers as he kneads the dough.

As he sits down across from me, he grunts with the effort of lowering himself back into the chair. His fingers covered in flour begin paring and quartering apples while he compares the current world problems with similar problems that Ancient Rome and Greece faced. His crystal blue eyes squint as if reading from a history book as he fills the crust into the pan, followed by neatly cut apples. He shakes cinnamon over the pie and all over the table as he repeatedly points the cinnamon at me while trying to make an important point. Then, as if by magic, he slowly pours sugar over the top of the apples and shakes his head remarking on the survival of the human race. Then, with a loud contagious laugh, he slowly bends over and puts the pie in the oven to bake. After he washes his hands and sits down next to me, he comments on my lack of attention while his thin lips sip on a glass of wine. While waiting for the pie to bake, he tells jokes that make his off white teeth catch my eye and I can not help but smile. Soon the kitchen fills with the aroma of a fresh baked apple pie. Only a moment after it is taken out of the oven there is a steaming hot piece of pie in front of me and my father waiting for his appraisal because he knows he makes the best pie I have ever tasted.

Ann Smith
English 004
Worthington Scranton

A Soldier in the Making

ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS I have done in my life was to train to be a soldier in the United States Army. Like so many young adults after high school, I did not know what I was going to do with my life. Recruiters were not knocking at my door to join the Army, but a close family member was dating a first sergeant and I guess I can say he was my recruiter. I had no money for school and I got excited about joining. I knew it was going to be a lot of hard physical and mental work, but I was ready for it. What else was I going to do?

I remember my first day at basic training. The mental part of this job kicked right in. Our drill sergeants had a job to do and they wasted no time doing it. They only had eight weeks to train us to be all we could be. There was no time spent getting to know us. Getting to know us was all in how much we could take. My first hour there I found out where I was sleeping for the next eight weeks of training. A locker right next to my bed gave me a place to store my gear and any care packages sent to me from home. The gear did not stay in my locker long, because someone had a cigarette in the bathroom of our barracks and before we knew it, our gear was on our backs, and out in the night we went, running our soon-to-be powerhouse body two miles into the night. Sightseeing was not allowed and when we returned it was verbally confirmed, "No smoking is allowed in the barracks." We had to forget we even smoked while we were there. We were told we were one big happy family in the making and when someone did something wrong we all suffered. Coming from a large family of nine, now I could see where my Dad got his way of thinking, being a Marine and all.

Training started at 4 a.m. every morning. We ran for two miles to an open field where we spent another hour there doing physical training. This

is where I learned to do my 50 push-ups and 50 sit-ups, the right way. They were a requirement for graduation. The two mile run back to the barracks only reinforced that we were up now for the day. The brisk mornings and blood pumping exercises were only the start of what could turn into a 15-hour day.

The hardest day I trained, I can remember so well, although I do not want to cut any day short of the magnitude each deserved. It was a day in April with monsoon-like rain. “Finally, we thought, “a day off. There is no way we could train in weather like this. We would surely drown.” We found out that we were wrong. You see, we had to be well rounded and be able to fight in any kind of weather. Therefore, training was definitely on. The sound of the heavy rain beating off our rain suits and the sound of our marching feet kept in time with the cadence we sang as we found our way to our make shift battlefield. The thick, red sand absorbed the heavy rain as we low crawled to the foxholes we were assigned. It was useless to worry about the wet sand that was collecting and sticking to our saturated skin and clothing. Our only concern was to keep the sand out of our rifles. A dirty and sand filled rifle could cause it to backfire or malfunction. Frequent cleanings were needed, and the shots fired all around us only reinforced the need of the 30 second time frame we were taught to pull the rifle apart, clean it, and put it back together.

The day had an unexpected ending. Upon the return to our barracks, we found a large pot of hot chocolate waiting for us to sooth our soggy bones. This was the first sign of compassion we saw from our Company Commander and drill sergeants. Training was hard that day, and confirmed by our commander’s praise. He said, “You women trained better than any of the men today.” I guess they actually had to be hard on us and push us so we could stay alive out in the field, even if it was raining. There is no compassion or anyone babying you out on a battlefield. The long hard days of training in the U.S. Army taught me discipline to survive and the confidence to accomplish any challenge that faces me.

Daniel Stiles
English 004
Hazleton

Stroudsburg, PA

I GREW UP in the city of Stroudsburg, and I loved living there. My hometown was a crowded city, but nothing like New York. My neighborhood is very peaceful, and the neighbors are very friendly. The only time there was any noise came when construction on the roads took place. Around the area I lived everyone knew each other. The parents called the kids the “Stroudsburg gang.” Stroudsburg was on the boarder of two different schools. My friends and I were all around thirteen years old and attended Pocono Mountain South. We had some memorable moments together, and we still keep in touch.

When I needed a friend there were many to choose from. Everyone was within walking distance of each other. On the other hand when I wanted to go out, I needed to drive. Around the neighborhood there was a mall, a ski resort, and a water park. There were plenty of activities in my hometown and wonderful memories to go along with them.

During the summer days the gang would spend time with each other every day. Near my house there was dead end where we played all the time. We even had enough kids to play five on five hockey games. The games started with just sticks and made up goals. We later bought equipment and the game became a serious sport for us. Every morning we had practice, and on Thursdays a game was always held. Hockey would be played throughout the day, and during the night we played manhunt. We always played at the same two houses because they had the best hiding places. In the fall basketball became the main form of entertainment. Every house had a basketball hoop. We could play at anyone’s house anytime we wanted. As long as nothing ever hit the house the adults did not care if we played.

The winter for my neighborhood brought joy to the kids and annoyance to the parents. My neighborhood would have heavy snowfall, and the kids loved every minute of it. Right next to my house was a very steep hill. When it snowed the hill became perfect for sledding. The ride down was fun, and the long hike

up left us breathless. My brother and I would sled for hours upon hours down the same hill. My next door neighbor had a small driveway, but very steep. Their driveway went down towards the house, so we never worried about sledding into the street. In the winter the plow would go down their driveway making a large mound at the bottom. Those days when the snow never seemed to stop, the mound grew and grew. Sledding down the driveway gave us enough speed to ride right over the mound. As soon as we hit the top of the mound, we flew at least four feet off it. At the time sledding was the best activity to do during the winter.

My hometown of Stroudsburg was the place to spend time for me. There were plenty of things to do all year around. Everyone knew each other and liked one another. Now with the gang grown up we rarely have time to see each other. During the breaks we try to spend time together, but nothing compared to the time we spent as kids. The memories I have of the gang and the development will stay with me forever. My neighborhood has not changed much since I was a kid other than the fact the kids are all grown up.

Jonathan Schroeter
English 004
Hazleton

A Worthwhile Place

WHAT'S THE FIRST THING you think of when you think of Nashville or Cleveland? Most people would say Country music for Nashville and Rock & Roll for Cleveland. However, in the Pacific Northwest, in the state of Washington, between the Puget Sound and Lake Washington lies the city of Seattle. Known as the "Music Capital of the World", it has been the home of such great bands as Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Soundgarden. With a music thriving environment, Seattle offers many great local venues. Notably, all the great bands that Seattle has produced all started locally in these small venues. Specifically, The Graceland is known for hosting today's more popular punk and heavy metal bands and chances are that your favorite band(s) have once, or continues to travel to Seattle and have played at the Graceland.

When you arrive at The Graceland, a line is always waiting to greet you. This is the perfect time to make new friends as you await your turn to enter. You will be very surprised by how much you have in common with individuals that enjoy the same music as yourself. The building is made of ash red bricks and has a plain black florescent sign with Graceland sketched on it. Parked next to the sidewalk are the vans and trailers that the bands travel in and you can always spot someone, usually a female, on the top of their toes trying to sneak-a-peak inside.

Once you make your way inside you find yourself off balance as your eyes try to adapt to the darkness you just entered. The smell of sweat and cigarettes fill your breathe as you breath in. The venue, at maximum, can hold about five hundred people and the place soon becomes packed and the atmosphere gets hotter while the excitement increases with every step. For individuals that prefer not to be so close to people they do not know, you have the option of going upstairs where they have seats available. The walls are painted with flyers for upcoming shows so you can get your tickets in advance before the show sells out. Throughout the venue you will find merchandise booths that sell anything from t-shirts, CDs, and even women's underpants from you favorite band or a band

you may fall in love with during the show.

If you're twenty-one or older, The Graceland also offers a bar where you can get a drink and get away from the younger crowd. The bar is filled with video games, a diner, and most often then not you will be able to see and meet performers from the bands playing. This offers a fan the best opportunity to get a picture and/or an autograph with their favorite musicians.

Right before the band takes the stage you can push your way through the crowd where you are so close that you can pinpoint every crack in the wood of the stage. The show hasn't started but everyone is so close that you begin to sweat and lose your balance as the crowd, as one, is swayed from left to right. The lights go out and you feel the drummer's beat hit your heart with every hit on the bass drum. The instant the dim lights come on the band is already on stage and performing their first song. The crowd goes ballistic as everyone begins to jump up and down. Hands from individuals behind you can be felt as they use you to keep their balance from the exuberant crowd. The band is so close that when the vocalist bends down to sing they are five inches away and you can feel their breath blow against your face. Your attire is not completely wet from sweat as you sing along and stop every now and again to catch your breath. You've watched the music videos and listened to the CDs but neither sounds sweeter than when it's performed live before your eyes. In between songs the band will throw out bottles of water to the crowd in order to help you cool down and hydrate.

As the band finishes their last song, sadness fills the air as it will most likely by a few months before the band stops in Seattle to perform again. As you exit the venue, goose bumps cover your body as the cool night air blows against your perspiring body. Walking down the street with a smile on your face and thoughts of the flyer covered wall, you find yourself with an extra step in your walk with the anticipation of the upcoming bands performing at The Graceland.

Alex Sarafanov

English 004

Worthington Scranton

Noise Pollution

IT WAS 1997; many Russian immigrants fled to America that year to Brighton Beach, famously known as the most congested immigrant neighborhood in New York. Brighton is a shopping center with every culture of the world influencing it like Florence and Milan in the 16th Century, but I would like to focus on the unbearable noise pollution coming from the train station and the crowdedness.

Living in a luxury two floor apartment on the beach would seem like a dream come true, but with a train station one hundred paces away and a market place that runs twenty-four hours, that dream becomes "hell." A hot summer day on the beach where I look for peace and quiet turns into the Champs D'Elysses.

"Coronas! Coronas! Come get your Coronas!" exclaims the man who wants to earn a little extra on the side. The children occupy the water near the shore and scream like someone is pulling on their hair. The lifeguards are whistling to all the lunatics that decided to swim to the shores of New Jersey. High school kids are playing brutal soccer and yelling derogatory terms which I think all of Brooklyn heard. An hour at the beach can make Pavarotti go deaf.

The beach may be loud, but the train station is "another brick in the wall." The station resembles the ancient Roman Aqueducts and it seems it's almost as old as them too. The rust covers the tracks like water on the lost city of Atlantis. The wheel of the train screeches against the tracks causing your teeth to rub against each other. The unloading of the passengers is like the French racing to get seats at the World Cup. They speed out from the train wagons like someone is trying to kidnap their first born. "Get out my way," yells a random woman at an old man. "What are you, blind? I'm walkin' here," says the construction worker to a group of high school children, who remain still like water in Venice. There is also a sort of a Red Light District gathering on the second level of the station that attracts men of all ages for a half hour at thirty dollars. This noise level grows exponentially by the minute.

Right underneath the train station is the Russian

Jewish Market Place. Any item of one's desire may be purchased here. This cosmopolitan bazaar magnetizes people from all over the Tri-State area. Consequently, the radiating clamor generated is overwhelming. The consumers love to express their fiery anger towards the clerk that sold a fake Helmut Lang suit for retail price –especially, when fifty percent of the crowds are Russians and Jews. Combining these two nationalities can make the Middle East seem calm. The Russians and Jews love to debate over the simplest of things like children in kindergarten, argue whether the bread was baked that morning or afternoon.

The market extends as long as a kilometer, with people that carry themselves like angry bulls. (Picture being stuck in a Diego Rivera painting), but instead of the desert atmosphere there is urban terrain. Brighton Beach is the Charlemagne Frankish Kingdom of present day. It stands out among the most vivid wonders of the world. Since no place in the universe is perfect, the burden that Brighton carries is noise pollution.

Other English 004 students whose work was selected by faculty, but not included in this edition:

Ryan Daugirda – Hazleton
Josh Kremer – Hazleton
Dhaval Bhalodia – Hazleton

Joseph Marcavage
English 015
Worthington Scranton

That First Night

IT WAS A MUGGY NIGHT in early June and my roommates and I were doing what we always did around six pm: watching TV. I lay there on the couch drifting in and out of sleep – the exhaustion from the day was taking its toll. Just as a dream crept into my head, I was awakened by Tony, the older, but less mature of my two roommates. He mentioned that his girlfriend Mandy and her friend were heading to Shakerz Bar. He wanted to know if I would tag along. I agreed even though I was not in the mood to be around a crowd. However, I found from past experiences that nights like those produce magic. I could not have been more right, for my life has not been the same since.

We arrived at Shakerz around 8pm. As I stood outside the door waiting to pay the cover, the stench of stale beer and sweat rose up in my nose. It made me a little nauseous. As I reluctantly handed over my ten dollars, the sounds of screaming banshee-like voices and obnoxious guitar filled the air. My head immediately started to hurt, so I questioned why I had come at all. I hastily downed my beer, and with the carbonation still stinging my throat, we scanned the room for Mandy.

The room was dark and misty, and there was a wet film on everything I touched. It was extremely humid and I began to sweat. I finally spotted Mandy standing at the end of the bar. She was wearing blue jeans with a pastel purple shirt. She looked plain but that was not her draw. One could tell by looking at her face that she was full of personality. She seemed to be alone, though, and once again I wondered why I came. We walked over to her and said hello. I remember saying something about being the third wheel, probably with a hint of annoyance in my voice. Mandy chuckled and remarked that her friend was in the bathroom. She mentioned that her name was Rena and that she was currently single. My stomach stirred at the comment. I had not thought about it before, but now I realized that I would have to make a good first impression. I reviewed my appearance in the mirror behind the bar and straightened myself out.

Just then Mandy motioned towards the door and pointed her friend out. I remember saying “Out of your league,” under my breath. She was gorgeous with dark skin and eyes. Her body was more curvaceous than slender, and she had that hourglass shape. She walked with clumsy short strides that I found irresistible. She was wearing a tan top that complimented the highlights in her brown hair, and a pair of khaki shorts that hugged her hips and thighs. But these details of her appearance were insignificant when compared to her smile. It was big and wide, spanning from ear to ear. Her nose scrunched upward, making three tiny wrinkles just below her eyebrows. Her brown eyes became small and squinted, and glossed over. A chill ran up my spine and I realized I had goose bumps. I quickly rolled down my sleeves.

Rena finally made her way over to where we were standing, and Mandy introduced her to us. We all made polite conversation for a short time just to break the ice. Then Tony spotted a friend of his from work. He grabbed Mandy’s hand and away they went. Rena and I were alone, but the uneasy feeling I usually got in those situations was not present. We talked as if we had been friends for years. She told me about attending school in Lancaster and I spoke of my adventures in Baltimore. And each time she laughed, that beautiful smile drew me closer to her. Suddenly the room lit up and a nervous feeling filled my stomach. My heart thundered in my chest. I knew what had to be done. I quickly mustered up some courage and asked her politely if I could call her. She threw her head back, smiled, and coyly said, “I don’t date Carbondale guys.” I was crushed and sat there with a blank look on my face. But I decided to forge ahead and whispered confidently, “Look, I’m not asking you to marry me. I just want your number.” I felt her smile against my cheek as she contemplated for a second. She then quietly spoke the digits in my ear. I took a step back; we were both grinning uncontrollably.

A moment passed and Tony tapped me on the shoulder. He asked if I wanted to leave and I reluctantly agreed. I gave Rena a hug and said goodbye. She grinned and reminded me to call her. As we walked toward my truck, a cool wind brushed past us and an excited feeling overcame me. I chuckled and Tony asked why I was laughing. I eagerly described how Rena and I got along splendidly and how she had given me her number. Tony remarked snidely and joked that nothing would come of it. I told him

how I hadn't been considering going out at first but now glad I was that I did. I remarked, "Ya see, Tone, good things happen when you least expect them to." He half smiled and nodded his head. "I know what ya mean, Joe, I know what ya mean."

Kerri McKeivitt

English 15

Hazleton

The Comfort of Hell

IT WAS CALLED "Hell House." Maybe its name is the reason I was so attracted to it. I felt like hell, so I decided to check out the place that was made for people like me. The house had been abandoned for years. No one wanted to live in a place that was falling apart.

The house was perfect for me; dilapidated, run-down, and neglected. It had no feelings; no life. I automatically felt connected to it. This is where I belonged, I thought, a place that I deserve. I walked up the old dirt path that led to the old dirty house. It was dark and damp, and I was in need of some alone time for my thoughts.

I found my spot where I hid my candle, (under the top step) and pulled out my matches. The smell of sulfur burned my nose and suddenly I saw light. The heat from the candle brought added discomfort to my sweat dripping face. I used the candle to light up my path as I walked toward the attic.

The attic was the worst place in the house. The air was thick and hot. I could feel dust particles sticking to the back of my neck. Pieces of wall-boards hung down with sharp nails sticking out. I maneuvered my way through what use to be a solid wall, but by then was just a few boards, some of which I hoped were holding the ceiling up. When I came through I decided to sit on one of the three pieces of furniture there. It had only two milk crates and a mattress. The mattress had spots all over it. It leaned half against the wall, half bent over the floor. There was a hole in the bottom left hand corner that had cotton protruding from the source. I decided to sit on a milk crate.

The walls were covered with the signatures of people who had found this spot before to fulfill all of their partying needs. *Rob loves Mary. Enter at your OWN RISK. Satan's playhouse.* The walls told their own story. The empty beer bottles smelled slightly, but they were only on the left side of the room.

There was a broken closet door to my right barely hanging on its hinges. Through the crack I could see endless blackness that can hide only insecurities. I

stopped looking at it and turned my gaze to the floor. My white sneakers were then brown from dust and broken debris. A spider crept past my right shoelace towards the closet door. I followed it with my eyes for something to concentrate my attention on. I needed a divergence from my thoughts.

The spider snuck under the broken closet door, then reappeared moving towards the gap in between the closet and the door. Its web dangled in front of the blackness. The candle light made it hard to see the crisscrossing of the tiny strings flowing in between the crack in the door. It crept its way onto its web and hung from it. There it was, hanging onto its life, its existence. At any given moment it could have fallen. I sat there half expecting it to, but it never did.

I imagined the spider was committing suicide. It hung in front of the empty blackness and swayed slightly. The image made me think of myself; dangling there somewhere in between life and death. I hated my life. I hated the fact that I had to come to this dirty, broken down house. But it was my only relief. This “Hell House” had become the only place where I could be alone; not bothered by the small town stupidity that lurked just outside these walls.

The spider then climbed into the blackness, into the insecurities. It had to face its demons, and so did I. I knew I couldn't stay in here forever, but I felt connected to the house. It felt like home. The awful discomfort of heat began to sooth me. I felt disconnected from the world, and I wanted to be disconnected.

I was unbearably silent. My ears had been ringing since I arrived there. I moved slightly to stop the edges of the milk crate from digging into me. My focus went to the candle burning at my side. The flames created shadows that flickered on the wall covered in graffiti. *Enter at your OWN RISK* lit up every few seconds, as if it were flashing.

A small hallway was slightly to my left. A splintered board carelessly fell across it, making it hard to see the dust covered, half boarded up window that lay at its end. The window showed nothing through it. I grabbed my candle, stood up and began to walk toward it. Carefully I ducked under the board. With a closer look, I could see that there was a faint image drawn into the bottom left hand corner, a swastika. I realized this was no escape. I was not getting away from the ignorance, from the people who filled this town with their hatred and “traditional” ways of thinking. I grabbed at the end of my shirt and rubbed the image away until I

could feel the glass begin to crack under my fingers.

I took my hand off of the glass and looked at it. I was black from dirt and sweat. Suddenly I hated being there. I quickly ducked under the board, and gave the room a final glance. The spider sat there, doing nothing. The *enter at your OWN RISK* words were not flashing. The closet door's crack was not lit up; showing more beer bottles inside of it.

This place had no life. All that was left were empty memories of the people who found the same peace here. How ironic I thought, that the very people I despised came here for comfort; for answers. I climbed back down the fragile steps, back into the world.

Steven Valenti
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A Teacher's Influence

AT THE END of my first year of elementary school, I was labeled a below average reader. Stamped with this classification, I spent my summer break of 1968 in the classroom. However, all was not lost as I trekked off to Summer Reading School each morning, leaving behind my neighborhood friends. I was off on a new adventure. I was going to learn how to read.

As I entered into this new and strange classroom, there were many children of whom I did not know. But I did not let that bother me. I was focused on my newfound excitement. The teacher was extremely young and petite with long blonde hair. Although her name escapes me, I still remember her gentle sweet voice and the caring she displayed to us all as she read passages from a book, *Fun with Dick and Jane*. "See Spot run. See Dick run. See Jane run," the teacher read aloud. She made reading seem so easy and fun. But would I ever learn to read?

That answer came my way one day when the teacher announced that each student would have to take a turn reading to the class. Suddenly, my heart began to pound; my head was spinning, creating a sick feeling in my stomach. I was no longer able to focus on what was going around me. There was no way to get out of it; I was going to have to read.

"Steven, it's your turn," the teacher cried. Suddenly, the room seemed so very quiet. It was as if all eyes were now focused on me. Slowly, I began to stammer and stutter, trying my very best to make sense of the words that lay on the page before me. With a quivering voice, I gave it my best shot. Then something amazing happened. The teacher began to coach me. Her soothing voice instantly released my fear as she walked me through the reading process.

"Take each word nice and slow—one at a time." With that said, I began to relax. As my comfort level grew, the words in front of me were transformed, as if a fog was lifting. I could now focus my attention on the words. They become clearer, more meaningful, as I continued plugging through the sentences. Every time I ran into trouble or made a mistake, she was there to guide me and, when I was finished, she complimented

me for a job well done.

This was an entirely new experience for me. One so very foreign from the military-style tongue-lashing my entire first-grade class had suffered from our teacher, Mrs. Barnes, for simply not knowing or not being able to get it right on the first try. This teacher was different. She actually liked children, and she loved teaching us how to read. From that day forward reading came to me naturally, as I was introduced to this new way of learning. Her patience and the ability to work well with children had a strong impact on me. She was more like a mother instead of a teacher. Quickly, I began to make friends with the words and sentences in the *Dick and Jane* books we were reading. My confidence level grew daily, as did my ability to read.

When I returned to school that fall, I was a completely different student. Now, when the teacher asked for a volunteer to read, my hand was the first one in the air. I couldn't seem to get enough of reading with my nose always in a book. The school library, which in the past had been a chamber of horrors, was now my sanctuary. Daily I made trips there to peruse the many books lining the shelves. Sometimes, during recess, I would sneak away from my screaming and laughing friends on the Jungle Gym for the tranquility of our small school library. It had high book cases that lined the walls, and smaller book shelves in the center. There were lots of windows, which allowed the sunshine to pour into the room, giving me a warm feeling as I entered. I loved the coziness and the chance to thumb through the abundant pages of literary art. It felt good just to look at the words.

At home, I tested my newfound skill by reading to my little sister, forcing her to sit on the bed with me while I tortured her with continuous readings from my two favorite books, *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* and *The Little House*. When my sister wasn't around and I had no audience, I would kidnap our dog, subjecting him to these same tortuous performances. If neither of them could be found—well then, I was content reading to myself.

My love for reading continued to grow as I did. Soon, I had amassed a collection of books, which I neatly stacked on the shelves in my bedroom closet according to size by the author's last name. Titles like *The Other Side of Midnight*, *Rich Man Poor Man*, and *Stranger in the Mirror* were the favorites of my private library. As a teenager I would tuck a pillow behind my back, propping myself up against my bed's

headboard, and read these novels for hours on end. There were days when I would challenge myself to read an entire novel in just one day. Although I tried my hardest, there were only a few times I actually won this self-induced game.

Literature has had a strong hold in my life ever since my summer encounter with that very special teacher. Books and reading have transformed me as a person in a multitude of ways. They have become my closest friends during some of the roughest times in my life. Reading and the memories of this teacher have prompted me to write children's books as a way to give back what I have learned. Often, I reflect upon that special summer and wonder where life took my special teacher. Did she ever stop to think of the impact her passion for teaching and books would have on a student? I can only hope so!

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Gandalf's Fall

THE LAST EVENT I remember is Gandalf plummeting into a crevice full of lava while battling a Balrog. I was awoken by a sound that broke the 6:00 a.m. silence of the five hundred acres of state game land. When Gandalf and his satanic companion landed in the vast lake, it closely resembled five-hundred seventy-six pages of words that fell upon a forest floor. My brief nap ended abruptly when I realized that I was thirty-five feet above the ground in my tree stand. Since I was temporarily suspended from the ground, I couldn't properly construct Gandalf's puzzle of fate because I was missing one important piece, *The Fellowship of the Rings*. I must have fumbled the novel and lost the nerve ending struggle with gravity.

My curiosity to comprehend Gandalf's struggle with gravity and the Balrog temporarily prevailed over my interest of harvesting a trophy whitetail. I cautiously stirred about my tree stand to locate my weathered version of *Lord of the Rings, the Fellowship of the Rings*. The novel was balanced, like an airplane in the sky, over a branch of mountain laurel, and in the leaves under it, lay several stray pages of the *Fellowship of the Rings*. I was relieved to see that the pages were still bound together enough to make sense of what had happened to Gandalf.

The bound pages left me hope of being able to read the ending, and also left me with two decisions. The first decision involved an early end to my hunting experience in the middle of the prime hunting time, late evening. This would have allowed me to prematurely discover what had happened to Gandalf. This was not a valid excuse to keep me from eliminating my chance to harvest a whitetail deer on the last day of archery season.

The second decision allowed me to stay in my stand for the last hour of daylight of my hunting experience. This dormant hour of the evening increased my anxiety with every expired minute because I thought about gravities affect on *The Fellowship of the Rings*, Gandalf's fate, and me. I began to develop a scenario that would match what J.R.R. Tolkien had in store for Gandalf. I proposed that Gandalf would

prevail in the battle, and he would become more powerful to help the hobbits succeed. I caught myself in a day-dream about the outcome of the story when I was interrupted by the rustling of leaves beneath me. My wildest dreams came true when I caught a glimpse of a whitetail trophy.

Therefore, I prepared myself for the situation I had spent countless hours wishing to encounter. I brought myself down from my adrenaline high after I successfully placed a lethal shot on the deer. I clumsily climbed down out of my tree by lowering the bottom half of my stand and the top half shortly after, much like an inchworm. I peered between that bars of my platform, and recognized that the distance between me and the discovery of Gandalf's fate had diminished. I reached the bottom of the white oak and planted my feet on the decaying leaves. By the time I planted my feet on solid ground, night had fallen, and I had to fumble around in my backpack to find my headlamp.

After I turned on my headlamp, I searched for the outcome of Gandalf's fall. I sat on a soggy log and read it like a thirteen-year-old boy would read his teen sister's diary. A half hour passed before I discovered that Gandalf had died with the Balrog. They had fallen into a lake, battled up a stairway, and struggled onto a high mountain peak where they both fell to their death. The decision, by Tolkien, to allow Gandalf to die did not make sense to me at the time, but I was missing an important reason for Gandalf's death.

The conclusion brought me back to my senses, and redirected my interest back to my hunting experience. I quickly shoved the damp and tattered remnants of my book into the front pocket of my backpack. Rain began to fall lightly as the zipper of the pocket ripped the front couple pages off. I was not bothered by the rain thanks to the weather-proof apparel that my father had purchased for me the previous Christmas. I headed out, in search of the deer that I knew had died from an arrow projected from my bow. After forty minutes of search, I found my kill, and I began the process of field dressing.

When the work came to an end, I needed to clean my hands with some paper towels that I had strategically placed in the front pocket of my backpack. Elbow deep in hemoglobin, I slid my hand into the front pocket to gather the paper towels. The palm of my hand soiled the last couple pages of my reading material, but I knew that when it dried, it would purely provide a colorful backdrop to Tolkien's words.

Worried about further damaging Tolkien's words, I partially cleaned my arms and hands. I became eager to share

my good fortune with my father, who was at the cabin approximately a mile away. The long drag back to the cabin granted me the opportunity to stretch my imagination. I fabricated ideas about what Tolkien had developed for the *Two Towers*, which is the sequel to *Fellowship of the Rings*. I believed that Tolkien was going to make Frodo finish his adventure by himself because of Gandalf's absence. I couldn't find this to be true, granted that there were two more sequels in the series. I just couldn't comprehend what Tolkien might write next in the *Two Towers*.

Knowing that I had a copy of the *Two Towers* at the cabin, I scanned the horizon for the dim flood light which hung from our shed. A low yellow light became visible after less than a minute of search. I finally reached the cabin and took care of my deer. I told my dad that I was going to wash up, and then settle down with the *Two Towers*. He asked, "Did you lose the book that you took with you this morning?" I answered by showing him the copy of *The Fellowship of the Rings*. I said goodnight to my father, reflected upon the fall of the whitetail deer, and directed my full attention at the *Two Towers*.

In my late night reading of the *Two Towers*, I discovered that Gandalf had come back to life as Gandalf the White. This made me think about what had happened that evening. I pondered about how Gandalf the White provided guidance to Frodo even after he had left him for a short period of time. The thought of the evening also made me visualize how my novel provided me with guidance on what had happened to Gandalf after if left me suspended with anticipation. The anticipation I experienced throughout the evenings still affects me today. I often look at my whitetail trophy mounted on the wall, and imagine it to come back to life and become more powerful and elegant, much like Gandalf the White.

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Tough Enough?

RECENTLY, Major League Baseball has been plagued with rampant steroid use among many of its top players. The sport's drug problem has disenchanted many of its most loyal fans and threatened the long-held notion that baseball is "America's pastime." As more and more high-profile players are now coming forward and publicly acknowledging their use, it has become clear to the players and those in charge of the league that a new testing policy must be adopted to fight the widespread steroid problem. The 2005 season will see a more rigorous steroid testing policy as a step in the right direction, many are concerned that it is not strict enough to have any real impact on the "big picture" problem of drug use, steroids *or otherwise*, among players. There are three main points of debate concerning the testing policy. Many people feel that the league should test for more than simply steroids. In addition, some critics of the new testing policy feel that, while the penalties for steroid violations have become stricter, they are still not harsh enough. Finally, people believe there should be an independent body which would conduct the testing, similar to the Olympics. Many people remain unsatisfied with the league's stance on drug use among its players and are still looking for a stricter policy.

In response to the widespread use by its players of not only steroids, but other steroid-like substances, the league has expanded its list of banned substances that it will test for. In addition to steroids, the list of banned substances will include steroid precursors and designer steroids such as THG, one of the substances Barry Bonds recently admitted to using, before a United States grand jury. The new testing policy will also look for diuretics and "masking agents," substances taken by players to hide the presence of steroids in their urine. Mike Koplove, a player for the Arizona Diamondbacks, said, "The players are satisfied we put in a stricter program. It's something that can be effective and let everyone know how serious we are

about cleaning things up. I think fans will realize we're doing our best to clean up what we and they think is a problem" (Qtd. by Patrick). However, many fans remain unsatisfied. While the expanded list of banned substances is a step in the right direction, many people feel that other drugs should have been added to the list, namely different kinds of stimulants like amphetamines. People feel the testing policy attacks only one aspect (steroids) of the main problem of drug use by players. Victor Conte, founder of the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative, voiced the opinion of many fans: "The question is any do they not ban stimulants? It is like attempting to reduce crime by banning the use of handguns but still allowing criminals to use rifles" (Qtd. by Patrick). Critics of the new testing policy believe that the policy should ban other "performance-enhancing" drugs if the league truly wants to clean up its drug problem.

Another issue of debate surrounding baseball's new steroid testing policy is the varying degrees of punishments for steroid violations. The former testing policy called for one test a year, with a penalty of treatment for the first violation, a 15-day suspension for the second violation, and a year suspension after the fifth violation. Because that policy was clearly not working, the league has now adopted a stricter policy regarding steroid use. Each player will be subject to one unannounced test during the season and random tests during the off-season. In addition, selected players, presumably those believed to be involved with steroids, will be subject to additional random testing during the season. The penalties are as follows: 10 days suspension for the first violation, 30 days suspension for a second violation, 60 days suspension for a third violation, and one year suspension for a fourth violation. All suspensions are without pay (Bodley). Clearly, the testing policy is now stricter than it had been in past seasons. The players and league owners believe that the tougher penalties will be enough to solve the problem that has plagued the sport. But many fans are not convinced the policy is tough enough. For example, many people point out that the new testing policy, while stricter, is still not as strict as the minor league's testing policy, and nowhere near as strict as the policy of the Olympics, which punishes a first-time violation with a two-year suspension. Senator Joseph Biden summed up the general attitude of the policy's crit-

ics, saying, “The new testing system sounds better than the flimsy one they had before, but the penalties are weak” (Qtd. by Patrick).

Finally, many people are not convinced of the league’s ability to enforce this new policy because there is no independent body to conduct the testing. The league owners and players believe that they are capable of handling the testing fairly and honestly, without outside help. Therefore, they believe that paying money to establish an independent testing body does not make sense economically. Critics of the policy, however, believe that an independent testing body is a necessity if the league is serious about cleaning up its drug problem and regaining the confidence and support of the fans.

MLB should learn a lesson from the Olympic movement, which years of cover-ups and ineffective testing until it created an independent agency to handle testing. Otherwise, when a body polices itself, there’s conflict of interest that can lead to suppression of positive tests because it’s bad news for owners and players.
(Qtd. by Patrick)

Pointing again to the Olympics, people feel that the league should leave the testing to a professional, independent agency to ensure the new testing policy is properly followed.

Drug use among Major League Baseball players is clearly a widespread problem that has negatively impacted all aspects of the game. And everyone agrees that changes need to take place regarding the league’s testing policy, people just have different opinions on what those changes are. People disagree on what substances the league should test for. Also, many feel that the league should hire an independent body to handle the testing. Finally, people disagree on how strict the consequences for failing the drug test should be. The main issue that underlies these three disagreements surrounding the new drug testing policy is whether or not the this policy is tough enough to clean up baseball and restore it again to the title of “America’s pastime.”

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Will the Real God Please Stand Up?

“SOMETIMES DEAD IS BETTER.” These are the words spoken by actor Fred Gwynne in Stephen King’s movie *Pet Sematary*. In this movie, the words are spoken to a man whose son has been killed and who believes that burying him in an old Indian burial ground will bring him back to life. I can not imagine anyone resorting to such an extreme measure in an effort to reverse death. Death is final. It is the end of the life process, as we know it.

When does life really end? Obviously, life is over when we are physically dead, but is life over when we are declared legally dead? Is death better than depending on a feeding tube to feed us? Is death better than depending on a machine to breathe for us? Is death better than facing every day in a ‘vegetative state’ where we can not move or communicate with the people around us? Is death better than not being able to live our lives? This is where the controversy of euthanasia comes in. The word euthanasia comes from the Greek language: eu means good and thanatos means death. One meaning given to the word is “the intentional termination of life by another at the request of the person who dies” (Qtd. by Williams). In other words, the act is initiated by the person who wants to commit assisted suicide. The word euthanasia can also mean the involuntary termination of life. This means hastening death by stopping some kind of support. This includes the removal of breathing tubes, the stopping of medical procedures or life saving drugs, the stopping of food and water and the withholding of CPR thus allowing nature to take its course. These procedures are available for the terminally ill and those in a persistent vegetative state or coma. These are the options that we should decide on while we are still of sound mind and body by making a living will. A living will, will allow our loved ones and doctors to know our wishes and to make decisions accordingly.

The issue of euthanasia is all over the news right now because of Terri Schiavo. Thirteen years ago, Terri Schiavo, at the age of twenty-six passed out in her

Florida house. Her heart stopped beating and because of the lack of oxygen to her brain, she suffered permanent damage. She has been living in what doctors call a persistent vegetative state ever since. This means her eyes are open but the part of her brain that controls movement has been destroyed. She can breathe on her own but cannot eat on her own. She is being kept alive by a feeding tube that gives her water and food. Without it, she would starve to death. Her parents believe that she recognizes voices and can make sounds. They want to keep Terri alive and are being helped by the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF). This is a non-profit group made up of attorneys and other concerned citizens, who are committed to giving helpless people of all ages a voice in the courtroom (Alliance Defense Fund). Terri Schiavo’s husband wants the feeding tube removed. He says she is not really living and that she would not want to go on that way. Since 1998, the case has been going back and forth in the courts.

As recently as last week, Schiavo’s parents have begged her husband to divorce her. They have offered to give him everything the couple had, including rights to any movie that might be made in the future in return for the chance to take care of their daughter on their own, all the while hoping for a miracle (Brinkman).

Who should decide the fate of Terri Schiavo? Watch television. Read the papers. Check the Internet. You will find stories and pictures of Terri Schiavo. She is not unconscious. She appears to be awake, and in some pictures she even looks like she is smiling? Is she? She cannot move. She cannot eat or drink. She cannot speak. Is she in any pain? No one knows if she even knows what goes on around her. Is that living or is that like being somewhere closer to death? Her husband says she is already dead. Her parents say she is alive and they want to keep her that way. Who decides? Who gets to play God? Does anyone have that right?

God gives us life, so he is the only one who can take it away. This is what the Right-to-Life movement believes. The Right-to-Life movement is on a mission to protect life. They do not believe that death is a natural part of life. They believe that since life is a gift from God, it must be prolonged, even with the help of machines, for as long as possible (Barnes). They believe that God and only God can end a life. On the other sides of the issue are the people who believe that each person should have control over his

or her own life. If we are struck by terminal illness or the quality of our life becomes too poor for us to enjoy life, then it should be our choice to end the suffering, with or without help.

As college students, probably the closest we have ever come to the issue of euthanasia is deciding whether or not to put a family pet to sleep. While we in no way put the same value on an animal's life that we put on that of a human, the bottom line is still to humanely put an end to the suffering of a living thing.

If the world were a perfect place, euthanasia would not be an issue. Everyone would have a living will. Our every wish would be in writing. There would be no need for family members or doctors to play God. The Schiavo case should be a lesson for all of us. Terri Schiavo is alive but she is not living. She is stuck in limbo between life and death. I think in this case dead would be better.

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Nan and Me at Duck Waddle Pond

I BELIEVE that each of us is somehow touched by another person, a particular event, or a certain instant that forever transforms who we are and who we will become. In my life, the person who has touched me most is my godmother. Even before my first birthday, Miss Lois, the nice, old lady who lived next door, became Nan (as I so eloquently named her as a toddler), but it would be several years until I'd realize the impact she'd have on my life. There is no end to the number of memories we've shared in nineteen years, and what she's given me, her wisdom, her passion for life, and even her love of reading will undoubtedly stay with me for years to come.

One prominent memory I have of life with Nan is our trips to Duck Waddle Pond, the fictional land to which we would travel in our bedtime stories. With characteristics like Mayor Phineas T. Hogg, Miss Lucy Goose the school teacher, and Mr. Hooty Owl the night watchman, tales of Duck Waddle Pond were the perfect fables for my younger sister and I to enjoy. I could picture Mayor Hogg as large and well-rounded, dressed in royal blue dinner coat and towering top hat. Miss Lucy Goose was scatterbrained and endearing, dressed in a blue polka-dot dress and bonnet. When we were curled up together, covers to our chins, in Nan's gigantic feather bed, there was no moment more exciting, no place more enchanting than Duck Waddle Pond.

Duck Waddle Pond was a huge expanse of water nestled in a patch of woods adjacent to the Murphy's farm. Farmer Murphy enjoyed spending time with all the animals, and when he became too old to look after his property any longer, he sold it to the Park Association under the condition that Duck Waddle Pond and all its inhabitants would be kept safe. All the animals, which included ducks, chickens, squirrels, rabbits, beavers, and pretty much any other small creature imaginable, lived in this quaint

community.

Like any good children's story, Duck Waddle Pond had interesting plot lines and was always complete with a palpable lesson to learn. The stories focused on the lives of the animals as they planned parties, solved problems, and enjoyed life at the pond. One such story involved Timothy Fieldmouse and his mission to establish a governmental system for Duck Waddle Pond. To fulfill his duty as governmental ambassador, Timothy traveled to nearby York's City Hall where his cousin Frederick lived. There he researched and explored the workings of York's government, and then returned to Duck Waddle Pond where he shared his knowledge with the rest of the community. Timothy did his part to contribute to the community's ultimate goal and was considered a hero for his accomplishments.

The brilliance of Nan's stories still astounds me today because she spoke to every part of a little girl's imagination. As a child I adored animals, and one of my favorite things to do was to visit Kiwanis Lake to feed the ducks. Nan often told us about the ducks from the lake vacationing at Duck Waddle Pond, and now it is clear how ingenious that was. Because of these references I was able to connect my bedtime stories to things I saw around me, and whenever there was a party at the pond I always asked, "Are the ducks gonna be there, too?" And of course they would be.

It is easy to see that my love for animals as an adult is largely due to the fondness fostered by our many trips to see our friends at the lake and at the pond. I believe that because the characters were animals living like people I was able to identify with the stories and the individuals in them. While like most children my sister and I were fond of stories like "The Three Little Pigs," no other tale could compare to our beloved Duck Waddle Pond. It was funny and intriguing, but more importantly it brought us together. Still some of my most cherished memories are of sleepovers at Nan's house and Duck Waddle Pond.

It wasn't just the stories that touched me so deeply. It was also about what they symbolized. Duck Waddle Pond represented the escape from a time in my life when I was too grown-up to be a child. I was never the kind of kid who watched cartoons and played all day without a care in the world. I was a five-year-old with the weight of the world on my shoulders. My sister, two years younger than I, was left in my care and there were always chores which took priority over

playtime and fun. Any child who came from a single-parent home, which a mother who worked two to three jobs to keep a roof over her head, can surely understand what my situation was like. I am extremely thankful for those moments when bedtime stories were all that mattered and I was allowed to get a tiny glimpse into what childhood could really be like.

My Nan was always there to give me the things I didn't have and didn't even know I was missing. She modeled for me how to be a good person and what it means to put others before yourself. From her I learned acceptance and appreciation for others' differences. She taught me to reach out to those around me who seemed lonely and to give to those who had less than I did. She spent quality time with me and told me I was special even when no one else did. To her I was the smartest, the prettiest, and the most lovable kid around. She took us on trips to places like Sea World and Chincoteague Island, and played or colored with us for hours on end. She told us stories about what it was like to grow up during the Depression, and taught us about places that she, as an avid traveler, had been.

Nan even managed to infect me with the reading bug. I was a bright, idealistic child searching for an outlet for my hyperactive imagination, and she introduced me to books and passed on her love of reading to me. I can't even remember seeing her without a book by her side. Nan was known to read more than one novel at a time and I had often witnessed her finishing entire books in a single day (and I still do). Her favorite genre is mystery, specifically murder mysteries like those of Lillian Braun and Patricia Cornwell. She also enjoys biographies and historical fiction.

Maybe it is Nan's genuine love of books that made her such a great storyteller. Each story was carefully crafted with love and it's clear to see that some of Nan's best qualities are also the best qualities of the characters in Duck Waddle Pond. Nan is compassionate and warm like Lucy Goose, insightful and wise like Mr. Hooty Owl, and passionate and sincere like Mayor Hogg. Nan was able to put a piece of herself into every story and wrap it up in a neat, little package that we could take with us and always look back on to feel her love.

Nan is nearly eighty now (and I know this because she is almost exactly sixty years older than myself), and somehow she still remains the loving, thoughtful, strong woman I've always known. She still enjoys reading and does it often, and if we ask her to she'll even come up with a brand new Duck Waddle Pond

story for us.

Throughout my life Nan has always been my very best friend, and I know that someday she won't be around anymore. Someday, maybe no far off, I'll have to search deep within the caverns of my memories to recall the woman I've always cherished and respected. But my one hope is that the exact color of her blue eyes, the sound of her laughter, the warmth of her hug is never too far gone to remember. If ever my memory fails me, I can always take a trip to Duck Waddle Pond and visit her there. We'll stroll around the pond chatting about old times, and we'll find that of all that has changed, our genuine love for one another will still be the same.

Other English 015 students whose work was selected by faculty, but not included in this edition:

Julie Cassel – York
Ashley Fruscella – York
Robert Ebinger – Hazleton
Katie Harrington – Worthington
Scranton

Jason O'Neal
English 030
Mont Alto

Language, Justice, and Politics

IMAGINE THAT YOU are an important executive in a prestigious firm. You rise to begin a presentation at the latest board of trustees meeting. As you begin to speak, the board members' faces grow increasingly confused. You become worried, especially as the board members begin speaking to you, and you cannot understand what they are saying. Everyone becomes more and more enraged with each other until finally everyone storms angrily out of the conference room. Now, imagine that you are a student at a university. You arrive at your lecture and take your seat, but when the professor begins to speak, all you hear is gibberish. As you look around the room, you find that your classmates appear equally confused. They cannot understand the professor or even communicate with each other. Some attempt to write messages, but all anyone can see are groups of strange, meaningless symbols. These examples, however unrealistic they may seem, illustrate the importance of language in society. Whether written or spoken, based on character groupings or individual symbols, a shared language is a necessary prerequisite for civilization. Modern societies have further recognized the utility of language and the vast power that can be derived from its manipulation. When perverted for political means, language is used to soften, distort, and destroy reality, thereby becoming an essential cog in the engines of injustice.

George Orwell says that "political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible" (Orwell para. 13). One might argue that war, though often fought for "just" reasons and thus defensible, is the most unjust act that humans can commit, and thus indefensible as well. However one views the issue, it is undeniable that language is perverted to aid in the perpetuation and even the ignition of these events. The preceding sentence itself is a mild example of euphemism, a powerful tool of linguistic perversion; the topic changed

from "war" to "events," with the latter certainly more generally acceptable than the former. The military establishments and governments use this tool much more effectively. In recent conflicts, euphemism has been widely used to "soften the blow," as it were, of certain unfortunate events when discussed publicly. The most extensively used example is "collateral damage." Collateral damage refers to the destruction of nonmilitary targets as a side effect to a military attack. This may include buildings and the like, but today the term is more often used to indicate civilian casualties, a slightly less euphemistic term meaning the death or injury of innocent bystanders. Needless to say, the final manifestation of the term is not particularly palatable to most people. Another example is the "pacification" of villages during the Vietnam "Conflict." "Conflict," or "police action," is usually used in the United States to mean an illegal war, i.e. one not declared by Congress but fought nevertheless. "Pacification" is a term that refers to the wholesale destruction of entire belligerent villages, possibly including the inhabitants. These examples are all decades old, but the use of euphemisms is not limited to history. As recently as early December 2004, President Bush revealed a policy that would allow "a little old lady from Switzerland" to be detained indefinitely by the government of the United States (Lewis, para. 1). How is this possible? The woman must be declared, at the sole discretion of Mr. Bush, an "enemy combatant." This simple redefinition of her status allegedly allows this hypothetical person to be stripped of her rights. It is this sort of distortion that goes beyond simple euphemism and into a darker domain.

The "darker domain" of language perversion is the use of language to dehumanize one's opponents. This technique, aside perhaps from nationalism, is the most effective tool of war yet devised. During WWII, the United States used dehumanization to encourage bloodlust in its young, male citizens. Propaganda films depicted brave American soldiers dutifully killing the evil "krauts" and "japs." In Vietnam, the enemies were the "gooks;" during the cold war it was "Godless Communism" and, under President Reagan, the "evil empire," which will remind many readers of President Bush's "axis of evil." During and preceding the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, language was used as a weapon of discrimination against black Americans.

This type of language perversion is best stated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” King is explaining why blacks cannot wait for a more opportune time to pursue their rights and cites examples of how language is used to dehumanize blacks:

when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” and “colored”; when your first name becomes “nigger,” and your middle name becomes “boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John,” and your wife and mother are never given the respected title “Mrs.”,...when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness”—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

(para. 14)

As the plethora of examples shows, Americans are adept at using linguistic tricks to dehumanize others. This is not to suggest that America by any means has a monopoly on the practice.

Hitler and the Nazis took dehumanization to an entirely new level. While the ultimate result of the German campaign of dehumanization against Europe’s Jews is well known, the methods by which the sinister goal was accomplished are perhaps not as well understood. The cornerstone of this ethnic assault was the perversion of language. In her book *Eichman in Jerusalem*, which concerns the Israeli trial of a Nazi officer, Hannah Arendt gives an excellent example of the sort of euphemism employed by the Nazis. “[T]he word for murder was replaced by the phrase ‘to grant a mercy death.’” (Arendt 108) The removal of “murder” from the lexicon was only one of the first steps in the Nazi regime’s campaign to redefine the Jews. One of the most important redefinitions was the legal definition of Jews as “stateless.” Again, Hannah Arendt explains: “The legal experts drew up the necessary legislation for making the victims stateless, which was important on two counts: it made it impossible for any country to inquire into their fate, and it enabled the state in which they were resident to confiscate their property” (Arendt 114). Eventually, all discussions of the “Final Solution,” the murder of the Jews, was governed by a set of “language rules.” “The prescribed code names for killing were ‘final solution’, evacuation (*Assiedlung*), and ‘spe-

cial treatment’ (*Sonderbehandlung*); deportation ... received the names of ‘resettlement’ (*Umsiedlung*) and ‘labor in the East’...” (Arendt 85). After years of euphemizing every possible term used in discussion of the Jews and other “undesirables”, the dehumanization campaign advanced to the point that the German people and Nazi officials allowed, and even participated in, the Holocaust, which eventually resulted in the murder, or “mercy deaths,” of approximately 9 million people, including about 6 million Jews. The role of language in the Holocaust is perhaps the most potent example of how the widespread use of ambiguous terminology and vague euphemisms can aid and abet the forces of terrible destruction.

The final type of language perversion is the total obfuscation of the truth; this practice goes beyond euphemism to outright lies, and is generally only available to totalitarian governments, such as the Communist party in Soviet Russia. Throughout the 1920s and beyond, the Bolshevik government was engaged in a campaign to indoctrinate the Russian people by controlling the language; they planned to craft a new national identity by defining the direction of the Soviet “language culture.” The Communist government took full control of the Russian language. Just two years after he rose to power, Lenin declared that the government would have complete authority over newspapers. That year, “newspapers and publishing houses made concerted efforts to bring the language of politics to the people, publishing scores of dictionaries, glossaries, and pamphlets with definitions of the new vocabulary of revolution (Gorham 9). The “culture of the Proletariat” was soon institutionalized in Russia. The Ministry of Education was renamed the Commissariat of Popular Enlightenment; the “Glavlit,” the Soviet censorship apparatus, was formed; new “Institutes of the Living Word” were formed to teach public speaking (Gorham 9-13). Writing in 1946, Orwell points out a consequence of this persistent linguistic indoctrination when describing a political orator:

The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over

again, he may also be unconscious of what he is saying, as one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favorable to political conformity.

(Orwell para. 12)

Aldous Huxley acknowledges a similar lack of consciousness as necessary to verbal indoctrination while describing the other totalitarian regime of the time, the Nazis. In *Brave New World Revisited*, he describes Hitler's oratory tactics. He writes, "The [the masses] more masslike, more homogeneously subhuman, he assembled them by the...tens of thousands, in vast halls and arenas, where individuals could lose their personal identity, even their elementary humanity, and be merged with the crowd" (Huxley 52). It is the crowd mentality, along with complete control of the media, that allows totalitarian dictators to deprive entire nations of independent thought and "subject them to the will of one man" (Huxley 47). Thus, the perversion of language helped two regimes to come to power, which eventually resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent people.

Clearly, language was and is a powerful force in the world. It can reshape the minds of individuals, which shapes crowds, which shapes nations. Realizing the power of language may cause one to recall and reinterpret John 1:1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God" (NET Bible). The Word truly is God; the written word, the spoken word, and especially the broadcast word have the power to reshape minds and thus the world is whatever image those with absolute power may conceive. Language is definitely the most effective tool available to humanity, and, when perverted for evil, it can contribute to some of the worst tragedies in human history.

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Gregor Samsa as an Injured Addict

JUST THIS MOMENT, I was struck by remembered words of a friend that we in recovery had been, at one time, “stuck in the midst of a Kafka novel.” His comment was the initial reason I picked up *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Not having read far, I finally came to the title story as a requirement for class. I took it as a sign that there was something for me to learn in that story, and I have. The story of Gregor Samsa nearly mirrors, in a metaphorical sense, the story of my last two years as an active addict, with a very important exception. His metamorphosis from the utilitarian head of his household to the shunned secret behind the door and his eventual death was a direct parallel, although my death behind the door was symbolic; part of my family was freed and the part that had sprung from my own body joined me in a new birth.

“As Gregor Samsa awoke from unsettling dreams one morning, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin” (Kafka 7). As I awoke from a few hours of unconsciousness, I found that my dreams were not dreams; my body had become as unfit for my role in life as Gregor Samsa’s hard shell and spindly legs were to his desire to board the morning train. I had suffered a spinal cord injury the day before during a routine medical procedure and did not yet know it. I tried to tell myself that a little bed rest would be suffice, and I’d soon be up and about, taking care of the business of making money and providing for the needs of my family. I just needed a little rest, just a few hours respite. Gregor felt the same way, and, “He must have tried it a hundred time, closing his eyes so as not to see his twitching legs, and stopped only when he felt a faint, dull ache start in his side, a pain which he had never experienced before” (Kafka 7). The only difference for me was that there were no aches that were fainter dull for a few days yet. They were screaming, excruciating and unlike any pain I’d ever felt in my life, though I

felt I had suffered more than any human being should ever have to up to that point. I was soon to learn that suffering is relative, suffering is subject to redefinition, and I learned to never use the phrase, “it can’t get any worse than this.”

My cast of characters were a bit different from Gregor’s. All were represented, though they often switched roles, and the head clerk becomes Grete and Grete becomes the father and the father becomes the mother, depending on the situation at hand. A few days into my journey, I arrived at the doctor’s office, having lived the entire time in a blinding, white-hot sphere of pain. The doctor immediately relieved me with pain killers. I was at last somewhat safe, though not ambulant, and could not understand the whispers outside the bedroom door, for as Gregor, I “felt perfectly well, apart from a drowsiness that was superfluous after a long sleep” (Kafka 9). The pain medication had helped me to have many long naps.

Here, my story diverges with Gregor’s for a bit. I had begun a tour of the various medical facilities in the area and beyond, finally settling on a nationally renowned clinic for problems such as mine, and, Providence be damned, the only treatment that seemed to have any kind of effect was an ever-increasing dose of opiate pain killers. My entire family for a time cared for me as Grete cared for Gregor. When it was obvious that my previous pastimes could no longer be enjoyed, gifts of books, magazines and video tapes began appearing, just as Grete had laid a spread out before Gregor attempting to determine his likes and dislikes. Computer equipment was adapted to my new station. An over-the-bed table appeared to hold a laptop, and a television was moved into the bedroom so that I would not have to stress myself in joining with the family in the evenings. So much care went into my comfort during this period as attorneys were called and lawsuits were discussed. As time went on, my financial contribution to the family became smaller, rather than larger. The tide turned, and the care was cursory, at best. It very well could have been sufficient, though I, at the time, was so consumed with my changed state that any type of adaptation or personal responsibility was not a conscious concern. The only thing that concerned me was living in the state to which I was fast becoming accustomed. Soon, the cane I had been using to hold up my injured right side was insufficient; the disease (by this time, we knew that it was a kind of disease; the nerve damage had sparked a strange neurological condition that spreads

throughout the body) had become full-blown on my left side as well and I required a wheelchair. Here my story rejoins Gregor's.

The revulsion of Gregor's mother manifested itself in my step-son, nine-year-old Andrew. He was afraid of my wheelchair. He associated the wheelchair as transport for one terminally ill. He had only ever seen its use in the very old and feeble and those who suffered forms of cerebral palsy. If we take *The Metamorphosis* as a literal tale, I was as much a "bug" to Andrew as Gregor was to his mother. The other children, the ones of my own body, would come to me, but Andrew refused for a very long time to acknowledge my presence, and when he was forced to confront me, he would shrink in horror at my rapidly degenerating form. My legs were becoming as spindly as Gregor's must have felt to him, and they were chameleon-like in that vertical orientation changed them from normal flesh color to shades of purple and black.

There was a similar act of revulsion from the rest of the family as other things had changed about me as well. My physical metamorphosis was evident in my legs and my inability to walk; my mental metamorphosis was not as apparent. If eyes truly are the mirror of the soul, as the Yiddish proverb avers, mine were the mirror of the chaos and insanity that was developing in my soul. My mind obsessed over the existence of a certain lock-box and the state of the supply contained within it. There was only one thing that made my physical existence bearable, and it was inside that box. It allowed me to accept whatever changes were occurring around me. It was my panacea. The dose of opiates had steadily increased as I had steadily declined, and my use of them now far exceeded anything a doctor would prescribe. Running out meant facing the reality of my situation, and that was not an option. Anyone hearing me speak would observe, as the head clerk did, that I had "the voice of an animal" (Kafka 15). My words were slurred from the thickening of my tongue. I felt as though I was speaking with someone else's mouth, though I grew accustomed, as Gregor did. "Apparently his words were no longer understandable even though they were clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had become accustomed to their sound" (Kafka 15). I remember an argument, when the pain medicine was withdrawn for a short time and I was once again understood, that I had not spoken clearly for months, and I had argued that only

one time during that period had I had any trouble with speech. I just did not know. It was a matter of perspective, and my perspective, as the addiction took me deeper, was forever changed. I came to see, in retrospect, that my metamorphosis was due as much to the pills as it was to the injury. They could not be separated. I was as changed to my family as an injured veteran returning home from Vietnam, disabled and dependent upon whatever would still both mind and body.

Gradually, my immediate family was no longer responsible for any of my care. They had gone on, as Gregor's had, with their lives. I was finding that my long hours spent working on the family finances and running the household, long hours I had spent with the belief that I was the only one who could do the job, were no divided, and the family was now functioning without me. Children were doing laundry, bills were paid by someone brought in for a few hours each week, and the days that my partner had spent sitting and watching me work were extended in order to make the requisite phone calls and deal with vendors and customers. Each member of the family became independent of me. I was in a room at the end of the hall, a necessary inconvenience to be tended to, and even that was delegated to our own charwoman. A woman was hired full-time to care for me and do the heavy chores of the family, such as shopping and cooking. With her there, they need not fear I was neglected, just as "there was no need for the mother's intervention or for Gregor to be at all neglected" (Kafka 40). As my caregiver seemed sturdy enough to deal with me, the charwoman in Kafka's story "was not particularly disgusted by Gregor" (Kafka 40).

My "charwoman" fed me now, though I rarely ate, just as "Gregor now ate next to nothing. Only when by chance he passed the food set out for him would he take a bit just for fun," (Kafka 41) I was brought a cup of soup every day and kept supplied with a can of Pringles potato chips (the only two things found that I would consume, if the mood might strike me), I rarely took more than a sip of broth and I would hold the potato chip on my tongue for what seemed like "hours, and mostly spit it back out" (Kafka 41). Food revolted me, chewing seemed unnecessary and strange in the changed shape of my mouth, and I just didn't trouble myself to try much. She also took care of cleaning my room, which included changed the sheets once a week. My personal hygiene consisted of

a shower coinciding with the weekly bed changing. I would often resist the assistance to the shower, determined that not enough time had passed to require a hosing down. I felt as Gregor did “coated with the dust that blanketed [the] room and blew around at the slightest movement,” the transformation so gradual that I didn’t mind my hair hanging in strings or the odor that permeated the room in the absence of any regular bathing (Kafka 43). Just like Gregor, I was “deeply indifferent” to my state (Kafka 43). Something had to break, and soon, for both me and my family.

There was a moment for me that was very much like the sound of Grete’s violin to Gregor’s ears. My partner was standing before me, eyes and heart hardened to my state, and he was flanked on either side by the faces of my children, who were now, two years later, nine and twelve years old. Their eyes held for me all the beauty that ever was or ever could be in the world, and I was the only one who appreciated that, especially not the man standing in the middle. He wanted only to be free. The children, I wanted to scoop up and carry them away with me, as Gregor fantasized about his sister. “He felt as though the path to his unknown hungers was being cleared. He was grimly determined to reach the sister and tug on her skirt to suggest that she take her violin and come into his room, for no one here was as worthy of her violin playing as he would be” (Kafka 44). My own charwoman was present on the sidelines, and she too, was tired of the troublesome creature I had become for her. I was soon to know Grete’s words when she said, “You have to try to stop thinking that is Gregor Gregor would have understood long ago that people can’t possibly live with such a creature, and he would have gone away of his own accord” (Kafka 47). It was discussed, and no consideration was given to whether I heard or not. I did hear, and I did see, and when the clock approached three, “[my] thoughts, full of tenderness and love, went back to [my] family . . . even more firmly convinced than [they] . . . that [I] should disappear” (Kafka 45). When the clock struck three, rather than dying, as I undoubtedly was, I reached for the telephone and called for help. I died to them that night, and that part of them which was a part of me, my children, were reborn with me, elsewhere, so that the rest were now free. In a figurative sense, Grete and the charwoman lived happily ever after, or so the story goes. If Gregor Samsa’s ghost returned, as mine had the next day briefly, it would

have observed, perhaps, what I had: the charwoman sweeping away the carcass of the recent past. My bedroom, the lair of the creature I had been for two full years, was being packed up and swept out, ready to be occupied or abandoned for something better.

Gregor Samsa’s experienced a transformation and did his best to live with it. When he saw the futility of continuing and the pain which he had caused his family, he surrendered and died. I, too, tried my best to live out the circumstances in which I’d found myself, and I was content for a while to do so as long as I didn’t have to feel any of it too deeply. When the moment came that I saw my own futile state, saw the pain of remembering in my children’s eyes and the loss they felt, I surrendered as well, but not to physical death. Personal responsibility became a possibility for an instant, and physical death was most definitely an option, but the higher road was the choice to live. Gregor’s story ended in his exit from his home and on to the waste pile. Mine ended in an exit from my home as well, but I found a new one with a colony of beetles where I could be accepted by and happy with beetles and non-beetles alike. I was picked up out of the waste pile, and I no longer needed the veil of drugs to hide my beautiful shell.

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A Symbolic Tribute: A Community's Gratefulness

AS I ROSE for the playing of the National Anthem on October 14, 2001, at the dedication ceremony for the Washington Township Memorial, I felt grateful for veterans who fought and died for our country; without their courage and loyalty, we, as U.S. citizens, would not be able to experience the freedoms that we have today. The Washington Township Veteran's Memorial elicited my patriotic feelings by its history, its design, and its meaning.

The memorial, formally known as "Freedom Lies within the Star," is a unique tribute to veterans of past warfare. Washington Township formerly had an honor roll that paid tribute to area veterans who served in World War II; however, the tribute was removed during the demolition of the old Fairhope School in 1942, and, unfortunately, the panels are still missing to this day. Since that time, the community did not have a memorial, due in large part to unsuccessful funding. Efforts to have a veterans memorial established were launched, a portion of a \$14,000 grant was left over from another project, allowing the township to use the remaining money to fund planning towards establishing a new monument. Township Supervisor John Yetsconish, when asked how the project was initiated, stated, "The flagpole that contains the American and P.O.W. flags were erected, and that sparked tremendous interest among the community to begin working on building a new memorial."

The memorial committee asked the community for ideas about the design of the memorial by offering a contest to residents, including middle and high school students, throughout the Mon Valley area. The memorial committee received a large number of submissions, and without knowing any information about the particular design, they solely made their choice by considering which design would have the biggest impact in both meaning and presence. The winning applicant was Josh Cramer, a high school student at the time, who stated, "my design was clear,

a star sitting upon a pentagon. It was simple and different." The design captivated everyone involved, and construction by Drew Rainy and his staff began shortly thereafter. Once finished, the memorial – an eloquent and meaningful piece of artwork—fulfilled the dream of Washington Township residents and their neighbors to establish a captivating monument that recognizes the courage and the dedication portrayed by local veterans in their efforts to preserve freedom.

The dedication ceremony for the long-awaited memorial was held on October 14, 2001, after more than fifty years of planning and solving problems that arose along the way. The weather was cold, windy, and rainy, but observing the satisfaction of those in attendance made me feel fortunate to be a part of the ceremonies. Witnessing the ceremony, as well as driving by the memorial every day, allows me to say that "Freedom Lies within the Star" is the most unique memorial in the area, and it will become more elaborate as future plans become a reality.

The memorial is located high atop a hillside alongside Route 201, overlooking the Monongahela River and the Mon Valley below. As a visitor approaches the sidewalk leading up to the monument, the most evident sight is the plaque that states, "Dedicated on October 14, 2001." The visitor continues along the sidewalk and notices the collection of nine-by-four-inch granite bricks that line the sidewalk, engraved with the names of businesses and residents who purchased the bricks to help raise additional funds for the memorial. The visitor then approaches the base of the memorial, where the unique design and its features can be closely viewed.

The most noticeable feature is the huge star that lies in the center of the memorial. The star escalates up towards the sky (if looked at from the base of the memorial outward towards the hillside), like an American Bald Eagle ascending into the sky, resembling the way America has continuously risen out of perilous events that the memorial commemorates, becoming a strong and more unified nation in the process. This star is undoubtedly the key feature of the memorial because it escalates from bricks engraved with the names of those men and women who served our country to the American flag high above, linking the veterans to their reason for fighting: the red, white, and blue of American patriotism.

The star is situated in the middle of five pentagons. These pentagons are created from sidewalks,

red river rocks, bricks inscribed with the names of local veterans, marble, and stamped concrete. Another plaque located in this formation of pentagons states, "FREEDOM LIES WITHIN A*STAR*/DEDICATED TO THOSE/WHO HAVE SERVED." Cramer's reasoning for including pentagons in his design was to "symbolize military power and intelligence."

Seven flagpoles have also been erected around the perimeter of the memorial to fly flags that pay tribute to our country and our various military branches and associations. The flagpole located at the top point of the star supports the American flag as well as a Prisoners of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) flag. Continuing clockwise, the flags shadowed by the American and POW/MIA flags honor the six branches of the military: U.S. Coastguard, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Merchant Marine.

The Washington Township Memorial is a very intriguing memorial because it does not depict just one war, but it instead collaborates the courage and loyalty of local veterans who served in any of the major conflicts that took place during the twentieth century. "Freedom Lies within the Star" pays tribute to all veterans at once, showing that each and every one of their services is equally appreciated. This memorial brings key symbols of America (the star of the American flag, pentagons, and flags honoring our country's military branches) into one stunning creation. The style of this memorial provides an artistic appeal, rather than listing names of veterans on a typical wall-type memorial. "Freedom Lies within a Star" is a memorial that not only honors the veterans from the area, but is also a wonderful use of public space because it allows the community to share the pleasure of paying tribute to the heroes it commemorates.

People may feel such emotions as thankfulness, sadness, and pride as they arrive at the memorial. They may be thankful that men and women were courageous enough to fight for a nation, on behalf of many citizens whom they would never come into contact with, personally. They may grieve because war has played such a major role throughout the history of our country. They may be proud that memorials like this one establish an everlasting remembrance for those who were involved in the many conflicts that defined the U.S.A. to be a force to reckon, but most importantly, that such veterans have finally been rec-

ognized. Area veterans are the first priority to be recognized, but Yetsonish states, "We are hoping to go nation-wide with the recognition of veterans for this memorial sometime in the near future, hopefully gaining a good bit of appeal in the process, which will enable us to encircle the memorial with the bricks engraved with the names of those who fought for us." Yetsonish also states that the future plans for the site include renovating the walking track, adding more benches, landscaping the site, and continuing to add bricks to the monument that are engraved with the names of those who served.

Local residents, as well as the veterans whom the memorial commemorates, agree that the long awaited memorial benefits the community. My neighbors, Mr. Bob and Jeanne Propes whose son, Rick, participated in the dedication ceremonies by raising the Marine Corps flag, state:

We feel that the Veteran's Memorial of Washington Township is a nice tribute to area veterans to show that the area has not forgotten about them. It is one of the nicest memorials that we have ever visited, and the designer and renovators of the site did an excellent job.

Veteran Dave Atkinson, the Chairman of the Memorial Committee, says:

The memorial was long past due and if you look at it you see many of the veterans listed participated in the World Wars, showing how long this memorial has been awaited. I knew a lot of the men and women who are listed on the memorial, and there is a lot of history involved with the monument. All in all, it means a lot to me, as well as many others in our community.

Atkinson also told me that many of the veterans listed are deceased; however, many stories can be told about these fallen heroes, and he does not want these stories to be forgotten. For example, Atkinson recalled the story of a veteran, from neighboring Monessen, who died in the Bataan Death March during World War II. Atkinson also reminded me that during the dedication ceremony, a flock of geese flew over the

event in the “Flying-V” formation. He described this as being, “an odd occurrence that displayed Mother Nature’s way of symbolizing the freedom of America.”

“Freedom Lies within a Star” is a well-deserved tribute for those men and women who served our country with loyalty, courage, and perseverance. Through the efforts of Dave Atkinson, John Yetsconish, and the remainder of the memorial committee, the design of Josh Cramer, and the interest of veterans and residents throughout the community, a memorial has been re-established in Washington Township in order to not only commemorate those true American heroes from the local area, but also to express the community’s respect and gratitude for their bravery and loyal services to our country.

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