

Best of Freshman Writing

Volume 8

Student Voices

A Commonwealth College Publication

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Contents

Joshua Gilligan <i>English 4 – DuBois campus</i> “Life Flight”	4
Keenan Slenker <i>English 4 – York campus</i> “Treats & Freaks “	5
Ray McBride <i>English 4 – York campus</i> “Abner”	7
Scott Dzienisienski <i>English – 4 Scranton Worthington campus</i> “Penn State Fanatic”	8
Tammy Lenig <i>English 4 – Hazleton campus</i> “Neighborhood”	9
Josh Gilligan <i>English 15 – Du Bois campus</i> “In the Beginning There Was Rap”	11
Laura Hope Stawski <i>English 15 – Hazleton campus</i> “Hopeless Hope”	13
Samuel G. Lepadatu <i>English 15 – Hazleton campus</i> “A Good Samaritan”	14
James Koast <i>English 15 – Fayette campus</i> “The Gettysburg National Soldiers’ Cemetery”	17
Jessica Manning <i>English 15 – DuBois campus</i> “Nightmares”	19
Matt Sandherr <i>English 15 – Worthington Scranton campus</i> “Graduation Day”	21
Josef Reeves <i>English 14 – Mont Alto campus</i> “The Power Plant Next Door”	23
Melissa Semchenko <i>English 15 – Mount Alto campus</i> “P.O.W.”	28
Linyu Zhang <i>English 15 – Delaware campus</i> “The Golden Arches”	32
A Note on Documentation:	34

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Best of Freshman Writing

WELCOME to the eighth 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 (www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/bof.htm). We only accept essays produced in

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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.

Joshua Gilligan

English 4 – DuBois campus

LIFE FLIGHT

THE CAR SPUN onto the dirt road, sending dust and gravel airborne. The two occupants in the front seat of the car hooted and hollered as the car fish-tailed up the gravel-strewn road. The smell of alcohol was thick in the car. One of the boys was unconscious in the back after having succumbed to the onslaught of heavy drinking the friends had just subjected themselves to.

“Man, I don’t know what the hell my girlfriend’s problem is,” the driver loudly exclaimed.

“Just let her cool off; she’ll be all right,” the boy in the passenger’s seat said.

“I know, but she always pulls this crap. It always seems to be right when I’m trying to have some fun, too!” the driver roared. “Doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” the passenger softly replied.

“Oh, well, can’t please ‘em everyday, I guess,” the driver said with a grin.

The two shared a laugh, and then clinked their beer bottles together before draining the contents in a swallow.

“All right! I love this song,” the driver exclaimed as he turned the volume up loud.

The radio screamed in the car as the car screamed down the road.

“Hey, Josh, I’m going to buckle up, and you should too,” stated the passenger as he stared blankly at his shoes.

“Josh?” Adam said again, with a little concern creeping into his voice.

The passenger looked up in time to see the car sliding right through a turn and towards a huge tree.

“Josh ...!”

I would be the first to tell you that my friends and I were no angels in high school. We often found

ways to get ourselves alcohol when we could find no other available mischief to keep busy. Since no one in my high school had his or her own place, many times we found ourselves being foolish enough to combine underage drinking with driving. Having fewer accidents and more control over myself while being impaired, I was often nominated to drive. After some time of getting away without accidents in the car or incidents with the law, I became a little more boastful and sure about my so-called abilities. Until one day in November of 1996, when I was put in my place. That place was a helicopter ride to Pittsburgh as I was “life-flight-ed” from Brookville. I awoke two days later to receive extensive reconstructive surgery on my face.

Although not everyone would agree that my outcome was lucky, I certainly do. I was lucky because I am alive and no one else was hurt that day. It would have been unbearable had I hurt my friends or anyone else. Both of my friends walked away without a scratch on them. Adam actually had a bruise on his shoulder, but it was from the seat belt that had saved his life. Joe, the kid in the back seat, never even knew he was in an accident that night. He found out about it when he woke up the next day.

That was a night I will not soon forget. That was a night my friends and I received a lesson on mortality.

Keenan Slenker

English 4 – York campus

TREATS & FREAKS

AS I WALKED the aisles of the local fair, a galaxy of memories filled the air. A large, rotating web of bright red and white lights on Mr. Ferris' wheel, pink fluffy sweet masses of cotton candy, and boisterous conduct are things that take me back to when I was part of the magical cavalcade. I was eight years old when my father bought a game stand in the summer of 1984 and decided to take the family to travel with the carnival. The exciting experiences of traveling with the carnival in the warm summer are imprinted in my mind with vibrant colorful lettering.

My earliest carnival experience was when my father, mother and I arrived at our first town, and I met the different people who worked at the carnival. Everyone was busy like programmed robots, erecting the rides and game stands. I dashed over to a large tent that had already been set up, which had a cow with two heads, a hairy woman, and other strange pictures painted on it. With a kitten's curiosity, I leapt into the tent's entrance. My jaw dropped; my eyes widened from my amazement at all the oddities that filled the tent: two-headed snakes, strange fetuses in jars, and a live cow with a fifth leg protruding from its side. When I turned around, three strange people stood behind me with arms folded. After I explained my situation, they politely introduced themselves. A shirtless tall man with pencil-thin eyebrows was the human pincushion. When I responded, "No way," he said. "Yeah, I even invented the strapless brassiere. Watch." He pulled out a handkerchief and two pins from his pocket, and then placed the handkerchief over his left breast and pushed the pins through the left and the right sides of the handkerchief into his skin. He said, "See, now women won't have to worry

about those troublesome fasteners." We all laughed.

The next day I ate so much cotton candy and chocolate-covered bananas it made me sick. The sun's warm touch woke me that morning, striking through a slit in the camper's dense drapes. Instantly, I sprang up, jumped into my clothes, and shot out of the camper door. I was hungry and knew Miss Plinky, an old, plump, high-spirited woman, would be making her famous chocolate-covered bananas in her bright red and yellow concession stand. When I arrived, that was just what she was doing, so I asked politely, "May I have one of your delicious bananas, Miss Plinky?"

"Well, sure, honey. Here, have two. They're fresh, just the way you like them."

I inhaled them both while making my way over to Cooks' Cotton Candy stand, where Mr. Cook was making up a batch. He poured sugar and pink powder into the center of the large, deep aluminum vat. When he turned on the machine, it shot out cotton candy along the sides of the vat. Then he scooped the cotton candy with a thin paper tube by twirling it along the sides of the vat. He twirled a huge amount on the end of the tube and said, "A sweeta treata for a sweeta boy," as he handed me the oversized delight that was as large as my torso.

My favorite experience was the night I first got on all the rides for free. It was night when I awoke from my nap. Ben, who was another carnie child, stuck his head in the camper door. "Hurry up! Come on! The rides are starting!"

"But I don't have any money," I replied.

With sprightly enthusiasm, Ben said, "You're a part of the carnival now. The rides are free, free, freeeeee!"

I darted out of the camper and ran side by side

with Ben toward the luminescent rainbow of whirling lights. The Super Duper Paratrooper speedily rotated high in the air. The buckets we sat in swung back and forth on a hinge from the centrifugal force. Ben and I screamed. When the ride ended, Ben and I laughed like hyenas as we ran to our next ride. We rode the Merry Mixer, Ferris wheel, Tea Cups, Gravitron, and Salt & Pepper shaker all night long. My abs and cheeks hurt from laughing, and the chocolate-covered bananas and cotton candy were well mixed in my stomach.

When I think back on all the merriment the carnival provided, I remember being a kid. As I walk through the local fair as an adult, in the back of my mind I'm thanking my father for buying that game stand and giving me the carnie experience of 1984.

Ray McBride

English 4 – York campus

ABNER

ONE OF MY most meaningful possessions is an old baseball cap; it is faded navy blue and has a torn brim and a red and white name patch, “Abner,” on it that is losing its stitching. About ten years ago, my friend Jason purchased a hat in his hometown that looked like something a car mechanic would wear to work. His hat was navy blue with a red and white name patch in the center above the brim that said, “Edger.” I thought the hat was pretty ugly, but I like it anyway because it was different. I asked Jason to pick out an odd name and bring me a hat the next time he went home. He did as I asked and brought me Abner. It cost me only five dollars for the hat and the name patch, which I sewed on myself.

The hat became my new good luck charm. It seemed that I met more girls when I wore it to the local bars, because it created considerable conversation. Everyone used to ask, “Who’s Abner?” or “Is that your middle name?” I used to tell them that my great, great grandfather was a famous general in the Civil War. He wasn’t very tall, but he demanded respect because he was such a good leader. His name was Abner, and his men used to call him, “Lil Abner.” It was funny, because most people didn’t get it. On parachute jumps, I started putting Abner in my right cargo pocket; it accompanied me on more than sixty jumps over a span of eight years. I took it on every deployment, wearing it during off duty hours or when we were on R&R. Ever since I have had the hat, everyone who knew me, knew of Abner. I have never let anyone borrow the hat, or allowed anyone to wear it.

The hat now sits in my closet most of the time. I don’t wear it much anymore, because the many years of jumping, traveling, and wearing it everywhere has nearly destroyed it beyond repair. My wife wishes I would throw it in the trash, but I won’t. I try to explain to her that Abner has been with me all over the world and with me when I have done some extraordinary things, like jumping out of airplanes. To me, it has a special sentimental value; it reminds me of the friends I have had, the things I have done, and the places I have been, while I was in the military.

Scott Dzienisienski

English – 4 Scranton Worthington campus

PENN STATE FANATIC

PENN STATE FOOTBALL. When I so much as hear someone mention these three words my ears perk up, and I listen. It is my passion, and I am willing to go all out to show my fanaticism. There are three times in particular that come to mind.

The first is the Penn State vs. Ohio State game on October 16, 1999. This was my second Penn State game, and after the first I felt the need to paint my face half blue and half white. It was an incredible feeling when the number one ranked Nittany Lions rushed out of the tunnel and the 97,000 fans on hand erupted as the dark blue jerseys glistened in the afternoon sun. At this moment with my blue and white face, I couldn't help thinking to myself that I could do better.

I would do just that. It would happen two years later, when the Miami Hurricanes helped break in the newly expanded Beaver Stadium, which now holds just over 107,000 fans. This time I went shirtless and included my chest, back, arms, and neck in the blue and white paint. This game was on September 1, 2001 under the lights for only the sixth time in the history of Beaver Stadium. Although it was still warm, I froze, and told myself that this would never happen again. I lied.

On September 14, 2002 Nebraska came into Happy Valley for what would be another night game, another national telecast, another attendance record with 110,962 spectators on hand, and of course another reason to show my colors. This time the face, chest, back, arms, hands, hair, and legs were painted. It was by far the most uncomfortable few hours of my life, but very much worth it. Judging by the looks I got from people on the memorable night that the football team completely dominated the Nebraska Cornhuskers, I knew I

had accomplished my goal: to do anything and everything to show just how much Penn State means to me. I have not done anything else yet this season, but Senior Day is on November 23 against Michigan State, and it's looking like a pretty good game to raise the bar once again.

Tammy Lenig

English 4 – Hazleton campus

NEIGHBORHOOD

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I thought of a neighborhood as a street in a town with houses on both sides, kids riding bicycles, playing ball or building a tree house in someone's backyard. That's what I considered a traditional neighborhood. I often wished I lived in a neighborhood like that when I was a little girl.

Where I grew up, the closest village was one mile north of us called Fishers Ferry. Five miles south was the village of Herndon. I lived in a big yellow house with my parents, five brothers and five sisters. My sisters and I were confined to a sloped backyard bordered by railroad tracks and the Susquehanna River, and a main highway, Route 147. The Little Mountain bordered the front yard.

During the summer vacation we would be home alone. Both of our parents worked, as well as our older brothers and sisters. We would wake up in the morning, go downstairs to the kitchen table, and there we would find a note from Mom. She would let us know what chores had to be done and that she would call us during her lunch break to make sure that everything was fine. Also, in capital letters at the bottom of the page, she would write, "NO FIGHTING," everyday. We would rush to get our work done so that we could play croquet, badminton, kickball and softball. The last two had special rules, though. Our backyard is bordered by railroad tracks, and if the ball was kicked or hit onto the tracks, it was considered a foul ball. The person who hit it was also responsible for retrieving it. Sometimes we had to delay games while a train was going by, because our ball would be lying on the tracks. While waiting we would sit down, count the boxcars until the caboose passed us and someone asked, "How many boxcars did you

count?" Then we would finish our game.

Some days we would spend our time on an island that lies directly across from our house, on the Susquehanna River. We would go down our backyard, and cross the railroad tracks to get to the riverbank. Once there we could walk to the island through the water and maybe our knees would get wet, because the water level of the river was rarely high where we lived. After reaching the island we would pretend that we were on *Gilligan's Island*. I got to be the Skipper; my sister, Gay, was Ginger; Jodie, the Professor; and Joy, the youngest, Gilligan. For the next couple of hours we would try to build a raft by using materials that were found on the island. We gathered logs that were about the same size in diameter and length, broke vines off and tried to put the raft together. Just like the television show, we never succeeded in leaving the island on a raft. Gay, who played Ginger, didn't want to get dirty; Joy, who played Gilligan, thought we were building the raft all wrong; Jodie, the Professor, was tired of doing all the work; and I, the Skipper, didn't think I had to do anything except tell everybody else what to do. That's when the fighting would begin. Gay and Joy would argue with Jodi and me, calling each other names until somebody would start crying and threaten to tell Mom and Dad. Then we would say we were sorry to each other and spend the rest of the afternoon swimming in the river.

On other days we would head for the Little Mountain, making huts, climbing trees and, my favorite, swinging on vines that grew from the trees and extended to the ground. The best vines would swing across a stream. We would see who could swing on the vine the longest while letting out a

scream that would make Tarzan proud.

Rainy days, not surprisingly, were the longest. We didn't have cable television and one channel was all we received on our antenna. We were born before VCRs, and we didn't have video games either. It was on these days that we would play school, or sometimes we would pretend to have a restaurant and take orders for the special of the day, toasted cheese sandwiches. We took turns being cooks, waitresses and customers. Afterwards we would argue over who would do the dishes. Finally, we would all just help so that it would be clean before Mom and Dad arrived home from work.

My sisters and I only had each other as playmates, and our imaginations. We often wished we had more friends to play with, as well as other backyards to play in. We have children of our own now, with bicycles, video games, computers, and our children are active in all kinds of sports. Yet our children are bored. I sometimes wonder what they would do if they could spend time in our neighborhood.

**Other English 4 writers whose work faculty deemed
worthy of serious consideration:**

Randy Geist – DuBois

Jeffrey Hipps – DuBois

Josh Gilligan

English 15 – Du Bois campus

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS RAP

IN THE BEGINNING there was rap. Rap was two M.C.'s on a stage locked in a lyrical battle of wits. Each M.C. was trying to best the other's last insult with a better rhyme. Gradually, the world caught on and rap transformed into hip hop. Now, hip hop is a culture. It has become a style of dress, a type of lingo, and a state of mind. Sometime during this music revolution, the bitter rivalry of rap evolved as well. Stage battles became studio battles, creating massive amounts of tension in the hip hop world. Many of these disputes are territorial. Sometimes the disputes are between artists coming from different places, and sometimes they are between artists coming from the same place. One rivalry has been escalating for the past four or five years between Eminem and The Insane Clown Posse. Though these artists share many similarities, they have many more differences that they cannot overcome. While Eminem and The Insane Clown Posse (ICP) share their home town and their shock approach, they have had very different paths to success and each performs to distinctly different fan bases. They have many similarities, but one of the most important things they share is their differences with one another. Their diverse paths have made them arch rivals.

One obvious similarity between Eminem and ICP is the fact that they are all white rappers coming from Detroit. Detroit has always been known as a music city. For decades, it has been a launch pad for many well-established stars. Like Eminem and ICP, some artists from Detroit have had to endure years of hard living before gaining the recognition they desire. Another barrier that both Eminem and ICP had to overcome was being white. Ever since Vanilla Ice, white people have not been

taken seriously as rappers until now. While ICP gained acceptance as legit white rappers, Eminem has utterly changed the whole world's view on the subject.

Another obvious similarity between Eminem and ICP is the fact that they love to shock their audience. They both make a very good living coming up with new ways to stun the world. Sometimes their methods are vulgar and violent while other times the rappers incorporate humor and happiness to astound. They often rap about rich and famous people they dislike, such as each other. Eminem writes songs about killing his mother or his wife, or he performs with Elton John while being sued by gay rights activists. The members of ICP paint their faces like clowns as do their legions of fans, and they drench two thirds of their audience with Faygo soda at every show. For artists like Eminem and ICP, shocking people means publicity, and publicity means money.

On the other hand, one clear distinction between Eminem and ICP is the paths they forged to fame. Eminem spent five years rhyming in the slums of Detroit before becoming an overnight sensation after being discovered by legendary producer and hip hop pioneer, Dr. Dre. ICP faced a more gradual rise to fame, with ten years of hard work and as many albums to prove it. Other than a few shady meetings in Detroit clubs during their rise to fame, the rappers have had very little contact, but both have put a lot of effort into attacking each other in songs, as well as during stage shows.

Another clear distinction between Eminem and ICP is the difference in their devout followers. Eminem uses MTV and other highly publicized mainstream events, while ICP stands for everything

that is not mainstream. The Underground. Mainstream music fans are less substantial. They are die-hard fans for the here and now, and quickly lose interest when a new talent comes along. Underground music fans show much more loyalty towards the artist and each other. Another difference between fans is the way they are treated. Eminem purposely pushes his fans away in his lyrics by degrading his fans for their trendiness, while ICP brings its fans together in its lyrics by praising its fans' uniqueness. Ironically, Eminem's fans have made him filthy rich while ICP's fans have made the members of the group only moderately wealthy.

Although Eminem and The Insane Clown Posse are all white rappers from the same town, with the same vulgar yet humorous style, they have very different pasts, and fans who are past very different. Although Eminem and the Insane Clown Posse meet all the criteria set by the original rap M.C.s, they are as distinct as the Day and the Night. They are indeed as diverse as they are alike. I have been known to listen to them both; however, I prefer ICP. I get tired of listening to an Eminem album in much less time than I do an ICP album. However, I see they are both good.

**Other English 15 writers whose work faculty deemed
worthy of serious consideration:**

Matt Melvin– Fayette
Robert Salko – Hazleton
Katie Ignatovich – Hazleton
Zack Mentz – Mont Alto

Laura Hope Stawski

English 15 – Hazleton campus

HOPELESS HOPE

THE ROOM REEKS of dried blood, isopropyl alcohol, and stale urine. As I step inside, the white walls enclose around me, and the sounds of the beeping and pumping machines fill the unusually quiet space. As I approach the bed, I can see that her mouth is slightly open and saliva is beginning to form in the crests where her parched lips come together. Her emaciated body lies under the thin, transparent hospital sheets and her bones eruptively protrude from her sagging skin. Her head is tilted to the left, and her hazy eyes are focused on the hospital's courtyard seen through the room's single window. Through the window I can see the last leaves of autumn clinging to the stark branches of the bare trees. My grandmother had often told me that when the season changes babies are born and elderly folks die.

A thick clump begins to form in my throat as I slowly walk to her bedside and sit down on the bed. I swallow down the clump and move next to her withering body. "Hi, Grandma, how are you feeling today?" I say in a voice that seems to have come out too loud for the tiny hospital room. She tilts her head towards me and smiles as she lifts up her fragile skeleton-like hand so I can see the red rosary I made for her in school dangling from her wrinkled fingers. I remember asking our priest to bless the beads for her when she became ill. Now, it is one of her favorite things. For the first time, I notice that in a room of white sterile objects the shiny red rosary looks almost powerful entwined around her weak fingers.

"Pray with me," she says in a quiet, forced voice. I say, "Okay," and take the shaking top of her index finger, and together we hold onto the first bead of the homemade red rosary. With lips that sound could no longer pass through, she painfully mouths the prayers that generations of our faith have dutifully learned to memorize. Together we begin to say her

favorite prayer, the "Our Father." "Our Father who art in heaven," I begin for her as the smooth, taut skin of my hand lies weakly enveloped in the loose folds of her parchment grasp. "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven." As I say the word "heaven" I feel her flinch and I can imagine the fear that is rushing through her helpless body. She is undeniably scared of dying, and she is desperately clinging to her faith to aid her through it.

I close my teary eyes and force myself to continue, "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead not into temptation but deliver us from evil." With great effort she leans close to me, and whispers, "I'll love you forever and ever after." I take a deep breathe and conclude the prayer, "Amen." I look down at her and a tear falls from my cheek onto her soft forehead. I smile at her and gently kiss where the tear fell. "I will love you forever, too," I say in a whisper.

She closes her heavy eyes and slowly begins to drift away. Suddenly, the angry machines begin to beep furiously and a team of nurses rush into the room and surround her, but amidst the chaos in the room her face is peaceful. My stomach drops and my eyes uncontrollably flood with tears as a round African-American nurse pronounces her time of death, "4:32 a.m.," and it is over; she is gone.

As they begin to lift her withered body from the hospital bed, I see the rosary slip from her fingers onto the cold white floor. I glare at the plastic bead, my face flushed with anger. All of those beads, ironically representative of the prayers she prayed that went unanswered. Her faith lay on that hospital floor, powerless. I turn my back on the scarlet red rosary and with teary eyes and a broken heart leave the room.

Samuel G. Lepadatu

English 15 – Hazleton campus

A GOOD SAMARITAN

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL Saturday morning by all accounts. The sun is out with only a few stray clouds marking up the blue sky. The occasional bird lends its song to the chorus of street cars driving up and down the streets of Ridgewood. And the smell of fresh city air (as fresh as NYC air can be) fills our lungs as we jolt out of the church through the huge mahogany doors and onto the sidewalk. There was hardly a word spoken in the pre-arrangement of our activity; tag after church is a sort of unwritten rule for ten year olds. I, being the dominant and most outspoken of the group, am naturally deemed the "tagger," while George, T.B., Paolo, and Robert all scatter the city block as the hiding "taggees." There isn't very far to go, and not many places to hide, but we make do. And part of the fun is the chase after one is spotted. We run around like yelping pups, screaming and laughing, huffing and puffing.

Most of the congregation has exited the church already and gathered on the sidewalk outside where they are mingling. As we occasionally run past the front doors, we hear a voice or two sternly yell after us in their vain attempt to settle us down. It is a fairly large church body, perhaps equivalent to the size of the congregation that could fit into a typical Catholic cathedral. Looking back now, twelve years later, it seemed a very cozy environment. Friends who haven't seen each other in years joyfully embraced one another; cheeks of children were turned rosy red by the pinching of elders; men laughed; women giggled; children screamed. Although totally oblivious to the reminiscent value of these surroundings back then, and perhaps spawned from the recesses of my subconscious, I look back on the memories of my care-free youth with fond nostalgia.

After about half an hour of the grown-ups' fellowship and the children's frolicking, it is time to go home. Each parent calls to his or her own child, and grudgingly we filter down the intensity of our romping. Eventually we walk slowly toward our cars, hoping that something will tie our parents up for just a few minutes longer so we can continue our game. When we realize that our parents are ready to leave, that thread of hope deserts us and we reluctantly part. I quickly say, "See you later," to my buddies and hop into my car.

The silver station wagon is a beast of a machine, both in size and in sturdiness (it would survive to give my family over 400,000 miles of road time before its demise). I ask my father to turn up the air conditioner because, of course, I am hot and sweaty after all that running. I look out the window as I cool down, my mind plowing through the possible strategies I could have employed in capturing my adversaries (lessons I would heed for next week).

Having bored of those thoughts, as ten year olds often and quickly do, I direct my attention to my parents' conversation. My dad is running on about something someone said to someone else that he found funny. My mother occasionally nods while staring out the window, obviously entranced in her own thoughts. Their conversation offering no amusement, I gaze out my window and allow my thoughts to wander as they might.

By now, we have entered Astoria, a section of Queens in which most men fear to spend more time than is necessary to drive through it. This is the quickest route from our apartment in Jackson Heights to the Ridgewood Seventh-day Adventist church. We have traveled this course countless times

before, but never before now, as I look out my window, have I realized the poverty and repulsiveness that so wholly plagues the district.

From the crowded, narrow street on which we are driving, I see the old duplex townhouses that line the sidewalks. They are all, every single one, shabby, rundown, and falling to pieces. Some have broken, rusty railings leading to eroded front porches with large cracks and gaping holes in the concrete. Others have siding that is chipped and worn or missing altogether, exposing the silver outer layer of insulation. Mold and mildew are caked on most of the windows, as if they haven't been cleaned in years, while others yet have soggy roofs with holes and missing tiles.

I watch a group of teenagers huddled around the front stairs of one duplex. Two boys (they couldn't have been older than sixteen) are sitting at the bottom of the steps. The skinny one on the right exhales a breath of smoke as he hands a piece of rolled-up paper to the anxious, shaking hand of his comrade. Just above them on the top step, another boy has his hand up the shirt of a girl who is struggling to break free. Leaning against the banister on the porch, a short Hispanic boy in a white tank-top gulps the contents of a green bottle. Further along this sidewalk, I watch curiously as an African-American woman nurses her infant, pacing circles in front of her doorway. A few houses down, an old man lies sprawled lifeless on his porch while busy flies buzz around his open mouth.

I've seen these scenes before, every week for the last three years. So why am I so despondent now? A feeling swells up in the pit of my stomach. I feel a pity that is beyond pity, perhaps borderline abhorrence. No matter how badly I want to turn away and escape the cruelty of this scene and find refuge in the pleasant innocence of my youth, I can't break free of the trance into which I have been lured.

As I watch the pathetic world that lay just outside the utopia of my station wagon, I jump, surprised by a loud thump coming from the back window across from me. Together with my parents, I jerk my head to see what it was. On the other side of the window we see a dark figure that startles us

just as much as had the unexpected noise. He is an older African-American man. His grayish-white, prickly beard adds a sharp contrast to the dark, thin figure of his face. His saggy, sorrowful-looking eyes appear as though they hold the wisdom of a lifetime of experience. His shiny, knotted hair looks like the wool of the sheep I had seen in a picture with Jesus in the church. He is smiling, and his pearly-white teeth sparkle in the mid-afternoon sun.

Although apprehensive at first, after intensely examining this humble creature, I feel somewhat comforted. My parents, on the other hand, are both frantically shaking their heads and exclaiming that they don't have any money. My dad peers through the windshield, hoping to be able to pull the car forward a little. But all he can see is the back end of an eighteen-wheeler just inches in front of our car's bumper. He quickly joins my mother again in the effort to drive the stranger away. Moving up to the front passenger side window where my mother is sitting, the old man continues to gently tap on the glass while he mouths words which I can't make out.

My dad is now rather flustered. He angrily waves his arm in an aggressive gesture, warning the man to leave. But the old man simply smiles and again calmly mouths his unheard words. Finally, my dad flings open his door, jumps out of the car, and above the roof of the car roars, "Are you deaf?! Get away from the car before I . . ."

Interrupting my dad in mid-sentence, the man apologetically replies, "I'm sorry, suh. Foe-give me fuh startling you and yo wife." As he raises a black object to my father's view, he continues, "But ya see, suh, it seems that you back doe is open an you wife's puhs fell out."

My dad's eyes transform from narrowly angry to humbly shocked. He looks back (my mother and I join him from inside the car) and sure enough, the trunk door is cracked open. As I look back toward this "good Samaritan" stranger, a smile forms on my lips.

"Uh, thank you, Mister. Thank you very much," my dad mutters as he takes the purse from the hand

of the man's outstretched arm. After my dad closes the back door and hops back into the station wagon, there is an awkward silence. I watch as the man slowly limps away with his head lowered. I watch him, but not with a hint of pity or disgust; I watch him with reverence and respect. This righteous man has been forced to live his entire life with the same kind of hard stereotype he has just experienced, because of circumstances beyond his control. And yet he wasn't rude or angry or spiteful. He showed nothing but the uttermost human kindness. Truly this man is worthy of respect above many other men.

Hoping to beat the green light, I reach over and quickly lower the window with which he had introduced himself to us. Yelling loud enough so as to make sure he hears, echoing the words of my father I say, "Thank you, Mister. Thank you very much." I'm not thanking him for the purse, nor am I thanking him for his good-hearted deed. I am thanking him for showing me the kind of man I want to be. He replies with a smile, "Yo welcome, young suh. Yo very welcome."

James Koast

English 15 – Fayette campus

THE GETTYSBURG NATIONAL SOLDIERS’ CEMETERY

SACRED PLACES are held dear by everyone; therefore, we have these places to remember the events that occurred there. These places vary from statues to cemeteries, and buildings of different purposes and are widely known for the history-shaping events that took place there. Other sacred places are not as familiar to us, for they only involved small groups of people, and are not as widely publicized. Therefore, not many people know they exist. I chose the Gettysburg National Soldiers’ Cemetery, because it is one of the sacred places that stand out in a lot of people’s minds. Why do people go to the Gettysburg National Soldiers’ Cemetery? The reason is simple. This was the site where one of the most decisive battles of the Civil War was fought. The events that took place there are widely known to everyone, but if not I hope to inform readers of them. The people who travel there are hoping to preserve and honor the memory of the men who valiantly gave their lives during each of America’s terrible wars.

The origins of the Gettysburg National Soldiers’ Cemetery date back to the days after the battle. President Abraham Lincoln and the governor of Pennsylvania, Andrew Curtin, thought it a fitting tribute to bury the fallen soldiers on the battlefield where they fought. Therefore, all the Union soldiers were exhumed from their hasty graves, and returned to more formal ones. Then, on November 19, 1863, Abraham Lincoln formally dedicated the cemetery to “these honored dead.” In the center of the site, the soldiers’ national monument was placed to overlook the circle of graves. Finally, the cemetery was completed in 1872. It was later de-

cidated that local casualties from later wars would also be allowed to rest here.

I chose to return to this site to observe the reactions of the people who still walk through this hallowed ground to try to understand why so many people visit the site. I saw many people on this trip, but I am only going to discuss the ones who stood out in my mind.

The first person I saw was an elderly woman who walked through the part dedicated to WWII casualties; she stopped at every marker. I was unable to tell whether or not she knew any of the gentlemen buried there. She walked with a demeanor that showed she was paying respect and homage to these brave men who gave all they could. I kept walking to various parts of the cemetery, but I often glanced back to see if she was still there, and she was.

As I was walking to the memorial at the center of the cemetery, I noticed a man and his son dressed in clothing of the Civil War era reading a tombstone. I watched them for a little while. I then went over and asked the man if there was a reenactment of some kind going on. The man said, “No, we are from the area. We dress like this sometimes to get a feel for the history.” He also told me that he and his son usually come to the cemetery and read the tombstones. That way they can learn more about the people buried there. I looked and saw that the tombstone they were looking at belonged to Captain William E. Miller. When I returned home, I looked him up on the Internet and saw he had won the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions on the third

day at Gettysburg. But, my questions were still unanswered. Why do people want to come and pay tribute to people they never knew?

I continued my walk to the monument at the center of the cemetery. When I got there, people were taking pictures and listening to a tour guide talk about the history of the site. As she proceeded to take the group on through the cemetery, I decided to tag along to see their reactions. There were eight people in the group (two children, two women, four men).

As we were walking, they asked various questions. One was how many Confederate soldiers were buried there. The guide said, "Seven were originally buried here." However, over the years their families petitioned to get them exhumed to be reburied in their own families' cemeteries. I could tell by the expressions on their faces that these people were really moved by that. I noticed one of the women was wiping her nose and eyes with a handkerchief, and her husband or boyfriend had put his arm around her to console her. The two children did not even misbehave; it was as though they were moved by the history of this place.

I then noticed a couple of men standing by a statue. They were standing there with their heads down, and their hands in front of them. The monument was the "friend to friend" Masonic memorial; there was a symbol on it. The two men wore pins with the symbol as well. When the men were finished, I asked them what the symbol was, and they told me it was the Mason symbol. They were there paying respect to their fallen brethren. I asked if they were related to any of the men buried here. They said none of them were family by blood, but they share a kinship with them through their organization. I was moved by what this man told me. He would probably never know or find out anything about these men buried here, but he was still paying them the respect that they richly deserve.

On my way out, there was a man with around twenty-five children with him. He was reading a plaque to them that said there were 6000+ soldiers buried there. Of those, 3512 were from the battle of Gettysburg, and 979 of those are unknown. One

of the children, a girl, said that was very sad. I watched as a number of the children agreed with her. They were also moved by the tragedy of it. The cemetery is now the home of soldiers from nearly every one of America's conflicts. It was eventually closed to new burials, but this place is still sacred to all who go there. The reason is that the Civil War was a terrible time in American history. People can not go to this place or any other kind of sacred place, and not be moved by it.

The reason I believe these people pay tribute is that some feel the patriotic power of the places. Many show their pride and respect for those men and women who gave their all for their country. Secondly, I think that some believe that going to these sacred places will give them a chance to honor and know the people who shaped the foundations of these sacred places. Like the elderly woman, who just went from tombstone to tombstone as though she was searching for an answer as to why these men now rest there, people vary in their reasons for showing respect. Some may place a lone flower on a grave or monument. Some shed tears on them, but everyone will still go on showing respect in their own fashion. The most important thing we can remember is that these places do exist. We have a duty to keep the memories they represent alive.

Jessica Manning

English 15 – DuBois campus

NIGHTMARES

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE that a nightmare is a nightmare. One is like another, and all nightmares are the same. However, I feel that my nightmares are varied. They can be classified into three groups: the falling nightmares, the chase nightmares, and the precognitive nightmares.

My chase nightmares make me afraid. These are the nightmares of my being chased by someone or something. They can be intertwined with or preceded by falling nightmares. Chase nightmares are believed to stem from feelings of anxiety or unknown dangers in one's waking life. Running from an attacker who wants to harm or kill you is an instinctive response to a physical threat. It is possible that chase nightmares may be a way of coping with fear, stress, or other various situations in one's waking life.

I have had numerous distinct chase nightmares. In one of my nightmares, I was being chased by someone I can describe only as the Grim Reaper armed with a scythe. He was chasing my grandmother, father, son, and a couple of other people in my family. I thought that he was after everyone I hold dear to my heart. I managed to get everyone he was chasing to safety. I then went back to fight the Grim Reaper and suddenly woke up. In other such nightmares, I have been chased by a multitude of snakes, spiders, and other animals or characters.

Additionally, my falling nightmares make me anxious. These are nightmares of falling or jumping from a great height. They usually occur during the first stages of sleep. Nightmares in this stage are often accompanied by muscle spasms. It is thought that the muscle spasms are an arousal mechanism to awaken the dreamer to be respon-

sive to possible threats. After reading about falling nightmares, I am inclined to believe that falling in a nightmare is an indication of insecurity, instability, anxiety, or shame. Falling nightmares also reflect a sense of failure or inferiority.

I had a recurring nightmare of this nature in my high school history class. In this nightmare, a man was chasing me with some sort of weapon. I always had a mode of transportation; although different every time, each was effective. Some modes of transportation were a skateboard, a bicycle, and roller skates. The attacker would chase me until I came to a building, a skyscraper usually. I would enter the front door, and suddenly I was on the roof with nowhere to go but down. I would turn around and see my attacker bursting through the door to the roof of the building, and I would jump. The split second before I hit the ground, I would wake up with a severe jerk. Unhappily knowing that I was sleeping, my history teacher would give me the evil eye.

Finally, my precognitive nightmares make me terrified. These are nightmares that seemingly include knowledge about the future, which cannot be inferred from actual, available information. Precognitive nightmares differ from déjà vu experiences because the precognition usually seems to involve someone other than the dreamer. These nightmares adhere rather closely to the corresponding external event, usually twenty-four hours later, but that is not always the case; it could be years. Women seem to have more precognitive nightmares than men, but the ability to have such nightmares declines with age in both sexes.

About seven years ago, I had a nightmare in which my mother was in a vehicle accident. She

was driving her truck on a particular stretch of road very familiar to me. I could sense she had a medical condition but I didn't know what it was. I wasn't sure why, but she lost control of her truck, struck an embankment, and started spinning in circles. Suddenly, the truck came to a stop across the lane of traffic in which she was driving. The rear bumper of the truck was on the yellow line, and the front bumper was buried in the dirt of the bank. I could see that she was shaken but otherwise unhurt. Although I couldn't see their faces, two people who I felt as if my mother and I knew had stopped to help her. I then woke up sweating and shaking tremendously. Two weeks later the same accident occurred, but the differences were that I was the person in the accident, I was in my father's truck, and I was pregnant. I believe that the pregnancy was the medical condition that I had sensed in my nightmare.

The evidence clearly indicates that my nightmares are diverse. Nightmares do have some similarities, but each one is different in some way. Although people have their own beliefs about nightmares, I feel that a lot can be learned from them. I believe that nightmares serve to make people more aware of their feelings of stress, fear, failure, insecurity, or anxiety.

Matt Sandherr

English 15 – Worthington Scranton campus

Graduation Day

After six weeks of intense training, my graduation date had finally arrived. For over a month, I had been pushed beyond my limit for this final moment. I had never felt so much pride at any other point in my life. I had made it through Basic Military Training.

We spent a few weeks practicing, so we knew exactly what to expect. Precise marching, pressed uniforms, and shined shoes gave us the sharp, professional and disciplined look we had worked so hard for.

“Flight, attention!” ordered our training instructor.

“Right face!”

“Here we go,” I thought to myself. The excitement ran chills down each of our backs as we prepared for this shining moment. We all had our chests sticking out with pride waiting for the initiating command.

“Forward, march!”

I could feel the whole group as if we were one machine traveling across the field. We moved forward in step, perfectly spaced and looking better than our parents had ever seen us. During this period of two minutes that we spent marching, I spent thinking back on what it took to get there.

The hardest step was the first. I ignored the reality of the decision to sign up until the day I left. I had to face leaving a girlfriend, friends and family. Now, my parents and I didn’t get along, which led to the whole thing, but I was going to miss them too. It was pretty damn painful. I really couldn’t let go of the life I had. At that point there was no turning back. The time had come.

Tearful goodbyes and stalling conversations finally broke with my trip to Harrisburg. Since I

was to leave early in the morning my parents took a room at a nearby hotel. I spent the night in another hotel with others from every branch of service to leave at 5:30 the next morning. I couldn’t possibly fall asleep that night. I spent the entire time on the phone with my girlfriend. The time crept up on me like something evil. My resistance to the idea grew by the minute.

The next day would be the longest of our basic training and would require the most patience. I was sleep-deprived and had signed so much paperwork that my signature had changed. Sometime late that afternoon, I said goodbye to my parents and boarded a bus for the airport. No turning back. I was now one hundred percent committed. The thought of it all disgusted me. I was in a daze.

When I finally snapped out of it, I was on my final flight to San Antonio, Texas. The time was rolling by so fast that there wasn’t any time to accept the truth. Next thing I knew, I was on the bus to Lackland Air Force Base, “The Gateway to the Air Force.” We were under-prepared, equipped with only vague ideas and lies from the recruiter.

Upon arrival, the bus traveled for just a minute and stopped outside of a building dressed with military flags. There existed only a few moments of silence before a swarm of sergeants invaded the bus and broke into our peaceful lives. They say Basic Training is just filled with “head games.” Well, successfully withstanding verbal abuse complimented with extreme physical demand might serve an acceptable definition for “head games.” They mentally ripped us apart and broke us into separate groups. Then, they chased those groups into separate buses. I was exhausted and ready to sleep. Since it was about one o’clock in

the morning we figured that the fun was almost over. About an hour after being dropped off, we were sick of standing at attention. Little did we know, but we were being watched. As soon as our bags hit the ground, doors opened and upset sergeants came up to us. I couldn't do any more push-ups, but I had to. I couldn't stay with it, but I had to. That night we finally made it our beds for one hour of sleep. Nobody slept. We were so shaken from the past six hours that nobody could relax and sleep in such a short time. It was only the beginning of the longest, hardest and most emotional six weeks we had ever endured.

We had done different activities day to day, but the difficulty remained the same. Every day we learned how to march, did an endless number of push-ups, and were given slightly not enough time to complete our given tasks. Basically, we moved faster and worked harder than we ever knew we could. And on top of it all, we had our own "dorm guard" shift in the middle of the night a couple days a week. Surprisingly, by doing our best and learning how to work together, we had made it through.

"Column left, march!" commanded Sergeant Rutiaga, our new personal hero.

At this point we were marching straight at the audience and straight for all the proud parents. It was our time to shine.

"Column left, march!" said Sergeant Rutiaga.

The final leg of the march, "the bomb run," is the most famous part of the ceremony. Upon the command "Eyes right" the column of airmen next to the crowd on the right continues to look forward to keep the whole group straight. The rest look to the crowd on the right.

"Eyes right," he said.

At this point I had reached my highest level of pride and satisfaction. I had found a new person within me through hard work and accomplishment. The training surprised me with how much I can really do and how much more is accomplished when everyone works together as a team. It felt so good to explore these areas in such an intense manner than I would do it again without any second thought.

Josef Reeves

English 14 – Mont Alto campus

THE POWER PLANT NEXT DOOR

THERE ARE MANY different nuclear power plants in the United States. Out of all of the power plants in the United States, some of the ones that are in the most danger of a problem are the ones that should be the safest. These plants are the ones that are located among the urban populations of major cities all over the country. In the states of Pennsylvania and New York, three power plants in particular stand out as being close to urban areas and also having safety problems. These power plants are Indian Point, Three Mile Island, and Peach Bottom. These power plants all have problems that could cause many deaths. If these power plants, being in the urban areas they are located in, were to have a problem, there would be total devastation. An example of what can happen to a power plant located in an urban area after a meltdown is Chernobyl in the Ukraine. During this disaster over 135,000 people were evacuated; however, the people were not evacuated fast enough to stop the problems associated with radiation (Visscher 1). There are many birth defects and many radiation-related cancers attributed to Chernobyl (Visscher 1). To prevent a problem like this in the United States, power plants must either be closed or moved away from urban areas. I do not think power plants located in urban areas in the states of Pennsylvania and New York are safe enough to remain in operation at their current locations.

In Pennsylvania and New York there are several major urban areas. Lying close to these population centers are several large power plants that are just waiting to have a major problem. All of these power plants have something in common: each of them has some kind of problematic safety record and also

is located close to a very large population of people. Each of these power plants could cause well over 40,000 deaths if they were to have some sort of catastrophic meltdown at their current location (“Nuclear Power” 1). A meltdown is not the only problem that could occur at a power plant; there are also issues with the nuclear waste and the general security involving terrorism.

Indian Point is a perfect example of a problematic power plant. This plant is located in an urban area. Indian Point has had many problems since it has opened. Between 1972 and 2002 there have been over 17 major problems at Indian Point (“History and Safety” 2-4). One serious problem that occurred at Indian Point in the beginning of 2000 caused 20,000 gallons of radioactive water to spill into the containment building and also released a great deal of radioactive steam into the air (“History and Safety” 3). After this problem, the second reactor at Indian Point reported as a “RED” reactor, which is the worst rating possible (“History and Safety” 3-4). The power plant also closed for nine months following this problem (“History and Safety” 3-4). Another problem at Indian Point occurred in 1998 when the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) fined Indian Point power plant \$55,000 for a violation that involved the emergency system design (“History and Safety” 3). Yet one more problem that occurred at Indian Point ten years ago caused failure in the backup reactor shutdown system for six months (“History and Safety” 3). With this many problems occurring at the plant, it is just a matter of time before a serious problem occurs.

Another power plant that has been investigated

recently because of problems is Peach Bottom nuclear power plant (“NRC Probes” 1). This power plant is located 17.9 miles from the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and is also close enough to Philadelphia to put this large urban area in the fallout zone for this power plant (“Nuclear Power” 1). This year alone, the NRC has investigated several different problems at this power plant. These problems include, but are not limited to, the erratic operation of the reaction core isolation cooling pump while the pump was in automatic mode; the reactor building vent failing to close following a primary containment isolation signal; and a feed water pump bypass valve failing to operate (“NRC Probes” 1). These problems, although they are not very serious, should not have happened. Any problem at a nuclear power plant should be taken very seriously no matter how big an effect it has. These problems show that these power plants are not as safe as they should be. If these problems can occur for any reason, then what is to say that an even greater problem that could kill thousands of people will not. In 1980 it was estimated that a problem at Peach Bottom could cause up to 72,000 deaths and \$119 billion in damages (“Nuclear Power” 1).

Another reoccurring problem at Peach Bottom nuclear power plant is the problem relating to the public announcement (P.A.) system and other evacuation alarms. The P.A. system is the speaker system that signals a problem with the power plant for both employees and the general public around the plant. This system is used during an emergency and would be used to tell people when to evacuate and when it would be safe to resume activities in and around the plant (“EA-01-148” 1). During an NRC inspection it was shown that the P.A. system was not working up to the NRC inspection standards (“EA-01-148” 1). This problem was classified as white, which means it could cause moderate problems (“EA-01-148” 1). From 1992 until 2002 approximately forty seven percent of the P.A. speakers in the power plant did not work (“EA-01-148” 1). Another problem found that related to the P.A. system was that from mid-January 2001

until mid-February 2001 and also from mid-March 2001 until mid-April 2001 the entire P.A. system was running on backup power. It was shown that the backup power would only have worked for up to 49 seconds in the case of a real emergency (“EA-01-148” 1). On February 13, 2001, and on April 17, 2001, both the normal and backup P.A. systems were down for over four hours, making it impossible to communicate with the workers and the population around the plant (“EA-01-148” 1). If there was some sort of emergency during the time of any of these problems, the general public would not have been able to evacuate as fast as necessary to prevent problems. These problems show that even the most minor of problems could possibly result in a major catastrophe.

Many different situations can cause problems at a power plant. The most serious of these problems by far is a meltdown. A meltdown can be caused by many different things. When most people think of a meltdown, they think of places like Three Mile Island (TMI). The Three Mile Island power plant is located just outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1979, this power plant had a problem which some would call a meltdown. The problem was caused by a few different factors which included many different oversights by the workers there. The first major problem that occurred at Three Mile Island was caused when a valve in the reactor was stuck open. With this valve open, gallons and gallons of water were released from the reactor which exposed the fuel rods. This problem was not caught by the workers at the plant (“Minutes to” 1). In a nuclear power plant the reactor can not go above 5000 degrees at any time. If the reactor does go above that level, there will be no way to cool it down, and this is what is called a total meltdown. At one point during the T.M.I. problem, the core temperature reached 4300 degrees (“Minutes to” 2). After many hours during the Three Mile Island problem, the power plant was finally back under control.

Even though Three Mile Island is safer now than in 1979, it is still not safe. This was shown by some

of the problems that have occurred more recently. One problem that occurred in 1999 was with the diesel generators. A nuclear power plant is controlled by a power grid. If this power grid goes down, then the power plants will, in effect, be shut down automatically (“Two Steps” 1). If the grid goes down, then there are supposed to be diesel generators that control the activity in the reactor until the power grid is back online (“Two Steps” 1). In 1999 it was found that for over three months the diesel generators at Three Mile Island were not working, and no one at the power plant knew (“Two Steps” 1). This could have caused a very serious problem in the reactor if there had been a loss of the power grid at that time. Another problem that occurred recently at Three Mile Island was in 1995 when the operators at Three Mile Island failed to assess the degree of a problem that was simulated during a test (“TMI Fails” 1). It turns out that, if the problem that was simulated at Three Mile Island was real, people outside of the ten-mile zone around the plant would have been harmed (“TMI Fails” 1).

Other problems that can occur at a nuclear facility are the problems associated with the waste. If the nuclear waste was to be out of water for a sustained period of time, it could catch fire (Kolbert 40). A fire in the nuclear waste would cause many problems. These problems could be as bad as a meltdown, if not worse. The nuclear waste at a power plant is very volatile. This waste includes both the fuel rods that are used in the reactor and also the water used to cool the reactor. There are many different problems that these products can cause. In a study done by the NRC, it was stated that a meltdown in the spent fuel pool could potentially cause the evacuation of people up to 500 miles away (“NRC Study” 1). This is a very serious problem, considering that there are 93 million people within a 500-mile radius of Indian Point power plant (“NRC Study” 1). Many power plants in this country are not well equipped with places to store and dispose of spent power plant waste. In an article in *Newsweek*, Jonathan Alter stated that

some of the fuel pools in the country are actually above ground and not protected by any type of wall like the reactors are (Alter 2). These fuel pools are used to cool the spent fuel rods. If these rods are exposed to the environment for one reason or another, they could ignite and cause a horrific fire that would release huge amounts of radiation (Alter 2). The reason for many of these problems at power plants is inadequate storage. There are currently plans underway to build a very large storage area under the Yucca Mountain range in Nevada (“NRC Study” 2). But this repository will not be open until approximately 2010 (“NRC Study” 2).

While Three Mile Island has done nothing to prepare the people of the surrounding community, Entergy, the owners of Indian Point, did do one thing to try to prevent a disaster at their power plant: printing and passing out over 200,000 guides about what to do in case of an emergency (Kolbert 36). This guide is what the company calls being prepared. The truth is Entergy is not prepared at all. Even with the guide, many people would be more likely to react irrationally during a meltdown. Entergy can not expect people to be prepared for an accident if the company is not prepared itself. The Witt Report is a report that tells about the adequacy of a nuclear power plant. This report also tells how ready a power plant is for a nuclear disaster. This year the Witt Report concluded that Indian Point did not have an adequate energy plan in place. The report stated, “...it is our conclusion that the current radiological response system and capabilities are not adequate to overcome their combined weight and protect the people from an unacceptable dose of radiation in the event of a release from Indian Point, especially if the release is faster or longer than the design basis release” (“Witt Report Finds” 1).

Both Three Mile Island and Peach Bottom have passed the standards set by the NCR. Indian Point power plant has also been tested by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). These tests included mini-terrorist drills and a walk-through of the plant (Kolbert 38). The Indian Point power

plant passed all of these tests (Kolbert 38). Since the power plant passed these tests, Indian Point was said to be safe. The fact remains that, even with the greatest of planning and testing, unexpected events can still occur. Most disasters are unexpected and, because of this, they can not be prevented. The NRC has been known to be very serious about testing power plants for safety. During these tests, just about every aspect of the power plants are observed and certified to be up to code. If the power plants are not safe or up to code, they will be closed until they pass inspection.

In the event of a nuclear problem, most likely there would not be enough time to evacuate the majority of the people who are within the “peak fatality” zone. This zone is a seventeen-and-a-half mile zone around the power plant (Kolbert 36). Within this zone, there are several hundred thousand people (Kolbert 36). The accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant was predicted to cause 42,000 deaths and up to \$102 billion in damages. If the damage caused at Three Mile Island were not enough, a problem at Peach Bottom nuclear plant would cause 72,000 deaths and \$119 billion in damages (“Nuclear Power” 1). These numbers of people are much larger than the number of people that surrounded the Chernobyl power plant when a meltdown occurred there. If the power plant was moved to a point that is not surrounded by people, the risk of a problem would be greatly reduced. Even though it would cost a great deal of money to move the power plant to another location, the cost would be far less than that of a disaster. It is estimated that a disaster at the power plant could cause up to \$300 billion worth of damage (Kolbert 36). Also, the power plant would not have to be moved far, just to a place where there are not 20,000,000 people within fifty miles of the plant. Maybe the locations of power plants in the future should be built less for convenience and more for safety of the surrounding people.

Nuclear power in this country is not safe. If there was a serious problem at a nuclear power plant, the area around the power plant would not be pre-

pared to handle an evacuation of, potentially, millions of people. There have been many problems found by the NRC during their testing at these power plants. In addition to the problems found by the NRC, many other factors have to be considered, such as nuclear waste and operator problems. All of these problems pose a large risk to the general population of the United States. When the power plant is near an urban area, the problem becomes even larger and the risk of danger becomes greater.

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P.O.W.

IN THE MARCH 24 issue of *The New Yorker*, Henrik Hertzberg, a columnist for the magazine, wrote a commentary on prisoners of war entitled “Terror and Torture.” The column briefly touches on the issue of the illegal torture that is frequently used to obtain important information from a prisoner. Torture tactics on prisoners have been used for nearly every war, even civil wars. I believe torturing anyone for any reason is unethical. I think needed information about the enemy is necessary to win a war but should be obtained respectfully through intelligent and secret tactics. Physical injury or humiliation should not be used to elicit information. Unfortunately, torture is still used today despite the laws put into place to protect prisoners of war.

Early on in the war with Iraq, people were informed about the American soldiers captive in Iraqi prisons. When “Operation Iraqi Freedom” began, it was not long after when prisoners were taken in on both sides. Almost every individual with access to a television, who has been keeping him- or herself updated on the war, has heard about the first seven prisoners of war—P.O.W.s. However, it was just one day we heard about the American P.O.W. situation. As I was writing this paper, I searched throughout the Internet for sites about the seven P.O.W.s. Disappointingly, I only came up with one site listed by Al-Jazeera Television. This site was, of course, in Arabic, and I could not translate it.

When I researched further, I discovered that posting information about prisoners of war was a violation of the Geneva Convention. This is stated in Article Thirteen of the Geneva Convention: “Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity” (“Geneva Convention” 6). Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld stated that Iraqi Television and Al-Jazeera clearly violated that section of the Con-

vention. One reason was that the visibly terrified and injured Americans were asked stupid, pointed questions in front of a televised audience (Cloud 3). As the camera scanned the room, there were bodies of executed soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Company, the same unit the P.O.W.s were from. One was shown with a visible gunshot wound to his forehead. This was noted as a grave breach of the Geneva Convention. If the treatment of prisoners of war must be humane, then the execution of the prisoners of war is illegal.

Article Thirteen of the convention refers to the “humane” treatment of prisoners. *The New Yorker* stated that in President Bush’s State of the Union Address, he highlighted methods of torture used by the Iraqis. Included in the list were electric shock, branding by use of hot irons, burning the skin with acid, the use of electric drills on the skin, and rape and threats of rape (Hertzberg 2). A few days after the reporting on the P.O.W.s, almost every reporter would talk about how the Iraqi government would play music very loudly to prevent sleep for the prisoners. The Iraqis would also replay footage of protesters of war in hopes of discouraging soldiers. It did not work. I believe that torture imposed by not only the Iraqis, but other countries as well, is inhumane. On April 12 and 13, the seven prisoners of war, including Jessica Lynch, returned home, beaten and bruised, but home nonetheless.

Jessica Lynch, the now well-known P.O.W., was one of those prisoners who was able to return home on April 12. She was rescued from Saddam Hospital in Nasiriyah on April 2. Lynch was the only soldier out of her unit, the 507 Maintenance Company, to be left at the hospital. The others were later rescued north of Baghdad (Stolley and Angle 2). Lynch had a number of injuries, including spinal injuries and fractures to her right arm, both legs, and her right foot and ankle (Stolley and Angle 2). Lynch has also reported that, while in the hos-

pital, she was fed nothing but crackers and orange juice. Maybe the Iraqis thought a daily dose of vitamin C would help heal all those fractures and wounds. I am sure they felt the same way about the gunshot wounds produced by low velocity small arms Private Lynch had on her body (Adler 1). This is a perfect example of the ways Iraq has been treating our soldiers. Granted, the treatment of Lynch was not as morbid as some of the techniques listed above; however, I do wonder how Ms. Lynch received broken bones and fractures to various areas of her body. Only Lynch and the Iraqis know what happened in that hospital, and when she is ready to speak, America will know as well.

Iraq has been in the spotlight for the inhumane treatment of their prisoners during the recent war. Sadly, the American military has not been there like it should have been. When Donald Rumsfeld stated that it was a violation of the Geneva Convention for Iraq to treat the American prisoners cruelly, he was being hypocritical. It was not that long ago when we were in a different war. It was a war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Afghani prisoners may have been treated appallingly at Bagram military base and many other prisons set up in and around Afghanistan (Harris and Wazir 1). The United States was hit with allegations of torturing the Afghan prisoners who were taken in by American soldiers.

On December 29, 2002, the *Guardian Unlimited*, an online newspaper out of the United Kingdom, released an article about a man named Moazzam Begg, an Al-Qaeda suspect. He was kept at the Bagram Military Base near Kabul (Harris and Wazir 1). Begg and other prisoners there were confined to small rooms, blindfolded, and thrown around like rag dolls. The prisoners were kept awake day and night with ridiculously loud music and bright lights. They were also shackled and tied up in awkward positions and forced to stand for long periods of time. In cases of battle wounds, or wounds in general, they were refused pain killers and medical treatment (Harris and Wazir 2). The American military did this to “disorientate and confuse” their prisoners. The military felt that when the prisoners were asked questions about the prisoners’ contributions in Afghanistan, they would talk more willingly. It is stated that Begg has yet to see a doctor, a lawyer, or a member of his family. Not being able to see Red Cross personnel is yet

another violation of the Geneva Convention. In Article Three, Section Two of the Convention it is stated: “Any impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties of the conflict.” The Geneva Convention also states that “the wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for” (“Geneva Convention”). This was not the case at the Bagram military base.

Two Afghan men died last December in Bagram. According to a military pathologist’s report, the men died from being beaten (Campbell 1). The one man, known as Dilwar, died from blunt force injuries to the lower parts of his body, complicating coronary artery disease. The second man was Mullah Habibullah, who was said to have died from pulmonary embolism, a blood clot in the lung. Former prisoners from Bagram claim that prisoners are chained so tightly from the ceiling that their blood flow completely stopped. They are kept naked and hooded and kicked to keep them awake for days and days (Campbell 1). This treatment is utterly inhumane.

Another camp used by the United States is Camp X-Ray, in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The camp is located on the southeastern coast of Cuba. Kept in Camp X-Ray are people, mostly of Afghan descent, who are connected to the September 11 attacks or know the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden. The prisoners are kept in cells no bigger than six feet by eight feet (“Harsh Detention” 1). Each cell is made up of a wooden roof, a concrete floor, and chain-link walls. Prisoners are given a one-inch thick mattress to sleep on, two towels—one to bathe with and one to pray on—and a bucket for waste (“Harsh Detention” 2). The prisoners are shackled and bound whenever they are let out of their cages, but to be nice guys, the U.S. military unshackles them when they are in their “cells”. I could not find information on the exact treatment of the Afghan prisoners; however, I have found a series of sites that had two pictures of prisoners that were supposedly accidentally released by the military (see pictures A and B at the end of this paper).

Picture A is a holding cell where prisoners sit, possibly waiting for an open cell, or are just there for the U.S. military’s pleasure. Picture B is a close-up of one of those prisoners. You can see in these pictures that the prisoners are forced to wear gloves, blackened goggles, and ear muffs to neutralize their

senses; they are also shackled. The position in which they are sitting does not look like a very comfortable position, and determining the time allotted for these poor people to be sitting like that, I am almost positive that their lower extremities are numb and non-responsive. This is a small example of what the prisoners encountered while stationed at the camp. A more interesting story can be told of the two to three-day transfer trip to a prison in Sheberghan that the prisoners endured—the ones that lived through it anyway.

An article on the *World Socialist* web site titled “More Evidence of US War Crimes in Afghanistan: Taliban POWs Suffocated Inside Cargo Containers” states: Scores, if not hundreds, of Taliban prisoners of war suffocated to death inside metal cargo containers where they were imprisoned after surrendering to Northern Alliance and US forces in the Afghan city of Kunduz (White 1).

These prisoners died from asphyxiation and various other injuries inside the airtight shipping containers. Journalists were allowed to speak with a few prisoners that were held at the camp. One prisoner named Omar stated that “all but seven people in his container died from lack of air.” Another unnamed man stated that thirteen had passed in his container and the survivors had to take turns breathing through a hole in the wall (White 1-2). If this account is considered humane among the United States military, then I am embarrassed to be affiliated with such a joke. All together, the saddest thing for me is the fact that the United States is also bringing itself down to the enemy’s level of unethical torture.

I have noticed that no one has heard any speculations of inhumane treatment of the current Iraqi prisoners. Perhaps this is because in this war cameras are watching every move the United States military has been making. I cannot help but wonder what happens to the prisoners beyond the camera’s view. It hurts me to think what the United States military would be doing to these people if the cameras were not there, and the reporters were home. I would hope the American military would act the same as they do with the cameras there, but I could not assure it.

Torture is unnecessary. I do not believe that it does anything at all. As stated in *The New Yorker*, people under torture lie. It is a horrible way of getting false information out of innocent people and

the truth out of guilty people (Hertzberg 30). Torture is unethical any way you look at it. I think it is horrible and something needs to be done about it. I do not believe we can ever get rid of torture techniques one-hundred-percent, but torture needs to be cut down a great deal.

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THE GOLDEN ARCHES

WHO HASN'T SEEN the golden arches—the smiling sign of McDonald's? Who hasn't experienced their fast food with economical prices? Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, understood that America is a nation of people who eat out. We don't dine; we eat and run (Pepsi). Since Kroc first offered franchises to individuals in the 1950s, McDonald's has become the world's leading food service retailer with more than 30,000 restaurants in 118 countries serving 4 million customers with its favorite foods—famous French fries, hamburgers, milk shakes and soda pop (*McDonald's Worldwide*). Recently, however, the corporation has come under extreme criticism for selling less than nutritional food. Many individuals have filed lawsuits against McDonald's, some of them bogus, claiming that the fast food had caused them to become obese. These same individuals fail to take responsibility for their own actions and find it easier to blame McDonald's for making them unhealthy. Nevertheless, McDonald's has become a symbol of junk-food pollution. However, what the general public has overlooked is the fundamental McDonald's spirit, which represents the American philosophy of doing good and giving back to the public, especially to children.

Before there was a name for “social responsibility,” McDonald's had already started its mission to serve the children and local communities. In 1974, McDonald's teamed up with the Philadelphia Eagles and created the first Ronald McDonald House in Philadelphia, providing the families of critically ill children a place to stay, while they are away from home

when their children are being treated. To date, the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) have awarded more than \$320 million dollars in grants worldwide to create an immediate and positive impact for as many children as possible. In January 2003, RMHC was named one of “America's 100 best charities of 2002, by *Worth* magazine” (“Ronald McDonald House Charities”).

RMHC aims to build a safe, supportive place for children to grow based on the principles of “do the best job, dollar for dollar,” and “give well, give wisely” (“Ronald McDonald House Charities”). One in 700 Americans and one in 500 children in developing countries are born with a cleft lip, cleft palate or other facial deformity. Birth defects, if left uncorrected, may lead to life-threatening medical complications. In 1999, RMHC launched a global initiative called Changing the Face of the World (“McDonald's World Children's Day”). The Charity has donated a total of \$2 million in grants to Interplast and Operation Smile, two organizations dedicated to performing life-changing reconstructive surgeries for children and young adults worldwide, free of charge. Interplast and Operation Smile have completed surgical missions in 18 countries including developing countries, such as Brazil, Honduras, Peru, Philippines, and Vietnam.

RMHC also established a scholarship program to provide educational assistance for under-privileged students to gain access to higher education (“McDonald's USA Scholarship”).

During the 2001-2002 programs, nearly \$650,000 of the RMHC/Asia Scholarship program was awarded to 500 students; nearly \$700,000 of the RMHC/African American Scholarship program was awarded to 475 students. Since 1985, \$10 million has been awarded to 10,000 students with Hispanic back-

ground. These programs seek to impact the lives of young people in the minority communities by recognizing their accomplishments, building their confidence, and promoting their potential.

In addition to the Changing the Face of the World and educational programs, in 1999, RMHC also launched a program called Working to Save Young Lives. According to the Center for Disease Control, suicide is the third leading cause of death among children and youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (“Suicide in the United States”). In order to create an awareness of this national health problem, and to provide support for children at risk and intervention for the people close to them, RMHC has supported a number of suicide prevention projects. RMHC awarded \$160,000 to the American School Counselor Association to help fund “On the Edge,” an educational video kit on how to identify the early warnings of suicidal symptoms. “On the Edge” was distributed to over 25,000 high schools across the country. RMHC also awarded \$3 million to the University of Chicago and \$1 million to the University of Michigan to carry out extensive research in suicide prevention practices and recommended treatment programs (Suicide Prevention”).

As one of the largest corporations in the world, McDonald’s has become a model in fulfilling its social responsibilities to serve the children and the local communities worldwide. It is true that McDonald’s serves fast food such as French fries, hamburgers, milk shakes and soda pop, and irresponsible people can always find excuses to blame McDonald’s for their faults. However, McDonald’s did not mislead any customer and force them to eat their food, and the significance of McDonald’s contribution to the children and local communities is far more profound than the influence of some self-serving lawsuits. “The Golden Arches” does not represent a junk food chain; it represents the caring quality of the McDonald’s Corporation; and it represents the American spirit of helping others and giving back to the community.

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A Note on Documentation:

Some of the essays contained in this year's edition of *Best of Freshman Writing* contain documentation. The editors assume that the students' instructors have verified the authenticity of this documentation. It is important to note that we have not been able to do so in all instances ourselves. In addition, we would like to call to everyone's attention that we received some papers that did not follow standard MLA parenthetical style formatting of documentation. We assume that this format is taught in all sections of English 15 and 30 throughout the university and that it is an important aspect of these two courses. Having received such instruction is a prerequisite for entrance into two hundred level courses within the English Department, most especially the 202 courses.

However, knowing the proper format for documenting papers is only part of what is necessary in learning to document college level writing. Students also need to know when to document and what are considered proper sources. Use of quotes, paraphrases, summaries, and statistics is most often a matter of demonstrating to an audience the validity of the writer's argument and a mastery of the materials pertinent to making such an argument. Good sources make persuasive writing—certainly more so than impassioned speech—with the audience that college writing is usually intended to reach. Language such as “I think” or “I believe” has little reso-

nance with educated readers unless the writer's point is a lack of total conviction. In order to validate one's convictions (*assertions* in writing terms) one needs to provide evidence in a highly logical fashion. This includes providing the reader with the very best sources possible.

Since 1995, students have been availing themselves of the Internet and most especially the World Wide Web as a primary source of secondary information. The university has been highly supportive, even in some sense insistent, on the use of electronic source material. It has provided students, as well as faculty, with perhaps the best database of on-line secondary source material available anywhere in the world. (Actually this “database” consists of numerous databases.) The editors have found that local librarians on our campuses have been most helpful in providing instruction in methods of accessing this information; however, it is our job as instructors to help students understand the differences in the quality of information they have at their disposal.

In short, we, the editors, would like to strongly suggest at this time that instructors across the Commonwealth College take a strident position within their classrooms toward the proper use of secondary source materials. It is not our place, obviously, to implement policy; however, Best of Freshman Writing is in a singular position to spread the word in cold print. We would like to know what you, the instructors, think. Please Email or write us at your convenience.

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