A Penny For Your Thoughts: Student Anthology 2016

Southwestern Oklahoma State University

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“Stop facing at me!” This phrase still seems to roll off of my tongue so easily. As a girl growing up with three older brothers, my childhood turned out to be quite the challenge. I had quickly become accustomed to the rough-housing and name calling, though I was never very good at either. There is quite a separation of age between my brothers and me. The eldest, Daniel, is 12 years older than me. This being said, I didn’t necessarily have the opportunity to “grow up” with my oldest two brothers. I spent the days of my adolescence with Aaron, who is only six years older than me. Whenever I think back to my time of juvenility, he is the one person I can vividly remember being by my side. While, not always in a positive way, he was still always there.

When I close my eyes, it instantly takes me back. I can see Aaron and myself playing in the backyard. My lengthy, chocolate brown hair is carelessly pulled up into a ponytail, dirt is streaking down my face, and there are grass stains marking the knees of my pants. Aaron is over by the young dogwood trees searching for the perfect branch to shape into a spear. His wispy copper cut is sticking to the sweat beginning to form upon his head. His lucid blue eyes glimmer in the sunlight finding its way through the leaves. He turns to me in an excited manner. “Hurry, we’re the gladiators now!” he says, with a whimsical sense of confidence. Re-enacting our best Russell Crowe fighting abilities, we carry on battling the enemies of our imaginations. The steak knives we confiscated from the kitchen emerge from shrubs throughout the yard. I discretely smile to myself. My brother is my best friend, and it will always be this way.

When I open my eyes, like any fleeting moment, the memory has quickly slipped away. We’re no longer little kids playing in the backyard. Time has taken its toll on both of us. We’re standing in a dingy cluttered room glaring fiercely at each other. The gleam in Aaron’s eyes has been replaced with an intense look of disgust and anger. I begin to yell, “Let go of me!” His grip gets tighter with every jerking motion. I can feel my blood boiling beneath my skin. I begin waving my arms haphazardly in hopes of gaining my release, and I am finally able to free myself. As I rush down the stairs, I can hear his foot steps behind me, getting louder and closer with each passing second. Once my feet are planted on the floor, I feel Aaron’s strong hands grasp my shoulders and my body being pulled in the other direction. I look to see Aaron doubled over with tears swelling in his eyes. This is a sight that I have never seen before. My heart aches as I watch droplets fall from his eyes and soak through his shirt. I find myself weeping as well, my aggression rapidly vanishing. “Bryce, all I want to do is protect you. I’m not trying to hurt you, but I need you to listen. This is a tough time for all of us. We are all hurting. I know I can’t possibly understand what this is like for you, but I want to help. You’re my baby sister and my first priority. Stop trying to push everyone away. It’s not up to anybody else, but us, to get through this. So, come on. We’re the gladiators now.” I feel safe in his arms as he grips me tighter. Once again, I grin. This really is my best friend.

I will never forget the times I’ve spent with Aaron. These memories, good or bad, are ones I want to hold onto for the rest of my life. Even though we may grow apart throughout the course of time, a certain unspoken bond will always remain between the two of us.
Art and photos
By Benjamin Jones
My Pal
By Chrisann Bandy

When I was growing up, my father was never in the picture. It was only my mom, my sister and I, with the support of our grandparents. Later in my childhood, our stepdad, Brandon, came into the picture. I always remember my sister and I being sent to Granny's and she would ask, “You girls ready for some hot tea and honey toast?” Granny made the best homemade bread. Trips to Granny’s house was always an adventure. While it was awesome to cook up a meal or spend the day in the kitchen making special memories to last a lifetime, hanging out with my Pal had to be the greatest.

While I ate my honey toast and drank my hot tea, Pal started putting on his boots. “You ready to work?” he asked, and I replied with a yep. “Then go get your overalls on,” he instructed, and I did just that. My pal owned his own little business called Brandel Oilfield Service. He owned about 20 light towers; they supplied light to events, parties, but mostly for the oilfield for locations. Pal was a hardworking man and always could rely on what he called “his little worker.” I was in charge of changing the “Red Stuff,” putting new filters on, and refilling the oil bottles. I got paid in money, cookies and peanuts. Bribery also worked, depending on the bribe, of course.

After a long day of exhausting work, it was time to feed the cows. Next thing you’d know, we were both yelping and a hollering “Sueeeeeee,” the feeding call. We’d sit there and count the cows as they stomp in to make sure they were all there. Gypsy, Bambi, Lighting, Longhorn, Rosebud, and Red.

“Yep, they are all here,” I’d yell. We threw the feed into the feeder and stepped away before we get trampled on.

“They are more afraid of you then you are of them,” he’d say every time I seem to be skittish.

We got back to Granny’s house to eat our supper. Pal said a prayer before we dug into the delicious mashed potatoes, chicken, cooked carrots and a tall glass of milk with a few cubes of ice. Although I did not like cooked carrots, if Pal ate them, I ate them. After dinner it was time for dessert, so we scooped up a big bowel of chocolate almond ice cream. We’d go sit in Pal’s old Lazy Boy; with me sitting in my spot on his lap, we sit and eat our ice cream.

Another day at Granny’s house and we had to put hay bales out in the pasture. My sister was driving the truck while Pal and I cut and tossed the hay bales off the top. Standing on the top of the hay bales, we are about two stories high. I don’t know what happened next besides waking up on the ground on top of my pal asking, “Pal, are we in heaven?”

“I don’t think so.” Someway, somehow, we had fallen off the hay bales and in the mix of it all my pal had pulled me on top of him so he wouldn’t squash me.

What will we do tomorrow? Will we build another play house, ride the mower like it’s a toy, or go out and climb the old willow tree and play with the cow? No, none of those this time. My sister and I grabbed our towels, walked outside in our bathing suits, thinking we were the coolest girls in town. We went down to the creek with Pal and swam. As he watched us goof off and make a mess of ourselves, he stood up firm and yelled “Stop!” We froze and just looked at him.

“Don’t move,” he said very quietly, “There is a snake heading right for you

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Photos and Poem by Emily Thompson

Finally, I know
i am more than my mistakes
i am more than enough

People come and go
friendships can come to an end
but love always lasts

High school is not fun
it is not the best four years
it is the worst time
girls. He should have known better than to tell me that! Up I jumped and sprinted as fast as I could, and he captured me in his arms. It didn’t take long for my sister to follow. Oh boy, did we have a laugh.

April 17, 2006, was officially the worst day of my life. I was getting a midnight snack when the house phone rang. I looked at the caller ID and it showed up “Pal Craig.” I thought to myself, “Well, this is odd.” I answer with a hello, but it wasn’t a voice I recognized.

“Is this Jennifer Thomas?” The man on the other side of the phone asked. Immediately, I knew something was wrong, so I woke my mom up. I could hear my mom in the other room, telling my stepdad she had to leave and go get Granny. As I stood there and watched my mother grab for her keys, she looked at me.

“Pal has been in a bad wreck, and I need to go get Granny and go to the hospital.”

“Please let me go!” I begged and pleaded. The answer was no, and from there I knew it was bad. I lay in bed and tried to rest my eyes, my mind is wandering. How could this of happened? I closed my watery eyes and prayed. I prayed harder than I had in a long time. “Please, God, don’t take my Pal. At that moment Brandon stepped into my room and told me to get dressed, we were going to Granny’s.

I waited by the front door for mom and Granny to arrive. I saw the car pull up and I didn’t know what to think. The moment they stepped out of the car, I knew, I just knew my Pal was gone. I balled my eyes and soul out. I had lost my best friend, my role model, my adventure buddy, my boss, I had lost my pal. It felt like everything had been pulled from under me in a split second. I didn’t understand what was going on. I didn’t understand why. Why did you take my pal? That night I slept in our old Lazy Boy, ate some chocolate almond ice cream and covered up with his blanket. I cried myself to sleep listening to my mom and Granny call family and friends to let them know Pal went to be with the Lord.

The business that he started from nothing with his little helper, now called B&M Power Up, was sold to my Granny’s ex-husband, my mother’s dad, Mike Bandy. He still has the business, and it has grown to be a big success in Oklahoma.

Pal is my motivation in life. I still have that old ragged Lazy Boy sitting in my own house. It still smells like his shampoo from when he would sit there with wet hair after a shower. When I’m having a bad day, I go and sniff, and I know he is there with me. We must treasure the moments we have with people, make the best of memories, and laugh as much as we can, because we never know when that last laugh will be.
No matter who you are or where you're from, everyone has a dream of some sort. These dreams can range from traveling to simply taking a first step. My dreams are simple. All I have ever wanted from life is a family of my own. Some people have it easy growing up, and while I'm not saying it couldn't have been worse for me, it definitely wasn't easy. My family has always been a little challenging. Things have certainly improved for me, but I don't want my children to have to worry about anything, no matter how minor it may seem.

Growing up, my family and I moved around a lot. My mom was working, and my father stayed home to do drugs with his buddies; he wasn't the best man to be around. I don't know why my mom stayed with him for so long. I think she was afraid to leave. To this day I still have no idea how my mom managed to support four kids and his bad habits, but she never stopped trying. Since she was the only one with a job, paying rent wasn't easy, which is why we moved so much. I don't remember ever finishing a year out at one school until we moved to Hinton. My dad left my mom when I was around nine, consequently causing my mom to get a second job. Around this time she also decided to start going back to school leaving me to care for my younger siblings. In my heart I know that she only did it for the greater good of the family, but I wouldn't want my children to worry about something like that. Taking care of those kids wasn't easy, and because of it I never really had a childhood. I learned to grow up really fast. I'm always going to do my best to make sure my family is taken care of, no matter the cost.

It wasn't always bad though. When I was eleven, my mom met what would soon be my stepfather. He has been such a blessing to our family. I don't quite know where we would be without him. Since marrying, my mother has not had to work a single day. He has done everything in his power to make sure she gets to spend as much time with us as she possibly can. She finally gets to be a part of our lives, which is great for my younger sib-
Dreams

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lings. Unfortunately, now I work and have other obligations. Even though I
don't get a lot of quality time with my mom, spending any time with her is the
absolute best feeling I have ever felt. Knowing I now have a shoulder to cry
on if I ever need it is indescribable. I can see how much it hurts her when she
thinks about how much she missed out on. I don't want that. I want to be
there every second my child says my name.

All of this is why I crave a family of my own so desperately. I want
the opportunity to raise children of my own because my mom didn't have the
chance to raise me. It may not make sense in the minds of others, but it's all
that has ever made sense to me. It's like I need the chance to make something
that someone else can't break. The family I had growing up was broken. I
need the chance to make one that isn't. My children will never have to worry
about whether or not they will have dinner or if they will get to finish the se-
semester with the friends they try so desperately to make year after year. I will
always spend quality time with my children because I feel that it is a vital part
of growing up. More than anything, I am going to give my children a life
that they don't have to recover from.

Everyone has a dream or two of their own. Some are a little more
far fetched than others, but I feel like none is impossible. Mine comes from
the heart. It's something that I'll carry with me for the remainder of my
life, no matter how long that may be. A family that has time for each other,
one that cares—that's my dream. As simple or as complicated as it sounds,
that's it. Whether I will have the opportunity to obtain this dream or not I
do not know. What I do know is that I'll never stop trying, because any
dream is possible, so I'm definitely going to give it my best shot.
An Athlete’s Secret: Dedication

By Courtney Reyes

Everyone knows with a little dedication, anything can be accomplished. Sports are a great way to express an athlete’s dedication. Dedication is a very important characteristic to have. Dedication is shown many different ways in sports. Dedication is the secret to success for many athletes. The most common ways athletes express their dedication to a sport are: showing up to every practice, practicing on their own, and keeping their grades up to be eligible to play. Not all great athletes have outstanding talent in the sport they play. It is the dedication that is shining through when they play that makes them so great.

We all know the expression, “practice makes perfect,” but most people are too lazy to follow through with it. One example of dedication is shown by an athlete showing up to every practice. Whether it is a walk-through, cardio day, or a morning workout, every practice is important. An athlete schedules practice, plays, and has many other sport-related things are always changing. Missing a day of practice is as crucial as missing a week of school; the information missed is going to be needed later on. This is what breaks the average athlete and makes him or her great. Dedication is pushing ourselves past our limits every sprint during practice. Dedication in practice is the difference between winning and losing.

Another way to show dedication in sports is putting in extra work. Extra work is an athlete going to the gym every chance possible and spending countless hours improving his or her skills. To be an outstanding athlete, extra work is definitely needed. Michael Jordan spent countless hours after practice in the gym perfecting his already perfect shot, becoming the most advanced shooter of all time. The work put in when no one is watching will result in how an athlete plays when everyone is watching. Also, being alone in the gym while practicing, an athlete is given the chance to focus, learn, and improve. Whether it is staying after practice, coming early in the morning, or even coming way late at night, it is always essential to put in additional work. If athletes aren’t willing to push themselves to become better at a sport, then they are going to stay average. Leaders are willing to go the extra mile to be the prime competitor.

Last, but not least, athletes reveal their dedication to sports by keeping their grades up to be eligible to play. An athlete’s commitment to a sport begins in the classroom. There is more to being an athlete than being talented in what we play. What is more important is being a smart, hardworking student. Most coaches will not play an athlete unless they have good grades. This is intelligent on the coach’s part because a student-athlete should be eligible to play their sport. Being dedicated to schoolwork and making decent grades can actually pay for college with scholarships. Colleges look for athletes that are devoted to their schoolwork to better themselves and their school. Coaches also notice if a student-athlete has an impressive work ethic in the classroom, then they will also in the sport they play. Dedication in schoolwork determines an athlete’s sport and life success.

In conclusion, athletes with the characteristic of dedication will overcome any obstacle thrown at them. They stand out from all other athletes, no matter the competition. Dedication will always overtop talent when talent doesn’t work hard. Most of all, the dedication of the athletes shows how much they care about a sport. Dedication is not something we are born with, but that we acquire over years of hard work to achieve what we love. An athlete’s dedication to a sport results incomparable success in the sport.

We cannot have success without dedication.
Photo in Tibet by Li Wang
To the Ends of the Page
Finishing a Paper vs. Not Finishing
By Dylan Brewer

We all have choices to make. Do we finished our paper or the last level of Final Fantasy? Do we stay up all night tossing and turning, constantly thinking about our paper? Will our current grades be enough to balance out after this one failed assignment? Time, grade, stress, and effort are all factors in deciding on if to finish a paper.

Is the paper worth our time to go and complete? How long will it take to find sources? When is it due? All of these questions deal with the time used that we spend to craft a paper worthy of being turned in. Checking our sources, writing, rewriting, re-re-writing, spell check, and more take much of our time away. Some papers are shorter than others, so we must also remember that. Even if we were to just leave the quill dry of ink, there is still the amount of time we contemplated not finishing.

That all-important point is something we have all worried about before. A paper can make or break that “D” needed to pass or that “A” required to keep that 4.0 GPA. Even if the paper doesn’t turn out to be the best, those points will help. A missing paper is worth no points, but a poor paper is at least worth some. In high school, those with high grades are nerds, geeks, and dorks, but once the final bell rings, they can be seen out in the world succeeding even more.

It’s a lot of work to get that grade, but once all is said and done, was it really that stressful to sit down to write the paper? Sure you have to go look up information, cite sources, and check spelling and grammar, but looking back once it was done there was nothing to worry about. A paper finished is a paper with no more stress, however; a paper not even started is one that will loom in the back of the mind, even long after the grade has been given. That ever-haunting thought will always lurk in the shadows of the brain, slowly eating away.

“I don’t want to go to school today,” we all told our parents when we were younger. There is always something we don’t want to do, but what takes more effort, complaining about it or actually doing it? True, the assignment will take at least some effort, but in today’s day and time, how much effort can we expend to finish or not to finish? We don’t have to go to the ends of the earth, just the ends of the pages.
Art By
Kinley Ford
A Trip to the Past
By Dylan Brewer

A young couple gets married and has a baby boy. The child stays with grandparents while the couple works and goes to school. The child is over protected. The boy grows and is bullied in school. The boy goes into homeschooling and must make new friends. The boy goes to a local technology center in high school. The boy graduates and goes to a nearby college.

From childhood, we experience cause and effect. Every cause has an effect, and it is those chains of chains and effects that shape us growing up. In the short story we see several causes and several effects. The boy’s past helps shape him but does not define him. According to Landry Brewer, “Those who don’t learn from their history, end up repeating it.” Our history is something we must learn from, but it does not make up who we are as a whole. Our actions are what define us, and our actions are causes.

Let’s look at some effects first. A child stays at the grandparents’ house. The child is over protected. The child is bullied. These are merely a few effects we can see in the story, but what are the cause? The child staying with the grandparents can be traced back to it being a young couple. A young couple with a new baby would need to make more money to feed him. The boy being overprotected could be a result of many things, but the most common is probably the child being the first born. As for the boy being bullied, what could cause that other than just some jerks at the school? Being over protected means seeing less of the outside world. Overprotection often leads to bullying due to lack of a defense to it and everything on the outside.

Those are some of the things that shaped the boy, but they do not define who he is. Let’s take a look at time of the actions that he took, his causes. An obvious one is leaving public school for homeschool. The cause, leaving; the effect, he must make new friends. The boy decides to attend a technology center. This is a choice, a cause. What does something that simple cause? The effect is that he wishes to further his education even more after leaving, so he ends up enrolling in a college.

Little things have an effect; it can be small or large. A cause always has an effect, and these effects shape us, but the things we cause are what define who we are. We must learn from our history, but if we live in it, we will never have a future.
Photo by Chrisann Bandy
Is Softball Harder Than Baseball?

By Madison Hughes, Elk City

Many people often question if softball is harder than baseball or vise versa. These two sports seem the same with similar fields, same amount of players, and the same objective. People often conclude that baseball is harder due to pitching, hitting, and the distance of the field. However, it is scientifically proven that softball is harder than baseball. The speed of pitches, the reaction time for hitters and fielders, and the distance of the field indicates that softball is indeed harder than baseball.

In softball, a pitcher controls the ball with her fingertips on the seam, and she has the ability to cause the softball to change speeds dramatically. A pitcher has a motion of low to high and is only 43 feet away from the hitter, which is harder for a batter to react to the changing pitch. Left handed batters have an advantage. They are able to slap, which is running towards the ball and hitting it. This makes it harder for an infielder to react and throw her out. Reaction time is 50% less than a baseball player. While hitting, a softball player also has .350 seconds to react, and the visual of the ball is misleading. Finally, the distance also contributes as to why softball is harder. Softball fields are closer to the plate and half the size of a baseball field. The bases are 60 feet apart. This makes it hard for a person to steal or for the catcher to throw a girl out at second.

Baseball pitchers use fingertips to throw the ball like a softball pitcher, but baseball pitchers are only 60 feet from the mound to home plate. Baseball pitchers throw with a high to low formation, therefore; a batter can react quicker to the changing pitch. A baseball reaches the plate at .38 seconds. It takes an infielder 4.3 seconds to react and get the runner out. A baseball runner has an advantage against the catcher because a runner has more time to steal and more time for the catcher to react. Baseball fields are shaped like a softball field but bigger with a grass infield and outfield. A baseball field is about 16,700 square foot. Therefore, a baseball player does react slower than a softball player.

Although these sports are very similar, they are very different. Softball is definitely harder than baseball due to differences in hitting, pitching, and the distance of the field. Think of it like this, softball is to baseball as tennis is to ping pong.
Photos by Kelsey Doughty
Many people become obsessed with their appearance. To me in no way should appearance dominate people’s lives. Models are known to be obsessed with their appearance; yes, ordinary people are always changing features on their body as well but have you ever thought that criminals change their facial features to hide from police or higher forms of law enforcements.

Being a model was one of my fantasies when I was a young girl. I always wanted to look like them and even dress like them. I grew up to realize that many models have mental disorders like bulimia and anorexia. Bulimia is an eating disorder where a person eats and then later throws it up. Anorexia is also an eating disorder where a person can’t eat or loses their appetite. Why do they do this? In the eyes of society they are ugly and fat and won’t get picked as Americans next top model. Is being beautiful and skinny more important than their own life? Models are advertising that it is ok to look like a walking stick. When your life comes to a point that you are so obsessed with your body that you start to throw up what you ate moments ago or to stop eating completely, then you need to realize you have a problem. It is not safe or healthy, so you should find help. Some people don’t are in denial that they have a problem because they don’t see it as an obsession of appearance or mental disorder.

Actresses have will change their appearance for different roles that they may take throughout their career. One thing that sticks out to me the most is that not everyone has perfect skin. Many stars cover, drench and even cake on makeup. They do this to make their facial features match the role, when it should be making the role match the star. A good example is Catniss from The Hunger Games; she had to lose a large amount of pounds to get the role. But later after the movie came out, she apologized to her fans because she would never want anyone to be that skinny, and that she didn’t want anyone to think that it was acceptable.

Some people even go into the extremity of getting plastic surgery done. I was watching True Life on MTV, and it was about a lady who was obsessed with her breasts. She wanted to get her breasts bigger and bigger. It literally looked like she had two beach balls stuck underneath her bikini. The bikini barely even covered her nipples! The medical doctor told her that if she was to go any bigger she was going to have back problems. Just like anyone who is so obsessed with their appearance, she didn’t care and went on with the surgery.

I saw on the news an incident involving a young boy. He was being bullied at school because of his ears. His parents didn’t like it but couldn’t get young kids to stop bullying. Fed up, the parent went to a surgeon to make his ears normal or, in this case, smaller. It’s not right, having a child go through surgery at such a young age. Kids will be kids, but we should never teach them that it isn’t ok to be exactly who they are. The more you change yourself, the more imperfections you will point out, and the more you will want to fix them.

In this crazy world, even criminals change their appearances. They change the way they look so that people can’t find them. Criminals are very smart and change themselves many times. Doing this prevents the police from capturing them. Criminal are very smart, they might change their appearances more than once to throw off the police.

Many people who are obsessed with their appearances want to be up-to-date on the fashion industry. There are many different ways people can change themselves to fit in. A person needs to see all the shocking things that can come with it. I thank God for what I look like today and that I am happy with myself. It is much easier said than done, but it is ok to care about what we look like. Just never forget where we come from and who we are. We must remember that any tiny obsession can come with various consequences.
Photos By Kennedy Barrrett
Addiction: Am I Just Another Statistic

By Jennifer Hayes

From domestic violence to kidnapping or murder, every aspect of addiction emanates violence. Have you ever heard the saying, "A country song played backward returns everything; you get your dog back, your house back, your car back, your kids back, your wife back, basically your life back"? In my opinion some of the most common causes and effects of addiction are violence, loss, trauma and statistics. Living with an addict, being an addict, working in a treatment center, I have witnessed and experienced the causes and effects of addiction and only one of them is good.

I remember a time when I just wished I would disappear. I was dreaming of course. The father of my three sons was a vicious alcoholic, and I was always on the receiving end of his abuse. He drank nearly every day, and "good" days were few and far between, "good" meaning sober and conflict free, of course. Two occurrences stand out most in my mind and were part of the deciding factor to leave him. He had me trapped in the bathroom choking the life out of me, and my oldest son walked in and said, "Daddy why are you hurting Mommy?" and later when I was pregnant with my youngest son, I literally received the beating of my life. It lasted over four straight hours. I had a broken nose, broken wrist, broken collar bone and broken home. People say "break the cycle" and it sounds simple, but it's not. I lived with his cruelty for nine years afraid to even look another human in the eye. The effect of his addiction to alcohol nearly killed me, and I became just another statistic, a young mother of three with no job, no home, and no one to turn to. I first called Project Safe, a battered women's shelter. They rented a hotel room for me and my kids to stay in until I could get transportation to get out of town. I decided on Ponca City, where my aunt and uncle offered us a place to stay until I could get on my feet again. Even though I was constantly in fear for my very life with the father of my sons, I missed him. But I knew there was no way to turn back.

Despite all the trauma that I survived. I began experimenting with alcohol. I would take the kids to a sitter and go to the bar with my best friend nearly every night and get drunk. I began losing a lot of time and feeling a lot of shame and guilt. I would wake up in odd places with no memory of the night before. I once woke up in bed with a stranger. I had no memory of how I got there or who this person beside me was. Occasionally I would wake up in parking lots because I was too drunk to drive home. I even woke up in my car in front of a convenience store with a dead battery over two hundred miles from home. Drinking took its toll on me, and I finally had to stop. I felt so guilty I was completely ashamed of my behavior and all the time I was missing out with my kids. It was then that I found drugs and discovered that I could be high and still function in every way. Thus began my addiction to drugs.

Becoming an addict was a slow process for me. I managed to raise my kids into adulthood for the most part. I did so usually under the influence of drugs or alcohol because I was a functioning user, and no one knew. I had bouts of sobriety never lasting very long, and for all appearances my life was pretty perfect. I became a professional in my community, got married and had another child, a daughter this time. Yet my addiction was slowly spiraling out of control, and after eleven years of maintaining, I lost everything again, but this time it was my fault. The one thing that caused me to completely give in to addiction was the death of my best friend. After being out "partying" one night, we were on our way home, and she was driving. She took something in the bathroom before we left the party that caused her to overdose, and she crashed the car. I finally got her out of the vehicle, called 911 and started CPR only to have her die in my arms once the paramedics arrived and took over. I felt so guilty because I couldn't save her. I began using heavily, and not just to function anymore. I left my husband through text on our wedding anniversary and didn't realize it for eight days because I was that high. Leaving him also left me nowhere to go except with other addicts on the streets. Once again a statistic, I was strung out, living on the streets, dealing drugs to survive. This is where the violence returned to my life with a vengeance. I went on a drug deal all alone trusting the wrong person and was kidnapped! I was held against my will, drugged, tied up, raped, beaten, and robbed in a seedy hotel room for an entire week. I have almost no memory of that week and absolutely no memory of how I got away. I learned real fast not to trust anyone, and I began carrying a gun.

Thankfully carrying a firearm didn't end as bad as it could have, although it was pretty bad to me at the time. I got busted for dealing drugs with a gun in my possession, but I was in jail less than twenty-four hours, so I didn't learn a thing. That was the beginning of the end for me. Several drug busts and felonies later I decided enough was enough and went to treatment. I completed it successfully and began working at the treatment center.

Being and working in recovery, I don't personally experience the nasty effects of addiction anymore, but I sure witness others who do. I work with traumatized young men who are the same age as my children. Many have already been to prison, many have witnessed or been part of death by being part of horrific crimes like murder, attempted suicide both accidental and intentional. All have experienced major loss in some way or another. Most like me have lost if all if they ever had it to begin with. They are all alone with no support, and every one of them is a statistic.

There is no end to the causes of addiction, and the effects are everlasting. The only happy effect of all of the violence, loss, trauma and statistics to be found is in recovery. I am less than three weeks away from having three years completely clean and sober.
Resting Easy
By Ashley Brown

None of us could have ever imagined that in the spring of 2015, we would be planning a trip to California to spread our sister’s ashes. My family had taken many vacations before. It seemed so wrong to be taking one now for this reason. We all knew it needed to be done. Reluctantly, we chose a date. We made the plans to complete the task at hand. Looking back at this trip, I always feel a smile creep across my lips. While the reason for our latest family vacation was a tragic one, good friends and family helped me make the best of it.

Arriving back home in California gave everyone on the trip mixed emotions. I, myself, couldn’t decide if I was glad to be back or heartbroken that I didn’t have my sister there to enjoy it with me. To be honest, I think it was probably a little bit of both. The last time any of us had been in the state, we had all been together, my sister included. It was a hard realization. Despite the sadness in our hearts, we continued with our plan. We were all anxious to honor our friend, Danielle.

We headed north on US Highway 1, taking in the breathtaking views. Having been a resident of Oklahoma for the past 12 years, I had forgotten how humbling this sight is. I think we all drove in silence and awe until we reached our destination, a small private beach in Half Moon Bay. It was a beautiful and welcoming sight to our heavy hearts. This was our sister’s favorite place to visit when we were young. And as the sun set on the first day of our California vacation, we knew we had chosen the perfect spot.

Waking up the next morning, I felt a great peace in my heart. I knew that Danielle would be pleased with our choice. As we readied our rented equipment at a local board shop, my brother leaned toward me and said, “She would love it.” I knew then that he too felt the same peace in his heart that I had. We walked as a family, down the shore to the spot we had chosen. Before entering the water we shared stories and memories about our beloved Danielle. We all agreed that we wished she could be there with us to watch the morning mist rise over the ocean.

One by one we entered the water. Laboriously paddling out to open water. As I struggled to meet my group, I remembered what my brother had said and used it to motivate me. She would love it here. She would love the salty air, the cool breeze in her hair, the sun shining down and the circle of friends and family waiting at the end of the long paddle out. Again I felt my heart fill with peace and love as I joined the people I love most in my life. We held each other’s hands, floating in that water at Half Moon Bay, but feeling like we were on another world entirely. Time stood still as we bared our souls to each other, taking in the serenity of the waves, marveling of life’s great mysteries, and sharing with each other our fondest memories with our sweet Danielle. We laughed, we cried, and it was in those moments that I realized, this trip that I had dreaded would become one of my most treasured memories.

On April 18th, 2015, my family, friends and I set out to California. Together we turned a difficult task into a beautiful memory. I’ll never forget the wonder that we took in from atop the cliffs driving up Highway 1. I hold a special place in my heart for the people whose hands I held on what could have been one of the most difficult days of my life. I’ll always long for that California air, the place where I made so many memories with my sister, before she passed. But I can find a little peace in knowing that she’ll always be waiting for me there, in that secret spot, resting easy in the California sun.
Problems with Social Media

by Jimi Terry

We are in a new age. Everything we do is involved with technology. From reading books to playing games, all of it is technological. We are a modern group of people. We like to be on top of everything. If one person has it, we all have to have it. From the newest iPhone coming out to a new social media, we are always in the loop. Most of us have all fallen into the social media trap. Having social media keeps us in constant contact with people. It gives us the chance of being nosy to see who is still together, who broke up, who died and so on. I am one person who can admit to having far too many social media sites. When I am bored, I can just go look at pictures on Instagram and see who tweets what on Twitter. Though there are many upsides to social media, there are also dangers to having it as well.

One major thing that happens on social media sites far too often is bullying. If we thought getting picked on in the hallways of high school was bad, it has definitely changed now. We are now at the point of no physical interaction. If we have a problem with someone, we just Facebook it and wait for others to join into our hate groups. People get personally attacked on social media all the time. It could be on how that certain someone is dressed or simply because someone has a problem with that someone. People also make page groups bullying others. On social media it is so easy to make a fan page. There could be a "I Hate Jimi" club floating around, and people would actually follow it. When it comes to these ugly things, enemies we find enemies that we do not even know. People can join a page and be as ugly as they want, no matter if they know the person or not.

Second, people like to "Catfish." Catfishing is pretending to be someone you are not on the Internet. I know this seems silly to think that people would just flat out lie about who they are, but it happens quite frequently. By just clicking the power button on your laptop, you can have the power to be whomever you want to be. You do not think you are pretty enough? Google a picture of a random person. Embarrassed to let anyone know you are on a dating site? Make up a name. With social media there are so many lies to hide behind. I could tell everyone I am 5'11 and 115 pounds, and by the googled picture I uploaded you would never have a clue any different. Not only are people lying about what they look like, they are hiding about who they are. You might think some cute teenage boy is messaging you; then you find out it is a forty-seven year old man instead. I hate to sound this ugly, but I know how bad this situation could be. You never know who is lurking around the corner. Not only are there lying perverts, there are actually lying lovers. There are actually people who have full-on relationships with people they have never met. They claim to love them and message them every day, but how do they know the people are being true? There is a show on MTV called "Catfish," and it actually shows that this happens. People fall so in love, but the other people always has excuses as to why they cannot see them until they bring the show in. They find the "cat fishers" and ask why. Most just say to build their confidence or even to get revenge. I think there is no excuse for heartache, but I guess you should not try to find love on the internet.

Last of all, relationships usually hit a downfall due to social media. On social media we are free to talk to whomever we want to. From an old schoolmate to a friend of a friend, there is always someone willing to chat. Friendly messaging someone can go downhill in the blink of an eye. When that girl you always had a crush on in high school messages to see how you are doing, are you going to tell your wife or see how it plays out? We are in an age of nonchalance. Nothing is hidden very well, nor do we try to hide it. Most people are open on social media, so they just cut to the chase. Cheating is such a simple thing to do on social media. There are countless dating apps to try to "keep your options open." Lying is sometimes not even part of it. If it says you are in a relationship on your page, that does not mean that people still will not try. Some people are actually okay if you do have a significant other. Relationships and social media do not mix.

Social media is not all bad, nor are all people. Social media just gets in the way of true things. It can bring out the good in people, but it can also bring out the bad. Even though I have social media, I do not think I would personally get upset if they were gone. I love to keep in touch with family and classmates, but I could just stick with calling. Though there are many upsides to social media, there are also dangers with having it.
Photos by Linda Johnson
The Road to Hell
Barbee Horstkoetter

It was dark and cold and we were accelerating at a speed I was terribly uncomfortable with. Our trailer was extremely over-loaded, even by redneck standards. The six percent grades were causing us to accelerate at rapid speeds that had us feeling as icy as the roads we were on. The uphill exits for runaway trucks were looking extremely inviting.

My husband, Mitch, and I were doing a hot shot job from New York to South Texas and the carefully laid out trip had gone to straight to hell. We were worried about the incoming blizzard. We were ready to exit after the last little wiggle the truck and trailer gave us on the newly forming ice patches.

We observed a road sign that showed a hotel and gas station at the next exit. Once we had taken the exit, over loaded, tired, and cold, mind you, we got to the bottom of the hill and there was nothing but darkness. We couldn’t see any signs of life anywhere around. It felt as if we were the only people on the planet it was so dark and deserted. The abandoned hotel and gas station were boarded up. Unable to find a place to turn around, we decided to continue on and pick the interstate back up.

We reluctantly continued driving down the dark lonely road and found a turn off that looked to follow back around to the interstate. The Garmin was recalculating to let him know to take an immediate left. He did, we turned onto a narrow street named Fearer Road. Fearer Road, indeed! It was dark in the middle of nowhere and I was scared out of my mind; then it got worse. The name of the road alone was enough to make us want to turn around and try again. We had an immediate hill and it proved to be a challenge up the icy hill. There was an old beaten up jalopy behind us with only one headlight that continued to pass by as we turned. Then the car stopped, backed up and slowly fell in behind us. At this point my heart was about to jump out of my chest. The first house we arrived at to turn around looked like it was straight out of the movie Bates Motel. With a nervous look and chuckle at each other we continued to drive past dark, dirty houses that were straight out of the horror shows. We didn’t want to stop or even slow down. The blizzard we had managed to stay in front of now caught us as we winded back around. The ditches and driveways on each side of the road were straight drop offs with no room for passing. If we had met another vehicle we all would have been in a bind. As we passed the Pennsylvania and West Virginia state line again the tension was thick enough to choke us. Little was said between us. Finally, the silence was broken; my husband, frustrated and a tad bit nervous, spoke first.

"Are you going to talk to me?"
"I...I... do... don’t know what to say," I stuttered stupidly.
“Did you notice the car that fell in behind us?”
“Yes. I don’t know what they are doing, but it has really got me shook up,” I whispered with a dry throat.

With a nervous chuckle he said, “There is no way we’re stopping!! We are in hillbilly country—they probably want to kill you and rape me!!”

I felt so much like prey that I couldn’t even laugh; I just sat frozen in panicked fear. After many more frightening turns and terrifying twists, we found our way back to the desolate frozen interstate, and once again across the WV and PA state line. The car that had followed us for over 25 miles, through banjo country and two winding state lines, suddenly dipped off and abruptly turned around.

Finally, as we drove we both were trying to pull ourselves together, both stressed, scared and silly. We pulled over at the first fully lite area, with an open store and a lot of people. We sat in our truck laughing nervously till we were laughing hysterically. The adrenaline was really pumping. That was one of the most frightening nights of our lives. It’s our belief if we had stopped or hit the ditch, we wouldn’t have made it to the interstate. I definitely learned to not stop unless I see lights.
Photos and Poems By Erika Odom

Ferris Wheel Kiss
The neon lights shinned
We stopped at the very top
And had our first kiss.

First Love
Hitting and fielding
On the dirt I feel alive
Softball is my love.

The Army Way
Service and pride
These are words soldiers abide
That’s the Army life.
Re-Tales: The Rants and Raves of a Mad Cashier-Sales Associate

By Kane Williams

Have you ever looked into the glum eyes of that worker behind the cash register and wondered, “Why is this person so jaded?” That, dear reader, is the result of someone who has had the displeasure of pressing keys on a cash register for longer than they once assumed they would and is feeling the brunt force of it. This may sound grim, and it is not true in all cases, as retail work is not inherently a bad thing. The woe on that cashier’s face is simply the amalgamation of many factors of working in an environment where one gets to meet the true faces of society.

The elevator pitch of working in a general store is fairly easy to understand: we want to find cheap labor without a rigorous hiring process. They even have cushy names for positions that have been around since the invention of the cash register. I am a sales associate, not a cashier. This was the pull factor for me when I found myself applying for a job at a place I shall not name. I took a personality test with questions such as, “Would it be a poor idea to hire you?” Even better still was the “interview” where I stepped inside, was asked if starting at $7.75 would be fine, and was given a job without so much as a handshake. Luckily I applied to Hell when they were suffering from major layoffs, so any beating heart would suffice.

Not long after I ended my training in Hell, I got my very first taste of what the general public had in store for me. A woman with four children entered through the exit door and approached my till, where she asked me where to find the blenders. At this point I was still relatively fresh to Hell and had not shopped there much previously, so I told her that I was not sure where to find one. The lady, annoyed, brought up her smartphone and tapped on the browser icon, bringing up the mobile page for an entirely different store, I indicated as much to her, only to be met with confusion and demands to see my manager. The manager, annoyed by the interruption to her smoke break, told the customer the exact same thing I did, which only produced more complaints. The foolhardy customer then waddled off to scour our kitchen section, where she became stumped to find that we never sold blenders in the first place.

The blender lady is only an instance of when a customer is simply confused, which is something that (though annoying) I can empathize with. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there exist those that refuse to even acknowledge me as human because of my position in the workplace. Here I should explain that, in my off time, I am supposed to be stocking shelves in the time allotted to me by the flow of shoppers; which means that I may be elsewhere when someone is ready to check out. On one such occasion, a regular customer stood at the conveyor belt banging his fists impatiently and yelling for service. After I finished putting some canned corn on the shelf, I ran to greet the brute and asked how his day was. Though I cannot repeat what he said verbatim, the general idea was “Where the (expletive) have you been? I need a pact of Marlboro 72’s and some (expletive) bread before I get your boss on the (expletive) phone!” I tried reasoning with him that he had only been standing there for a few seconds, but it went into one ear and out the other.

Here is a warning for those interested in working with the public: “Big Brother is Watching.” Did that sound paranoid? It was supposed to. As everyone knows, retailers have closed circuit cameras plastered on every corner of the store. Until very recently I assumed that these eyes on the wall were merely for recalling events in case of suspicion or review. I really wish someone would have informed me that the upper management had access to live views of them too. One night last year I decided (foolishly) that I would step outside to have a little “fresh air” break. Why should the smokers be the only ones to get reprieves? I stepped out the door and took one solid breath, thinking nothing of the ringing phone in the store. Not even one minute later my manager poked her head out of the door to tell me that the District Manager caught me lollygagging on the live feed and warned me that I did not have that privilege. Silly me, I assumed I had rights.

Retail work is just not for everyone, which is something I fully understand now. I have been able to persevere through these events only because they have been far and few between. One must learn to accept the bad with the good, and there are still positives to the job. Perhaps it is just a byproduct of working with the cruel and ignorant public, but one does gain a sense of confidence from being able to deal with the situations that crop up from time to time. I have come to appreciate the plight that my fellow sales associates face and hope that their experience, as well as those who plan to adopt it, may be more pleasant in the future.
Photos by Alanna Nacion
Will You Let Your Past Determine Your Future?

By Hailee Nickell

“Hailee,” yelled my mom telling me to start carrying boxes and unpack my things. As I started unpacking, I began to wonder how long we would live in this house. Usually, it just would depend on if my mom could pay the rent or how long she would stay married. I have lived in about nine houses from the time I was born to now. I have always had emotional problems that came from being unstable and just never knowing what would come next in my life. I dealt with being emotionally and physically abused, but somehow, I made it through. What turned out to be the most horrific experiences of my life made me the person I am today, and I learned that the past doesn’t have to determine your future.

During my later years in life as a teenager, I started to recognize that I didn’t have to live my adult life the way I was raised. I wanted an amazing life for myself, a life that when I turned 50, I had something to show for all the living I had done. My first step in pursuing that started in my junior year. I began attending Vo Tech in Burns Flat, Oklahoma, in the Cosmetology program. In high school, many people doubted my ability to succeed. I proved them all wrong, and I passed the program, passed my state board exam, and after two years of hard work, obtained a license in Cosmetology. I knew that working as a Cosmetologist would make way more money than putting mustard on someone’s hamburger. I figured that was a great start on my way to learning new skills and getting a job after I graduated. Getting a license in something I love to do made it all the more rewarding, and I loved that I got to make people feel good about themselves. After high school, I made the decision to attend college at Southwestern Oklahoma State University at Sayre. At first, I was scared, nervous, and especially worried about how my schooling would be paid for. Thankfully, I discovered grants and scholarships that I qualified for and gratefully received. I planned on (and still plan on) getting all my general education over with, continue my next two years at Sayre through Weatherford with the interactive media technology, and receive my Bachelor’s degree in Special Education. My excitement for the privilege to be able to go to college was outstanding and my biggest accomplishment thus far. I was on my way to overcoming my past, and I couldn’t have been happier.

During my first semester at college, I started to learn that just because I wasn’t raised with nice things, didn’t mean I couldn’t have them later in life. I bought a new car, got an apartment, and also some other things for myself that I never had growing up, all because of my hard work. I was witnessing that my future, success, and happiness were all in my hands. I made good grades, determined my major, and found a purpose for life on my own. I knew that making a stable environment for myself would help my anxiety and the feeling of uncertainty that I had felt for most of my life would slowly fade away. It felt like I was getting out of rehab and learning to live life again, which was a strange, but amazing feeling. My life I lived when I was younger, still to this day causes me anxiety. Even with simple situations, I can’t handle it at times. I always worry about something. I am slowly overcoming all of that mess, and I know that all the hard work I am doing now will pay off soon.

Aside from overcoming the past, I also found out that forgiveness makes it much more bearable. Holding a grudge is like letting someone live rent free inside your head. I think half of what made me so miserable when I was younger, was resenting my mother for the hardships that happened to me. Although they were her fault, I am at peace knowing she did the best she could with what she had. I know she loves me and could take it all back given the chance. With reasoning all this in my thought processes, I realized that I didn’t have to be miserable forever. My life is in my own hands now, my finances, my stability, and just everything that has to do with my well-being.

Hard times, good times, and memorable times, all made up my childhood. I lived through things I wouldn’t wish on anyone, but came out like a rose. I now look forward to building my life as my own person making my own decisions and can’t wait to see where life takes me. Will you let your past determine your future? I sure didn’t!
Photo By Craig Fletcher

Photo By Jessica Walker
Two Magical Worlds Created by Muggles

by Natalia Zambrano

The magical world is a place which has been the inspiration for authors like J.K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien. They were able to create amazing stories about friendship, evil and magic. These books are not only entertaining, but they are good literary pieces that have captivated people of all ages. Both The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter are recognized around the world by youth and adults. The books have many similarities even though their publications are decades apart and targeted to different audiences.

Both books have similar stories. In J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter, Harry is a boy who goes to “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” to learn about magic. He has two loyal friends and an enemy who wants to kill Harry Potter and conquer the wizarding and muggle world (non-magical). His ultimate goal is to eliminate all the “mudblood” people and achieve pure blood dominance. Similarly, in J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings, we have Frodo, on an adventure with friends to defeat evil. Frodo has inherited a magical ring of power from his uncle. With the help of Gandalf, the wizard, they form the “Fellowship of the Ring” which is formed by the men Aragorn and Boromir, the elf Legolas, Gimli the dwarf, and Frodo’s three Hobbit friends. All of them set on a journey to help Frodo destroy the Ring of power which belongs to Sauron, The Dark Lord, who created the ring to rule Middle Earth.

Another interesting similarity is the way both authors make their villains so evil that people won’t even dare to say their name. In Rowling’s work Lord Voldemort is called “You know who” or “He who must not be named”. In Tolkien’s, Sauron is called “The great eye,” “The Dark Lord,” “Lord of Mordor,” among others. These villains are portrayed as if they were Lucifer himself. They are feared, and no one would try to confront them nor even name them—except the heroes in our stories, who want to defeat them and don’t want to be oppressed by the fear of the name. As Albus Dumbledore said, “Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself” (Croft).

Love is a similarity in both stories which is essential to the plots, and it is not only the romance but is the love represented in friendship and loyalty. In Harry Potter one of the reasons Harry is always stronger than Voldemort even though they are so similar (they are both orphans and both grew up without love but one chose evil and the other good) is that Harry found love. He knows friendship and learned to love; people are willing to die for Harry and fight for his cause, while Voldemort has nothing and only spreads fear. In Tolkien’s work Frodo has Sam, who is his rock and is willing to go to infinity and beyond for him, not to save the world but to save Frodo. He is the one pushing and saving Frodo even from himself. For example, when the ring’s power will take over his thoughts and drain the life out of Frodo’s body, Sam, also exhausted, carries Frodo’s body to the mountain of fire. One writer states, “The novel so strongly conveys love, redemption, and heroism achieved in the face of overwhelming odds” (Brunsdaile).

Both works have a lot of adventure but are also very well written. They are books of literary merit. Obviously we can tell the difference of maturity in both writing styles. Tolkien spent his life working on his tales. His characters are wiser and more complex. Rowling’s characters are less polished. One literary critic notes, “When Frodo says of the lowly, ring-obsessed Gollum ‘He deserves death,’ Gandalf replies in words of profound moral power: ‘Deserves it! I dare say he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment’” (Whitlark). Compare this, to Albus Dumbledore’s best-known moral pronouncement in Rowling’s work: “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.’ While Harry’s moral choices are thoughtful and growingly complex, they have not yet achieved the richness of Frodo’s, Sam’s, or other of Tolkien’s heroes” (Barbieri). Rowling’s books are also for a younger crowd, but she didn’t mean them to be for kids. That’s why they become darker, to show Harry’s courage and commitment. Her books have been called a “vast river of words, flowing from one surprise to another and interconnected to a sea of publicity.” In Tolkien’s story there is always darkness, and the story has to evolve around it. Rowling’s become dark as time passes by and the characters mature as they live their experiences. Harry is looking for his identity and purpose while Frodo is a grown man on a quest to save his world.

The Lord of the Rings is an epic fantasy novel that sold 150 million copies. It is literary, rich, well thought out, and very well written. Harry Potter sold 450 million copies worldwide. It is not as deep and polished as Tolkien’s work, but is also an epic adventure that came of age along with us. They might not be targeted for the same audience, but they have many similarities in their plot and outcomes that allow people of all ages to submerge in the fantasy of their tales.
Age and Wisdom: Hand-in-Hand

By Linda Johnson

Grandma Carpenter was a mystery to me as I was growing up. Her name was Ida and she was 65 years old when I was born, but I never thought of her as old. She was a striking figure with silvery white hair like cirrus clouds surrounding her face and a porcelain-like complexion that showed scarcely a wrinkle. Her skin felt like velvet and she smelled like roses when I hugged her. Her azure blue eyes seemed to shoot like lasers through any object she focused on, so I tried to stay out of her sight. She wasn't the typical grandma that most of us saw in old black-and-white movies. She was a trifle bossy and no-nonsense, but she was never mean. When she was with my siblings and me, her demeanor seemed detached, as though she was leery of letting her guard down to play with us. My impression of her was that she was attractive, fairly pleasant, but not very emotional. I never spent nights at her house, nor went to the park with her, nor did anything fun with my grandmother that I can remember. As I got older and learned more about her, I came to appreciate the hardships that she went through in her life: hardships that I feel certain would have broken me.

Grandma was the granddaughter of two fire-and-brimstone preachers, the niece of another, and a devout Southern Baptist. The life journey my grandma took would have tried even a saint. In 1902, Ida married her first husband, Alison Dosier Bennett, in Falls County, Texas when she was only fourteen years of age. By the age of twenty-seven, she had given birth to seven children. One baby died when he was only two days old, and—although not an uncommon occurrence in those days—losing a child was still tragic. Ida was scarcely beginning to recover from the loss of her baby son, when within a six-week period in early 1916; she delivered a new baby girl, lost her husband and lost a six-year-old daughter during an epidemic of the Spanish flu. Three months shy of her twenty-eighth birthday, Ida had become a widow, lost two children, and was left with six children to nurture and raise.

In the early twentieth century, widowed women needed husbands to support them and widowed men needed wives who would mother their children. In May 1917, Ida married James William Taylor Carter. Known to his friends as Jim, Mr. Carter had four children from his first marriage. He and Ida had three children together—my mother being the oldest one of them. By 1922, Jim and Ida had a family with thirteen children. She was a rock and worked as hard as any man: sewing clothes and quilts, canning food in a kitchen that was probably hotter than Hades, gardening, keeping house for a family of fifteen, chopping cotton in the Texas heat, and raising a family. Through all of the ups and downs of her life, she depended on her faith in God, but she was sorely tested. Ida was widowed again in 1932 when Jim died from a cerebral hemorrhage, and she also lost a third husband, Owen Carpenter, to leukemia in 1969. By 1963, she had lost her oldest daughter and five more sons; two were killed in farm accidents, one was killed in World War II, one died of kidney disease, and two died of heart failure. Only two of Ida's ten children survived her—Marie, the baby girl born in 1916, and my mother Pauline, Ida's first child with Jim.

My mother was convinced that Ida was psychic. After Jim Carter went missing on a cold, icy November day in 1932, his friends and family members looked for him two days. Waiting at home for news of her husband, Ida was in a high-backed rocking chair that was groaning from the frenzied movement of its occupant. Suddenly, she ceased her wild rocking and called her family to her side.

She took a deep breath and said, "I know we have to keep looking..."
Photos By Kamber Leforce
for your daddy so we can bring him home, but you need to know that his spirit is with the Lord.”

His oldest son, Scrap, was not ready to hear that his father would not be returning home.

“He’s the toughest man I know,” cried Scrap, “and we’re not giving up on him!”

“You don’t understand, sweetheart. He just gave me a good-bye kiss on my cheek,” Ida said through her tears.

Family, friends, and even strangers kept searching for eight more days; on the tenth day they found Jim and brought him home.

Jim and Ida’s son Kelton was the baby of the family. In 1943, he was twenty years old, blonde, tan, and handsome. With blue eyes that danced and a smile as wide as Texas, he was loved by everyone. Kelton joined the Army, but was stateside until early 1945 when he was sent to the Philippines. He had not been there long when the war came to an end. An announcement of the war’s end was made to the troops in the camp and they were given leave to go into town to celebrate. Kelton and his friend stayed at the barracks because the friend had duties to finish before leaving camp. As Kelton sat waiting on the steps of the barracks, relaxing while smoking a cigarette, his friend accidentally shot through the screen door and killed him almost instantly. Cleaning his gun was one of the duties the friend needed to finish. Thousands of miles away in Padgett, Texas, my mother received a message that Ida needed her immediately. Mama raced to Grandma’s house, knowing that something horrific must have happened to upset her mother enough to send someone after her. Upon entering Grandma’s kitchen, Mama saw Grandma collapsed in the in the middle of the floor. Somehow she knew that someone dear had died; her mother was a proud woman and she would never let anyone see her in that manner unless she had totally lost control of her emotions. She couldn’t speak or get up. Mama sat on the floor beside Grandma and stroked her hair for what seemed like forever until Grandma finally spoke.

Sobbing, Ida said to her, “Kelton is gone—he won’t be coming home.”

Whispering, Pauline asked, “Where is the telegram?”

“There isn’t one,” she gasped. “I know he’s gone because a white dove flew in the kitchen window.”

Pauline didn’t question her mother’s assertion, and later that day, they received the telegram telling them of Kelton’s death.

Ida Carpenter died in 1984 at the age of 96 years. When I was a very young adult, without much thought, I came to the conclusion that my grandmother was not a very loving person. Because my brothers, sisters, and I didn’t have many fond memories of her, we believed that she was indifferent to us. As I have aged, and hopefully gotten a little wiser, my opinion of my grandmother has been radically altered. I no longer doubt that she deeply loved all three of her husbands, her children, and her many grandchildren. Today, when I think of everything she went through and the losses she sustained without giving up on life, I feel a little ashamed and regretful that I did not try harder to get to know my grandmother. I had no right to judge her, especially since I have never come anywhere close to experiencing the gravity of the losses in my life that she experienced in hers. I no longer believe that she was cold-hearted, detached, or unemotional. Maybe she was simply trying to protect herself from getting too close to those she feared losing. Perhaps she believed that she had already given all she had to give.
Photos by Kylee Fargo
Music
By: Jenna Patton

Meaningful too many
Understood throughout all languages
Soothing to the soul
Iconic
Composed by geniuses

The Cello Fellow
By: Jenna Patton
There once was a handsome fellow, who was very shy and mellow.
He wanted something great, so with hard work and fate he became famous for playing the cello.

Peaceful Night
By: Jenna Patton
I am filled with peace
Gazing at the bright night stars.
Here I lose my fears,
Twinkling lights so surreal.
All my worries dissipate.

Winters Isolation
By: Jenna Patton
Snow falls on my cheek
While I shiver from the cold
I can see my breath
And hear the sound of silence
Alone in the dead of night.

Dream
I dream to understand the world around me
To metaphorically fill my soul,
I dream to drink the oceans’ water
To quench my dire thirst,
I dream to consume the world’s forests
To satisfy my aching hunger,
I dream to live not only to exist,
But to grasp onto something worthwhile
-Bryce Allen

You
So then he asked her, “What is it you dream to be?”
She closed her eyes, “You”
-Bryce Allen

Cloudy days
By: Kaye Ervin
The clouds hid the sun in their cool hands
As a mother would a child
The sun peeks from behind
Smiling playfully at me with Mischief in his bright eyes
Beautiful
Original
Overwhelming
Knowledgeable

Lydia Merkey

Kittens
Kittens are so cute
They like to have many toys
Kittens love to play

Lydia Merkey

COFFEE
It makes you hyper
It is a necessity
It helps you stay up

Lydia Merkey

DOG
My dog
Active, Joyful
Catching, Running, Jumping
Always waits on me
Canine

Lydia Merkey

Sweets
By Madison Hughes
I can taste it now.
yummy, delightful they taste.
This was just a dream.

Lydia Merkey

Softball
By Madison Hughes
Two teams are playing.
Plowed, red dirt and fresh, cut grass.
Many enjoy this.

Lydia Merkey

Winter
By Madison Hughes
Winter is crazy.
The snow is kissing the Earth.
I enjoy winter.
Come
By Jeff D. Huddleston

As God doth don flesh and blood,
Directly unto man to come,
With the message of reconciliation upon his lips,
Olive branch in hand.

Wrapped in humility and love,
Gently treading as a child,
His lovers begin to seek his face,
His enemies to plot his death.

Price now paid, redemption wrought,
Christ beckoneth with the right hand, “Come”;
And with the left stayeth he the wrath of God...
Soon both hands shall drop.

Savior and Judge he doth now sit
And thou... where shalt thou be found to stand?


The Big Day
Ashley Grybowski

A white dress covers the aisle.
A black tux dresses the man.
Vows are being exchanged as these two stand.
Two hearts becoming one, so much love in between.
Her daddy tells him to make her his queen.
A final kiss seals the deal and off they go.
To make a life together, to make a home.
They are now grown up, separated from what they’ve always know.
A new love to be shared together, here’s to my forever.
Art by Melanie Mikles

Photo by Sydney Street
"Good Morning, Sunshine"
The Caretaker
By Sarah Broadwater

Like sun on my face, warm to the touch,
Wind through my hair, more than enough.
Timid leaves fall towards the cold, hard ground,
The winter frost a welcome to those who are found.
Wildflowers have wilted, their stems tangle the floor,
From my fingers have you slipped till you’re here no more.
I grasped the withering beauty to keep it here with me,
But the seed of doubt was planted and faith I could not see.
Fear grew in your garden of lies,
A vicious weed I learned to despise.
The caretaker was magic in making the weeds disappear,
She groomed the watered flowers to keep you near.
A freeze was threatened--the garden not prepared,
It quenched the beauty till it was no longer there.
A caretaker no more, I soon became one with the night,
Sunken into the darkness of a wrong not made right.
Letter from a Horse
Named Comet

By Andrea Nichols

As the morning sun rises, I look at its beauty as my owner looks at me. I roam the land she has given me to graze on. When I graze, I feel her gaze upon me. She watches me out her window, for this gives her joy. Years go by and still she watches me with the same love and joy she did when she first got me. She smiles as I trot and neigh when she comes up the drive. This gives me great pride as I am her Comet! The happiness of new life and the sorrow of death have seen her endure. My owner, the one who loves me as man’s best friend. Now as my time has come to an end, just know my life with you was the best ever. For you, my owne, gave me all the love, care and joy any old horse could ask for. I am in the greenest pastors you could ever want for me. I have the best life ever thanks to you, our lady who loved me like no other.

Comet
I made the call to 911
And told them truthfully
"I think she’s dead,
Her bloods all over me."

I numbly gave the address
Should be easy to repeat
9341
North Carter Street

I was asked to stay on the line
But time was running short
I laid the phone beside her
And stood out on the porch

When the police finally arrived
They didn’t see me there
I listened to them describe her
White female, brown hair

I followed them around the house
Looking for some clue
"No sign of struggle."
Single shot, .22

I watched as they took her
Leaving me to clean the floor
It’s very strange to watch yourself
Be carried out the door
**Neglected Treasure**

By Bryce Allen

She seemed rather plain with dull brown hair and complacent eyes  
Her long slender fingers caressed her own lean neck  
Almost as if she craved affection she never received  
Her pale skin offered some explanation to her isolation  
The freckles that lay haphazardly upon her dainty arms  
like flecks of filth  
Tarnished her translucent appearance  
She was simply natural  
She did not possess the type of alluring grace  
commonly noticed by others  
Yet peering closely, each sapless feature on her  
became quaintly endearing  
Her relaxed posture no longer seemed lazy, but  
Inviting and compassionate  
The fine, wispy cut that spread across her shoulders grw  
like the roots of a tree  
Long and healthy  
In her eyes you could see the earth  
Complex and raw  
Her tender fingers came from the hands of which many yearn to hold  
Delicate and comforting  
Her touch was like the spring rain  
Gentle and soothing  
Her colorless complexion did not seem sallow  
but appeared like porcelain  
Pure and lustrous  
Like art, the blemishes across her arms offered  
contrast to her flawless skin  
Precise and purposeful  
Once she was truly seen, she was understood  
Everything she was, was beautiful  
Everything she was, was kind.

**little worker**

By Chrisann Bandy

From digging in the garden.  
To cutting off my toe.  
You held me there and didn't let me go.  
For I was your little worker, and you were my world.  
From cutting hay and feeding the cows.  
To falling off trailers and catching me in the air.  
You didn't let me go.  
For I was your little worker and you were my world.  
From changing oil and fixing my bike.  
To destroying the motor we had just built.  
You didn't let me go.  
For I was your little worker and you were my world.  
From sitting on your lap eating all the ice cream  
And dancing like a princess in a fairy tale.  
To stealing your heart and filling up mine.  
You didn't let me go.  
For I was your little worker and you were my world.  
From climbing the willow tree and playing in creeks.  
To sitting on the front row of my Father's home.  
You didn't let me go.  
For I was your little worker and you were my world.  
From all the memories and love that we shared.  
To the end of all that had yet to come.  
I had to let you go.  
For I was your little worker and you were my world.  
From a little girl inspired by her pal.  
To a young woman built by her pal.  
I know now you never let me go.  
For I will always be your little worker and you will always  
be my world.
Photos By

Bryan Perez

Photo By

Jessica Justus
I've been to places that make me feel small,
I've seen creatures in old hotel rooms that made my skin crawl,
I've learned people from New York will know you're an Okie when they hear you say "y'all",
I've seen street performers in Vegas completely drop the ball,
I've viewed the beginning of our nation's independence in a National Archive hall,
I've seen Old Faithful in its rise and fall,
I've been in the middle of a Nashville, old-school, country brawl,
I've seen places that science can't explain at all.
The Denver winter had made me cold,
The Yellowstone sunset had proved to be gold.
The future is filled with stories that are yet to be told,
My experiences have made me bold,
The past is my mold.
I sound worn and wise, but I'm only seventeen years old.