



12-2015

The Game of Life: A Collection of Student Work from SWOSU-Sayre

Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Description

The Game of Life Containing the works of students attending the Sayre campus of Southwestern Oklahoma State University in the spring, summer and fall semesters of 2015, this annual publication is produced in conjunction with the Literary Festival. Sponsors for the event are Language Arts Instructors Terry Ford and Judy Haught. The Dean of the College of Associates and Applied Sciences is Sherron Manning. The cover photo was taken by Emily Thompson, and the back cover photograph was by Amanda Holt. This anthology is published by University Press, Weatherford.

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Recommended Citation

Southwestern Oklahoma State University, "The Game of Life: A Collection of Student Work from SWOSU-Sayre" (2015). *Sayre Writing Workshop Anthology*. 6.
https://dc.swosu.edu/sayre_writing/6

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Home by Cody Patton





Rules *By Jameka Jackson*

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Five years ago I was in the seventh grade. I was just beginning to make great friends, and I thought my life was perfect. For those moments, it was. My dad had just become a full-time minister and my mom the first lady. They were really cracking down on the holy life. They made sure we dressed a certain way, talked a certain way, and carried ourselves in the right way. My oldest sister didn't like those rules, though.

She has always been the rebel child, and my parents knew that. The first child is usually the worst child. She and my dad haven't really gotten along since she was ten; now she is seventeen. She has never done well with rules and regulations. She has the mindset where she's going to do what she wants and everyone has to live with it. Now that my dad is a minister and we really have to watch ourselves, she and my dad have started to butt heads. When my dad would tell her to do something, she would just sit there like she didn't hear him. When he approached her about it, she said she didn't care and if he didn't leave her alone she would call the cops.

She began to see this younger guy in the neighborhood whom everyone knew had a bad reputation. He smoked weed, sold drugs and had two kids. She knew my dad didn't like him, but to prove her point about rules, she went to a guy that didn't have any. She had her first alcoholic beverage with him and started to dress differently because of him. She had a bigger attitude then she ever had. She even bucked up to my dad, whose 6'0 and three-hundred pounds of muscle. One night she told my dad everything that she has been doing, and to say the least, she got what she deserved that night. She created this big scene, and my dad was sent to jail. One of her teachers helped her through this entire thing. The teacher helped her quit her job and

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gave her a place to stay. There was another man that helped and encouraged my sister to get with this boy, because he thought she could help the boy get better. They ended up calling DHS, and since my parents have no record of anything, she was forced to stay home by the law. She wasn't allowed to come out of her room unless she had to use the bathroom. My parents would bring food to her room and didn't allow me or my younger sister to see her. After I heard what happened, if I did see her, it would've been to fight. I just couldn't believe that she would put my parents through so much after everything they have done for us.

The one thing I will never do in life is disappoint my parents. People always ask me why I do whatever my parents tell me, even if I don't want to do it sometimes. It's because I don't ever want to see them in pain. I wouldn't be able to deal with that look of disappointment. Seeing how bad she broke my dad's heart that day made me want to be the best daughter they could think of having.



Cross Roads Photo by Marketa Jones



Beside You In Time

By Jonathan Nichols

I'd gone to see a friend's band play at a local bar in Danville, or that's what I was telling myself. Beer and bands were my forte in those days, but Danville wasn't my usual stomping ground. Of course I was there to support the local metal scene and get properly inebriated, but a very specific ulterior motive had plotted my course this night. As I would later discover, fate is not without a certain tenacity. I'd met a girl some months earlier, during a very tumultuous time in my life. We had a lot in common. She was fun and beautiful, with piercing green eyes that spoke to me before our first words. It was not to be yet, but I knew somehow, that this song hadn't ended.

A week or so before we had started talking again, I told her that I'd be in town and asked her to the show. Unfortunately, she was two hours away and wouldn't be home for several hours.

"Well, I'll be there for a while. Text me when you're home?" I asked.

"Ok :)" was the reply.

Although I could tell she wasn't convinced, I had acquired a grin that seemed stitched onto my face for the remainder of the night.

I arrived at my destination strutting in like a peacock, electric enthusiasm dancing through my veins. The Illinois night air was thick and humid, like an unwelcome blanket, the orange glow of mercury vapor lamps casting ephemeral shadows against the stoic buildings. The usual crowd had already begun to pile in, jostling like slow moving pinballs. Stale sweat, incense, and beer were jockeying for position in my nose. Amid the double bass drum patterns hammering under waves of distorted guitars and searing vocals, I ordered my usual and settled in next to the stage.

Around one in the morning, I found myself behind the bar in a sort of after-party. After helping load the bands' gear, we stood around talking and drinking. I'd mentioned my potential rendezvous, but the grin was starting to fade along with my optimism. The Guinness had begun to taste as bitter as defeat. I sulked back in for one last drink before departing, red brick walls peering down like silent mocking sentinels. The guys were trying to cheer me up as I nursed the last bottle, when a text came through. My eyes shot to it, and the grin was painted back on as I opened the message.

"Home now. Still around? :)"

"On my way. :)"

Bolting back into the van, I shoved the remainder of my drink into the nearest hand and said my goodbyes. They knew what had changed my mood, and the usual words of male encouragement were bouncing around like a beach ball.

Twenty minutes later, I shared the first night of the rest of our lives with my love. Time stood still as my eyes locked into those beautiful, fierce green pools, and standing there at the moment, it didn't matter how long it took. It was our moment. She was there and still is. Beside me in time.

The Chase is Over

By Kasey Barton



The grass smelled as if it had just been cut. Full from the overwhelming amount of crispy chicken strips and French fries I had for supper, I drove across main Street and one block over to Clay Street. As I turned on Clay Street, I heard my mother shout.

“Right there his is. Go get him, Kasey.”

My mother panicked as I started chasing after the criminal in the white shirt. The man strutted across the empty lot. Spinning around another corner, I headed toward Main Street, dodging cars as the criminal ran. The chase was on.

Earlier that day I was in Ft. Worth, Texas, heading home after a long weekend at the races. As I got on Facebook, my newsfeed was full of worried citizens of Cheyenne. All the worry was about a man who was on the run from police because he had been with a guy who had stolen a vehicle from Arnett, Oklahoma, earlier that day. As friends and family filled Facebook with images of police helicopters and police cars searching for the wanted man, I never thought when I got home, I'd be a part of the excitement.

As I continued to follow the man, running down alleys, jumping over curbs and speeding into parking lots, I began to wonder if I was going to be able to get someone's attention to call the police. All at once he was alone, fighting a war by himself. The man must have been crazy if he didn't think he would get caught eventually in a tight

-knit community like Cheyenne, where all the citizens are like family. People in town saw me chasing the man with my car and realized I was after the criminal everyone was talking about.

The chase was soon over when the criminal in the white shirt was tackled and brought to the ground by a resident, an older man of Cheyenne. Everyone was at ease at last. During this experience I learned that patience is key and doing what needs to be done can pay off. If the criminal had a little more patience, he would have just hidden out a little more then ran after the sun went down and the citizens of Cheyenne were in bed. I also learned that sometimes, like in my situation, everyone has to take control and get things done even if they are scared.

As the man that was on the run was being arrested, the sheriff came to me and told me:

“You know we're hiring down at the station; come get an application.” I giggled as he walked away. Knowing that I saved the community from a great deal of concern was my biggest accomplishment that day, but I know I couldn't have done it without the brave citizens of Cheyenne.

As Paul Ryan stated, “Every successful individual knows that his or her achievement depends on a community of persons working together.”



Traveling by
Dustin Ferris

Wait! Look over there!

No over there.

At the green-clad strange
Creature with the big eyes.

Eyes shaped like the
Drawings of aliens.

She moves with grace
With the stealth of a plane in the sky.

Long and stick-like

She prays

And as she prays, she waits.

Waits for the perfect time
To descend on her next meal.

As I sit and wait

She walks by.

I watch her move in a 180-degree
view.

She is big like a giant out of a story book.

The Encounter



She sees me and stoops down
to pick me up.

As I touch her outer layer,
it's warm and squishy,
But very nice under my feelers.

She lifts me high in the air,
Holding me gently
in her giant hand.

At first I was scared,
just like she was.

But then I feel her at ease with me.

She examines me
with wonderment,

For she thinks I am BEAUTY,
One of God's great creative creatures.

I am the PRAYING MANTIS!

Photo and poem

by Andrea Nichols



DEER DRESSING BY DANIEL THOMPSON

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Practicality is overrated. We live our lives in a stream of efficiency and usefulness.

When we dare to stand and say that we want to exist in a state of impracticality, we are assaulted with sports, entertainment media, and pets. Original, spontaneous impracticality is hard to come by in this day and age, and that is why I am here to tell you about how to dress a deer. I must insist that you leave your pre-existing notions of deer dressing behind you, and if you are a hunter, I recommend you leave, now. Deer dressing is not for the faint of heart or the serious of mind, but its rewards, both emotionally and visually, are truly worthy of the effort it requires.

A few items are needed for the art of deer dressing, the most prominent among which are the clothes themselves. Deer dress exclusively in designer outfits, so you will need to contact specific individuals within the fashion industry to acquire this necessity. Do not be concerned about this task; there's more people who can assist you in this area than you would assume. Along with the clothes, you will need a large, comfortable room for the dressing to take place in, unless you choose to field dress your does and bucks. This latter option is not recommended, however, as it is difficult to convince a deer to wear pants within sight of its peers. This revelation brings us to our next potential necessity: an-

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esthesia. Deer are naturally self-conscious critters, and drugs have the glorious tendency of removing inhibition (and consciousness). Warning is due here; failing to relieve these beautiful creatures of their inhibitions may result in physical harm to your person by way of biting, trampling, and/or gouging with antlers. That said, you now have all the items you will need to start this fun and rewarding activity!

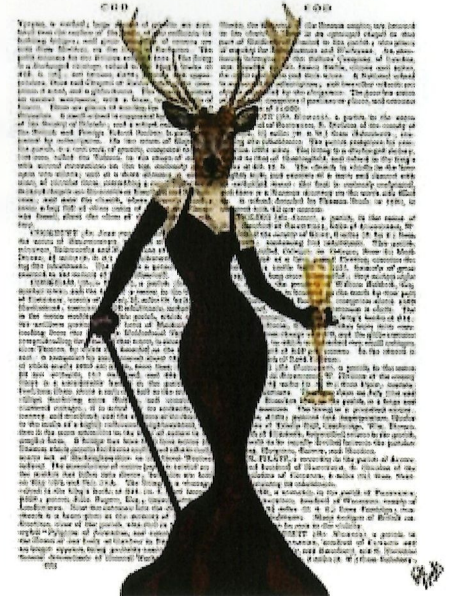
The first step in the process is procuring measurements. Invite the wilderness creature into your dressing area. The deer may experience some initial anxiety, which you will want to curb by emulating the sights and sounds of the great outdoors. While potted plants and wilderness aura CDs are your best option, you may wish to pursue a low cost alternative by dressing like a tree and making loud bird noises with your mouth. Establish mutual trust with the deer, using the Slowly-Walk-Up-And-Place-Hand-On-Creature's-Nose technique seen in 98% of all horse movies. If this technique fails you for some unforeseeable reason, stick that dream-killer in the butt with anesthetic. Now, take the deer's measurements and record them carefully for your designer contact. As these animals are politically incorrect creatures, make note of the deer's gender and plan to dress it accordingly. When the deer has awoken from his drug-induced coma, you may secure his (or her) complete contact information and release it back into the wild. With the measurements firmly in your logs, you may now proceed to the next step.



Ordering deer clothing is perhaps the most creative aspect of this admittedly ridiculous process. The options

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available are practically limitless, from ironic camo outfits, to Bill Cosby sweaters, to Tutus, to movie costumes (of which the Darth Vader option is most highly recommended). You will want to make your outfit choice on the perceived personality of whichever deer you will be dressing, assuming you were able to determine personality before drugging it. Enjoy the process. Safe clothing choices include tuxedos for the bucks and nice evening gowns for the does, but you will not be judged any way you choose. If you wish to dress your deer in 18th century court apparel and parachute pants, then you are free to do so. Science has noted that the only attire you will NOT wish to dress your deer in is the "Highland Yodeler Overalls and Hat" option sold by unaccredited designers across the market. A majority of deer released back into the wild wearing this costume have been indefinitely ostracized by their respective herds, and forced into a delinquent lifestyle. Do not doom your deer to a delinquent lifestyle. When making your order, keep in mind that it will take time for the designers to personify the outfits according to measurements, and there will be a waiting period of up to 3 weeks. Once the clothing arrives, this phase is concluded, and you may proceed with the actual dressing of the deer.



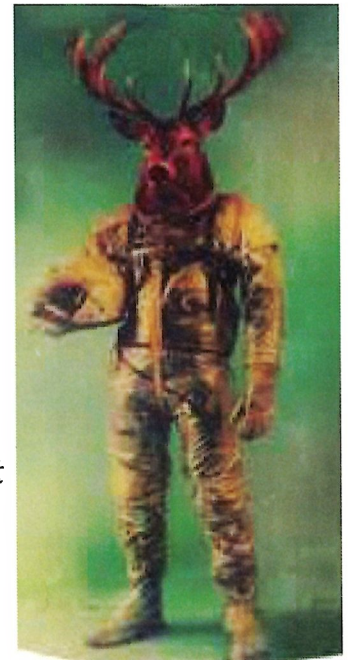
To begin this process, repeat the previously mentioned procedure of introducing the deer into your dressing room.

Once trust (or anesthetic) is re-established, you may begin the dressing. Begin in a logical manner with the undergarments and do your best not to think about the implications of a wild animal wearing them. Whisper vague Chinese proverbs in

the animal's ears as you do so to keep the animal calm (assuming it isn't fully anesthetized at this stage). Next, apply the pants. Even without consciousness, the deer will have a reaction to this development. Watch for kicking and flailing. When applying any over-the-head shirts, antlers can present a particular problem, best solved by patience and by sticking corks on all the pointy ends.

Once the pants and upper-body clothing are on, accessorize. Deer love bows and ties, but not clogs (we do not know why). When the dressing is done, bring in the mirrors. Allow the deer time to observe itself and take in its new-found fabulousness. You may want to leave the room in the event of a negative reaction. After the deer has had appropriate time to grow comfortable with its new look, your work is done! Release the deer back into the wild, and watch it prance about in its knickers. Revel in the satisfaction of knowing that you have wasted hours of your life in one of the most bizarre ways conceivable.

Deer dressing is a fine art. It's not meant to be understood; just enjoyed. Leave behind your misgivings and common sense, and embrace this truly fulfilling past-time. When you watch your first deer enter back into deer society, it's a feeling that cannot be fully described. You will think to yourself, "What have I done?" and then, "LOL," followed by, "Wait, how will they use the resto-" and immediately interrupted by, "Never mind, let's do it again." Anyone with free time and a strong sense of humor can enjoy this process. I have but one final warning for you to keep in mind: don't tell PETA. They've been trying to peg me for years. You now have all the knowledge necessary to carry out this good work. I wish you the best, and hope that you can find as much depraved pleasure in dressing deer as I have.



I “Unfriend U”

By Brandy Sanders

Grammar Nazi: *“Someone who believes it’s their duty to attempt to correct any grammar and/or spelling mistake they observe.* This was the title given to me by my children and then later all my friends and family on Facebook. Is it wrong to want to see the correct spelling or usage of your and you’re, or there, their, and there? Or even *the* instead of *th*? Seriously, how much trouble is it to add one letter to a word? I feel that social media is to blame for people’s lack of interest to spell words correctly or even to care if they haven’t.

First, came the wonderful world of text messaging where, in all our hurried glory, there is no longer time to spell a word completely out and text-speak is an actual term. “OMG, I’m g2b L8 4 wrk g2g!” Let me help decipher that: “oh, my gosh, I’m going to be late for work, got to go!” Text messaging has made some people even lazier, at least in my experience. Being the “Grammar Nazi” that I am, I have a hard time texting in abbreviations. I will text my brother what some would consider a letter, and the reply I will get is, “k”, “K”? Seriously, I just took 5 minutes to text you a message and all I get in return is “k”? Talk about making my blood boil. Having teenagers I have also discovered that there is an abbreviation for just about any word or phrase that comes to mind. Teenagers no longer speak in complete thoughts and sentences face to face anymore. SMH!! (For those who are “text-speak” illiterate, that’s “shake my head”.)

Then there is Twitter, where 140 characters will get you a “RT” if any of your millions of followers finds you interesting or humorous. And now we have Twitter-speak and hashtags (that’s an essay for another day). Twitter-speak is the same as text-speak only now the entire world can witness our cleverness to butcher every possible word in the English dictionary. You is u, and are is r, and know is no. Is it really necessary to abbreviate short words? I even found there are technical Twitter abbreviations and industry Twitter abbreviations. Thanks to socialmediatoday.com there is a Twitter dictionary. I am not kidding!

And last but not least, there is Facebook where posts are not limited to 140 characters and rants go on and on. My problem with this is, if I have to decipher every other word of someone’s status update, I’ve lost interest in anything that person had to say because I’m too busy deciding if your is you’re, or wood is would, and “unfriending” has crossed my mind several times between there and their. One of my friends constantly writes posts where almost every word is spelled out except for *the*, she spells it *th*. She throws in the occasional “LOL” and “IDK” but every time there’s a “th” I wonder, “Does she really not know there is an “e” on the end?” and my temptation to ask her without being perceived as mean is overshadowed by the text message reply that I just received from my brother. I can be mean to him, and he has to listen because I’m the oldest.



Racial Prejudice

By Yareli Martinez

It remains embarrassing to admit that the land of freedom and opportunities has had to witness racial prejudice. The founders spoke about equality, and still there are citizens that lose sight of that because of their malignant thoughts and feelings of superiority when presented beside another race. Even though there are countless effects that surface because of racial prejudice, the most important effect is the increase in violence due to an individual's upbringing, lack of correction, and ignorance.

A huge cause of racial prejudice is the atmosphere that an individual was raised in as a child. I think that this is the saddest cause. It is dealing with being accepted by family or being different and shunned. We are born with a clean slate, and it is sad that people have their minds ruined so quickly. The best example I can think of is in *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Lee's book is taught in all, if not most, educational facilities. Students spend some of their high school education looking into a book that has themes like justice and judgment, youth, mortality and ethics, and racial prejudice. During this lesson, it is probably not the first time that students have encountered stories and lessons concerning racial prejudice. I think that this factor is just another that is added to the list of things that have to be taught but do not have to be absorbed. Students are expected to remember certain things for certain classes for a certain test, and then it becomes okay to just forget it all together. This mindset is what is destroying America. It ties back to the upbringing of an individual. We are taught to just hear about things and not do anything to change them because things like racial prejudice were just in the past and no longer happens. This cause needs to stop being an excuse for why nothing is being done.

The lack of correction is also a huge cause to the violence that will spur racial prejudice. There is not enough being done to those that are racially prejudiced, and another effect is that the race being hated feels degraded. For things like beating and all abuse, we have law enforcement officers in place to take

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charge of those things and correct them. The laws that have been implemented over equality do exist, but we know that law is nothing if it is not being enforced. The most current event we have to look at is the Michael Brown case. According to CNN, “A police officer fatally shot Michael Brown.” Michael Brown was an eighteen-year-old teenager that was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, while being unarmed. This case has aroused violence in Ferguson. African Americans in this area feel like their race was degraded. Their race was looked down on to the point that a young man could not walk home with a friend without being shot at and unfortunately murdered. It is important to sit back and think about the law enforcement officials that are in place right now. This case proves that there needs to be training implemented to ensure officials are against prejudice and are not prejudiced.

The last cause of racial prejudice, out of the many that still remained unsaid, is ignorance. There are a lot of individuals who possess this prejudice simply because of a negative experience that they had with one individual of a certain race, and they feel like they can judge everyone in that race because of that one action. There is always that individual that holds her purse just a little bit tighter whenever she sees that a black man is walking towards her cart at Wal-Mart. The ignorance ties in with the idea that one group is better than another. It might be because of the idea that all of them are lazy, or all of them are dumb, or none of them are capable. Ignorance is the worst disease. Personally, there was an instance when I was placed under these uncomfortable and infuriating situations. I previously lived in Georgia, where I attended high school up to my sophomore year. In those two years, I went through a phase of wanting to become a law enforcement officer, and I enrolled into my high school’s law enforcement elective class. I took the class and the instructor began to portray how small minded he actually was by pointing out the fact that I am Mexican. His ingenious stance on the matter of my being in his class was that I would learn the ways around getting caught by any police officer so that my continued trafficking of drugs and weapons would be facilitated. Either that, or that I would allow my cartel husband to use my authority to his advantage. Although I was unquestionably irritated, I just felt so much compassion for him because he was so close minded. To have the nerve to even voice those idiotic thoughts was truly heartbreaking.

Often, things like racism and racial prejudice are configured into one. Racial prejudice, according to *The Free Dictionary*, is the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others. Going into that same site and searching for racism, it is the exact same definition word for word. Races are getting offended. Their tolerance level has reached its potential, and violence will spur because that is exactly what we are witnessing today. Retaliation inside of the higher courts is the upcoming effect.



Another Day on the Rig

16

By Cody Boulware

It's another day on the rig. The heat feels as if the sun is about to fall onto my head, and there is a thread protector stuck in the pipe that is sitting in the mouse hole. Time is running short, along with my temper. I holler over to the other floor hand, "Grab that hammer beside you." I proceed to hit the thread protector like I was trying to kill its whole family. Still, it doesn't budge, and my temper flairs more with every blow of the hammer. I finally resort to the mechanized equipment, an ST-80, meant for making up joints of pipe. I maneuver it into position, trying to operate this beast of a machine with the finesse of a brain surgeon. I gently clamp it down and spin the thread protector out.

I feel accomplished, but this feeling quickly dwindles when I look down to see that I damaged the pipe. Panic quickly set in. Should I just try to make it up and see if it works? Should I tell my driller what I have done? I finally come to my senses and walk into the doghouse to tell the driller.

"Brinkman, could you come look at this?"

"What is it?"

"I think I screwed this joint of pipe up."

"How did you do that?"

"With the ST-80."

To my surprise, Brinkman strolls out of the doghouse and inspects the damage. After looking it over, he looks over to me and calmly says, "I'll tell the tool pusher. If he says anything, then just tell him you picked it up like that."

"Okay," I say, feeling relieved.

I go on about my usual duties of scrubbing, power washing, and making connections. When I hear my name come across the intercom, I go to the nearest intercom box and hear Brinkman on the other end.

"Come to the rig floor," Brinkman says.



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I run up to the rig floor without any worries, until I see Big Chuck, our Tool Pusher, standing on the porch of the dog-house. Without any pleasantries, Chuck barks out, “What happened to that joint of pipe?”

“I noticed that when we picked it up,” I confidently explained to him, since that is what my Driller told me to say. Big Chuck looks down at me; I can see that he is getting mad as his face turns as red as a tomato.

“Bullshit! I can tell those marks are from the rollers on the ST-80. If you had picked it up like that, then there would be rust on it. Those marks are shiny.”

I look over at Brinkman. I can tell that he didn't stick to his own plan just by the look on his face. So at this point I only have one choice.

“I used the ST-80 to get the thread protector out because it was stuck,” I confess.

I didn't think it was possible, but Big Chuck's face reddens even more, to the point that I am thinking his head was going to explode.

“You idiot. You should never use the ST-80 to get a thread protector out! That machine is only meant for the drill pipe. And since you lied to me, I'm going to write you up, and dock you a dollar an hour for thirty days.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Did a simple thread protector really just cost me money? Did my Driller really just throw me under the bus like that? It all became extremely real when I was signing a write-up in the Tool Pusher's house after work.

I lost a lot of faith for my boss that day. I was reminded about it every day that a paycheck came in for the next thirty days. I told myself that I wouldn't try to cover up my mistakes, even if my boss told me to do so.

But, of course, life isn't always that easy.





Pumpkin Patch at Grandma's . Owasso, Texas .

Photograph by Amanda Holt

A Distraction that Corrupts

By Kaylie Springer



People of this generation would not know what to do without their cell phones. A person without a cell phone in his or her hand would not know how to function or communicate. Cell phones have advanced with more technological concepts than what they were meant to perform. A cell phone is a distraction to everyone, whether it corrupts driving, relationships, communication skills, or grammar skills.

Every day, people send text messages or talk on the phone while driving down the road. When a person is texting and driving, this can cause the person to run off the road or swerve from side to side. A person is not paying attention to his or her surroundings while being occupied with a cell phone. Running off the road or swerving may cause a person to have a wreck. People never think that they will crash just by looking at their cellphones.

“Aw, man. I am so good; I can multitask,” says the everyday person who texts and drives. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, texting while driving kills 11 teens each day. Having a wreck causes a person to not only injure him or herself but also creates the capability of injuring someone else. Thirty-two percent of people use their phones while driving a car. People never think that they will

have a wreck, but it gets the best of them and it happens.

Some people who have a cell phone can become addicted to it by excessive use. A person being on his or her phone non-stop can result in neglecting his or her family. People that use all their time on their cell phone never pay attention to the events happening around them, or the people that surround them. According to *World Birth and Death Rates*, “Some 55.3 million people die each year, 151,600 people die each day, 6,316 die each hour, 105 people die each minute, and nearly two people die each second.” Time with friends and family is limited. A person never knows when his or her last day is in this world. A person should not let a cell phone be his or her prize possession. Instead of people surrounding themselves with Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, or Hay Day, they need to latch on to family members and relationships and spend time with them.

Communication and grammar skills are very important. Cell phones have disrupted and destroyed how people talk and spell. Texting and talking on the phone have ruined communication skills. A person who always texts and calls by using his or her phone is more than likely not able to communicate very well face to face. An interview for a job offering does not let a person send in a text and more than likely does not let a person call over the phone. An interview will be face to face. A person who does not have good communication skills and who has always used the easy way out is more likely to not do great on the interview or communicate face to face.

Studies show that it makes it difficult for students who rely so heavily on technology to actually communicate to adults in person because they don't quite develop all of the necessary skills to hold or even start a face-to-face conversation. However, these skills are a crucial tool in the workforce.

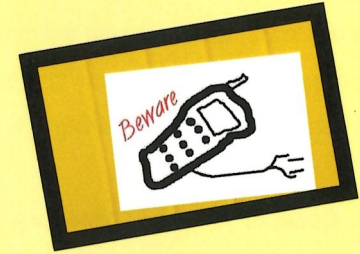
Cell phones have made grammar skills difficult by abbreviating words and shortening words. Some people would spell the words text as “txt,” because as “bc,” laugh out loud as “lol,” what as “wat,” though as “tho,” and oh my gosh as “omg.” Cell phones have corrupted our communication and grammar skills to no end. Teen-

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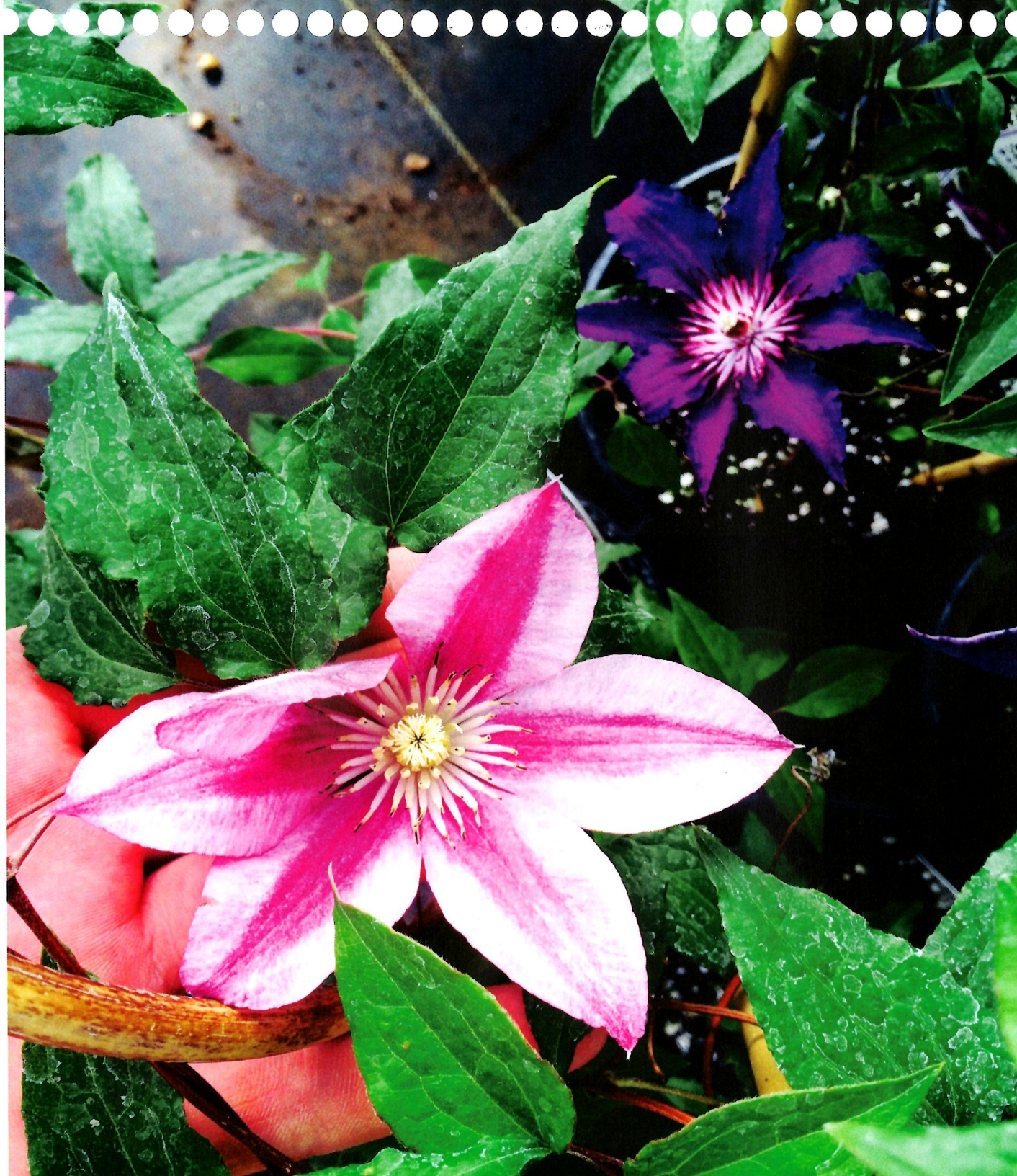
agers and adults misspell words because they are used to spelling words in text messaging that are abbreviated or shortened. People become uneducated each and every day.

A cell phone can be an advantage or a disadvantage to someone. It can be a distraction or a learning tool. Cell phones influence people in different ways. There are some people who will not pick up that phone when they are driving or let their cell phone control their lives and make them neglect their family and other relationships. Some people even text like they are writing an English paper wanting an excellent grade. The influence of a cell phone and how it affects a person depends on that person's needs, wants, and morals.



A Rodeo Queen

Photograph
By Josh Allen



Flowering Stars

by
Wes Burks

No Mess Is Too Much

By Jaylese's Mom

It was a bright summer day, the kind of day that encouraged people to get out of their houses and move around. Since we both had the day off, my friend and co-worker Lee suggested we take our kids to Chuck-E-Cheese in Oklahoma City. It felt good to get out of Elk City; it felt even better to take my daughter, Jaylese, to go do something special. Life had been difficult for the two of us lately, and I knew Jaylese was in desperate need of some fun. So Chuck-E-Cheese it was, where a kid can be a kid.

"You can listen to whatever you want," Lee informed me as he made a right turn and headed in the direction of the interstate.

"Alright, I'll play DJ," I responded as I plugged my cell phone into the auxiliary cord hanging from Lee's cd-player and began scrolling through my music library. "Any requests?" I asked, turning in my seat and looking back at the two children in the backseat of Lee's little red car.

"'Dark Horse' by Katy Perry!" Jaylese exclaimed without hesitation.

"You got it," I said, finding and selecting the song. The popular pop song began playing the familiar tune through the car speakers, and I settled into the passenger seat, preparing for the hour and change drive to Oklahoma City. The sound of both kids singing along to the music made me smile, and I looked over at Lee driving just as he looked at me, both of our expressions playfully saying, "Kids these days."

We made it about halfway to our destination when Lee's son, Hayden, asked about snacks.

"I've got them over here," I replied as I retrieved the bag of goodies we had purchased at the convenience store before our departure. "Chips or M&M's?" I asked, holding up a bag of each.

"M&Ms!" Hayden squealed, fighting against the child restraints of his car seat in attempt to reach the bag of chocolate candies in my hand. He eagerly attacked the opened candy the instant his little fingers felt the bag within reach. Jaylese opted for chips.

"His juice goes in his cup," Lee told me as I rifled through the plastic sack for their drinks.

"Jaylese, please hand me is cup from back there," I said. I filled the cup up with juice, checked the lid to ensure it was screwed back on tightly, and passed it to Hayden. I placed Jaylese's drink in the cup holder designated for the backseat where she could reach it when she wanted it. "Make sure you put it back in the cup holder after you take a drink, ok? That way it doesn't get spilled."



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By the Sea by Kennedy Barrett

We were on the outskirts of Oklahoma City when I looked back and noticed Jaylese's bag of chips in Hayden's chocolate-covered hands. He was just sitting there with the bag turned upside down, chips smashed up and spilled all over the place, staring at me as if he had been waiting for me to see what he had done. Jaylese was staring at him, a look of horror on her face.

"Oh my," I gasped. I imagine my face mirrored the look on Jaylese's.

Lee glanced in his rearview mirror to see what was going on.

"Oh, no big deal," he responded with ease. "It's ok buddy, you're not in trouble. We can clean it up when we get to Chuck-E-Cheese."

Without thinking, I muttered, "Shoot, I'd be pissed. I hate it when kids make a mess in my car."

Lee surprised me with his response. "I don't make a big deal out of it. I mean, they're just kids. Kids make messes. It's just how it is."

"Still—," I said in a somewhat disapproving manner.

"What can I do?" Lee continued. "What are my options? Get mad, yell at him, and let it stress me out? What good will that do? In the end, I still have to clean it up. But I don't have to ruin a good time over it. I don't get mad at kids for doing kid-things. If I yell at him, he's going to get upset. I'd rather see him happy. It takes a few minutes to clean up a mess; it takes a lot longer to clean up the damage done by getting all bent out of shape at him about it."

I nodded my head, absorbing this perspective of his that was so new to me. I felt a twinge of guilt deep in my stomach. How often do I yell at Jaylese? I get so mad at her for what I consider to be an unneeded addition of work she loads onto me, and I am so unforgiving when it comes to messes she makes. At that moment, I felt ashamed of myself. If I simply took a minute before responding to an incident and reminded myself that she was just a kid, how many tears of hers could I have spared? Being so harsh to her made me feel bad, and to make matters worse, it made her feel bad too.

"You see," Lee said, "before blowing up about it, I ask myself if it's worth hurting his feelings over. The answer is always no. He's my baby; nothing is worth hurting his feelings and making him feel bad about himself."

I sat in silence for a while before looking over my shoulder at my beautiful little girl watching pensively out the window in the backseat. Feeling my gaze, she shifted her attention and her eyes met mine. Giving her a small, apologetic smile, I slipped my hand behind my seat. My smile grew bigger when I felt her softly place her hand inside of mine. For the next few miles we rode just like that, our hands entwined in each other's in a secret handshake that sealed an unspoken agreement. From that point on, I vowed to ask myself before responding to a situation involving her, "Is it worth hurting her feelings over?"



The Man I Never Knew

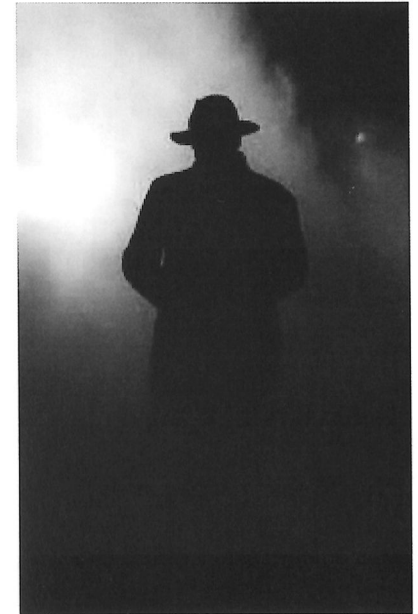
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By Brandy Sanders

After years of wondering and constant nagging of my mother, I set out in search of an unknown father. I searched for several months on the Internet with only a name I had been given years ago. I called dozens of numbers that bear his name and was getting nowhere. I hesitantly asked my mother one last time for some much needed information, a possible last known address. I then set pen to paper and sent the letter of a lifetime to a man I never knew.

A week passed by, and I had yet to hear anything in return. Did he get my letter? Did he even have a clue what I was asking? Was he the right person? Will my letter be “returned to sender” unopened? The questions that went through my mind of the unknown were driving me crazy. Then one night, while I was working the night shift at a motel, I got a message on *MySpace* from someone I had never heard of asking, “Are you the Brandy who sent a letter asking about her dad?” Tears immediately started to fall and I began to shake a little. I asked myself, “Is this really happening?” I replied that I was and asked who she was and how she knew. She was his daughter and had read my letter and began her own interrogation of her father. We spent countless nights chatting. Turns out we both worked the night shift and had a lot of time on our hands. Soon it was like we had known each other our whole lives.

A few more weeks passed by, and I finally received a reply from this man that remained unknown to me. He said he had lost several years of his memory and that he had no recollection of my mother. I would later find out from my sister that his memory loss was due to severe



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drug use. My letter had caused a fight with him and his daughter, and he asked me to please not contact him again. Those words, *please do not contact me again*, would haunt me for quite some time and broke a little piece of my heart. I chatted with my sister a few nights later and told her about the letter. It was true that she and her father were not talking because he refused to acknowledge me. He wanted her to have no contact with me, and when she refused he would no longer talk to her. We were sisters in our hearts and minds even though we had no legal proof.

Several years passed, and we continued our computer chats and constant phone calls. Her father would hang himself just a short time later. I would not attend the funeral because that was not how I wanted to meet my sister for the first time. We would meet several years later and only twice to this day although we live fairly close to visit each other. I don't know what stands in the way; life I guess. I don't think we will ever get that legal proof, but we don't really need it; we know we are sisters.

It would take several years to share my findings with my mother and tell her the whole story, as my heart would not forgive the years of not knowing a father. When I found out all the details that led to his life and the troubling childhood that would be my sister's, I knew God had me right where I needed to be. I just wished my sister had been with me. Looking back I think I'm glad I didn't meet the man I never knew. I was in search of a father, but found a sister.

*small town girl
with big dreams...*

Photograph of Zoie, using filters and effects. By Amanda Helt

Wandering the Badlands

By Kurtis Clark

From outside my hiding place, I can hear the townspeople rustling around looking for me.

"Where is that brat?!"

"Find him!"

"Don't let him get away."

Ha! Do they think they can catch me? I have been doing this for years! They even call me Dead Eye Bandit!

"Runaround! Get your ass out here now!"

...

I adjust my headset and drown out the surrounding noises with indie and alternative rock. I start up my Sky Board and burst out from under the food stall, spilling it onto the ground,. "It's Dead Eye! And you'll never catch me!"

The townspeople jerk their heads toward me and start their muffled screaming. While they start running after me, I swing around, laughing at their attempts to catch a sky board on foot. When I turn around, what confronts me is the town guard, all on their boards. My laughing comes to a halt and my face is stuck in an awkward position. The guards glare at me and bolt forward to catch me. Ah, crap.

I twist my board sharp and take off down a side street. Two of the guards chase after me from behind while another appears on the other end of the street shortly after I pass halfway. I am blocked in. I ride to the side of a building and lower my power output to hover just a few inches above the ground. Grabbing the top right of my board I press its underside to the wall and active my grav-locks and jerk up the wall to the roof. Let's see you chase me now, stupid guards . . .

The guards rev up their engines and soar up to the roof. Oh, the woes of being poor. I want a board that can actually fly, too. Well, depression time is over,



gotta run. Swiping, ducking and twisting, I maneuver through the roof top clutter and clothes. Swinging around a corner, I run into a thick cloth that unbalances me for a second before I remove it from my face. I look down at the article in my hands. Oh, this is a nice jacket. I put it on and continue my escape.

Bursting forth from the roofs, I land in a circular way to diffuse the force and check my surroundings. I am on the main street headed to the town edge, good. Behind me the three guards impact the ground, kicking up a large cloud of dust. Two more show up from the side alleys. Grrr, they sure are persistent. Kicking up my own dust, I rush for the gate. I need to find a way to lose these guys. I look around desperately when I see something that piques my interest—the town gate.

With all five guards hot on my tail, I rush forward. About a hundred feet from the town gate, which is nothing more than two composite poles with a sign hanging in between. I squat down on my board and un-holster my prized twin high mass energy revolvers, aligning my targeting lasers on the chains supporting the sign. With a quick shot of each revolver, the sign falls and I duck low so it will miss me.

Missing my back by just a foot, the sign falls behind me impacting the ground, where it rebounds into two of the guards chests' knocking them down and

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sending their boards haywire—one of which knocks into another guard's board knocking him for a loop. But it's not over yet. I swing around and continue to fly backwards. I raise my revolvers and fire on the two poles. It takes several shots for each, but I get them off in time and the two poles collapse down. One hits the board of a guard and he ends up kissing the ground, but the final pursuer evades. Fortunately though, after having all his comrades' incapacitated he stops the pursuit and I escape into the horizon. Oh yeah, I am awesome.

The town's folk gather up to help the guards when the sheriff arrives. He picks up the seared and shattered sign chain and then looks at the broken poles, "it is a pity that boy ended up like that, he is by far the most annoying petty thief around here, but he is definitely one of the best shots I have ever seen. Dead Eye huh? Little Runaround has dreams," the sheriff looks down and shakes his head, "I fear the day when people actually start calling him that."

After a few hours of riding I finally see my home. A circle of transport and mining craft. I belong to a nomadic group of surface miners, rather than looking for precious metals we never go deeper than a few thousand meters and look for water and minerals along with some other more practical metals like iron or copper to sell to the towns. It is hard work and it doesn't bring in much money and doesn't provide a very comfortable life . . . yea I don't like being a miner. It is one of the reasons I took to being a bandit of sorts. The other reasons would be for my family, as just a low tier mining family we don't have much income. So I go to town and "find" some small necessities. I don't take anything major, nothing someone would go out of their way to retrieve. Mainly just some small energy cells, food, and the similar stuff that normal people have plenty of. My father and older sister, if two years is considered older, always gets on me but I bring in almost half of the families supplies and income. It isn't much but I was able to get me my own board, albeit a crappy one, but a working one all the same, as well as my prided rail revolvers. Although neither would be considered a necessity, I chalk it up under tools of the trade.

Arriving at the camp I notice that the usual banter of the people on break has a bit of tension in it.

"Did you hear? The Three Faced Demon has appeared around here."

"Do you think it has anything to do with that scientist in town?"

"Dang that Demon, I remember when he was still the Predatory Dragon, nothing more than a thorn in our sides, but now . . ."

The Three Faced Demon? The monster that destroyed a kingdom, a name that is known all through the Badlands and Kingdoms alike. Someday the name Dead Eye will be just as widely known as a great bandit!

Reaching home I blast into the room announcing my great success today, "Rachelle! George! Father! Come take a look, I got a great haul today! I got . . .

Looking around I can see Rachelle, my older sister, downcast and George, my younger brother, balling against her. Rachelle looks up at me, "Rachelle, what's wrong?"

She looks down again "Randy, dad's dead."

My mind goes blank. Dad is dead? My dad? The dad that always yelled at me? The dad that scolded me for everything I have ever done? The dad that ridiculed my dreams? . . . the dad that tucked me in at night, the dad that bandaged me up when I got hurt, the dad with tear stains from worry after I didn't come home at night, the dad that did everything he could for his family, the dad that did his damndest to put me on the right track, the dad that loved us more than himself? That dad, my dad, he died?

After several moments I look to my sister who is there sitting silent, "How? Rachelle, how did dad die?"

Rachelle seems choked up, I can understand, "The mining rig had a malfunction and when dad was assisting the mechanic the rig started up, they both were . . ."

It doesn't seem she can say it, "I understand."

She looks at me with worry in her eyes, "Randy, we are being kicked out of the convoy."

Instantly rage fills me, "What! What do you mean we are being kicked out!? Where are we supposed to go? How do they think we will survive?"

Rachelle looks away helplessly, "you know the rules, if you can't work you can't stay."

I don't even know what I am saying anymore, the words just come, "they can't just kick us out! W-What if I took on dad's job? Then we would be able to—"

"Randy!" Rachelle seems, distressed, "you are barely fifteen and next month I'll be seventeen, the jobs we can do are almost non-existent! And then what about George, he is only six! There is no way we can take care of him by ourselves like that!"

Gritting my teeth, I ask, "Then what are we supposed to do?"

"Remember before mom died, she would sometimes talk to someone on Atomic Link for a few hours?"

I don't follow, "Yeah, so?"

Rachelle sighs, "The mining leader already talked to me, and it seems mom had some relatives in a nearby kingdom, he called them and they agreed to take us in until we are old enough to take care of ourselves. We will need to leave by some-time tomorrow."

"That . . ."

"It is a little far, but there is nothing we can do, come on, we need to get ready."

"That damn Runaround brat, shooting up our gate."

In the nearby town the guards and town's engineers are busy fixing the gate

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when a large group of armed men show up. The one with the most fancy equipment and surrounded by escorts comes forward, "hey, is there a scientist staying in this town by any chance?"

The town guard steps forward nervously, "Sorry. good sir, but our small village doesn't have any scientist staying here."

The man looks at the smiling guard and pulls out a gun and places it to his head. The guard pulls back but is too late and the man shoots him in the head. The surrounding people immediately begin fleeing. The man looks to the men behind him and screams out to them, "HE IS HERE SOMEWHERE! FIND HIM. BRING HIM TO ME! Alive! Do what you want with the town!"

At that point the men behind the man go crazy with cheers and the slaughter began. The people of the town fought back yes, but they were just way too out-matched. These bandits were very well equipped and had a very large force.

It did not take long for the scientist to be found and dragged to the man. The scientist looks up to the man, asking, "Marquise the 'Bandit Lord', what are you doing here?"

Marquise smirks then looks down on the collapsed scientist, "Hodd, you know exactly why I am here. Where is the Bridge Drive?"

Hodd starts laughing. "I don't know where you heard about it, but you are too late. Some kid called Runaround stole my jacket already, that is where it was hidden. I was about to go reclaim it when you arrived!" Marquise looks at one of the men returning from the town, the man shakes his head. "Well, Hodd, that is unfortunate."

Hodd looks viciously at Marquise, "Ha ha ha, MARQUISE, you will NEVER get the drive!" Hodd lowers his voice to a quiet mumble "it is not something for mortal men to use."

Marquise looks at the injured scientist disdainfully, then raises his gun to Hodd's chest and fires, shooting directly in his heart. Marquise turns around and starts walking off, "Runaround? That kid from the mining nomads?" he looks to one of the men following him, and the man responds to his look, "We should arrive tomorrow afternoon."

Marquise continues walking away from the burning village, "Good." The next day the mining nomads of the area vanished just like a nearby town the previous day, but it was too late; Randy had already left.

Several hours after the Bandit Lord had left the town, Hodd—thought to be dead—begins to climb to his feet. Removing his shirt, he reveals a thin body armor



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and a small dent with a bullet lodged in it. Hodd digs out the bullet, and the armor begins to repair itself.

Walking up to a rock pile a kilometer from town, Hodd reaches into a hole and flips a switch, causing one of the rocks to distort and unveil a metallic container within. Hodd picks up the container and turns to the direction of the mining nomads, "Sorry ,kid, but Marquise can't get ahold of this."

From behind him, another small group of people show up. Riding a sky board ,their leader moves forward, removing his helmet, "Dr. Hodd?"

Hodd looks at the young man, "The Predatory Dragon, I presume? Or should I call you the Thee Faced Demon now?"

Looking at the doctor, the young man replies, "Reiter is fine. When we saw the smoke, we rushed here. It is a good thing you are okay. wW are here to escort you to the central cities."

Hodd looks to the smoking town with complicated feelings. "What of the bandits?"

Reiter replies simply, "A small issue."

Early morning, before the sun has even risen. I already have everything packed on a hover pallet connected to my board. Rachele and George are both sitting atop the pallet. The leader of their nomad tribe had come to see us off,

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"Randy, Rachele, I am sorry about you father. Please take this. It isn't much but may it help on your journey . . . I wish you could stay, but the rules are very clear."

I look at the leader with a bit of anger for kicking us out but understanding that he has no choice. "We know, old man. Thanks for the money."

Rachele looks at the sleeping George, then to the old man. "Goodbye, Leader. Thank you for taking care of us for so long."

With our simple good-byes, we three siblings set off to the horizon.

After a few hours I turn the board and start heading away from the town. Rachele looks over to me questioningly, "Randy, why are we heading away from town?" Then she notices the coat I have on. She lowers her voice and glares at me, "Randy, where did you get that coat?"

I scratch my head and give a wry smile, "Well, you know yesterday morning when I left to the town?"

Rachele clenches her teeth and eyes, "You didn't."

"In my defense, I didn't know that dad would . . . yeah . . . sorry. We'll stop at the next town; we should be there in a few days. We have plenty of supplies until then."

A few days later we reach the next town, Sword's Edge, named this way because it was originally a garrison position for an ongoing war between two kingdoms. Well, that was a long time ago, and now it is a relatively peaceful place. Using the money from our old Leader, I purchase a cheap room for us to sleep in. it will only be one night, but there is only the border town left, and it is only a couple days away. Then we can hire a transport ship to take us the rest of the way.

While in the town we travel to the market place to stock back up on supplies. Rachele is talking to one of the stall owners about some food preserves when I hear some strange news from a nearby lunch table. "You guys hear about the Bandit Lord going on a rampage in the text town, what was it called?"

"Oh, you mean Waypoint? I also heard that he slaughtered a nearby nomad group of miners. If you ask me, I think he may be looking . . ."

George must have seen my expression because he asks me, "Rand, are you ok?"

At this I snap out of my astonishment. I am just glad George is too young to understand what those people just said. I don't know why, but I have a very foreboding feeling. While I take George out of earshot, "Rachele, hurry up resupplying. I have a bad feeling. I'm taking George back to the room."

She looks at me confused, but replies, "Fine."

While on the way back, I hear some commotion from the market behind me but I don't pay close attention to it. In places like this a commotion is quite common, especially in the market areas. Besides, the town guards start over almost immediately.

In front of the notice board, George stops and stares at it for a second. I

look at him: "George, come on." Rather than following me, he turns and asks, "Rand, the town's people called you 'Runaround,' right?"

I am a bit annoyed: "It's Dead Eye. Now come on."

George looks back one more time, then follows, "Okay."

After several steps I stop. Why would George ask what people call me? "Hey George, why do you ask?"

George turns and points to the notice board. My stomach drops and my heart nearly stops. On the board is a wanted sign. My wanted sign. It reads "Wanted: Runaround Randy, Alive. \$10,000. Posted by Bandit Lord Marquise."

Usually I would be happy. For a bandit, having a wanted poster is like a badge of honor. But this amount? And who posted it. The Bandit Lord, the one who is said to have destroyed Waypoint. That was the town I was just at. Then the nomads. That must have been my tribe. There were no other tribes around. That guy said he was looking for something . . . was that something, me? But why? I was always so careful. I never stole anything that would warrant a bounty. Hell, in just a month I could re-enter the same town and no one would care, so why? Wait, if the Bandit Lord attacked the nomad tribe then . . . Rachele!

"Crap! George, come on! Whatever happens, stay by my side!" I grab George's hand and start off toward the market where I had left Rachele. Crap! Now that I think of it, the commotion earlier was near there! I need to hurry!

George and I fight our way to the stall where we last saw Rachele. She isn't there. Instead there are several town guards. This is bad. I can feel the blood drain from my face.

George looks at me, seeming to understand something is wrong, "Where is sister?"

I look down to George, "She must be at the room, let's go look, ok?"

George seems doubtful, he must see the worry on my face.

We make it back to our room and the door is open. I can hear movement inside. George tries to go in thinking it must be sister, he seems relieved, but I stop him and cover his mouth. There is more than one person inside. He looks up to me and I instruct him in a whis-



per, "Here is some money, go down stairs and order a juice for us ok?"

George looks to the room, "but what about sister?"

I look him in the eye, "go get her one too ok? I'll bring her down in a minute, alright?"

George looks at me questioningly, "Okay."

Gratefully he goes down stairs. Now, the hard part. I unclick one of my holsters ready for a quick draw while I remove the other holster and hide the revolver in my sleeve after adjusting the grip to fit. I walk into the room.

"Oh, you must be young Randy, it is nice to finally meet you."

Inside the room there are two men, one sitting in a chair and another with a knife to my sister's throat who was sitting next to the man. There was a gun on the table next to the man's hand. They both had a symbol on their clothes that I remember, it is the same one that was on my wanted poster. These men are a part of the Bandit Lord's group.

The sitting man resumes speaking, "So where is little George, isn't he with you?" The man is smiling but it seems very menacing.

"Let go of my sister."

The man stops smiling, "Oh? Straight to the point I see. No time for small talk is it? Well then if you want us to release her then drop your weapons and stand facing the wall."

I do as instructed and remove the revolver from my leg. When the man sees the weapon on the floor he interrogates, "You are known to use twin revolvers, where is the other one?"

With as straight a face as I can manage, I reply, "I had to sell it for travelling funds." The man seems to buy my lie and stands up and takes a couple of steps and looks me over.

"Very well. Kill the girl." The man with a knife moves. Crap! I panic and swing around and point my arm to him, but before I can fully move my arm the man standing in front of me grabs my wrist and smile, "lying brat, you really think I bought that?" I can tell I am pale. That is how little blood is in my face. My mind is blank and yet in chaos at the same time. "Now brat, watch as your sister is drained of blood!" the man is laughing while I can see my sister is in disbelief, and completely petrified.

The man behind her begins to press the knife to her throat, and I can see a



single drop of blood. At this moment all noise vanishes for me, the shuffling of foot steps, the laughing of the man, every noise just fades away. It is almost like time has slowed, everything is in slow motion. I can't even see the man grabbing my arm, nor my sister, just the man with the knife, specifically the magic cross. The intersection of where his eye line meets his nose. This is the magic cross. Even though my wrist is restrained I can still move the revolver inside my sleeve slightly. But I cannot aim it at all. Yet I can see where it is pointed. It feels more like I am pointing my finger than my gun. I squeeze the trigger. I don't even think about what I am doing, I can't, my mind is totally a peace. Not blank, but at peace, no excess thought, just one goal, one purpose, kill. So I squeeze the trigger. I can see it, the bullet, it is nothing more than a streak, but I can see it. I watch it. As it flies through the air. As it approaches the man. As it enters his skin. As it exits the other side of his skull. When the bullet hits the back of the room time begins to return to normal. My vision widens. I can hear again. The man is no longer laughing, Rachele is breathing heavily and grabs her neck. The man I shot hits the floor, nothing more than a pile of meat. The man grabbing me looks at me in disbelief. Then looks down at his side, there is blood staining his clothes. My revolver is sideways pointed at him. When did I shoot him? He falls down on his knees, then collapses to the floor. The light of his eyes have disappeared.

Rachele, holding her neck comes up to me holding the gun I dropped. She grabs the one in my hand, "Randy! Come on! We need to leave! Randy! Now!"

Huh? Leave? What about our room? I need my gun. Huh? Why does Rachele have my gun? Who is that on the ground? People are screaming. Did something happen?

"Randy, where is George?!"

George? My little brother, where is George? Huh? Rachele, where are we going? Wait, why can't I speak. What did I want to say? It feels important. There's George, he has juices. Rachele? What about the juices? Are we just leaving them? That's a waste of money. Why are we leaving? Rachele that's my board. You usually ride on the pallet, not the other way around. Wait, why am I on the pallet? Rachele you are going too fast. Are we leaving town? Where are we going? I hope its worm. I am cold. My hands keep shaking so I must be cold. Several kilometers outside the town Sword's Edge by the border to the nearby kingdom, Marquise the Bandit Lord is sitting inside his house construct talking on an atomic link. On the other end is a man dressed in the same uniform the rest of his group has on.

"My Lord, the three kids have gotten away, we found the two scouts that were holding them dead on the floor of their room. We believe they have fled in you direction. Like we thought, they must be running to the kingdom."

Marquise leans back in his chair. "Well, that is unfortunate, my good man. Would you please burn down that dismal hotel?"

The man on the other end bows slightly, "Yes, lord."

Marquise shuts off the link and enters the front of the construct where several attendants and assistants await along with the commanders of his group. Marquise takes a seat in a large lavish chair facing the others, "it seems as though young Runaround has eluded our grasp once again, but it seems his luck is now in short supply. Like I thought, he must want to sell the Bridge Drive to the kingdom. Sadly he will never make it there. Although if he finds out we are waiting for him here he may run." Marquise ponders for a bit before looking to one of his commanders, "Greg, take a unit with you and take the sister and brother. They will make good hostages if Rudy has hidden the drive somewhere."

One of the men present bows respectfully, "yes lord, I shall return in five hours." After replying he turns and steps out of the room to leave.

After Greg left a young man enters the room and bows respectfully as well, "my lord, a small squad of Centralists has been sighted heading this way; they will arrive seven hours from now. It is reported that the scientist Hodd is with them."

We are currently sitting in a crevice outside of town. Rachelle is preparing some food and George is playing in a small cave. He doesn't even understand what is going on. It is nothing more than an adventure for him. Sadly for me, shortly after we left town I finally understood what had happened. It hit me like a wall, no more like five. I killed a person. Not just one either, but two. I shot human beings. I had never even shot at someone before, and I just shot two men dead. I can see the second man's face when I close my eyes. I don't even know when I shot him. I can't even pick up my revolvers anymore. Every time I pick them up I can remember, no more than remember, I fully feel the sensation of when I shot the first man. The heat of the gun's grip, the image of the bullet piercing through his head, the slight recoil.

That is what is the most scary, when I shot him, what I felt was the recoil. That was all I felt, recoil. I had no hesitation, no indecision. I just shot him, I did not even think about it. It was so easy, just pull the trigger and someone dies. Someone's life vanishes, just like that. This feeling, this sensation of killing, of ending the life of another . . . how can people stand it? It is scary, so, so scary.

I don't want it, none of it. Never again. Please, just no more. Just make his face go away! Please, I have had enough. I am sorry, I don't even know your name yet I, I . . . please don't look at me like that, please, just leave me alone.

Rachelle hands me a small plate of basic food preserves that she was able to grab before leaving town, "I am sorry."



I look up from my plate, "why should you be sorry, you didn't do anything, I'm the one that . . ."

Rachelle places her hand atop mine on my knee, "I am supposed to be the older sister," she looks to George, "I am supposed to take care of you two," turning back to me she avoids eye contact and just looks to the ground. I can see some drops of liquid fall from her hidden face, "but I couldn't do anything! Nothing, I was totally helpless. I am supposed to protect you but in the end you saved me!" she removes her hand and sits back without revealing her face, "I am the eldest, but was just so scared, it was so scary. I thought I was going to die. I-I thought they were going to kill you, and George, too. Even though I knew what they would do, I just, I couldn't move. No matter how much I tried, how much I willed myself, I was just too scared." She looks up at me in the eye, her face is stained in tears, "then you saved me, you saved us. Please remember, no matter what happened you saved us. When I couldn't do anything, when I had almost given up, it was you who saved us. No matter what you did, you saved mine and George's life, just remember that." Rachelle tries to present a smile, it is not a very good one. It is obvious how scared she is.

I do understand what she is saying, though. I didn't just kill them in cold blood, I did it to save Rachelle. Even though I understand, I just . . . I killed them. I ended their lives. And I didn't even think about it. I just did it.

While eating the food in front of us, I can see a cloud of dust in the distance. I can recognize what makes this kind of cloud: "Sky Boards . . ." and more than one.

Rachelle looks up to me, "What?"

The boards are coming in from behind her. There is no one around here that has such a number of boards that would be coming in this direction except . . . this is not good. I throw the plate in my hands on the ground spilling its contents all over the dirt and rock as I snap onto my feet. "Rachelle!" she jumps at my sudden actions, "take George and get back to town!"

"Randy, what's . . ."

"Rachelle, NOW!"

She looks around as she stumbles up and sees the dust cloud behind her, she looks surprised and terrified at the same time, "Y-y-Yes! George! Let's go!"

"Sis?" George is confused but Rachelle grabs his arm and pulls him up, causing him to spill his food. He seems dejected, all innocence, I want to preserve his. Rachelle looks at me with complicated feelings, she wants me to come with them. I really do want to.

I look her in the eye, "They are after me. I will draw them off and meet up later."

"But—"

"Rachelle! Remember, who is the best boardsman in our entire tribe? Who is the best shot? Who is the best at running away? I will be fine." Tears start down

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her face again but she doesn't just say anything, instead she just give me a hug. I tried to sound resolute but, even I could tell how unsure I am. It must be glaringly obvious to Rachele, she could always see right through me.

I watch as the two crawl out from the rocks where we were sheltered. I really hope this won't be the last I see of them, at least with this they should be safe. If the Bandit Lord gets me he should not need them anymore. Although I do not plan on going quietly or easily. I grab ahold of my revolvers, those images flash once again. My stomach churns and I feel as if I may puke. I choke down the feelings and shoot out on my board. I turn to the side and kick up as much dust as I can. With this my pursuers should know the direction I am headed.

It doesn't take long before the group of boarders reach me. There are nine of them in a diamond formation with a man that seems to be their leader in the center. He is probably in his mid-thirties and has a clean shaven face with relatively neatly fixed hair. Probably only messed up from the wind. He looks more like a military commander than a bandit. Yet he wears the emblem of the Bandit Lord and those that surround him are, well, staple bandits. Scruffy, unshaven, bulky and with worn clothes, even if their uniforms are essentially the same.

I raise one of the revolvers to one of their point men, the closest to me. Looking through the sights I center on him. I can feel that sensation, like the gun is a part of me. I know exactly where it is pointed even without looking. As I prepare to fire images flash in my head. The images of those two in town. Of their eyes as they lost their lives. Of my gun firing. Of my bullet entering his skull. Of the man kneeling before me. At these images, my hand just freezes. My finger won't move. I strain, and strain. Yet it remains solid. I can't shoot. I can't pull the trigger. I can't kill them .

..

No! I must! If I don't, I can't let them capture me that easily. Not just for me, but for Rachele and George too! I promised them I would meet them at the town. So I must fire! Fire! Shoot! FIRE! Pull The Damn TRIGGER!

I can feel the trigger finally move, it goes smoothly. Almost like there is no resistance. With a 'click' my revolver cylinder cycles, the energy cartridge flashes a bright light, the energy is condensed, then converted to mass, the mass is forced down and out of the barrel. Hurtling toward the group of bandits the bullet closes in on them at astonishing speeds. The mass approaches its intended target, it flashes by, missing the man and impacts the ground a distance away. Huh?

Upon my shot the formation scatters. I missed? I try again. I pull the trigger, no freezing this time. The trigger is pulled with little resistance. This time I aimed for a different person. Directly at their chest. The bullet impacts the ground again. I look with my eyes, my gun is pointed at the man, but what I feel, is it pointed at the ground. No matter how hard I try, no matter how I adjust my aim. It appears to be directly pointed at the target, but I can feel where the bullet will head, toward the ground. They are deploying their shields and are maneuvering but the bullet is not

being diverted, nor is it being dodged, the bullet is going in a straight line, I just. I can't seem to point the gun right. I can't point it at them.

Even then, I can at least still shoot. I may not be able to hit them, but they don't know that. I can just keep firing while I flee . . . wait. Where are they going? I am over here. Over there is, no . . . No they are after me, so why! Why are they headed toward Rachele and George? I-I must stop them. I begin to fire. Non-stop. Faster than I have ever shot before. Yet, yet why won't any hit! Please, let them hit. Hit! Why? Why won't they hit! I charge directly at them, three of them split off and come after me. They open fire on me. Their bullets scrape and scratch at me. They do not get a solid hit on me even once. Although I am unable to hit them either, there is one evident difference. I *can't* hit them whereas it seems they very purposefully *won't* hit me. No! This can't be happening! Please don't let this happen! The others are closing in on Rachele, she is just on foot and they are on Sky Boards, there is no way she could out run them even if she was at a full run, and now she is even dragging George with her. I want to go, I want to help them. Pick them up and flee. I know it would be useless but, it is better than doing nothing. Yet I can't even do that! These three won't let me anywhere near them, besides I am already too far away from them. It is way too far, but for some reason I can see Rachele's face clear as day. Through the dust, through the dirt, through the barriers of distance I can see her as clearly as if she were just a meter in front of me, rather than the several hundred meters apart we are. And plastered all over it is fear. Fear for life, fear for her future, fear for George in her hand, fear for me so far away, fear for what is to come. It is unbearable, I don't want to see her like that. She does not deserve this. I am sorry. I am sorry. I don't know what I have done but they have nothing to do with it! So please, leave them alone! Just leave them alone!

I am forced to just watch as the bandits surround my siblings. I am becoming frantic. I fire and fire and fire. But the bullets just won't hit. I have never really been religious but if there really is a god, please hear my please. I don't care what happens to me, but please, please help them. I don't know what I did but they have done nothing. Please save them. Please, I can do nothing. From the revolver in my left hand I can feel a warmth. Something is happening! Have you heard my prayers!? I don't know what will happen but I raise the revolver towards the group surrounding Rachele and George. I pull the trigger placing what hope I have left in it. In front of my eyes a bright flash appears, turning my whole world white. From the white shadows appear, they pass by my face and a slight pain surges from where they hit. I can feel a warm liquid running down my face. When the white fades I can see my hand. Or what's left of it. My revolver is in pieces and has shredded my arm and hand, I can no longer feel them. My revolver had overloaded and then, exploded. I look to where I was aiming, I can see the bandits carrying a knocked-out Rachele and George away. God? What sin have I done?

The three surrounding me break off, and I hear a clank sound by my feet. When I look I see a concussion grenade just a half meter from me. With a blast of

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wind my vision goes black. My head hurts. I sit up while grabbing the back of my head. Where am I? Uhg, what happened? My hand . . . ?! my, my hand.

"Rachelle what . . ."

I twist around only to see a note tied to a pole beside me.

If you want your siblings back, bring the bridge drive to the encampment outside of town. Otherwise your precious sister will become ours and for your little brother, well we have no need for a brat. You have ten hours.

"Rachelle . . . George . . . what have I done?"

As I hold the note the events before I blacked out come flooding over me. I look at my remaining revolver. Then back to the note. "Bridge Drive? What the hell is that?" I through the note in frustration, "DAMNIT! What the hell am I supposed to do now!?"

I can't use my left hand anymore. Worse than that I can't even shoot them. I have to do something. I can't just leave them, or can I? NO! What am I thinking? Just leave them and say they got killed on the journey? It's easily believable. What am I thinking? They are my siblings, my family. The only ones that I have left. More than that they are the only ones left that care for me. How can I just abandon them? But, what can I do? The city guard won't help me. They have an army of hundreds. I can't even shoot them. How can I save them? The only thing I have is my revolver and it is now useless. I have nothing, I am powerless, weak. I don't even have what they want, I don't even know what it is. Even if I have nothing I must at least try right? I look down at the remaining revolver in my hand. For the longest time this has been my most prized possession. My most prized skill. Now it is worthless. It could not protect the only thing I had left. So what good is it? But it is all I have. If that is the case, I can at least try, no I must regain my skill. I must be able to shoot again. I must be able to hit my targets again. It will still be hopeless, but even if by the smallest margin, I must stack my empty deck. Even if it is just one card. And this is the only card I have, I don't even have my board anymore, damaged beyond repair by the grenade. It has been two hours since they took them. It will take three hours to get there. I can't wait until the deadline, but I have time.

I stack up several rocks in the shape of a human silhouette. Standing a good ways away, I take aim at the figure. Imposing the image of the person who took Rachelle onto the figure I squeeze the trigger. A cloud of dust sprouts to the side of the figure. My left hand is useless, even after I bandaged it with what wraps I could salvage, so I am stuck firing the revolver one handed. That has never been an impediment to me before but now . . . no that is not why I can't hit. I just can't resolve myself to kill. It is one thing to say, but it is another to pull the trigger.

I take aim once again. I can feel the gun, it is just the same as before, like the gun is a part of me. Also just like last time I can tell it won't hit. I readjust my aim, dead center. I ease the trigger back, and another puff of dust. I check my sights and they are pointed away from the target. I take a deep breath and try again with the

same results.

After the fifth shot, I lower my gun. This is not working. I can feel the gun yet when I point it, I can see those two. I can see the light leaving their eyes, the disbelief and the unwillingness plastered on their faces. I stand there for a moment, I do not know how long, it felt like hours but at the same time just a few seconds. I look at the figure and then down at my revolver. I can feel it. As if I am feeling my fingers or arms. I raise my gun up to the sky and lower it toward the figure. I fire and miss once again.

I sigh without moving my gun, I turn to look at the horizon. An indigo sun dyes the brown rocky ground a deep turquoise hue. I close my eyes, I can feel the grip, rough and cold. From it images float, nothing but death. I can see the room where I shot those two men. They stand there looking at me, haunting me. In front of one of them is Rachelle, she looks so scared. Is it because of them or . . . me? Rachelle, don't make that face, you should be smiling, happy. You have always taken care of me and George, you of everyone I know deserves to be happy the most. Behind her that man is standing there. Not the one I shot but the faceless figure of the Bandit Lord. It was you, you people are the ones that took he smile. I swear, if it is the last thing I do, I will bring back her smile. I will make sure she has her happy ending. To do that you are in the way, you need to go away. I Will make you go away . . .

The grip is no longer rough and cold. It is comfortable, warm. The ghosts of those long dead no longer seep from it, but now they are the images of those I need, must, protect. All my memories and feeling of both Rachelle and George. From when I was a baby and Rachelle sat by my crib, when she nursed me when I scrapped my knee falling off my first Sky Board. When George was born, when he crawl off and no one could find him. Then we would see Rachelle walking back with him in her arms. When Mom died and we all cried ourselves to sleep on the couch. How she would return with rough and almost bloody hands from work so we could afford to have a nice dinner for my birthday. How me and George would sit and play for hours. How imposing Rachelle could be when she scolded me for steeling and how cute George was when he screamed "bad!" at me. How bright their faces were when they smiled. How tender they were when they were worried. They have been sad, they have been angry, they have been happy. They have felt and been through so much, but the one thing I don't want them to be is scared. I will not let them be scared, and for those that make them scared, they can just go away. And if they don't, I will make them.

With my eyes still closed, I move my revolver. I can tell where it is pointed without looking. I squeeze the trigger with a smooth fluid motion. With a click the cylinder cycles and the energy is compressed to mass. With a flash and a bang the mass is ejected from the barrel. It speeds through the air and with a crunch it impacts. I open my eyes and look. There are cracks and a large hole in the head of the silhouette. I point the gun again and fire it once again. There is no need to aim. Once

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in the neck, another in the heart, two through each lung and one severing the Aorta. There is no more hesitation. No more remorse. I know what I must do and I can finally accept it. I no longer fear killing my opponent, I just fear what it is that I have become and what I will turn into from here on. I have been here for two hours, it is time to go.

After finding my resolve to do what I had to do, I began my long walk toward the encampment. I had no expectations of actually winning, or even surviving.



Yet I couldn't let myself run away. What kind of low life piece of shit would I be if I at the least didn't try? I do not want to die, and I may end up just running away in the end, but it is not my goal to fight the Bandit Lord's group. It is to save Rachele and George. To do that I have no intention of bursting through the front door. I have come early for that reason. I will sneak up to the side. I have covered my jacket in dirt to match the surroundings. I will move slowly on the ground. Using my disguised binoculars I can tell when the enemy is looking, if I stay still I just look like a lump of dirt from a distance.

When I get close to the outskirts, I will have to be more careful. Using my slightly recalibrated revolver, I can snipe off the guards. If I do this correctly, I can do it without anyone finding out. After, I will sneak into the base and jump from cover to cover, killing as needed and then hiding the bodies. When I find Rachele and George, I will release them. I have some blankets for them like my jacket. We will then sneak out in the same fashion as I got in. When far enough away, we will head back to town and repair my board and get as far away as possible.

Well, that was the plan anyway, but when I arrived in view shot of the encampment what met my eyes is not what I expected. My mind is blank, I just stand there looking unsure of what to do. I expected a walled off area or maybe a series of tent constructs. Rather than that what met my eyes are many constructs yes, but unusually they are either burnt down or are being burnt down. There are even several that have been evidently blown up.

This does not look good. I begin to rush toward the encampment in a panic. I completely forget my plan. As I run it hits me. What I am fearing above all else. The stench. A smell that sends my mind into chaos and panic. The stench of death. Of blood. Of corpses. In my panic a noise floats over to me. A scream, no screams. More than one. Not just screams either, gunshots, roars, the sounds of combat. There are still people alive.

The chaos of my mind clears, but I am still unable to think or grasp the situation. All I know is if there are still people left, I must go there. I don't know why, maybe I hope that Rachele and George are with them. That they escaped this carnage. That they are not just corpses in a burning building. So I run. Not in a calm manner, but in desperation. I continuously trip, stumble and fall. I don't even think I am breathing properly. I don't even think I remember how. All I know is I must go there. Must go see. Must know what happened. Rachele, George, please be safe.

As I arrive at the edges of the massacre, the stench intensifies. It is almost unbearable. There are bodies everywhere. Torn, mangled, burned, filled with holes. They had died in horrendous ways. What kind of monster could have done this? This is not the work of a mere man. I couldn't be, this viciousness, this brutality. Only a monster could do something like this.

At the back of the gallery of corpses, I see a man that I did not want to see, that I prayed would not be here. It is the man that took Rachele and George, or at least what is left of him. His face is half gone, his arm is charred so black that it is breaking apart, his leg is about three feet away. He is nothing more than overcooked meat now, but him being here means that Rachele and George, they are here too.

The sounds of combat have stopped. I must hurry. I fumble through the charred wreckages of the constructs to the place where the sounds were coming from. When I reach there I see him. A man, standing there with another in his hand. He is standing on a Sky Board, one that I have never seen before. The man he is holding has his neck in an awkward angle as he is dangled from the side of the board. He has blood flowing from his mouth. The man tosses the corpse to the ground where many other corpses lay.

This man he, he killed everyone. They are all dead. Rachele, George . . . this man, did he kill you, too? "Rachele . . . George." There is nothing in my head. Not just blank but empty. Totally empty. No memories are flooding in. no thoughts are sprouting. Just, nothing. I can no longer even talk right, "ah, ah, ahhhh,

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AHHHHHHHHH!"

I scream, I don't know why, I just scream. This man he, killed Rachelle, he killed George! I, I . . . I will destroy him! I don't care who he is! I don't care what he is doing! He will Die! I will KILL Him!

"RAHHHHH!!!!!" I scream once again and charge the man. He looks at me. It is like he is looking at an insect. I will show him! I move my revolver, I already know it will hit. Right at his head. I fire the gun and side step. My face goes into shock. I missed? Can I still not hit a person?! Even this bastard! This bastard that killed my family! All that I had left! I refuse it! I refuse to believe that I cannot hit this man of all people!

I fire again and aim directly for the gap in his armor to pierce his heart. Again I miss! The man's face changes, he seems surprised. Bastard, is he looking down on me? Has he realized I can't hit him? One more, just one shot! I slide to a stop and hold my gun as steady as I can. Time seems to slow. My breathing becomes loud. I can feel where the gun is pointed. But I still aim. This shot must hit! I cannot forgive this man! I must kill him! Him of all people, he must die!

I pull the trigger, the firing sequence cycles. I can see the bullet leave the barrel. It is headed straight for the man's throat. There is no way he will dodge or for it to miss. It is a bull's-eye! Huh? The bullet misses. It hits the building behind him. But what surprises me more is why it misses. The bullet, it—it curves. In mid-air, it just changes direction away from the man. He is smiling. How? How is this possible?!

I try shooting more times and every time the bullets move. The man is just standing there, grinning! I try a ricochet shot and it still misses. I try shooting the board but again it moves! Why? Why can't it hit him! He is laughing now! Damnit!

Wait, when I fired on his board the bullet didn't move as much. It is fine when shooting at the side of the board. But what about the top? It has a lot larger surface area, no, the top is armored on boards. Shooting it would do nothing. The bottom, on the other hand, if I can hit one of the turbine axis or a blade, I may be able to destabilize it.

I take aim. This is by far the most difficult shot I have ever tried. I squeeze slightly but with force. The bullet fires and the man's face changes. He seems genuinely surprised. But at the same time he moves. He changes the position of the board, so my shot misses.

"Boy, you truly are quite interesting!" the man bursts out, laughing.

He shoots forward at me. I can't even react. He grabs my face and, in a grand summersault with his board, he throws me against a wall. From a distance another group approaches. They are wearing the same armor as the man. More of his comrades. I can't even kill this one man! How can I fight more of them?

"Reiter! What is taking so long?" one of the group calls out to the man.

"Just having a little fun with an interesting guy!" says the man, Reiter, istill laughing.

Reiter then turns to me on the wall unable to move, "Boy, you are quite good, even able to find a weakness like that in my deflection shielding. But you shouldn't be so quick to go to your death, there are people waiting for you."

At those words two figures emerge from the group, a boy and a girl, "Randy!"

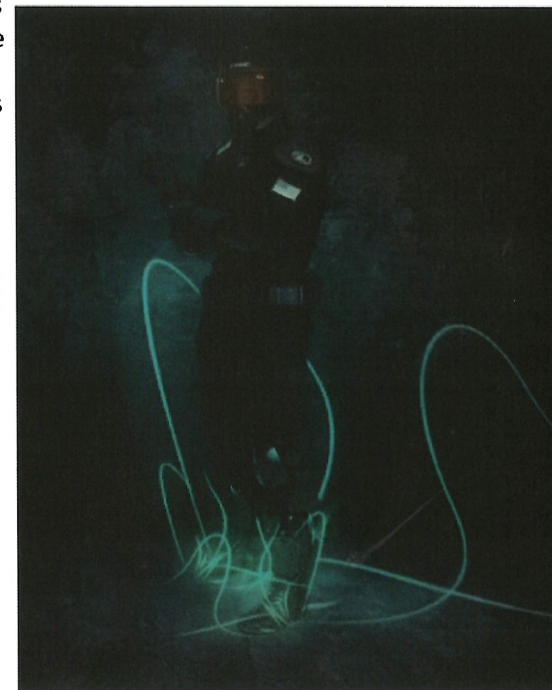
I look upon them with indescribable feelings, "Rachelle, George."

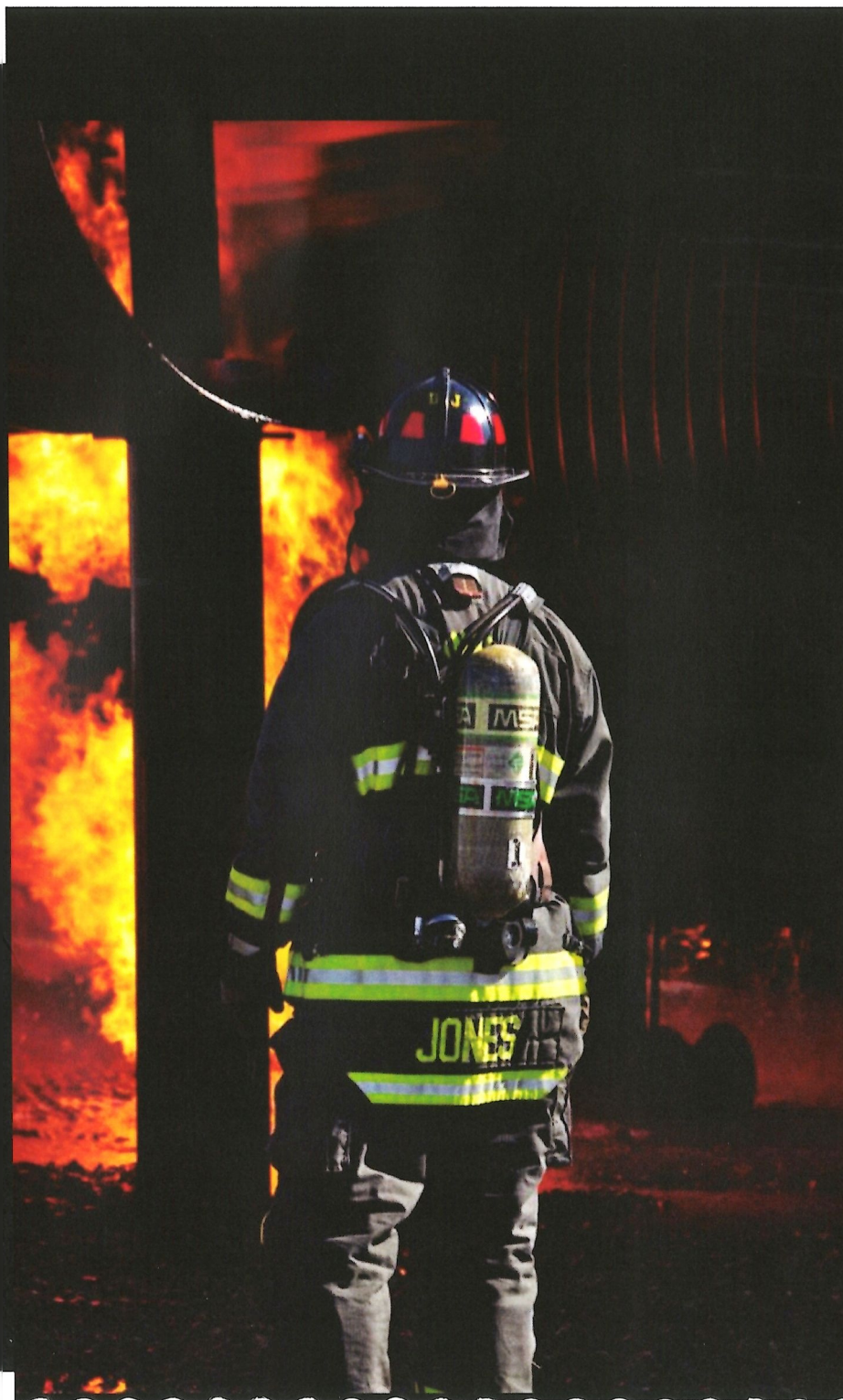
They come up to me with an older male, who chastises me. "Kid, you should try to be better at protecting your brother and sister. They may end up getting caught in the cross fire next time."

Rachelle and George are kneeling besides me unsure of what to do. The man kneels down as well and pulls me head first to the ground. The two beside me gasp as the man removes my jacket, I can't even resist him.

"Don't worry, he'll be fine, just some temporary paralysis from the shock of the impact." The man pulls me back up against the wall, "By the way, boy, this is my favorite jacket. You really shouldn't steal. You never know what you'll get, and what it'll get you mixed up into."

The man stands back up and with a call from his group he returns to them and they leave. After an hour or so I can move again so Rachelle, George and I make our way back to town. We stay there for a day to recuperate, heal and repair my board, then set off for our relatives for the last time. Two days later we arrive at our destination. It wasn't until later that I learned who it was that I encountered that day. The Three Faced Demon, a true monster famed for single handedly destroying an entire kingdom. It is also said that the people that have fought him and survived could be counted on one's fingers, and I, Runaround Randy, am one of them, and I even have more than one finger under my belt, but well, all in good time.





Hero

By Benjamin Jones



The Most Shocking Realization of My Life: Somehow Equally Comforting

By Alicia Unterbrink

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It took being a mother to appreciate and understand my own. All the same, I never foresaw resembling her the ways I have come to realize I do. I had sworn to not be like my mother, as I am sure so many children do; after all, a daughter's mother is always the least cool person to her.

Truthfully, the first time I caught myself resembling my mother was by the words that I spoke to my daughter. I could not believe how easily the same phrases rolled off my tongue. Quoting my mother is as natural as breathing now. From falling down while learning to walk to falling off her bike, my daughter has learned to brush herself off and try again due to the same simple yet powerful words I heard as a little girl, "No blood, no foul." While that is helpful to my daughter, I often use another quote of my mother's that is humorously helpful to me when I hear "Mom, Mom, Mom" a million times a day. Instead of pulling my

hair out, I sarcastically say, "I'm changing my name." I get a kick out of that one because my daughter will look at me as if I have gone mad.

Many new mothers refer to parenting books. I, on the other hand, came fully equipped with skills thanks to my mom. When my daughter has a stomach ache, I naturally reach for the Sprite or ginger ale and crackers. It is not due to a research study I have read or any medical advice I have received from a doctor. I can remember holding my daughter when she was an infant, rocking her while listening to her sad attempts to breathe through her stuffy nose. Especially considering her age, I opted for a homeopathic remedy instead of pharmaceuticals. I turned the shower on hot, pulled the curtain closed, and shut the bathroom door with me and my wee little sick one inside. As the bathroom filled with soothing steam, I could not

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escape the feeling of nostalgia; after all, I had my fair share of stuffy noses as a child and had sat curled up in my mother's lap, her stroking my hair and rocking me back and forth while the hot shower worked its magic until finally I could breathe. As a parent, I know now that the true relief belongs to the mother, who receives the satisfaction of making her baby feel all better again.

My mother taught me more than just words though. I naturally approach situations with my daughter in the same manner and way my mother did, which has proven to be very comforting as a parent. The greatest discovery I have experienced out of all is not just understanding but appreciating why my mother raised me the way she did. Kids do

not come with an instruction manual, so I am ever thankful that my own mother instilled so much in me; I have learned that everything she did was a gift, endless priceless lessons, that do not end with me. If I accomplish being half the mom mine was to me, then I will have the blessing of knowing my own daughter will be a great person and mother someday herself. I hope I succeed in carrying on her legacy of mothering. If I do so, I know my daughter will always have me with her long after she is a woman herself, just like my mother remains with me.



*It is only the women whose eyes
have been washed clear with tears
who get the broad vision that
makes them little sisters to all the
world. —Dorothy Dix*

True Dreamers by Yareli Martinez

Before the “American Dream” was named the “American Dream,” there was a search for a place where dreams had no boundaries. It is well known to all Americans that, “Europeans “discovered” America by accident” (Guisepi). It became a discovery that immigrants from all over the world would take pride in. Immigrants whose only attempts were to do what they could not do elsewhere. Immigrants who not only share the same title, but share the equal dream to achieve success. Even when the United States is known as a the land of opportunity and equal treatment, there are individuals who continue to create a fine print and state that those rights do not apply to immigrants because immigrants are all stereotyped as lazy, disgusting, and thieves.

An article published in the Huffington Post talks about Limbaugh, a well-known conservative commentator that sits around and complains about progress. In this certain article, Limbaugh talks specifically about Mexican immigrants that are given applause because they take on jobs that they think are hard work. It was also embarrassing to see that Limbaugh states that, “75 percent of the Hispanics believe that prosperity is the job of the government” (Planas). Hispanic immigrants, along with all immigrants, know what it takes to survive in this country and it is why they take on the jobs that they do. Immigrants do the dirty work and they are not competing with a citizen in line to clean toilets or pick fields under the blazing sun. To call them lazy and dependent is incredible. Lazy are those that are sitting down in a radio seat with air conditioning bickering about how jobs are being taken from citizens, when the jobs that are being taken are the loathed ones.

Known as the ALIPAC, the Americans for Legal Immigration PAC is a committee that advocates for continued anti-immigration laws and stronger border laws. *The Huffington Post* published an article that talks about one of their efforts to destroy any plans of amnesty with immigrants. According to the article,

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the ultra conservative members of this group decided “to send used underwear to undocumented immigrants” (Benedetti). They did this because of the request that had been made for the purchase of underwear for immigrants who ruined theirs when crossing the Rio Grande to get across the border. After this action, who are truly the disgusting ones? That committee must have forgotten that a very high percentage of Mexican immigrants are in fact the ones who wash their clothing, including their dirty underwear. Disgusting are the racist individuals that limit improvement (Benedetti). 42

The most outrageous controversy is that immigrants are thieves because they take away life itself from citizens. In an online rant, the author goes on to complain sarcastically about the need to stop calling immigrants by the name immigrants, and began calling them thieves. He states, “they are thieves stealing from the American people for their own personal gain” (Otto). Stealing what? The opportunity to succeed? When did ambition become a crime? Otto rants about everything that is being taken from the all mighty white citizen but does not speak up and say that his people are lacking the motivation to take any opportunity. An immigrant is not a thief for wanting better. The article contains a picture depicting stands with free things such as healthcare and education, and basically states that immigrants are coming with the knowledge that everything will be handed to them (Otto).

He could not be anymore wrong.

The decision to take the voyage of crossing the border was not handed to them. The strength to survive was not given to them. The will to search for a job in unknown territory was not given to them. Nothing in this country is given to anyone. That is what distinguishes America from the rest. This country’s history is filled with the ambition for something better. Conservatives that advocate against amnesty are going to have regrets.

I was an immigrant and so were my parents. We crossed the border when I was three years old and I wish I could remember that voyage. I wish I could remember the strength that my parents had to take care of me. I am not ashamed to admit that I remained an illegal immigrant in this country up to the age of fourteen. Thanks to God, both of my parents and I were granted permanent residency and nothing changed. Before and now, I have worked for everything I have. My parents have worked for everything they have. We did not come to this country to sit around and be served. Just like all immigrants, we came to succeed. I will proudly admit that I am on the right path toward achieving that goal.





A Single Rose By Kimberly Ayala-Murphy

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"Hello" was the soft nurturing voice echoing through my ear as my aunt answered the phone. It was about mid-day when I called her. She said she wasn't feeling well; she had a terrible headache and had taken some Tylenol.

"I am about to hang some curtains in my room," said my aunt over the phone.

"Ok, well, get some rest and take care of yourself. I love you," I said, hanging up the phone. Little did I know that would be the last time I would hear my aunts' sweet voice again.

It was that same day when I got a phone call from my mother: "Mija, I have some bad news. Your aunt is in the hospital she had a stroke and is in surgery." My heart ached; the thought of losing my aunt was terrible. Unable to think, I rushed to the hospital to find my family members giving each other solace while waiting for news. After hours of us praying and hoping for good news, the doctor finally came in and informed us that she had an aneurism on the right side of her brain, and they were able to stop the bleeding, but the aneurism had caused severe damage to her speech and movement on the left side of her body. With relief and sadness, my family hugged one another with eyes full of tears and thanked God she was okay. We all braced ourselves as we entered the room. I remember seeing her there in her bed so helpless, so fragile, so still. I would have given anything at that moment to have the woman I cherished and loved so much healed from all her sickness and pain.

The earliest memory I have of my aunt is watching her draw beautiful roses on pieces of scratch paper as she would talk to my mom and grandmother. She would start out with a small oval her hand gracefully moving across the paper creating the petals, within minutes it transformed into a beautiful rose. I re-

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member practicing trying to perfect my rose like hers. I would start out with the same small oval, but my finished product would look nothing like hers; instead my rose looked like it had been stomped on and died. I would ask her show me again, please, hoping I'd get it right the next time. She was a natural artist. She had never had a lesson in her life; yet she would draw so carelessly as if it were second nature to her.

The next morning, I returned to the hospital where I found my family. My aunt was awake, but unable to speak. She gave me a reassuring smile that she was okay. With a heavy heart, I raced over to her and hugged her. It was a few days later that her health regressed and our family had to make the most difficult decision of our lives. We had to let her go; she was suffering so much and we loved her too much to let her suffer. That same day, the staff removed all the machines to let her pass on her own. However, two days had passed and my aunt was still with us. We cried, prayed and shared wonderful memories of her with each other. I remember sitting next to my cousin, her daughter, and we would squeeze each other's hand at the fear that her next breath would be her last. Tired and restless, I left the hospital to check on my husband and kids. It was then when I was gone that my aunt left us to join our creator. I hate myself to this day for leaving! I should have stayed. I should of waited a little longer. I rushed like a mad women back to the hospital. I had never run so fast in my life as I did that day. I finally reached the room. I ran to my aunt, holding her as tight as I could, wanting it all to be a horrible dream.

My aunt, Maria Rosario Martinez, passed away on January 2, 2010. It was the first time I had lost someone so dear to me; it was as if my heart had been ripped out, and I had this hole that could not be filled. As I said my final goodbye, I laid upon her casket a single red rose.





Sketch by William Barr

The Waiting Game

By Joseph Coats



Perspective

By Niki Lohberger



Obelisk

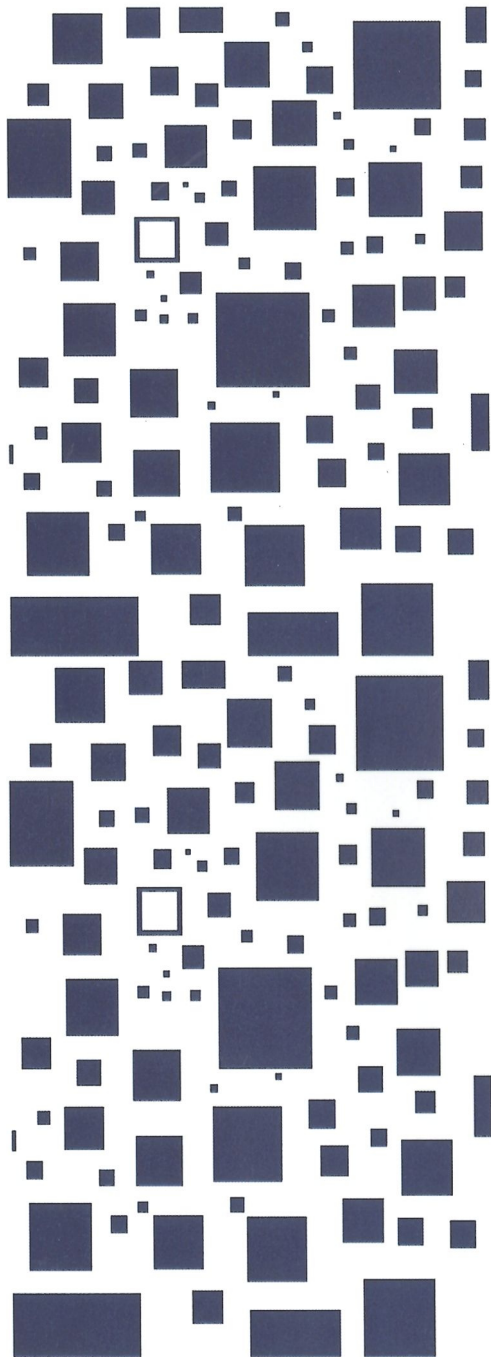
By Niki Lohberger





The Falls

***By Niki
Lohberger***



SQUARE by Jessica Patterson

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I am here.

I am there.

I am every where.

My world is square instead of round.

My life is completely upside down.

My time is gone.

I know not where.

Everyday it's a square.

I hit every corner

looking for escape.

But no such luck has come my way.

But I keep looking.

I will not get down.

I will STAND my ground.

This box will not beat me.

I will break out.

When I do

my heart will feel light.

I know one day

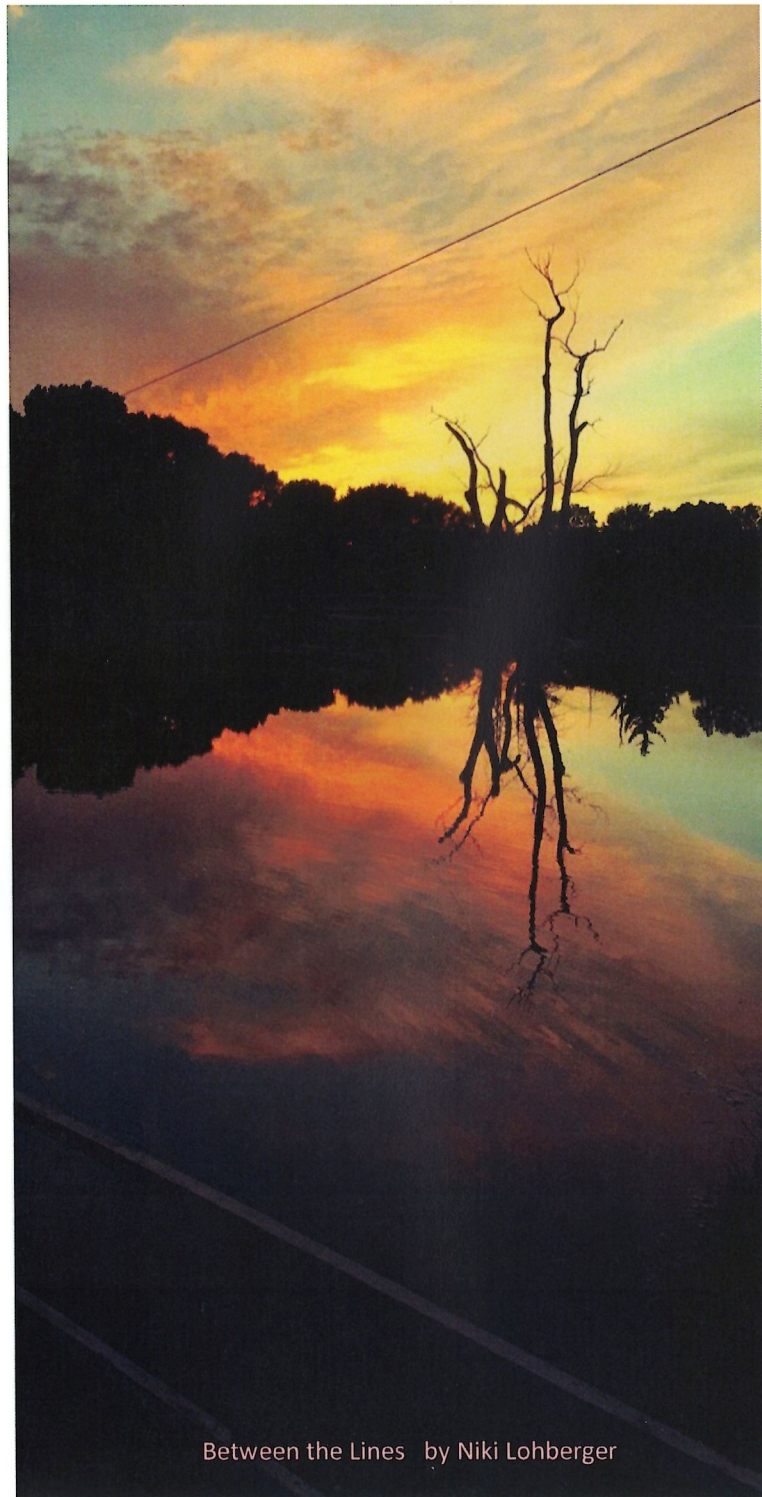
my time will come.

My life is a square

but not for long.



This Is the Life! Photo by Kelsey Doughty



Between the Lines by Niki Lohberger

Love's Hourglass

The hour is late
 My time has come
 I 've fallen prey to a dreadful fate
 Before my time is done

Though my heart is dying
 My love will carry on
 I must keep trying
 'Til I have gone

My final wish to make
 For love's precious sake

I must say I love
 Remember me, my love
 I now pay life's final due
 As I give hope one final shove

The reaper is calling
 I've had my last breath
 The sands have stop falling
 And I fell prey to love's slow hourglass

- By Michael Briggs



Life? Rock It!

By Erica Odom



A Study in Green by Dylan Brewer



True Blue by Dylan Brewer



Coral on Coral by Dylan Brewer



Double the Fun

by Dylan Brewer



THE END of the Road

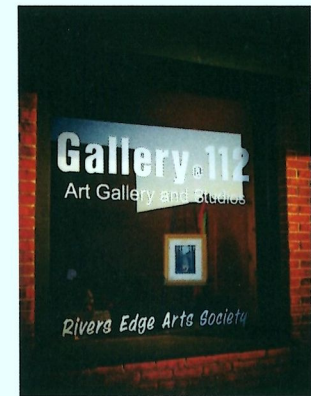
By Amanda Holt

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