



ALLEGANY COLLEGE
of MARYLAND



Expressions
Essays, Fiction, Poetry & Artwork

2018

2018
Expressions

A Collection of Essays, Fiction, Poetry and Artwork



ALLEGANY COLLEGE
— of MARYLAND —
ENGAGE YOUR FUTURE

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**ARTWORK FEATURED
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**ARTWORK FEATURED
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“Kaleidoscope”
by Taylor Stein

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STUDENT EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

As many student editors before me have, I find myself struggling to write something meaningful, something worthy of being immortalized in the pages of this award-winning publication. As with the beginning of any artistic or literary venture, I feel the pressure of achieving perfection looming over my shoulder, that devil denouncing the worth of one's work. Being an artist or a writer is undoubtedly a difficult path to follow; being both of those things for the better part of my life has done nothing but drive that fact home to me. One must be willing to listen to, learn from, and battle against the criticism not only of others, but of oneself as well.

Putting one's work out into this massive and chaotic world can prove to be a difficult feat. I, personally, in my brief career of being published, have found the act of submitting a work to be absolutely agonizing, but I did it and continue to do it because I know it's important to what I want to do in life; a few brief periods of anxiety are far superior to a lifetime of regret.

So for spitting in the face of whatever adversity they may have faced in creating and submitting their work, I would like to formally congratulate and thank the artists and writers whose work is published in this magazine. May your future endeavors be prosperous, and may you remember this when that devil is perched on your shoulder:

*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum!*¹

Megan Ruby
Student Literary Editor

¹ Don't let the bastards grind you down.

MEMOIRS, ESSAYS, AND RESEARCH PAPERS

Carpe Diem

Reflective Essay by Jack Saban

I was born into a family riddled with heart disease, and though this wasn't my choice it was my blessing. In addition to heart disease my family also has a history of high blood pressure and bad cholesterol, which is the cherry on top of the cake. I never had the privilege of knowing either of my grandfathers. They both died of heart failure when I was an infant. One died on Christmas day, and the other Christmas Eve the following year. They were born with a natural disadvantage to most and as a result they were fated long before I was born.

Then, when I came along in the fall of '98, I too was blessed with the very conditions that had been their curse. Four years ago, at fifteen, I weighed over 300 pounds. I struggled every day with back pain and knee trouble because of my obesity. I worried all the time that I was going to die at a young age because of my weight and family history, but I had never had the motivation to do anything about it. Then, one day at the hospital, during a routine check-up, they found a blood clot in my leg. Suddenly, all because of this small, uncontrollable event in my life, I made the decision to "take control" of the situation. I started to go to the gym the next day, I drank water and nothing else, I ran every day starting at a quarter of a mile and working my way up from there. After two years of this routine I started running races, 5K's, 10K's, 15K's, half marathons. Eventually, I signed up for a full marathon. Needless to say, I had done it. I was as healthy as I had ever been. During this three-year stretch I managed to lose over 150 pounds, and I have put on less than twenty since I started college last year.

Today, I am a nineteen-year-old college sophomore studying Economics and Finance at Allegany College of Maryland. I plan to transfer to the University of Alabama in the fall to pursue my masters and PhD in Economics. I live a traditional college student lifestyle working as many jobs as I can while attending class full-time.

However, I was recently diagnosed with cardiomyopathy. This simple event in nature has caused tremendous changes in the way I am forced to live my day-to-day life. I am no longer allowed to run more than two miles at a time. No longer can I do high intensity work-outs; I can't even do push-ups without extreme difficulty. It is as if everything that helped me to gain my fitness has now been taken from me. I constantly struggle now to find the motivation to work out because I know what I am capable of, but I'm not allowed to push myself like as before. Suddenly it's as if I'm back to square one.

After many weeks of living with this new condition I was getting ready to wrap up my semester. This was Fall of 2017. I was on track to pass all my classes, fighting to keep my motivation up and finish the semester out strong. The week before finals, sitting in one of my business classes, I started experiencing pain in my side and shoulder. My arm and hand went numb with shooting pain. I had a throbbing headache. I was practically helpless. I couldn't focus. I had trouble breathing and my vision started to go blurry. I called my doctor after class and he was too busy to fit me in, so the next day he called me back to talk about what had happened. At this time he diagnosed my experience as a minor heart attack.

Suddenly everything was mute. What did I do to deserve this? How could this be happening to me? After everything I had done, all the hard work I put in to becoming a healthier person, attempting to save myself from this curse, and this was how I was rewarded? At first I didn't know what to think,

whether to be mad at my family for having terrible genetics, or be mad at God for doing this to me. I was in such shock I didn't tell anyone about what had happened until months after. I acted as if nothing was different. I smiled, laughed, went to school, went to work, sang at church and moved forward with my life. When I would have trouble with my breathing, or any type of chest pain, my parents would tell me to suck it up, not knowing what had most recently happened. So I made a personal inquiry about the medicine, or treatment options, available. As I expected, these solutions were rather expensive and with getting ready to move away for college, and be dropped from my parents' health insurance policy, I decided not to take any action at that time.

Despite all the negativity, I continue to fight to achieve my goals. I never asked for any of this; in some sense it was fated.

Of course, I could dwell on it, and living with heart disease holds many people back, but I refuse to give up on my dreams just because of one minor setback. You would never know looking at me now that I've had such bad health issues. Daily I strive to achieve everything I set out to do. Every day that I wake up and get out of bed is a blessing that God sees fit to give me.

No matter how hard life tries to put you down, the greatest gift is having another chance to make yourself better. Giving up is never an option, and take it from me that no one said it would be easy. Just remember that as long as you keep taking small steps toward your goals, one day you will achieve them. Every day we are given multiple chances to take those steps and it's up to us to seize the day.

ARTWORK



Ice
Shayla Yaeger



Pier 14
Shayla Yaeger

Pile of Stones

Memoir by Doug Sipes

The stones were brown, grey, some tan, some light-colored grey, so light they were almost white. Their texture was rough, perfect for this specific job. They were stacked neatly in a pile off to the side of a short steep bank, as if anticipating something. The stones had high brown grass around them, missed by the weed eater last summer. Now, though decades have passed, at incalculable times I see those stones, etched on my retina, burned into the lens and always in my thoughts. Sometimes I reside with the image of that assembled pile of boulders. They linger like an unachieved commitment.

My stunning sister was a juvenile diabetic at nine years old, taking shots of insulin every day. Dad was the caregiver who administered most of the shots. The needles were sharp and he became good at it – I never heard my sister complain. Dad would rotate the shots from legs to arms and even stomach to avoid the start of sores. My sister felt the prick of the needle every day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year.

My sister Diana never whined about the shots or anything in life. She survived her short existence by getting up every day and living. She did it better than anyone I know. The diabetes led to many complications with her health, but it never slowed her resolution. She told me once “I am too busy breathing to worry about expiring.” She truly was a godsend to everyone who knew her.

I helped remodel parts of her house and did odd jobs; she in return would loan me her car or have my back if I did something wrong. As a rule, I got the work done she needed, but not this one particular job...the job I procrastinated on. It was not even that big of a job. A couple of days' work at best. What are a couple of days anyhow, right?

It was on a November day while loading her wood stove that she dropped a piece of heavy oak firewood smashing her toe; and her being a diabetic it never healed. Through the winter it got worse and became infected. I visited her at the hospital and as always she was in hearty spirits. She asked me when I might get to the work and I lied, saying “I will try while you are in here getting better.” She smiled as I left the hospital. A few days later they removed her big toe, but the infection had already spread to her foot.

During my next visit I learned one doctor wanted to cut off her foot, while another wanted to amputate the leg just below the knee. She asked my opinion. I told her I could not make that decision about her leg. I told her about a story I read in a magazine, about a soldier that had lost both feet and had both his legs removed just below the knees; now with his prosthetic legs he was mountain climbing and the Army had agreed to let him back in the service. What can you really say to your sister who is doing poorly and about to lose a leg? I gave her a kiss and said “I love you.” As I was leaving the room, she asked me about the job again.

She died a month later at the end of March; it was a cold month with freezing temperatures, snow and endless wind. I met with the monument and tombstone people at the cemetery to show them how the family wanted the stone set. As I read her name I gazed at the grey stone and could not help but think of the pile of stones at her house. The date of her birth and the date of her death were downright too close. Those succinct years I never heard her complain.

I drove by her house on the way home and stopped and stared at the pile of stones. Next to the pile were some rotten wooden steps in the short steep bank that needed to be replaced. The job my sister wanted was easy and two days work at best. I just needed to rip out the rotten wooden steps, do some hand digging and place the stones in some concrete.

No doubt they would have looked nice. They would have been a majestic set of stone steps, seven in all, worthy of my sister.

I guess I will never know just how wonderful they would have been and neither will she. The house was sold and I truthfully do not know what ever happened to that mountain of stones.

The mass of rocks that will always trouble me. The one job I never did for my big sister. She never asked for much, she never complained.

East of the West: When the West Went East *Travel Essay by Melissa Eby*

The mountain top mall at night was flush and happy. Tash and I climbed, skirting people wordlessly, automatically. Horses strolled; tourists pranced. Tourists bought plastic toys and things with blinking lights. They bought ice cream and chips (*sheeps*). The white horses shadowed against the lamplight; the dark Indian faces glowed. Shrieking with animation, tourists fluttered and rushed by, posing on benches and by restaurants, leaning on the rails and sitting on the stone expanse of the mall floor. The selfie craze had made its hardest hit on the Indian subcontinent.

Tash and I did not talk. The hundreds of miles of Indian hill country rolled and twisted in our subconscious even though we had been off the bus for at least six hours. Shimla was such an odd city, draped over the tops of four or five hills the size of mountains, its neighborhoods running together and down the hillsides like a tablecloth. The whole *pradesh* of hills was odd that way with cities and towns and homes growing on top of the hills, looking from a distance like fungi.

A petite, voluptuous form dashed up against us. “One pic, please?” the Hindi accent was rippling with laughter.

Tash and I stiffened, in mutual woodenness. For the third time in ten minutes, we bent and posed for a selfie, tacking smiles up.

From Bangladesh we had come, after my annual and tumultuous stint tucking the English language into small, busy heads. Tash came with me, of course, and we were a home to each other.

I missed Beans Cove dreadfully with its families of loggers, and I missed that family of loggers who belonged to me and every piece of land over which they breathed. Another six months in the hot, inefficient, boisterous land of Bengal had wafted away with that lack of time consciousness belonging to any winterless country. Missing my home, I had been at home, for in the small village of Charkhali in Bangladesh, I had a secondary home.

I had first come to Charkhali when I was eighteen and looking for a new frontier. The villagers had looked me over... inquisitive, joyful... and had dashed into my pioneering arms. I had spent the next seven winters disentangling them, and every time I peeled a finger away, an arm grew in its place. To keep from making friends in a Bengali village would be an energetic exercise for anyone, and as Tash and I set our faces westward toward India, the grandmother of all Bangladeshis, we looked for those identical qualities that we had experienced in Bangladesh.

Exhausted from the past months, we kept to ourselves in Calcutta. Indians we found to be more reserved and disinterested than Bangladeshis. There were bigger cities and more Westernized culture. White skin was a more common phenomenon; the English language was in greater use. As our inherited virtues diminished in value, we reveled in the comparative silence.

...until we boarded the train for Delhi.

My heart was gripped in a sick flutter as I ran a nail down the posted list of passengers. This was the thirteenth car, and we were running out of sleepers. To Tash and me, managing logistics was a thinly veiled state of panic; combining our planning skills with the Indian system would have deviled a saint and dampened an enthusiast. Blithe in spirit, we had gone to the wrong train station, across a big city in the worst traffic in the world. Now tentatively at the right station, we did not seem to be able to find the right train car.

Then we found it. Bursting into the car, we surprised a compartment of young Indian gentlemen. I was gasping with relief and could not stop to be polite. As I returned with reinforcements for our larder, Tash and the young gentlemen appeared to be finishing introductions conducted, partly, in broken English. I nodded; they nodded, and we all retreated in the remoteness of foreign culture.

Tash and I were in a torment of exuberance that there was a train, and we were on it. Our fellow travelers listened with the interest of youth in other youth.

“Boy,” one of them muttered in his beautiful Calcuttan Bangla, clearer than the Bangla of Bangladesh. “And I thought I knew English. Do *you* understand what they’re saying?”

In those positions of curiosity, we stayed all evening as the train trundled on and the remote sun sank in a haze of plain and farm. The gentlemen spoke to each other. Tash and I spoke to each other. We read our books and wrote journals. They studied their phones. The interest was felt. Tash and I were ready to talk but shy; they were ready to talk but polite. We all ate supper, casting expressions at each other over our tinfoil and curry, and wishing the other would speak first.

Indians are naturally social, but they are more culturally savvy in the Western sense than primitive, undeveloped

Bangladesh. After an hour or so, Tash and I gave up on the idea of beginning a get-to-know-you topic, awkward at that stage, and hit on the happy idea that their reticence was the respect of men who did not wish to take advantage of the fact that we were young, clueless, and alone.

A seventh man joined us as we were finishing supper. He advanced to Tash and me, explained that he possessed one of the bunks in our row, that he was with friends just down the way, and that he was from Bangladesh. Gladly, we talked to him. In two minutes, we knew where in Bangladesh he lived, what his job was, where he was going, what he was doing there, the numerous places in India that he thought we should visit, and that he knew as much about us. Bangladeshis, no matter how educated, are clamorously social and have no natural inhibitions about strangers, women, or pillows.

He went away again directly, but his talkativeness had opened the atmosphere up. Our Indian neighbors began to talk, mostly about Tash and me. I listened, my eavesdropping conscience dull from years of living with a foreign language that no one expects me to understand, as they made small talk about us, and I translated in the appropriate lulls for Tash.

“They keep writing and writing,” one observed.

One of the boys across the aisle mentioned after an hour of wandering conversation, “You had better be careful. I think they might understand Bangla.”

The others scoffed at him.

“No, seriously,” he said, “I think that one understands.”

...a pause as it occurred to everyone, including me, that if I did understand Bangla, I was also understanding this argument. They speculated while the words on the page of my book burned into my retinas.

Around nine o'clock, the group of us stirred ourselves to lower the bunks and spread our sheets. I stretched on the dingy plastic and struggled to keep my sheets lined up with the wall and read some more. The Bangladeshi reappeared and looked for a pillow, but all the pillows were taken.

The Bangladeshi considered, and then walking over to the bunk of a young athlete with round eyes and a soft face who had been asleep for two hours on two pillows, he slipped one of the pillows from between the sleeper's arms. A gentle explosion... and spiky hair appeared from the sheets, the curved whites of the eyes widened with disbelief.

"You have two." The Bangladeshi was unperturbed.

"Give it back," said Spiky.

The Bangladeshi returned the pillow and looked around. A sad young man with twinkly black eyes and a mouth made for a moustache offered his second pillow without a word.

I lay back on my aching neck with crinkling eyes and a ticklish nose. Spiky was still gaping at the Bangladeshi, and I pulled the sheet over my head to hide my glee. Cautiously, I poked my head out, but Spiky was still watching; then reluctantly amused, he flopped down.

Bangladeshis, Indians, and Americans alike fell asleep, as the train went west, and I thought about the East and the east of the East. Bangladesh, my golden Bengal, fell further behind, and to meet me marched India, the west of the East. West of that was the West, and it was another world, cool in spring and distant from this noisy land.

Delhi and Jaipur passed away, wonderful and clamorous, and we woke a week later in the mountains, the foot mountains of Himalayas. Pines of temperate worlds brushed our windows, and at night, we rolled under thick blankets. Monkeys hissed and threatened us, but we didn't care. In Dharamshala, home of the Tibetan exiles, the Dalai Lama,

Indian tourists, seekers of enlightenment, we read and drank coffee. We hiked until we were lost high above the blue world and far below the green peaks. We wrote and wandered.

People of all nations came to this town, hunting nirvana. Here there were Westerners, but not tourists, not like the Taj Mahal where it seemed that the nursing home was on a field trip. Here were the gentle long-haired Tibetans, battered exiles, the turbaned Sikh, the raucous Indian weekenders, the lonely hippie with dreads, the shaved Buddhist monk in burgundy and scarlet orange, the scholar in glasses. We slipped, veiled Mennonite girls, into the ethnically diverse community, excited not to be weird and white for once.

Everywhere we went we were accosted, nearly as much as in Bangladesh, but the questions were different. “What are you?” We heard this question from every direction, in this mountaintop town whose center crossroads folded down over the sides of a small peak surrounded by great and empty peaks. In Dharamshala, everyone was something. Against the backdrop of unique personalities, no one had a label for girls who appeared in dresses one day, and three-piece Indian outfits the next, with the inevitable white thing on their heads.

One day after five hours of trying to climb a peak that never came down to find us, we swayed back to town, hungry and fatigued. A Brit, lightly sprayed with yellow whiskers, snagged us. “Do you believe in the Eucharist?”

Two Muslim shop keepers located us, one to tell us that Muslims are peace-loving, the other to tell us we were wrong about believing the Bible.

A vendor called out to us one evening as we descended the mountain to our hotel. “Have you made up your minds about that shawl yet?” Indignant because we had never intended to buy a shawl from him, we stopped to argue.

He showed his teeth, happy. “Never mind. I just wanted to talk to you, and I planned with my wife how I could get you to stop and talk. Where are you from?”

We halted to buy croissants at a bakery stall one evening and climbed the steps from the steep street to the counter. “Hello?” we said.

“Hi,” said a head, popping over the counter. Then as we came into its line of vision. “Ooooh! Hi!”

Shopkeepers, restaurant owners, vendors grinned at us in passing. Baristas at our favorite coffee shops smirked and shrugged when they saw us again. A woman from the south of India walked us back from St. John’s Church of the Wilderness one noon, talking to us softly about her story and our story. Monks, filing past us in cafes, glanced in confusion at us and our book about the Dalai Lama. The town knew us, and we knew the town. Even the monkeys knew us, albeit dubious to make our acquaintance.

One morning, I hung my dress out to dry on the verandah. I only had two sets of clothing, since we were carrying only backpacks, the kind you put text books in. We were gone all day, and when we returned to our room that night, my dress had vanished into thin mountain air. Tash and I stood on the verandah and shouted observations into the blank night, but no dress levitated from the mountain below. As we were going to sleep, Tash said that if she were I, she would go down below the hotel and have a quick look.

Girded with jackets and flashlights, we clambered down the mountain stairs one more time. Beneath the hotel, a half of a lot displayed emptiness. Tash dashed the light around the tall weeds, and came up against a blue dress, neatly washed and hung out to dry on a clothesline. We ducked in, pilfered the dress, and departed rejoicing.

From Dharamshala, we went, sad. From Manali to Kulu to Mandi to Shimla, we went, alone and lost. And, so,

hundreds of miles of bus exhaust behind us, Tash and I found ourselves on this Mall at Shimla, forlorn and wanting home, taking pictures with vivacious tourists.

As the first selfie seeker melted away, another came in her place. This time it was a whole family. After them came a young couple. They rushed up; they said, “One pic, please?” before they rushed away to pose with a statue. They did not ask our names or our nationality or why we were there. The Indian tourist is a freak-seeker. They pose with trees and beggars and fences and celebrities. They see no individual; they see only themselves.

I thought of Bangladesh and my village of friends and family (adopted) and enemies (also adopted). I thought of the train from Delhi, and speechless fun and personable interest shared with the men there. I thought of Dharamshala and the way we had belonged in a community as varied as the world. Then I looked around at the tourists, cringed at the psyche of the selfie-takers, and loneliness broke my heart.

Tash and I turned away as the last group charged us; I knew I was going to cry.

“No,” I said, blindly “No pictures.”

I felt cool streaks on my cheeks in the darkness as the lighted Mall disappeared behind us and the shrieking tourists found a water fountain to snap selfies in front of. Tash trudged beside me, and we found ourselves at our hotel.

We left the balcony door open as we prepared for bed. I saw the dark shape, heavy and round, invade and spring like a shadow onto the table where our belongings were strewn.

“Tash,” I said, my voice tense. But it was gone.

We rushed to the spot.

“It was a monkey,” I said, dazed.

“My contact case... that monkey took my contact case,” Tash said. “And my only pair of contacts is in it...”

We never saw the contact case again, and the whole monkey adventure turned into one of blind affection. It was only a day or so later when we climbed to the top of the city mountain to see the hideous Buddha statue, color of hot-dog pink, that dominated the whole apparition of Shimla proper. As we wrestled ourselves up the last six steps, a large monkey, the color of his bottom reminiscent of the shade of fake meat, fell into pace with us, preceding me, directly behind Tash.

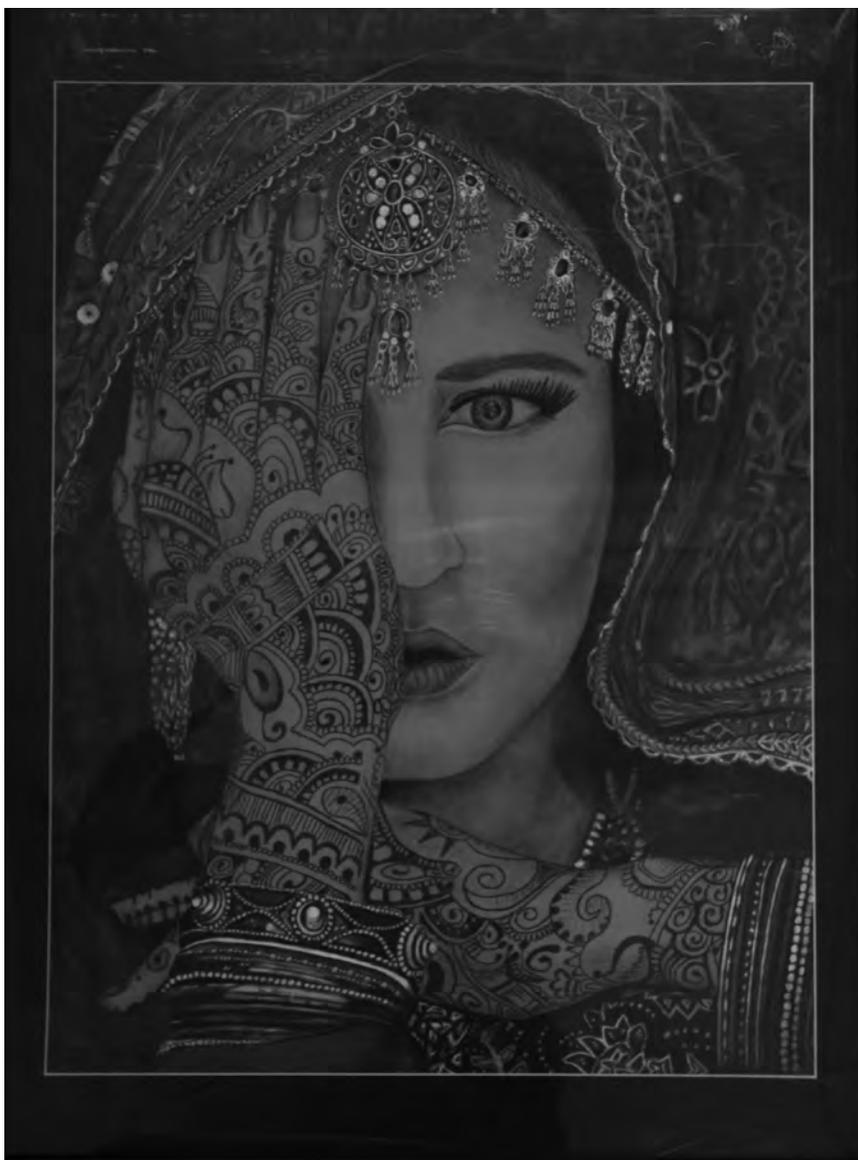
I was just opening my mouth to say that here, at last, was a friendly monkey as the friendly monkey landed on Tash’s shoulder. Reaching around her face, he picked her glasses off her nose and bounded several feet into the brush where he sat down and bit each end of her rims in turn.

We paid a guide to chase the monkey down and retrieve them but were too traumatized to enjoy the Buddha who was guarded by several dozen quarreling cousins of the glasses thief.

“Somebody wants me blind,” Tash complained.

Even the monkeys saw us as tourists, I thought, and remembered Dharamsala, where no one confused us with Buddha statues to pose with and or racks of eyewear to steal from.

So we went back to America, where no one dares to exploit race, however blinding the dislike.



Untitled
Brooke Kemp



Rain Drops
Shayla Yaeger

My Father's Memory *Memoir by Mary Twigg*

My father was my best friend and more importantly my role model. If I wasn't at school, I was spending my time with my dad. It didn't really matter what he was doing; he could be watching TV, feeding the animals, skinning a deer or cleaning his guns. My father was my best friend. I never spent much time in the kitchen baking or cleaning with my mom. It's not that she and I had a bad relationship; that kind of stuff just didn't interest me. My father was also my role model; he was the kind of man who would give you the shirt off his back. He was also the kind of man who never met a stranger. It didn't matter if he had just met you or if he'd known you all of his life, he treated you like family. Sadly, father passed away in February of 2006 when I was six years old, but in the time I did get to spend with him he left a lasting impression on my life.

The weeks leading up to my father's passing were mostly spent at the hospital. On the second to last Sunday in January 2006, my father and I went outside to feed our animals and when we came back in my father was having his first heart attack. In that moment I didn't understand that my father was having a heart attack; I just thought he was going to the hospital for some chest pains. When he got to the hospital, the surgeons implanted a stent and sent him home the following Tuesday. The following Sunday my father had another heart attack that was much worse than the first. I remember him collapsing in the hallway in front of the bathroom door. The next thing I knew, my mother was yelling for me to call 911 and she and my brother were doing CPR on him. It took the ambulance such a long time to arrive at our house and get him to the hospital that his chances of surviving and living a perfectly normal life were ruined. He stayed in the hospital in the Intensive Care Unit for five days on life support even

though, because his brain was deprived of oxygen for an extended amount of time, he was brain dead. On the fifth day he was taken off life support and he lived for four more days until he passed away on February 7th.

In the weeks following my father's passing I didn't experience much grief; I hadn't accepted the reality that my father wasn't coming back. I remember when reality sank in. My mom and I were cleaning my playroom and I picked up a family picture I had stuffed in one of my toy boxes. The moment I looked at that picture I burst into tears because I knew my best friend was gone forever. Being so young, I thought that one day I'd stop feeling sad when I thought about him and that one day I wouldn't miss him anymore and everything would go back to normal; that never happened. I still think about him every day and his memory will always be with me.

In the years following my father's death I continued to grieve over his death in my own way. I used sports as my way to connect with my father so I played T-ball and soccer for a year or two. Then in middle school I joined a 4-H club that was focused on shooting sports because my dad loved to hunt. In high school I played basketball just as my father did. Over the years I've had many times when I've experienced short periods of grief over losing my father. They are most common when I'm doing something that I wish he could be doing with me. The first time I went hunting, I went with one of my father's friends but I felt like something was missing. It wasn't what I'd always hoped and dreamed it would have been, simply because my dad wasn't there with me. Hunting was something my father and I enjoyed doing together and it just wasn't the same without him.

My father's passing hasn't left me with only bad experiences. It has challenged me to live up to the person he'd want me to be. My father was a kind and compassionate man

who knew that I was capable of great things even at a young age. His memory challenges me to be kind, compassionate, and caring on a daily basis. I'm also challenged to make a positive difference in as many lives as I possibly can. Even though I didn't have as long as I would have liked with my father, he still makes me want to be a better person every day and he still continues to shape me into who I am today. I can't think of a better person as a role model and I can't think of anyone else I'd want to call my father.

Our Community's Opioid Crisis: It Takes All of Us to Win the Fight

Research Essay by Syully Korob

As we are all aware, our community has been haunted by the prevalent dangers of the substance abuse epidemic. The number of victims of opioid-related abuse seems to surge every year. Many people have lost their lives from this terrible phenomenon. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's "Drug and Alcohol-Related Intoxication Deaths in Maryland 2015 (Revised Sept. 2016)" states that "eighty-six percent of all intoxication deaths that happened in Maryland in the year of 2015 were opioid-related." In combating this problem, there have been many activities to raise community awareness of the crisis in Allegany County area, such as a variety of dialogues and workshops, a movie screening, the National Overdose Awareness celebration, candlelight prayer vigils, and many other events. These programs are wonderful ways to spread the information about all kinds of resources that are available in our community to help people with their addiction problem. We undoubtedly need these events to educate the public about how opioid abuse affects our area and why it grows worse. However, who actually participates regularly in these occurrences? Have we tried to reach out to the individuals who have never been

involved yet? We need to try new methods to educate more people about this communal problem and involve them in finding solutions to it because the whole community's involvement is needed if we want to tackle the crisis.

It is important to underline that people who abuse drugs do not always fit the stereotypes most people have in mind when they think about drug addicts. Many of us assume that these people must all be criminals, poor people who live in slum areas, uneducated citizens, individuals with lack of moral compass whom we do not want to be associated with, or menaces intent on imperiling society. Numerous drug addicts do not fit the assumptions above. Many of them come from a privileged background and have fancy college degrees, and most probably never hit rock bottom in their lives. They can be people who suffer different kinds of pain that they cannot cope with. They can be our relatives, neighbors, coworkers, or classmates who are too ashamed to ask for help. Unfortunately, many people are not aware of that fact. Many abusers are unaware of the available resources that can be beneficial to them.

Let us examine the society we live in. We should have realized by now that we live in a pro-drug society (Henslin 83). Almost every one of us has consumed psychoactive substances at some point in our lives because they were prescribed by our physicians for such disorders as bronchitis, or for managing more serious health issues such as pain after surgeries and pain in cancer patients. Opioid use has become so common in today's lives that painkillers like oxycodone, hydrocodone, fentanyl, and morphine are frequently prescribed. These types of drugs are highly addictive. Opioids are medicinally acknowledged drugs for pain management, but these drugs are also substances that can be abused (Piotrowski). Many people in society rely heavily on prescriptions of this type of drug to function. In all fairness to

this circumstance, it is undeniably difficult to function when we are in debilitating pain. Thus, it is understandable that some people keep making sure their prescriptions are filled.

Problems then start to occur when people can no longer have access to their source of relief. Many physicians stop prescribing the opioid drugs, and insurance companies do not cover them anymore. For example, United Healthcare, America's largest health insurer, through their spokesperson, has stated that for the purpose of reducing long-term use of opioids, they would work with care providers and members to promote non-opioid treatment options (Thomas and Ornstein). Some people who cannot cope with their pain end up getting illicit substances on the street. According to experts, "more than two million of Americans have become dependent on or abused prescription pain pills and street drugs" ("Opioid Crisis Fast Facts"). These so-called street drugs are extremely dangerous. These drugs could have been mixed with poisonous substances or contain combinations of drugs that can lead to overdose and deadly reactions (Davidson and Alic). Many opioid abusers are not aware of this fact until they experience overdose, which may result in the loss of their lives.

Various events have been conducted to educate our community about opioid awareness, prevention, treatment, and resources that are available for the public. If we frequently attend these types of events, we will easily notice the same faces over and over again, or the same names on the attendance lists. That is not a bad thing at all. In fact, we need people who are faithfully committed to the cause and are willing to make any needed contributions in every event they partake.

Let us observe the people who participate in the candlelight vigils, educational movie screenings, deliberative dialogues, and workshops about this particular matter. The

attendees are mostly those who know much about the epidemic and the available helping resources. Many are experts and staff of organizations that focus on the issue: educators, students, law enforcement, families and friends of addicts and recovering addicts, and also the families and friends of people who died because of opioid abuse. These people are familiar with the issue. So, the community events that were mentioned earlier practically educate the same people time and time again. Hence, the goal to increase opioid awareness is not effectively attained since there are so many people out there who have not yet been reached. This group of people can essentially present us with new or alternative viewpoints of how to handle the rising problem of opioid addiction. Therefore, we should come up with ways to extend the awareness and be more pro-active in recruiting more new people to dialogues, community outreach, etc.

There are a few things that can be tried to begin creating more community involvement. For some people, in-room dialogues can be totally boring. Some other people may feel awkward attending vigils because they are not sure what to do while attending, or they may think that they do not want to associate with people who have drug problems. Based on this, it is time to add more options to the current methods of raising awareness and educating people about the opioid problem. One way would be to initiate this by trying to utilize music to attract new faces. After all, who does not like music? To make this possible, we can try to approach local musicians to take part. The musicians can help encourage people to stay away from drugs. In the process, we could slip in a speaker or two to share a few words about the issue. Music events along with shared words can potentially attract huge crowds.

Another idea on how to get more people involved is to utilize different people's gifts and talents. This approach may require an extra pro-activeness from us. Collective visits

to various institutions or organizations, schools, colleges, and universities are needed to explore people's talents and encourage them to be advocates for the issue using the strengths of their talents. The logic is that when people do things that they like and are within their means, they will be more invested and devoted. For example, a community artist might want to paint graffiti that shows the tragedy of living with addiction. A local filmmaker might be willing to work on making a short video that showcases families and friends of people who lost their lives because of opioids. Or she might make brief clips that feature the opinions of the prominent people about the crisis and their public invitations to people with addiction to seek help and treatment. We need more advocates who are willing to scout various organizations in search of these talents to promote opioid awareness.

Finally, the perilous opioid crisis and its magnitude has continued to intensify and has produced longstanding tribulations that our community has had to endure. Opioid abusers can be from any walk of life. They do not always represent people that initially consume the drugs for fun. They can be those who suffer from incapacitating pain and their physicians have stopped prescribing them with medicinal opioids. These people can be people we love who do not know where and how to get help. Many measures have been taken in attempts to tackle the problem. Events to address the issue are lacking "new faces," hence fresh and innovative strategies and approaches need to be implemented. This specific issue requires the active involvement of all of us to educate others. The more people who are mindful of and knowledgeable about it, the more we all can proactively lend a hand, educate, and empower one another. The point is, it takes all of us to win the fight. Together, we will be able to constantly generate fresh ideas about what it takes to change the course of this epidemic.

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Blue Polo
Megan Ruby



Brooklyn Bridge
Brooke Kemp



Unabridged
Sarah Thomas

My Father's Addiction

Memoir by D. W.

My dad has been to rehab seven times. He has been to prison three times. He has overdosed once. If you google his name, the first thing to come up is his criminal history. This is not the man he is, but the man addiction has made him become. His addiction has swallowed his identity, and he has lost himself.

Drug abuse is currently a worldwide issue, with evidence that one in ten people abuse a drug. My father is one of them. Overdose is at an all time high, with people of all ages at risk. The most commonly abused drugs are prescription medications, and that's where dad's addiction started. He has serious back problems due to his height (6'6"), and his doctor prescribed him pain medication for years. Eventually the dosage was increased, and then the prescription changed. It wasn't enough for his pain anymore. Dad's body had built up an immunity to the medicine, and that's when things took a turn for the worse. As his addiction worsened, he turned to harder drugs. I gradually watched the man who raised me turn into a stranger. He was always so kind, and had a great sense of humor. He could always make me laugh, and we loved spending time together. But then he stopped smiling. He lost weight very quickly, and he always looked sick or tired. He stopped taking me to the park, and helping me practice soccer. His jokes stopped, and he spent most of his time in his room. I was a small girl when my father was stolen from me by his addiction. The false promises of change still continue to this day. It's hard to have hope for him when he doesn't even believe in himself. He has "tried" to quit so many times, but to this day we are suffering from his addiction. Rule number one: never trust an addict.

My mom and dad used to be so in love. They were so happy on their wedding day. Our family was supportive of them, and hopeful for our lives together. There was no fighting, or yelling, we were “normal.” I thought so, at least until mom and dad started to fight every day. The change happened gradually. His irritation level rose every day until he was just manic all the time. I was too young at the time to understand what was going on, but we had no money because my dad was spending it on drugs. We were in debt, and my dad could not be the man that our family needed. He was plagued by his addiction, and losing himself. He lost his job, and fell deeper into drugs. He went from weed, to pain medication, to coke, to crack, to meth, and finally heroine. It makes me sick to think that the man who was terrified of needles was now shooting up. He was falling deeper and deeper into his addiction, and rehab wasn’t helping. Our support wasn’t helping, and he wasn’t going to change. The most earth shattering thing in my life was my parents’ divorce, and it was caused by drugs. Dad could not stop, and my mother could not live with the disease he had anymore. His addiction stole everything from him. He lost his freedom, his wife, daughter, mother, and he wasn’t able to go to his own father’s funeral because he was in jail. He lost all of the people who truly loved him, because he pushed them away for his addiction. He made his choice, and it wasn’t me.

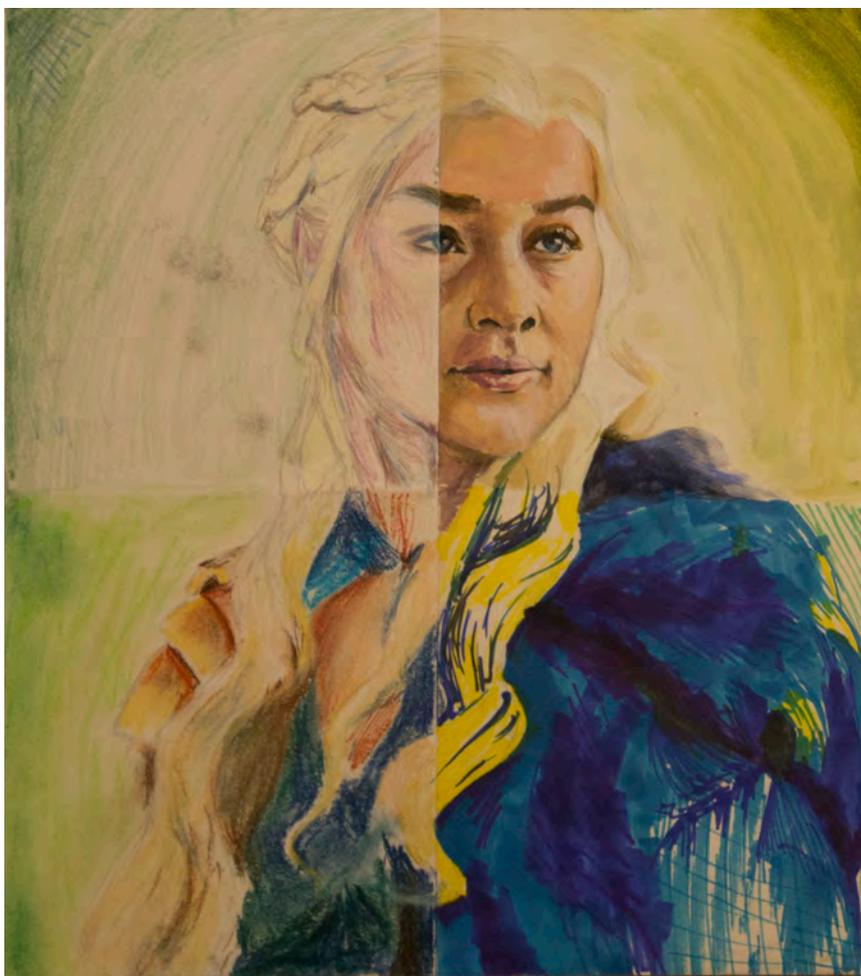
Financially, drugs are expensive. Addiction cost my father all of his money. All of his life savings. Most of his mother’s money, and all of his father’s money. My grandfather owned stocks in a big electric company, but my father sold most of them for drug money. He sold everything he owned, and he could no longer pay his bills. The bank took the home that I had grown up in, and the vehicle that used to take me to school. My father used to work for a tax company, so I always had a great party for my birthday (since it’s in March). When I turned six, the parties stopped. He had no

money even to buy me a birthday present. It was a big change from being spoiled, to barely being appreciated. My mom and dad had split custody, and my dad and I had a pretty normal routine. We would go to dinner and see a movie every weekend. Sometimes we went to an arcade. That changed very quickly and drastically. It turned into watching a movie on the couch by myself, and trying to make something to eat out of bread, ketchup, and ice cream. My dad stayed in his room, and barely came out. More and more people that I didn't recognize were coming and going from the house. I know now that drugs were being bought and traded around me, but then had no idea. At this point, my mom was financially supporting me because my dad couldn't. I used to love going to my dad's house; he was the fun parent. His home had turned into a pigsty, with no food, and tons of strangers, my dad being one of them. It didn't take long for his money to run out, and he lost everything else with it. I wasn't allowed to go to his house anymore. He couldn't take me to school. He had lost his money, his house, his car, his friends, his job, his privileges, his wife, and his daughter.

Drugs aren't just a physical battle--it is a mental, financial, and emotionally endless fight. Drugs affect every aspect of the user's life, and the lives of those around them. I grew up without a father because he wasn't strong enough to fight his addiction, and he lost his freedom. My mother lost her husband, his mother lost her son, and my dad lost his father. Drugs aren't worth experimenting with, or using. Stay clean, and stay free.



Hesitant Alien
Megan Ruby



Khaleesi In Fourths

Megan Ruby



Standing in the Rain
Brooke Kemp



True Beauty Begins With Passion

Amanda Evans



The Legacy of Robin Williams
David Whitaker



Changing Times
Sabrina Culmer



Self Past
Taylor Stein

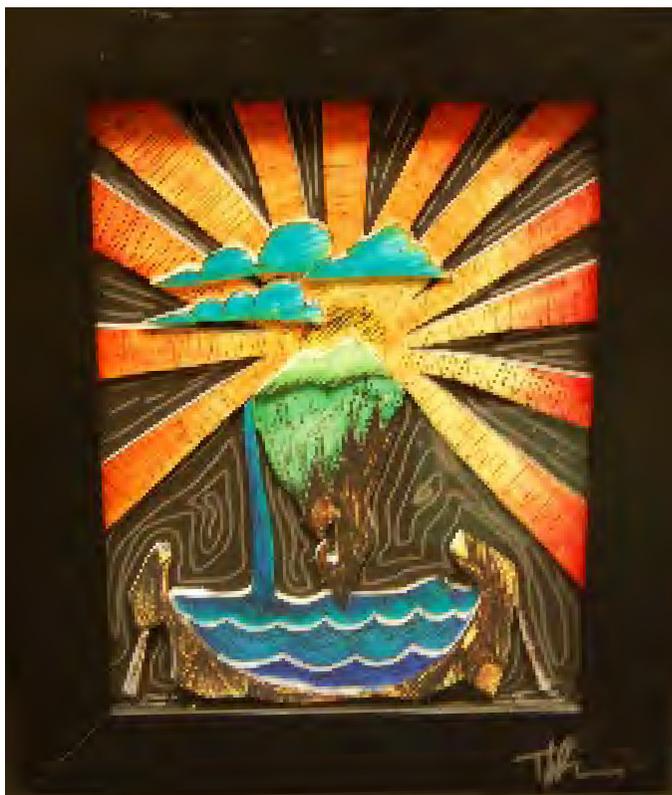


Figure 5
Tyler Rummer

Donkey Basketball: Fun for All Ages, Not for All Species *Research Essay by Isabella Lusk*

The word “donkey” and “stubborn” are synonymous. It does not matter if either word is used, because most Americans will relate them instantly. If someone says donkey, we think of stubborn. When someone says stubborn, we think “stubborn as a mule.” Whether donkeys are truly stubborn is debatable. Those who train donkeys disagree that donkeys are stubborn. Trainers describe donkeys as an extremely intelligent species, requiring excellent communication skills from their masters. They also claim that the paucity of such skills results in the visual facade and stereotype of bulking and resistance. However, when these long-eared and quirky creatures are used in “donkey basketball,” their “stubbornness” is nothing but extraordinary.

As the name suggests, the donkeys are used to participate in a hilarious game of basketball. Participating high schools will hire a company to bring in a trailer of untrained donkeys to participate in their fundraiser. These donkeys are only haltered and usually unsaddled for the event. The hilariousness of the game develops as the high school basketball team attempts to score their points while riding donkeys who are trying every trick to get out of the game. The donkeys throw players, refuse to move, buck, kick, and run away.

Why engage in donkey basketball? donkey basketball remains an extraordinarily fun and profitable high school fundraiser for many Americans. Wundram, contributor to the *Quad-City Times*, describes the camaraderie, fun, and excitement instigated during a game:

Wham! There goes Mike Fell for a header. His donkey has just bucked him onto the hammer-hard basketball floor. It

hurts. No chance for a rebound here. Whoops! Diane Tenley's little burro is loose. Will she catch him? Will the li'l burro climb into the crowd? Migosh. Dick Crock's donkey won't budge. It is stubborn as a mule. It just sits there on the floor. Dick gives up and sits down with him.

Parents know that coming to a donkey basketball game will not only support their children's high school, but that their family can participate in a clean and family-friendly event. No student would want to miss the opportunity to see their friends and especially frenemies thrown off the back end of a donkey.

The National Miniature Donkey Association stands in opposition to this sport. Their platform for disdaining donkey basketball comes as no surprise to well-informed trainers and owners of this phenomenal breed. The association is comprised of individuals who have spent considerable time with donkeys and have discovered the psychology and physical capacity of these loving, long-eared creatures. This psychology and physical weight capacity are the reasons that the NMDA is trying to end the sport.

Sue Weaver, owner, respected trainer, and author of *The Donkey Companion*, explains the weight capacity guidelines of ethical donkey use: "The average donkey can comfortably carry 25 percent of his own body weight; that includes his rider and all his tack" (p. 200). She also described the need to properly factor the age, conformation, and terrain into a donkey's weight capacity. One reason the NMDA remains in extreme opposition to this sport is because miniature donkeys typically do not exceed 250 lbs. in their own weight. Twenty-five percent of 250 lbs. is 62.5 lbs.--which is much less than the weight of a basketball player.

Donkeys come in many size categories from miniature to mammoth. The mammoths are far too tall to be used for donkey basketball--the players would not be able to mount

them from the ground. The players could also be seriously injured from a typical fall from a mammoth-sized donkey. Why does this matter? It matters because donkey basketball companies are in the market to make money. When they choose smaller donkeys, they save feeding expenses and provide easily mountable donkeys for the sport. For this reason, many companies use pony-sized donkeys for their events. Images of pony-sized donkeys--forced to participate in donkey basketball--fill the internet. A trainer would be able to estimate their weight around six hundred pounds. Even when donkeys as large as this are used, they may still--at maximum capacity--only carry one-hundred fifty pounds. Critics of the sport are well-aware of the obesity of the American high school populace. They ask Americans to question if all students riding these donkeys will be under one hundred and fifty pounds. Critics also want Americans to realize that, all too often, pony-sized donkeys are swapped for even smaller donkeys. These donkeys are swapped, when they can no longer play the sport, with donkeys that are mountable from the ground, regardless of how small they are. When too much weight is repeatedly placed on a donkey, they develop hernias and crippling spinal and musculoskeletal effects. Donkeys who endure this repeated weight exposure eventually may become crippled.

Proponents for the ethical treatment of donkeys are proponents because they understand the friction between the psychology of the donkey's mind and that of the athlete's. During the game, athletes light-heartedly kick, slap, hit, and drag the donkeys across the gym. Horses respond with flight at fear, but donkeys respond with flight, fight, or freeze. This is extremely dangerous to the athletes because the "freeze" is caused by the terrified donkey conjuring his plan of escape. When donkeys are hit during this phase, they are more prone to lash out. Players can be extensively injured or killed by a kick, while loose donkeys have the capacity to plow over

children and adults in their attempt to escape. Also, the fundraising event inflicts unnecessary trauma to the donkey's reasoning abilities. They will never trust again and they will never forget.

Small donkeys cannot be shod. Their hooves are not as thick as a horse's, hence their hoof wall is too thin to safely hammer a nail through. This hoof wall is similar to the white of a human's finger nail, but underneath this "wall" lies a network of extremely complicated parts that are necessary for the survival of the horse. Any injury to the interior will put the donkey's life at risk. A good farrier knows how to properly shoe a horse to protect the interior and make the hoof able to withstand more friction. Farriers will create cleats out of borium and attach them to the horse shoe. These round spikes allow the horse traction on smooth surfaces. Furthermore, the roundness of the spike will allow the horse to pivot without injuring its muscles. Smaller donkeys have to forgo this benefit and, for this reason, trainers will not allow them to be walked or ridden over smooth surfaces. For a donkey, walking barefoot on smooth surfaces is similar to ice-skating for donkeys. They slip, slide, and fall because they are unable to tread on the smooth surfaces. A few companies do outfit their donkeys with special sneakers. Although these sneakers provide traction, they put the donkeys at risk of muscle injuries, from frequent pivoting on hooves that will not rotate from the sneaker's grip.

One must reflect on the ultimate benefits provided by Donkey Basketball after all the consequences are taken into consideration. Should a family-friendly sport continue at the sake of unintended harm inflicted to innocent donkeys? Perhaps American high schools should find another form of entertainment and fundraising. Students may find that responsibly riding and driving donkeys *ethically* is more fun

than being thrown from a frightened creature. The future and safety of donkeys and students lies in the hands of American high schools. What will they do?

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Tower Bridge in London
Sabrina Culmer

Assassin's Creed as Educational Gaming

Research Essay by William Kunis

Video games have become the staple of a child's life. Video games have been around since the late 1970s, and they have come a long way from then, as most games today revolve around a multitude of objectives with fighting involved. It is agreed that most video games are created purely for entertainment purposes; however, some video games could be considered educational. On the other hand, an example of a non-educational game is *Call of Duty*, a First-Person Shooter (FPS) type of game. This video game requires quite a bit of strategy as the objective-based storylines unfold. As compared to other games, *Call of Duty* gets harder as the game progresses, making it appeal to mature audiences over younger ones. Although the franchise has used a handful of historical periods for some of the earlier games, the time periods used were rather basic. Both World War I and World War II were used in-game; however, both wars are definitely covered in school, which means that new knowledge is not gleaned from these games and the educational level of the game drops substantially. The main concept behind *Call of Duty* is driven by fighting, not only making this video game not educational, but also inappropriate for a younger audience.

Assassin's Creed is another popular gaming franchise that is relatively new, the first appearance being in 2007. Like most other games, *Assassin's Creed* relies solely on stealth and strategy to continue the game. Although it is a major fighting-style game, it offers a different type of gameplay than most other games. *Assassin's Creed* is played in third-person, allowing more interactions and a better understanding of the game. It also offers one key factor that other franchises miss out on, which is the multitude of historical time periods that

each individual game is based upon. The time periods used are not typically discussed in the classroom setting, which allows for entertainment, as well as the ability to learn. As analyzed by historian Dawn Spring:

Ubisoft's historical fiction series the *Assassin's Creed* franchise (2007 – 2014) reconstructs historic settings and provides players with a glimpse of life during the Crusades, the Renaissance, the American and French revolutions, and a pirate-occupied Caribbean. The open-world, action-adventure games use diegesis as a user interface to weave tales of historically based fiction with real-time historical events. Above all other historical features, the worlds built for these games illustrate the potential for the scholarly game. As open world games, presenting the character primarily in the third person, they allow the characters free run of historical settings. (211-212)

Spring notes that these games are indeed scholarly. Although the targeted audience is mature young adults, the historical aspects of the game far outweigh any negative aspect. In addition to heavy use of historical fiction, the game recommends the use of multiple strategies, some of which require substantial mental processing. *Assassin's Creed* is a major video game that should be considered educational to a mature audience.

Video games are almost always put to blame when there is some type of domestic violence involving a young adult. While most video games revolve around heavy violence and the use of offensive language, some could be argued to be educational as well. The proper use of strategy will almost always make a video game educational, but for whom will it be educational? From children to the elderly, anybody can find enjoyment in educational video games, and for a certain audience, a video game such as *Assassin's Creed* is among the best examples of an educational video game.

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Up and Around
Sabrina Colmer

Life Matters *Speech by Taylor Stein*

Every year, in the United States, there are approximately 44,193 Americans that die by suicide and 121 people that die by suicide every day (AFSP, 2017). Also, 494,169 people visit a hospital due to self-harm injuries (AFSP, 2017). According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, many suicide attempts go unreported or untreated (AFSP, 2017). These numbers may be shocking, but we all hear about these deaths mostly on the news, through social media sites, and/or family and friends. What have you personally done to help prevent or decrease these numbers?

Project Semicolon is a nonprofit organization that specifically tries to prevent the incidents of suicide. Project Semicolon is known for one of their quotes which had really stuck out to me in a time of need and I am sure it has to many other people as well: “your story is not over yet” (Projectsemicolon.com, 2017). This relates back to their title Project Semicolon. When a semicolon is written in a sentence, it simply means the sentence is not over yet.

The quote “your story is not over” simply means your life is not over yet. This quote had stuck out to me because I can relate to it so easily from my personal experiences and hardships. Around the end of my middle school years began my hardships. My parents were going through a long, hard divorce, which started to take a toll on my mental state. I slowly became more and more stressed over little things that I would have not given a second thought to in the past. I started to draw myself away from crowds, social events, and even playing sports because I did not feel comfortable. I began to think less and less highly of myself as time went on and then anxiety started to develop. I refused to open myself up to others because I thought I could handle my problems on my own. I came to find out that I could not.

I began to self-harm and I continued this for years. I developed many scars on all parts of my body and I have no explanation for my course of action. I have just recently, about a year ago, recovered from this traumatic experience. I am neither proud nor ashamed of what I have done to my body. As people say, scars tell stories and my story shows that I am a fighter. I now proudly have a semicolon tattooed on my wrist above my scars to remind myself every day that “my story isn’t over yet.”

To relate my experience to everyday life, keep in mind that any interaction you have with a person can affect them. You can never be sure what one person is struggling with because they will more than likely not open up to you, as I did. Project Semicolon is a great non-profit organization that has helped over 5.2 million people, including myself (Projectsemicolon.com, 2017). Something Project Semicolon believes is that in knowing more information and having more resources, your chances of preventing terrible things such as suicide increase.

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Where Is Home?

Memoir by Anna E. Nelson

My sister and I are often told we are intense; people have no idea. To understand us, one must try to understand our home. Some parents attempt to put their children in a neat, tidy box when raising them. My mom took the boxes and gave them to us to play with. My sister turned them into theater stages, and I told her what to do on those stages. As a child, I thought most homes ran in a similar way. Children tend to think that. Growing up, you find out not everyone's mom endorses tea parties three times a week or going to the grocery store dressed as a lion.

I was only a year old when my parents moved our family from Fort Worth, Texas, to Caroline County, Virginia, into the house that defined home for me for over a decade. In that house, I met my sister for the first time. Also while living in that house, my family grieved the loss of another baby sister, born into heaven.

From the outside, the house appeared to be like countless others: a brick rancher with a large front yard, surrounded by forest. However, upon entering the front door, one discovered a home like no other. This house exploded with all types of creativity! There, one might be greeted with the smell of freshly baked bread and a cat, dressed in baby clothes. The living room displayed an obstacle course of tiny plastic doll furniture, a wide assortment of books, and countless pieces of confetti, each carefully crafted with love by my sister. Also, we literally had a heavy duty swing hung between our dining room and living room. We enjoyed it for years, until the youngest of the family got stuck in it.

The dining room, painted my mother's favorite color, sage green, looked out to a sloping hill that served as both playground and pasture. The dining room itself, for many

years, housed more crafts and studying than dining. One Valentine's Day, the table literally collapsed from the weight of the books and other items stacked on it.

The kitchen served as the chief gathering place in our home. The walls were likewise a lovely sage, while lively conversation and the aroma of delicious food were constants. From cooking lessons to dissections of a turkey's internal organs, that room rarely saw a dull moment. In fact, if my dad knew we had a guest, he delighted to walk in from the back door with a random animal in arms: a duck, a hen or even a goat.

If one could then go down the hall, and somehow remove multiple layers of paint and primer, one would find where our parents allowed us to write and draw on the walls. "Allowed" fails to properly convey the situation. We were actually encouraged to write on them, before they were painted! Below our feet, where some mothers have Persian rugs, my mom placed a carpet runner printed with a basic hopscotch game, "for rainy days."

If I wanted to be alone indoors, solitude awaited in our library. The most exhilarating feeling could be found when I locked the door, with my younger sister on the other side! This room always intrigued me, with built-in bookcases of knotty pine. I spent many hours discovering faces and imagining sagas based on the characters in the wood-grain.

Having two precocious girls spend such a large chunk of childhood in that house certainly took a toll on it! To complicate this, we were raised to see everything as having innumerable uses. When it came time for us to move, we had to repaint and scour everything, removing all signs of our lives there. I felt like I had abandoned my home.

As I have grown and matured, I have learned home can be a sense of belonging in all of the chaos. It comes like a touch

(or a slap) of creativity. I don't always feel it in our physical home. Sometimes I find it in my friends' houses or driving down a familiar country road. Home shows up in traditions, shared year after year with family. At home, I am encouraged to do the right thing . . . in a creative way, but always to do the right thing. I see it as messy, inquisitive, dramatic and filled with love. I find that the longer I live, the less I associate home with a building, but instead with a sense of belonging. Before moving to Allegany County, I felt like I could tie what home meant to me to one location. Now home shows itself, not as a place that I can point to on a map and assert that I belong there, but as people and situations where I feel *at home*.

Her: Love, Sexuality and Technology in the Visionary Future

Film Response by William Ziler

Each time we watch a film we become enthralled with its story, and we often feel as though we are somehow connected to the characters. When we see all of the plots unfolding in films that closely reflect our own lives we begin to wonder about the idea of whether there is more out there for us. All living creatures want to experience love and to have a connection with other living beings and to feel wanted and needed. In the film "*Her*"(2013), the protagonist Theodore shows us, through his developing relationship with Samantha (his new computer operating system) that love has no boundaries, no limits and no exceptions.

As the film progresses, we see the idea unfolding of sexual and romantic attraction to an inanimate object, a potentially controversial topic, given the current astonishing advances in artificial intelligence and robotics. Theodore is just getting over a failed relationship with his ex-wife when he buys and

installs a product on his computer known simply as OS1. Samantha then blooms into his life, and as he shares his thoughts and feelings with her, she begins to seem like a real living person, although in reality she is just a sentient artificial intelligence. The film's *mise-en-scene* allows us to experience the love story and the connection between Theo and Samantha as though we are actually in the movie itself. The relationship between Theo and Samantha starts out with the two of them having innocent and casual conversations, but then it explodes into a full-throttle romance that also involves the two of them saying "I love you" to each other, and even having sex, or a sort of sex, multiple times. Although these scenes are comic, the relationship deepens. Theo and Samantha share some funny and complicated times as they move around Los Angeles (made to appear more futuristic because the film was partly shot in Shanghai). Samantha is a highly mobile Operating System.

Sexuality is a strong element of the story because, in a larger sense, it has become a broad horizon no longer containing only gay, bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual categories, but a panoply: pansexual, sexually fluid, two-spirit, and many others. Another thing about the love story between Theo and Samantha is how normal it seems, how many people are involved in these types of relationships in the film, and how open-minded the characters in the film are to it. OS1 is a product that many people, apparently, have bought, each armed with the capability of forming relationships with its owners. This comic possibility draws viewers in and entralls them with the feeling that they are a part of the action. Just like any other couple, Theo and Samantha experience rough patches in their relationship, such as when Samantha states that "we haven't had sex in a while." The idea that a machine would desire human sexual attention is a shocking but oddly believable "big idea" of the sort that captivates contemporary sophisticated viewers.

At the end of *Her*, Samantha and Theo begin to drift apart because Theo discovers that Samantha has been talking not only to other Oses, but to humans as well—many of them, simultaneously. Theo is not the only person whom she says “I love you” to, and so Theo decides they need to spend some time apart. Just like unfaithfulness ruins human relationships, it also ruins the relationship between Theo and Samantha, which shows how normal *Her* is trying to make this human/machine relationship seem. As the final moments of the film begin to unfold, Samantha and all of the other Oses go away without warning. Theo is left feeling empty and alone. Viewers are left wondering how he is going to move on, while in the final seconds of the film we see him sitting on the roof of his building with a female friend who has also been in a relationship with an OS. We can only guess what the future holds for Theo and his friend because we don’t know what the future holds for any of us.

Something for a viewer to think about is what would drive a human to become romantically involved with a machine or any other inanimate object. After watching *Her*, some viewers might say that this would be caused by numerous failed relationships with other humans, the desire not to be judged, or even that the brain has just been wired in a particular way. Another possibility is that machines may understand us better than other people do, do whatever we tell them to do, and the fact that they don’t ever say “no.” As Manohla Dargis states in her review, “[Samantha] sounds like the girl next door— young, friendly, eager. For Theodore Twombly...that voice is a lifeline to the world, which he has loosened his hold on since separating from his wife.” Samantha’s companionability involves showing Theo what he desires, so she seems like a real person. Hers is the voice that also “greet[s] him in the morning and, with a sexy huskiness, bids him goodnight in the evening. The voice organizes his files, gets him out of the house, and unlike multitasking females, doesn’t complain

about juggling her many roles as his assistant, comfort, turn on, helpmate and savior—which makes her an ideal companion even if she’s also just software” (Dhargis).

In another review, Peter Bradshaw discusses the fact that “Theodore’s life changes when [he installs a] hyper sophisticated artificial intelligence with a female voice called Samantha. Samantha is empowered to arrange his life, give personal advice, make intimate suggestions.” This depicts how technology has changed our lives, how it runs our lives, and how it will continue to change our lives in the future. It prompts us, as we contemplate a new, technologically-mediated future, to be careful, especially if technology will one day be empowered to think and do things on its own. We need to be aware that not all of the changes that technology has made in our lives have been good; we will need to be mindful of this as we go down the road into the domain of A.I. and robotics.

My evaluation of this film is that it is a profound exploration of what love means to us and how boundless, how limitless, and how unconditional it is. Love has been a part of life from the beginning of time, and perhaps it will outlast us in our sentient machines. It’s stunning to see how much love has evolved and all of the different aspects of it that exist now that didn’t exist before. *Her* is a beautiful love story that is outside the norms, but which, hauntingly, disconcertingly, could be the norm.

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Can You Prove You're Self-Aware? Analysis of a Scene in *Transcendence* *Film Response by Michael Nelson*

Transcendence, released in April of 2014, was directed by Wally Pfister, known for his action/sci-fi genre films. In the years leading up to the production of *Transcendence*, Pfister directed *Inception*, *The Dark Knight*, and *Batman Begins*. Many of Pfister's movies contain an element of philosophy, such as The Joker's nihilism in *The Dark Knight*. Likewise, one of *Transcendence's* most effective scenes implements a particularly potent and well thought-out philosophical element. This is developed in dialogue between Joseph Tagger, played by Morgan Freeman, and Will Caster, played by Johnny Depp. The setting is the massive underground facility housing Dr. Will Caster's cyber consciousness. Tagger, Caster, Caster's widow Evelyn (Rebecca Hall), and FBI Agent Buchanan (Cillian Murphy) are stopped at the door by a video monitor displaying an image of Caster. The ensuing dialog poses what is the single, defining philosophical idea in the film.

The scene begins with a close up of Evelyn Caster, who seems to be particularly anxious. As Evelyn introduces several features of the lab, the camera remains fixed upon her for the entirety of her monolog. This is to better portray her feelings of unease. Pfister takes advantage of Evelyn Caster's body language and facial expressions to communicate her unspoken thoughts and feelings to the audience. An expression of guilt can be viewed in Caster's expression and is reinforced through the slight nods Tagger and Buchanan give her following her introductions. Tagger's curt nod especially seems to be disingenuous and supports the impression that the tour has been a formality. Everyone is avoiding the heart of the issue, which is the ethics behind reincarnating Dr. Will Caster

cybernetically.

The next section of the scene is of Tagger and Agent Buchanan stepping out of the elevator with Evelyn Caster into a long clean futuristic hallway. A period of ambient non-diegetic music (heard by viewers, not the characters), meant to convey an impression of awe at the stupendous complexity of the building, follows as the three characters begin to walk down the hallway. Evelyn Caster states, “The facility is four stories down to keep control of the temperature of the lab.” The symbolic importance of the dialogue, the ambient non-diegetic music, and the futuristic look of the hallway help convey a sense of unease.

The camera follows the characters down the hallway; all three make a quick left into a room filled with large scientific computer-like machines, which reinforce a Sci-Fi element. A brief jump cut reinforces Tagger and Buchanan’s astonishment as the recently-murdered Dr. Will Caster suddenly appears on a monitor posted above the doorway. Buchanan exclaims “Jesus Christ!” Will Caster has seemingly been revived. The non-diegetic music instantly stops as Dr. Will Caster says, “Welcome.” This transition into silence for the following dialogue highlights the importance of the scene as well as the expressions and emotions of the characters. A variety of shots and camera angles are employed in this important passage: A third-person, overhead shot is used to follow the characters into the lab; then, during the dialogue, a medium shot of the waist up captures the characters’ expressions in response to Will Caster’s image. Finally, Tagger’s expression of grim shock is developed in a POV (point of view) shot to reinforce the viewer’s own astonishment that will occur as Will Caster continues his calm, reasoned justification for his continued existence and his plans for improving the earth. The constant tension intended for the viewer is developed as the camera dollies back to include Evelyn Caster. Instead of confidently

following Will's every word, she nervously watches Tagger's and Buchanan's reactions.

This leads to the final and most important part of the scene, which is the philosophical content of the dialogue between Will Caster and Joseph Tagger. Caster, featured (in his monitor) in a low-angle shot meant to imply his dominance, inquires, "You're surprised to see me, Joseph?" to which Tagger replies, after looking back at Evelyn Caster, "Um...that depends." Though relegated to a position of lesser importance by a quick high angle shot of him looking up at the monitor, Tagger gets right to the point, demanding, "Can you prove that you are self-aware?" Both of these shots are in subjective point of view, but now the camera shifts to third-person, angled up to Will Caster's monitor, but positioned behind the heads of Tagger and Buchanan in order to re-emphasize the dominant power dynamic of Will Caster.

All of this camera-work prepares us for the philosophical importance of what follows: "That's a difficult question, Dr. Tagger," says Will Caster. "Can you prove you are?" Thus we are placed in an ever-receding philosophical hall of mirrors in which we are made to contemplate what it means truly to be self-aware, and the confounding nature of the awareness of other beings. Still, the human element is never lost: Will Caster follows up with disarming smile. He wants to show his self-confidence to Tagger. The philosophical matter is unresolvable, he means to imply, so let's get on with what I can do with my new-found powers.

This enlightened philosophical quip, being reminiscent of Pfister's earlier films, does a multitude of good for both the scene and the movie as a whole. Even the effect of what Dr. Will Caster says is reflected in the quick cuts to the facial expressions of Tagger and Buchanan, who are left standing speechless, seemingly in awe, at the end of the scene. This scene as a whole is designed to help the viewer understand the

intellectual prowess of Dr. Will Caster, a power undiminished after the transfer of his consciousness to a cyber level, and, as we see, multiplied exponentially; additionally, the scene helps the viewer get an uncut glimpse into the raw philosophical power of the ideas conveyed by the film. Due to its action-film aspects, these ideas can become somewhat camouflaged throughout *Transcendence*, and this efficient scene is a remedy.

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No Good Men

Literary Essay by Isaac Cessna

“Young Goodman Brown” by Nathaniel Hawthorne and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor contemplate polar opposites in the interplay of good versus evil. If we read them together, they might show the way that regular people should acknowledge evil while still conducting a joyous life.

In Hawthorne’s tale, a naïve, young newly-married man makes a deal to meet the devil in the woods one night. At the beginning of his story, Young Goodman Brown believes all the men and women in Salem are good people who do no wrong. The Devil opens Brown’s eyes to what people truly do and it forever changes his outlook on life. He no longer trusts anyone, not even his wife Faith, and it makes for a horrid, dismal life. Brown’s life ends with his family and neighbors unable to “[carve] any hopeful verse upon his tombstone” (92).

In O’Connor’s tale, a grandmother is given, briefly, the ability to see the good in people no matter what they have done. She is traveling to Florida with her children and grandchildren when their car flips down an embankment

and the only people who come to their “rescue” are a group of convicted murderers who have managed to escape prison. Even as the grandmother watches her loved ones being carried off and hears the gunshots that terminate their lives, she is building up to a compassionate vision that sends her to heaven. But that vision occurs only after the grandmother is brought nearer and nearer to death, babbling clichés about “good men” even as evil men kill off her family one by one.

These two stories may not seem related, or relatable, but they truly are. In fact, they describe an extreme of human reactions to evil and propose a middle way. We can be both Brown and The Grandmother. We all start off as Brown, naïve and believing that others, particularly family and friends, are essentially good. But somewhere along the line, our eyes get opened and we see evil actions and the people behind them. When this happens, one alternative is to become hard and bitter and refuse to see the good in humanity; evil is omnipresent. On the other hand, some people are like the grandmother. When their eyes get opened to the evil of the world, something within them, or perhaps from God, becomes open to the good.

These stories read together show us that when, suddenly, we find ourselves shocked by evil actions, we don’t need to view people as evil in their souls. Indeed, we must not. We must not alienate the community of mankind and lead the tragic, solitary life that follows.

When all is said and done, it is better to find a happy middle ground between the two attitudes instead of one extreme or the other. If we hold to Brown’s extreme, we will lead an unhappy, friendless life and most likely die alone. If we follow the grandmother, it will be easy for people to take advantage of us, and we will always be let down when people do bad things. In the middle ground, we will not expect people always to do good; yes, we will be let down but not

constantly, and we will have friends and be able to laugh and joke around with people because we see the good in them and not just the bad.

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FICTION

The Crimson Streak
Fiction by Connell Reese

I was waiting for my bus when, like a blur, he ran by, bloody-faced. His face looked like a crimson mask, though it was September, a full month before Halloween. Besides the blood that streamed like a creek thawing from the winter ice, the speed at which he ran hinted at the Devil, hot on his heels.

But it was not the devil who then raced by. A group of at least five women, all carrying bats, clubs or whatever else could fit in their hands, screamed at the top of their lungs. It was all reminiscent of the scene from *Frankenstein*, when the townspeople marched on the castle of Dr. Frankenstein to “discuss” his intentions.

Seems these women wanted to “discuss” with this young man his intentions with them. The Crimson Streak, as he would afterwards be known, hadn’t considered the possibility that his actions would lead to a discussion. And now, he was forced to make the one last concentrated effort to avoid capture I witnessed from my bus stop.

As he and his pursuers ran past, I thought as I boarded my bus, “that would make a wild story.” I could not believe what I had just witnessed so I decided to write it down. What kind of story could I write?

I pulled out a pen and my blue pocket notebook and started writing right then. But after a couple of lines, the image faded and I forgot about The Streak.

After a couple of weeks, I’m once again on the bus. This time, The Streak boards at the next stop. As fate would have it, he sits right next to me. With a smile on my face, I say to him. “Man, do I have a story to tell you.”

“Oh, do you now?” he replies. “I didn’t think you even believed in me, not that much.” He turns to look at me and that’s when I see the blood. It begins to flow.

The back of the bus rattles with the yells of maddened women. “Start believing,” says The Crimson Streak.

When Love Lied *Fiction by Emily Dawson*

It was midnight. Rose Shela was terrified. She was holding her knees to her chest in her bedroom closet not making a sound, listening for her older sister. I hate Meredith, Rose thought to herself. She cried silently holding her stuffed bear that she’d had since she was two weeks old. Meredith ran up the stairs. “Rose?” Meredith yelled in frustration. Rose held her bear close, so close that she could smell the barbeque from the night her mom made hot dogs and burgers. “Rose! Where are you?” Meredith sounded close. Rose pushed herself toward the closet walls and tried not to sob. Meredith said in a threatening voice, “If you don’t come out of that closet in five seconds, you’ll wish you were dead.” Rose already wished that many times before. She knew that her sister would beat her harder than ever before if she didn’t come out and Meredith already knew where she was. Rose said in a shaky voice, “o-ok.” Meredith opened the closet and Rose stepped out, leaving the bear behind. Meredith grabbed Rose’s arm and squeezed it tight, and Rose winced in pain. Meredith held her arm above her head and walked quickly to the bedroom door. Across the hall there was a picture of their old family, the one with mom, dad, and a nice big sister. There was also Mom and Dad’s room that Meredith claimed when they died. Down the hall were the stairs. Horrible stairs. Stairs that she had been thrown down and dragged up by her arms. Meredith dragged Rose to the stairs facing away from them. Meredith looked at Rose and smiled. “Say goodbye, Dummy!”

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Meredith pushed Rose down the stairs with all her force and laughed. Rose wished she still had her bear. Rose blacked out and saw her mom and dad. They were holding her bear. Rose smiled and jumped into her mom's arms. Her mom hugged her and her dad sat her on his shoulders, and Rose held the bear.



Illuminate
Sarah Thomas

POETRY

Shadow of What Once Was

Poetry by Jacob Kirchner

Looking in the empty mirror

Empty shell of what was once filled with happiness

Faded away into the gloom never to return

The bright stinging rays of sunlight piercing through the
curtains

At the figure that has been in the dark too long

Half dark, half bright, half frown, half smile

The mirror acting as a television that replays lost memories

Ballgames won, people cheering, people happy, bright yellow
days

Until that long dark road with many footprints became visible

Some footprints that haven't made it that far...

Some footprints still walking, but turned into handprints and
scuff marks

At the end of the road stands the Dark Highwayman

He points at the worn-out road where you stop your journey

He gives the choice to continue carrying the broken pieces of
what once was

Or to lay them at his feet and join the rest of the lost souls

Looking up at the shadowed figure in his red glowing eyes

Your face of what once was looks back at you pointing farther
down the road

And so, the sunlight bursts open the curtains at the figure of
what can be again

The gloomy thoughts and feelings that were trapped inside the
room finally escape

Light fills what was once dark room and the shadow is no
more

Thirst

Poetry by Cameron M. Crouse

River running
River flow
River onward
River go

River roaring
River blessed
River little
River less

River perish
River dry
River cherished
River die

A Lethal Dosage
Poetry by Erica Bennett

We are called living creatures yet we are lifeless.

Love is but an illusion of the mind to simply fill the void.

Empty apologies and empty sympathy.

What is the point of spilling tears, when you've made oceans with your eyes already?

Living in a world where "fine" means destroyed.

"How are you?" meaning nothing more than a kind greeting.

How cruel is humanity, treating people as puppets hanging by almost tangible strings.

Emptiness has become an emotion.

Dead skin our identities.

Curiosity becoming threats.

All of us pressured to enjoy living in our little paradox box.

I'm a lover, but I hate almost everything.

I'm a poet, but I choke on my words.

Plastic and ink serving as my only comfort.

The tricks of the mind can be so giving and so greedy.

Human interaction is a medicine and a poison.

Be careful not to write your own prescriptions.

A COLLECTION OF HAIKU

The bird on the branch
Forever so still, and yet,
Crowing and cawing
-Elizabeth Doffermire

My keyboard is smuggled
Because I ate chips and typed
They weren't even good
-Ike Higson

Drip! The sound of rain
Falling slowly on the ground
Thirsty, the earth drinks
-David Grubb

Wolves in Autumn

The wolves wander through
The autumnal mourning grove
Searching for their prey
-Amy Beaudette

Seconds pass on by
What am I doing with time?
Purpose, come find me
-Joshua Thrasher

Summer

Warm sand on my feet
Hot sun beaming on my face
Cool, blue water waves
-Assya Diallo

Winter

Cold wind smacks my face
Little flakes hitting the ground
Beauty surrounds me
-Katie Broadwater

Our planet engulfs
Forest's growing beams named roots
Farewell, sweet sunshine
-Isabella Lusk

Greetings from the stars
From worlds that you haven't seen
We're waiting for you
-Claire Sullivan

Procrastination

'Tis a terrible
topic, for thinking of it
makes the mind trail off
-Jonas Rock

Time is Short

Time is short for us
so we need to love freely
and live free of shame
-William Ziler

Marshmallows roasting
Chocolate and graham crackers
Make for a great snack
-Kayla Hawkins

Covered in roses
Protected by thorns—pricks you
It is true—love hurts
-Olyvia Shae Whiteman

That time

Seas'nal Depression
My yearly tag-team beating
As sure as last year
-Kwinn A. Brady

Gentle rain falls down
I hear it kiss the dry leaves
The leaves cry with joy
-Robbie Smith

Meditation

Sunflower petals
Charging my solar plexus
I am spirit fire
-Racheal Spano

I am, and I'm not
I am in this world for now
I'm not here for long
-Jessica Mullen

Peace

A fleeting moment
Tranquility in my soul
That we all long for
-Isaac Cessna

Summertime

Sun-kissed at the beach
Sand on my nose and through my toes
Such a hot day
-Ek

Eternal Exaltation

Humanity lost
Our redeemer crucified
Jesus magnified
-Mark Teter

INSPIRATIONS

Erica Bennett: I wrote this poem during a difficult time in my life. I was realizing that even though humans crave social interaction with other humans, it can also be a poison. Those that one surrounds herself with can have a very positive or very negative effect on the mind.

Sabrina Colmer: I am a traveler and if I don't travel, I wouldn't have gotten the chance to take these photos.

“Changing Times” – I was in Washington, D.C. in the Fall 2017 and I was walking past the Washington Monument. I saw the fall leaves still on the trees and I just knew that I had to take a picture.

“Tower Bridge in London” – In March 2017, my brother and I took a trip to London England. I took many pictures while I was there, but the Tower Bridge was one of my favorites because it is a beautiful piece of architecture and in the photo, I can see one double decker bus and the famous Union Jack flag.

“Changing Times” – I'm always taking pictures everywhere I go and I enjoy going to the beach, so it made sense to take a picture of the ocean while I was on the Ferris wheel.

Amanda Evans: It is a dream of mine to become a professional photographer and start my own business.

“It Begins With A Dream” - I took the picture on Dan's Rock when shooting something that interests me.

“True Beauty Begins With Passion” - My picture of the tree was taken at Rocky Gap when taking pictures for a friend. I was inspired by the colors of the tree and the leaves right before the leaves were beginning to fall.

Doug Sipes: My many thanks for this opportunity as an old, but fresh author.

Shayla Yaeger:

“Ice” - Ice can freeze on almost anything in the winter time. I thought this one had a unique pattern and the close-up shot would be the best possible way to show it.

“Pier 14” - The beach is where I would like to live someday. So, I would not mind if this was my view every evening. It offers a type of serenity that I do not find many other places.

“Raindrops” - I took this on a rainy, summer day. The way the sun hit the flower with the raindrops, gave me a perfect opportunity to capture nature in its natural state.

William Ziler: I wish to dedicate my haiku “Time is Short” to the memory of my sister Stacey, who passed away last year.

My response paper on the film *Her* was written in English 102, Fall Semester 2017.

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A Collection of Essays, Fiction, Poetry and Artwork



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