

WORDPLAY



English '57 Series

#22: Fall 2015

INTRODUCTION

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE BEAUTY OF GREAT ART IS THAT IT TAKES WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW AND MAKES YOU FEEL IT. THIS IS BUT A TASTE OF THE IMMENSE CREATIVITY AND EMOTION THAT WAS PUT ONTO PAPER IN THE ENGLISH '57 COURSES THIS SEMESTER. EVERY ONE OF THESE STUDENTS WAS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN THEIR WRITING SKILLS AND SHARPEN THEIR IMAGINATION WHILE SITTING DOWN WITH A TUTOR ONCE A WEEK TO DISCUSS THEIR CREATIVE WORK. THIS PUBLICATION STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO THEIR HARD WORK AND INGENUITY, WHILE THEIR WORK STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO GREAT ART.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MANY THANKS TO PAUL KRATWELL FOR ORGANIZING AN EFFECTIVE WRITING LAB THAT HAS HELPED AND CONTINUES TO HELP STUDENTS OF A VARIETY OF BACKGROUNDS. ANOTHER THANK YOU GOES TO THE TUTORS IN THE WRITING LAB WHO JUGGLE HECTIC SCHEDULES YET STILL REMAIN PATIENT AND CREATIVE WHEN WORKING WITH THESE CREATIVE LEARNERS. THANK YOU TO CHERYL SOLINGER FOR ALWAYS TREATING LEARNERS AND TUTORS WITH RESPECT AND PATIENCE. THANK YOU TO THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FOR YOUR ENDLESS SUPPORT. AND, LAST, BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST, THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE STUDENTS WHO TOOK THIS COURSE.

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Shannon Hansen

“Shannon's enthusiasm for creative writing is contagious! Every piece that she brings in is crafted so carefully. She frequently plays around with perspective in her writings, and I think this piece is the epitome of that. While being told from the perspective of a plant, I think it has the potential to give readers a lot of insight into their own "growth" as well.” ~Olivia DeValk

The Tale of a Plant

By: Shannon Hansen

There once lived a small seed no bigger than the size of a babies finger nail. It wanted more than anything in the world to be a beautiful, aromatic flower. But here she was, in a jar, an ugly, dry, and foul smelling seed just waiting for spring to arrive so that she may be planted amongst generations of wonderful flowers. As the months passed from fall, when the leaves were changing and falling, to winter when the snow flew, she would lay in her jar with the other seed pods dreaming of spring. She would dream about the bees meandering from flower to flower tickling their faces while they collected pollen. She daydreamed of the humming birds whizzing by, gleaming bright green in the morning sun, off in a hurry to lap up nectar with their hollow tongues. She would be caught in a trance of lovers walking in the garden hand in hand tenderly brushing the tops of the flora and bending down every once in a while to inhale the perfume of her brothers and sisters.

Then as quickly as she had been dreaming of spring, it had arrived. The moment she had been hoping for, to be planted and bloom into a beautiful flower. But that was one thing she had never thought of, what kind of flower was she? Was she a brilliant yellow daffodil or dramatically purple iris? What if she wasn't even a flower but a dazzling cherry tomato? Or even worse a sickening, revolting weed! Before she could think another thought, she was taken from the jar and plopped into the moist, dark soil. Then all at once the light she had been so accustomed to turned into darkness. Now she was truly alone, scared of what she might become.

After many weeks of waiting and growing, our little seed has finally popped out of the damp soil and emerged into the shining light of day. When she looked up, she sees a radiant ball of golden light coming down and warming her damp leaves. It is as if this light is aiding her in flourishing into what she hopes to be a magnificent plant. As she grows taller she peers around noticing that the garden is split like a maze. One had vegetables and fruit, another with no plants but a gigantic stone structure spitting water into a small pond, and the last she notices is hers. It is filled with a variance of greenery. Bright yellow tips of daffodils flourish to her right- so she is not one of their kinds. To her left a bush of refreshing smelling lilac cultivated over a field of grass- so she is not amongst their ranks. As the wind blows tiny white seeds don't fly off her head so thankfully she is not a retched dandelion weed. What was she for she was still a juvenile green bud?

Then one morning after the dew had all but left, she noticed something had changed about her. There was a sweet fragrance in the air: it was like nothing she had ever experienced before. Was there a new plant in the garden mocking her with its new found freedom from their entrapment? But as she looked down she noticed that it was she that had escaped from her green bud bonds. There were thorns where there were none before. Stately pointed

leaves emerged from the sides of her long stem. Lastly gorgeous crimson petals emerged on her head and it was at that moment that she knew who she was: a Rose.

Brittany Kelly-Dillow

"I'm proud of Brittany's determination to complete this story. I enjoyed being able to help her grow as a writer this semester." ~Kaycee Kaiser

Step-Sisters

By: Brittany Kelly-Dillow

When my mom married Carl, my whole life changed. I was forced to leave my house, my school, and most importantly my friends. I knew I shouldn't have thought this way, but before I really got to know Carl, I hated him. I hated him because he ruined my life and took my mom away from me. He messed everything up. I knew as soon as she started dating Carl that he was going to cause a change in my life and I did not like the idea of that.

Before she started dating Carl, my mom and I were very close. We did everything together. We cooked meals together every night. On the weekends we would go to the movie store and rent movies to watch. My favorite thing to do with my mom had always been just talking about how our day went during dinner. Now we don't do any of that. It's gotten even worse since she told me we were moving into Carl's house with him and his daughter Kendall.

On move in day, mom woke me up at six a.m. She was just so excited that she needed to get started even earlier than planned. We had almost everything packed up except for our bedding and the clothing we were going to wear on move in day. Carl helped us move everything into a moving truck so that we wouldn't have as much to deal with. I'm sure he was only doing it to impress my mom.

At Carl's house, he told me that my room was on the second floor, the third door on the left side of the hallway, right next to his daughter Kendall's room. Great. It felt pretty weird to be carrying my stuff into this house. It was a lot bigger than the house my mom and I shared. I thought I might get lost. When I did get into my new room I felt a little better. This could be my safe place to get away from everyone. I could do whatever I want to this room because it's mine. That made me a little happier and I started moving things in a bit more quickly.

By my third trip into my room I saw Kendall's door open. It wasn't open very wide, just a crack, but I could see her inside of the room. She was staring at me through the crack, watching my every move. I rushed straight into my room and slammed the door. Freak.

When I finally got the courage to, I went back downstairs to get more boxes. I was hoping that Kendall had closed her door, but to my surprise it was open completely. Another surprise was that I couldn't see her in her room. "Whatever." I whispered under my breath. I shouldn't even care, it's not like she's my sister to care for. In fact she's seventeen, two years older than I am. She can take care of herself.

Opening my door, all of the ok vibes I had all day disappeared immediately. Here was Kendall. In my room. Looking through my things sitting on my dresser.

"What are you doing?" I yelled.

“Just looking to see what type of person you are. I see you like the cello?” She says innocently, holding up one of the five cello CDs I had on my bookshelf.

“Get out! This is my room freak!” I felt a little rude saying that, but who looks through someone else’s stuff? That’s just too rude!

Kendall leaves right after I tell her. I don’t know why I yelled at her like that. I guess I’m just really stressed out, but I won’t apologize. Maybe now she will know not to look through other people’s things. I keep grabbing boxes from downstairs and putting everything into it’s place until finally Carl comes up to tell Kendall and I that dinner was ready.

I go downstairs about ten minutes after Carl tells us that dinner is ready. I just didn’t feel like facing anyone right now. I still don’t want to, but I know that everyone will be mad if I ditch out on supper now. Downstairs everyone has already started eating. I have to sit to the right of Kendall and across from Carl. Lucky me. As soon as I sit down Carl starts talking to me.

“How was your day? Did you have any time to relax at all? Do you still have things to unpack?” I answer him back as politely as I can. I may not like him, but I would never be rude to him.

The rest of dinner basically goes as followed. Carl asks questions about my life and things I enjoy. I try to answer him while giving him the hint I don’t want to talk. Kendall gives me death glares and mom doesn’t say anything to anyone except Carl. I couldn’t wait for dinner to be done.

Dinner finally comes to an end and I run straight to my room. I just want this day to be over. I don’t even care that I have school tomorrow which is going to suck. I still can’t believe I have to start school on a Thursday. It’s bad enough that I have to start school halfway through the third quarter! I’m going to bed. It’s only seven, however it feels like it’s midnight. I’m so tired and ready to get things over and done with. Here’s to hoping tomorrow will be a better day.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. Ugh. Six a.m. comes too early. I wish I could just stay home and start school on Monday. I get up and turn off my alarm. Well I might as well think positively. I get everything ready. My school clothes are nice, I make sure to wear a little bit of makeup, but not too much so I come off as an attention seeker, and I go brush my teeth. After the main task of getting ready is over, I go down to eat breakfast.

At breakfast I see Kendall for the first time since dinner. She looks completely ready for school and is about to head out of the door to wait for the bus. I guess I don’t have time for a good breakfast like I wanted so I just grab a pop tart to eat on the bus. The bus ride is good. No one sits by me which is nice because it lets me listen to music for the whole bus ride. School goes smoothly as well. I make a lot of new friends and I like most of my classes. Lunch was my favorite part of the day, especially because I got to eat a lunch my mom made for me. When I saw the paper bag with my name on it on the kitchen counter this morning, I felt like she’s finally remembering I’m here too.

Getting off of the bus, I go right into my room. I don’t feel like socializing with Kendall right now and mom doesn’t get home for another hour. In fact, I think I might take a nap. This has been a very good day considering all of the new challenges I’ve had to face. I deserve to rest and relax for an hour or two.

I wake up to the sound of Kendall at my door. She knocks, opens the door just a smidge, and through the crack tells me that dinner is ready.

“Ok, thanks.” I reply. Dinner is basically the same as it was yesterday. More awkward questioning from Carl and mom being in her own little world. The only difference from yesterday is Kendall. She doesn’t look as hateful as yesterday, but I have a feeling that she’s going to do something weird.

I was right. Only a few minutes after I thought that, Kendall asks me some questions.

“So Cassandra.” Ugh I hate when people call me by my full name.

“It’s Cassie actually. I prefer to be called Cassie.” I say, trying to come off nonchalant.

“Ok. So Cassandra how was your first day of school?” What? Didn’t I just tell her I don’t like being called Cassandra? And is it just me or did she sound like she was being sarcastic? Is she trying to make fun of me for having to start school in the middle of the year? Does she think it’s funny I had to leave my life behind to come live here?

“It was just great, thanks for asking.” I can’t even hide the eye roll I give her. I probably didn’t need to sound so sarcastic either, but what a jerk!

“Cassie, Kendall was only asking about your day. Apologize now!” Mom is mad.

“No thanks. I don’t think I will.” With that, I march up the stairs and slam my door. From the dining room I can hear mom yell that I am grounded. She sounds so angry, but I’m not the one she should be angry at! This is all Kendall’s fault.

It’s been five hours since dinner and I still can’t sleep. I’m starting to feel guilty. Was I the one in the wrong? Kendall looked so hurt after what I said. She just makes me so angry! The final thoughts in my head before I fall asleep are about facing my mom tomorrow and apologizing to Kendall.

I woke up early this morning. I don’t know how considering I fell asleep so late last night. It’s over an hour before I usually wake up and I know that if I go back to sleep I’ll just wake up more tired than I already am. I decide to go downstairs and eat breakfast right away. That will save me from having to face the family until later tonight. I walk out of my room and down to the kitchen as quietly as I can. I almost walk through the kitchen doorway until I see a person standing with their back to me.

At first I think it’s a possibly robber or killer, but then I see that it’s Kendall. Why would she be down here so early? That’s when I see the brown paper bags. I see her putting a sandwich in a bag with her name on it, then one in a bag with my name on it. Immediately my first thought is about how upset I am that my mom didn’t think to do this for me. Then I realize how much more guilty I feel because Kendall is nice enough to think of me. Even after I was so mean to her, she still is doing this for me and not even telling me.

“Kendall.” I don’t know exactly what I want to say. I should’ve probably waited until later and maybe not have even let her know that I know she is doing this, but all of the emotions inside me aren’t letting me think correctly and I just have the overwhelming need to say something.

“Why are you doing this?” That could have been worded better. “Thank you for doing this.” I say before she can answer me. “But why are you doing this? You don’t owe me anything, especially after how I behaved last night. Don’t you hate me?”

Kendall looks astonished. "Of course I don't hate you. I know you hate me though. I'm sorry that so much has changed for you so quickly and I never meant to come across so weird, but I didn't really know how to act in front of you. You need to remember that this is all new for me too."

"I'm so sorry." I say wholeheartedly. I truly am. "I never meant to be so mean to you. I was just so upset and I guess I just directed it all towards you. I'm sorry." For the first time I see Kendall smile. "It's alright. I forgive you. I think we both just need some time to adjust to this new situation."

"Yeah. Definitely." With that, I grab a popart and have breakfast with my new sister.

From then on, Kendall and I start to get along more and more. We still have our fights every few days and she's still pretty weird, but it's not as terrible as before. My school life is going great, I've made a lot of new friends. Now the only thing left to fix is my mom and Carl's obsession with each other. I'm sure with time I'll figure that out too.

Allison Linssen

“Allison was great to work with this semester. She is always enthusiastic and passionate. It amazes me how she transforms her inspirations into such complex poems. Her ideas develop into beautiful works of art and are true expressions of herself.” ~Michelle Wilde

Curse of the Seasons

By: Allison Linssen

Spring begins with new life

And a second chance in the form of dreary rain

That makes the sky churn angry colors

Familiar to the dark gray skies of winter

And the rain brings a promise of what is to come

With bright colors enhanced by warm sunshine

And soft breezes that thaw my soul

From the icy winter air

And perhaps as it starts to feel warmer outside

I'll start to feel a little bit warmer inside too.

Summer begins with blazing heat

And bright blue skies clear of any clouds

That reflect over sandy beaches and strong waves

As children laugh and play in the tide

And try to escape the water as it splashes against their toes

Similar to how I try to escape the darkness locked in my heart

But as the hot sun changes the complexion of my skin

From cold and light to warm and dark

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And with this beautiful weather
I hope that the sun changes my thoughts as well.

Fall begins as the air starts to get crisper
And leaves that were once green
Start to change with specks of warmer colors
Almost as warm as I feel as the summer weather leaves once again
And things all become increasingly brighter
Like a reflection of how I feel on the inside
Filled with a happiness I know will soon be gone

Winter begins as trees lose their leaves and the air gets frigid
And the first layer of blinding white snow covers the ground
Reminding me that nature's elements
Will always be stronger than I ever will
Making this season more terrifying than beautiful
Because I know that along with cold weather comes less sunlight
And darker days that bring back sad memories
As the snow numbs my toes it also numbs my heart
And the irony in that is this should be
The most wonderful time of the year.

Ryan Loos

“Ryan is a very creative writer, who put a tremendous amount of work and thought into each piece of writing. His writing from the start of the semester was exceptional, and he has only grown from there. Working with him this semester has been a good experience; he proved to be a dedicated 157 learner and even helped me learn more about the process of creative writing.” ~Kevin Mohawk

Imperfect Creations

By: Ryan Loos

Why do we write? Why are we, as biological beings and technical tinkerers, compelled to write—to scribe various shapes in liquid pigment on coarse sheets otherwise lacking such? Why do we scribble series of words past the point of simple recording and permanent memorization? Why is writing an art?

At some point our ancestors discovered that language was perhaps the most diverse tool in existence, and this holds true today. It can be as steadfast as stone bricks and as wavering as rushing water. It can be as apathetic as drying paint and as touching as running tears. It can transcend what we recognize as reality, and all of this is by our discretion, for we are the keepers of this tool's, let's call it, battery pack.

Writing is little more than a conduit to the ideas of the mind. It is an attempt at communicating beyond conversational speech (except in cases where that's preferred, of course), to share the immense thoughts of the conscious and the subconscious alike. But the human psyche is so much more than letters and punctuation. It is a galaxy—no, a universe! A universe where each grain of sand or fragment of rock is a thought that may contribute to something more. There are scorched planets and frozen comets; blazing stars and consuming black holes; phantasmagoric nebulae and vast reaches of confused particles among emptiness. Some structures are easily identifiable, others remain only enigmas. Some even support life, but all are part of what we know as the mind.

This is why writing in reality, like all art, is imperfect. It is a Frankenstein creation of what reality allows us to envision and create. Its goal is to translate the energy of the spirit into something applicable to others; allegorical allusions, metonymous metaphors, symbolic syntax, and connotative consonance. All are a few pieces of abstract machinery used to convey the user's thoughts. No single mechanism may achieve the goal of art nor may any combination. This is because the level at which our emotions and thoughts are pure and completely accurate is below the level at which we process them. Trying to communicate these mental processes is like trying to mine a gold nugget with only a butter knife: We can take out the chunk that holds it, and we can even refine it with repeated combing and examination. But in the end, there will always be some impurity because we simply are not equipped with fine enough tools to accomplish our task.

Indeed, writing will never truly accomplish this golden aim. It may only approach the asymptote of completion and minimize loss by dystrophy just as a length of conductive wire is created to limit the energy loss from point A to point B. Similarly, as we praise the electricians who can translate electricity with as little waste as possible, so too do we give respect to authors who can conduct ideas from themselves to others with as much accuracy as capable.

But if this perfect presentation of our visions is impossible (and is known to be impossible) then why do we still write? Why do some authors push themselves to the crystal cliff of their own sanity to pursue this art? Simply, it is about understanding. Just as the Tower of Babel separating mankind into different groups served as a barrier to understanding, so does the very fact that we are separate organisms prevent us from complete sympathy. The closer we come to a form of perfect expression where ideas and emotions alike can be felt as if native to the receiver, the closer we members of mankind come to absolute understanding of each other and ourselves. Those who may have caught a glimpse of this end—of something greater than themselves—do not understand it but feel it. They become vaguely aware of this Transcendentalist truth— of an enlightenment, of a higher knowledge that makes all else seem inadequate, of an end to hatred because what is hatred but misunderstanding.

I have no doubt that if communication ever evolves to a level where the unconscious itself may be shared among strangers, war, violence, and even bitterness itself will cease to exist at all. Until such a day of clarity, however, writing will continue to evolve, to improve, to strive toward the mirage of perfection.

Claire McMannes

“Claire really grew as a writer over the course of the semester. I enjoyed observing as she found her voice. She learned to take the emotions swelling inside her and let them seep onto the pages that she wrote.” ~Michael Howard

Blank Walls

By: Claire McMannes

I remember looking at the blank walls and wondering how I ever thought something would stick – I don't even know if I was even talking about the walls. I remember the day when I finally got them just right, posters perfectly aligned and just enough to cover the walls, but not too much to the point that it was over crowded. We had finally gotten the second book shelf in my room after much debate on whether or not I really needed it. When my mom and I finally did get it into my room I covered it in all of the few things I kept throughout all of our twenty-eight moves. I remember thinking to myself, 'I finally can take it out of the box, it will never have to stay or go back into the box.'

I also remember the feeling of actually having a room, one that was no longer fleeting but when I came back it would still be there. I may come back and it will have a light coat of dust, but that only means that my things will have been there long enough to even accumulate the dust. Besides, it would be my dust. It would be there no matter what because I finally had a home.

But now, I see that box right where I thought it would never have to go again. I remember angrily throwing stuff into the box a few weeks ago. How I yelled, a lot, as I did so. Rubbing my face and running my hands through my hair, tears falling like salty rain, I remember throwing things at the walls and tearing my favorite poster making me breakdown even more. I remember punching the pillows to the point where my old ones were starting to tare and leak feathers that fluttered around the room. I don't know if the yelling was really even outward when I did it. No one was home – I mean at the 'place' anyway so it didn't matter. To be honest, I don't think I would have even cared anyway. I ended up having to repack my books again because the way I slammed them into the box was starting to tear them from the pressure of the ones above them. It wasn't their fault after all, so why hurt them?

I remember when my mom first told me that we would be moving again. It wasn't like the other times though, this was different. This was supposed to be it. She met this guy a few years ago and they decided to move in together since she was moving up to Madison for a job anyway while I stayed in Platteville to finish my senior year with my best friends family who took me in. I usually try not to get too attached to my mom's new 'guy' knowing that it will only end in slamming doors, a few choice words, and my mom sneaking into my room to have a 'talk' with me on why it didn't work out and how 'not all men are like that.' My mom's boyfriend breakups were just like our moves, invertible and going to happen no matter what. But this guy, he was different. I came up every weekend to visit my mom during the school year, the drive was a bitch but I knew it meant a lot to her so I did it anyway. I remember first meeting him and thinking, 'wow, this dude is a dork', but turns out we had a lot more in common than I thought. After a while, he became a sort of dad to me. Yeah, I have a dad but he was never actually there for me when I needed him. My dad was the type who would fill up your tank, give you a few bucks, and think that that was parenting enough. But my

mom's boyfriend, he actually talked to me and gave me the time of day that didn't consist of criticizing me, he even gave me my first car without a second thought and asked for nothing simply saying that I was a 'good kid.' He would also do the little things, like get my favorite cereal whenever I went up there. He was incredibly amazing for my mom and the two seemed to genuinely love each other, he finally got her to cool down a bit. He was like my dad.

But then summer came and with it the storms that I never noticed. The fighting, the yelling, the passive aggressiveness – it exploded until you could practically see the red line dividing the house with 'my side, your side.' But while that red line existed I stayed in my room where that red line seemed to not really know where it was supposed to go. I would have my headphones cranked up so high I thought my eardrums were going to bleed or my head was going to explode, if it didn't from the sound it was bound to anyway. But despite this I could still hear their fighting. At age nineteen I felt like I was a little kid listening to their parents fighting while hiding under the blankets telling myself the lies of how everything is going to be alright. Some nights my mom would come in and talk to me after she had been out with some friends she met online, almost all the time it was in the a.m. She would ask me how work was and I would tell her and vice versa. Sometimes she was crying and others she was smiling happily. This happened more and more frequently after he said he no longer loved her and that we would have to move out – but only after I got settled into college. That's when she started coming home more happy. It didn't take me long to realize that she had found a new guy. That's when I started locking the door at night. I remember hearing the light knocks and then the sound of retreating feet shuffling away accepting I wasn't going to open the door. I guess it was my turn to start crying now, I was never one to do so, but sometimes you just need to let all the hurt out. After a few more nights I became numb to it all and I would just stare blankly up at the ceiling. I never really thought of anything, I just stared at it as if maybe the answer to why everything went to hell would just show up on it, it never did. After a while I started to get an itch to do something other than just sit there where all the tension brewed around me and hung in the air like dirty laundry. One night I just grabbed my keys, put on a pair of shoes, and walked out the door. When I first started my car that night I had no idea where I was going. But, since no one was up that late I was free to just drive around all over Madison, but that got a bit expensive after a while. So, in exchange for driving, I started to park in one of the lots about twenty miles away whenever I couldn't sleep. I would grab some gas station coffee, since that's the only place that was open that late, and just stare out at the stars and wonder what it would be like if things were different. Maybe I would come home from college, my mom would open the door and her boyfriend would be there, and we would all just sit and talk, almost like a normal family. Cheesy, right? I knew that, but at the time I didn't really care. All I wanted was some quiet that wasn't tense. I always thought you could find your answers if you looked hard enough. But even when I was staring out at the lit of sky, I still couldn't find a reason my once seemingly perfect family was falling apart.

I was always the jealous person. Not in the way you would think though. It was never materialistic jealousy but more so 'wow, I wish I had that' whenever I saw how my best friends parents interact because none of them were divorced. Or I would be sitting in their house and see all the little kid drawings, placed out childhood memories, and massive amounts of photo albums on, almost, every surface. They were there to stay, they were not going anywhere. It was a home with a whole family. Sure, it probably has its problems, everyone does, but it was a home. Even when I stayed overnight at a friends and their parents would apologize for the mess I would only say I truly didn't mind. I took a weird kind of comfort in the fact that they were there long enough for it to be that much of a mess, to have the space for it. So right when I started to feel like I had a home, I lost it. I felt like I finally deserved something, that something good happened and there was no reason other than it did and I was okay with that. But now that something bad happened and there is a reason for it I'm – I don't really know; furious, depressed, confused? All of them?

You know that saying? You never know what you had until you lose it? I never felt that way because my parents were always divorced to me. I never knew what it was like to see that fall apart because I was only three when it happened. Yes, it was ugly all the time and I knew there was NO love lost there – but this, I witnessed it all. The one thing I thought I had I no longer did. I knew the shattering pain of a divorce that wasn't even a divorce. This felt only worse because I knew I would not see him again. I knew that they would not remain friends and, therefore, neither would we.

The next day we are loading up our cars with stuff when he shows up in an expensive black SUV. There steps out this guy who actually thinks it's okay to peck a kiss on my mom. Who the hell is this guy? What the hell is he doing here? I remember resisting the urge to punch him in the face. Out of all the times I could first meet this guy, who I already decided I didn't like (just because I wanted to be an ass), he and my mom choose now.

When we were all done packing up my mom hopped in my car with me much to my distaste. I even shoved a bunch of boxes in the front seat so she couldn't. But she simply just put them on her lap when she got in. Now, I know it's not her fault in the slightest that it all fell apart but – bringing him here? No. It was not okay.

When we started down the street to go to the new place I cranked up the radio before she could say anything. I didn't want to hear shit. I didn't care if I was rude this time, I was leaving for college anyway so what did it matter.

She looked over at me, doing that thing she does when she tries to read me. She doesn't even try to hide it.

She turns down the radio where all I can hear are a few words muffled by the ringing in my own ears.

"You okay?" she asks squeezing my shoulder.

I glance at her knowing my eyes are perfectly shaded by the sunglasses on my face. So, she was getting nothing from me other than, "Yup," I say crisply keeping my eyes on the road.

"No you're not," she says sympathetically.

I feel a bit of anger flare in me.

"No," I admit, "I'm not."

"Why?" she asks as if she already knew the answer.

"Because I have moved too many fucking times and you bring HIM there and frankly I'm pissed and I am trying to ignore that fact and drive so I would like to drop it right now."

I don't even look over to see my mom's expression, mostly because I don't care. I always had to be the adult and simply pack up the boxes and go – but now I am an adult and a fed up one at that.

"I'm sorry."

I look over at that and see she is starting to tear up and only one thought enters my head –

Fuck.

I was never one for crying so whenever I see anyone else doing it I have no idea what to say. If it's me who made the person cry I immediately feel like crap and try to fix it and this, despite how pissed I am, is no different.

Wordplay Fall 2015

I feel a strong tug in my heart and my grip tightens on the wheel as if encouraging my sympathies to do the same.

I have a right to be pissed therefore I want to be the angry asshole of the car. But my mom made it difficult with that sniffled 'sorry.'

"It's not okay," I say surprised that I was able to keep a leveled tone.

"I never meant for this to happen."

"I know, but bringing HIM there was past the limit and you know it."

"We needed help," she says sounding slightly defensive.

"My car is big enough, you know that."

There is a small pause where she doesn't seem to be able to find the words.

"I'm sorry."

"I know," I say taking a deep breath, "but this is it. No more moving. I'm done."

She looks at me for a moment with a shocked expression but she quickly calms it.

"Okay."

"Okay," I repeat with a nod.

Highway

By: Claire McMannes

"It could be worse."

"Shut up," my mom mutters, her grip tightening on the overly faded steering wheel of the old pickup truck we borrowed from my uncle.

"We are at least still moving," I say gesturing to the open road that was slowly meeting up to the overly dented front of the truck with each struggled movement of the truck.

"Oh yeah, that makes it SO MUCH BETTER!"

I watch as she slams her fist on the arm rest making the small amount of change in it rattle with the sudden explosion of movement.

We are quiet for a while, driving down the highway with our windows down, the air conditioning doesn't work - much like the rest of it. We drove down to- okay, how about I give a little bit of a backstory to this so you know a little of what is going on here? Cool? Cool.

So, we first start our magical journey (insert sarcastic tone) when we drive to my uncles house to borrow his truck to drive up to Madison to get a table and chairs. He was not there and it turns out there were two trucks. We tried to call him but to no avail, a decision had to be made and it had to be made soon since the guys on Crag's List want to get rid of them today at four. So, we take the truck that looks at least half way decent.

As our journey commences we start to notice some trouble. The air conditioning suddenly turns off forcing us to roll down our windows and let the hot July weather in just so we could have a bit of air that did not taste like stale Doritos and old Mountain Dew cans. The truck rattled every now and again and Mom REALLY had to press on that peddle to make it go. Throughout the whole drive I was crossing my fingers and praying to whoever the hell was up there that we would make it in time. You see, my Mom is a wonderful lady- to anything, inanimate or living, if it pisses her off she GOES off. You know when Hulk was in a small confined space in the old movies and he would just break everything in sight? That was my dear Mom.

So when the truck finally tugged up the long hill to the guys' house I sighed with relief, the sweat wasn't JUST from the heat after all. We got it all done in a matter of minutes and after we shook hands the guy went back inside to his air conditioned palace (Okay, so it was a small condo but anything that was remotely cool at that time deserved castle rating, especially when you've been stuck in an old sticky car).

When my Mom put the keys into the ignition and turned it this horrible nail screeching sound echoed all around us and seemed to shatter our eardrums. I placed my hands firmly around my ears in an attempt to shield them from the horror-too bad I couldn't cover my eyes because my mom looked livid.

"Fucking REALLY?!?!" she shouted at it before going red and realizing we were in a residential area.

My mom rubbed her temples and closed her eyes taking a deep breath as she did it.

“Okay,” she says talking more to herself than me I’m sure, “okay, I will start this pile of crap, we will go home, and we will be okay.”

She tries it again only to get the same results three more times before it clanks into a loud and protesting start.

“Thank god,” she sighs shifting the car into gear and starting down the hill.

“Yeah, almost lost your cool there,” I said giving her a smirk.

She gives me a fake glare before smiling.

“Shut up.”

So now here we are, driving down the highway, one hour later and we are going thirty miles an hour – yup, you heard me, thirty miles an hour on a highway.

Turns out we took the wrong truck, the one that my uncle and grandpa were going to take to the shop for reconstruction later on that day. How did we figure out you may wonder? Well, a heartfelt and concerned text from my aunt: ‘You took the wrong one, dumbass! LOL J’ You would think the smile face at the end of that text would make my Mom just a LITTLE less mad – but you would be dead wrong. So, as we clunked along in our little borrowed piece-o’-shit Mom commenced to yelling at her phone and cursing the car for an impressive twenty minutes before going silent again.

I can feel the tension in the air, this is usually the point where my Mom either apologizes for yelling or I make some stupid joke. I knew it would be awhile for Mom to cool down again but I had NOTHING to say. We were hot, sticky, sweaty, and tired. I needed something to lighten the mood.

Now, whether it was luck or God decided to make this more comical, I don’t know, something speedily started to pass us.

By this time we are barely going twenty but this is something neither of us expected to see.

“Mom...” I say feeling slightly uneasy.

“What,” she groans rubbing her right temple with her free hand.

“The Amish, they’re passing us.”

She goes quiet for a whole five seconds before slowly turning to see a small buggy carrying a teenage girl and her Mom right along next to us. As the horses trotted along the mother a daughter waved at us as if saying ‘Haha! Whose more advanced now?!’ Only they didn’t, it was probably either their religion prohibits them from making fun of us or they just felt really bad – I will take the ladder on that one.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” she says rubbing her face in utter frustration.

“In retrospect they DO have more horse power than us,” I reply before I can even think about whether it was actually smart to make a joke when she is THIS stressed out.

She stares at me for a long moment, or at least long enough for me to get nervous despite the fact we are slowly decline in speed.

Wordplay Fall 2015

“Too soon?” I ask, my face going as red as the truck (if you didn’t already know the truck is red, but you can imagine it as a rolling turd because that’s basically how it’s running).

Suddenly my Mom bursts out laughing, her whole body shaking along with the coins in the arm rest once again, only this time it’s not out of rage.

“That -, “she wipes tears from laughter away from her face, “was awesome.”

Now, I know what I said wasn’t all THAT funny but whether it was heat exhaustion or just plain old exhaustion she laughed as if she were at a Kevin Heart comedy show.

“God,” she says finally settling down and leaning more relaxed against the stained seat with one hand on the wheel, “this fucking sucks.”

“I know,” I say doing the same, only without the wheel, “but at least we’re still mo-“

“Don’t say it!” Says Mom shooting up from her seat and putting a finger up to stop my speech, “we don’t have any wood in here!”

“So what? NOW you’re superstitious?”

“No,” she says in a slightly defensive tone, “just careful.”

“Not superstitious at all?”

“No, of course not.”

“O-Kay,” I say rolling my eyes.

For the next half hour we talk about random things – our favorite colors, foods, seemingly unimportant things until my Mom finally asks –

“Why all the random questions? Am I being interviewed for a magazine?”

“Unless it’s called Crap Hole and all You Need to Know, I don’t think so.”

“So then why all the questions?”

“I’m just curious,” I say with a shrug.

She rolls her eyes at me but humors me for the next half hour (yes this is taking a long time but we are driving under twenty miles an hour on a highway from Madison to Platteville so it takes a while!)

As the engine starts to rapidly give out more and more as we go I know we are NOT going to make it to our destination-it was time to call in reinforcements. So my Mom calls her sister Laurie who will meet us in the Dodgeville Walmart parking lot – if we even make it there.

But in an interesting plot twist that only happens once-in-a-pretty-much-never we finally came upon the ‘Welcome to Dodgeville!’ sign in its wonderfully horrendous dull, and peeling, orange writing.

“Yes! We made it!!!” exclaims my Mom fist bumping the air in victory, you would think she won the Olympic gold medal.

“Mom-“

Now it is MY turn to be superstitious.

“-we aren’t quite there yet!”

“Shit!” she says sounding slightly horrified.

“Do you think it will change anything?”

Now, at this point, we probably seem crazy. Hell, maybe we were, our windows being down and the lack of speed didn’t exactly make us any cooler. But with our luck we would break down a foot before making it to where we really needed to go.

“I hope not,” I answer, “because that hill is NOT inviting.”

I point out the long, grey paved hill that lead up to our salvation, also known as Walmart (that is the ONLY time I will EVER say that about a Walmart - unless there is a zombie apocalypse and all there is left is Twinkies then it will be my go-to).

“Shit,” says my Mom.

I honestly can’t think of a better word to describe our situation so I just nod.

“Well, here goes nothing. If the car starts to roll backwards just jump out – it’s a piece of crap anyway.”

Now, you may be laughing right now, or not, but she is being TOTALLY serious right now.

I repeat my action of nodding in agreement once again as we make our way to the base of the hill. Usually it looked pretty small, but now it felt as if we were climbing fucking Mount Everest.

The first few feet is not totally horrible, until we are half way there and the truck starts to give out.

“Lean forward!” my Mom yells shoving her body back and forth to get to move more.

I do the same thing, then a thought occurs to me.

“At least put on some rock music so we don’t look completely crazy!”

My Mom stops to glare at me for a second before commencing again.

Hey, I never said it was a good thought.

For a while it seems hopeless, but God – or whoever the hell is up there – must have been on our side because we made it up the hill, victorious.

As we trot along in the car we drive by a semi unloading some beer.

Mom looks at it longingly.

“God, I could use a drink right now.”

“Well, there’s some right here!” I joke gesturing to the semi.

My Mom crinkles her nose.

“Nah, it’s Busch Light, I’m too classy for that.”

I give her a deadpan stare.

“We just drove down the highway under twenty miles for SEVERAL hours, we are covered in sweat, we NOW smell like old Dorito’s and Mountain Dew, the fucking AMISH passed us on the way up here, and we just ‘hard-rocked’ it up the hill to Walmart and you say you’re TOO classy for Busch Light?”

My Mom and I stare at each other before bursting out laughing.

We laugh even harder when we pull into a store and right as we do the car gives out with a loud bang that makes everyone in the parking lot stare. But we don’t care – we just keep laughing because we were tired and so dang relieved that we even MADE it. Besides, it’s Walmart people, half of them are wearing pajamas and it’s the afternoon!

Turns out we somehow beat my aunt so we went inside to get some drinks and something to eat. My Mom a beer, NOT Busch light because no matter the situation my mom is ALWAYS classy, and I a coffee because it’s been a long day and it’s never too hot for coffee.

As we wait for my aunt we hang out by the truck eating Oreo’s and talk about random stuff until my aunt finally showed up and we could FINALLY go home. My Mom never knew just how much it meant to me when we just talked about random things. Whether it was our favorite color or least, I just wanted to talk to her. So, yeah, it was a long ride – but I loved it.

Kelsey Nelson

"Kelsey is a very talented writer, and, as I told her several times throughout the semester, I am so impressed by her ability to write action scenes! Because we both love science fiction and fantasy, our sessions were mostly interesting discussions about the many plot ideas she has. It was great working with her, and I think I am just as proud of what she created this semester as she is." ~Jordan Straight

Identity

By: Kelsey Nelson

Black smoke rolled off the hills, bringing with it the smell of rotting flesh and death. Blue-grey eyes gazed upon the sight, fear tickling at the edge of each pupil. Faint sounds seemed to pelt into his ears in slow motion, everything so quiet he swears he heard a pin drop. As the cloud of black smoke grew ever closer, the sounds around him became clear; a woman's scream, a child's cry, thousands of panicked feet rushing fruitlessly to escape.

A hard shoulder smashed into his own, bringing everything around him to life; the ever darkening sky, the terrifying shift in the air...

And just like that, it was gone..

Widened eyes and bared teeth rushed toward the sky, a yowl of fear breaking the silence of the early morning. With tail between its legs, the wolf looking creature stood.

Kensley was a special living thing. Once man, he now has the ability to "shift" into different creatures. Creatures of the old world; not the new, broken one. The only problem is his fading mind. With every new creature comes a new slice of instinct, a new voice in his head telling him how to do simple things; such as finding a place to sleep. However, he is only burdened by these multiple personalities when he is in his human "form".

Now, in his wolf form, Kensley's mind was quite silent, a welcome change. He knew he had to keep moving before the scientists came with their guards, who in turn came with their guns.

Forcing his fur to lie flat, he set out into the forest, stomach growling to no end.

'You don't think I know when I'm hungry!?' Kensley growled to his chest, though anyone listening would hear senseless snarling and barking.

His stomach responded solemnly, continuing to grumble, but without such ferocity.

Overhead a bird gave a warning call, having spotted the dark furred wolf. "Grrr," uttered the 24 year old male, no longer regarding himself as a man. 'Well there goes any chance of breakfast,' he continued to grumble, shaking out his fur.

Kensley tried to think of the last time he ate, but couldn't remember. 'It must not have been in this form...' He shuttered, the thought of him being anything other than a wolf not conceivable. While he was in a specific animal form, he couldn't imagine being anything but that animal. However, when the strange man was in his human form, he felt uncomfortable in his own skin, and was fully aware that he could be anything else in the animal kingdom. He felt that he should be anything other than a human. Something in the distance rumbled, Kensley's ears perking up as he looked behind him with narrowed eyes.

The smoke was already visible, not good. 'No, not yet! Wait!' He thought in panic as his thick, red furred body overtook itself and changed from a wolf to an eagle.

'Smoke, I can't do smoke, gotta get outta here,' his thoughts ran as quickly as he flew, taking off from the forest floor and breaking free of the canopy of leaves on the tree overhead. The leaves weren't like the old world, they were slimy and sticky, some clinging to Kensley's amber feathers as he continued to fly into the open air, away from the smoke.

This smoke wasn't quite like the smoke from his memory, or dream, he could never tell. This smoke was produced by the scientists on purpose. It was meant to knock out creatures of the new world, and mutations like Kensley. The scientists were capturing whatever they could to take back to their laboratories in the sanctuary the immune people had built.

No one knows exactly what happened that day, the day that smoke rolled across the Earth and killed more than 75% of the human, animal, and organism population. Of the 25% that survived, more than half were mutated by the radioactive smoke, but a small fraction were immune to the smoke's effects. They remained "normal", and those "normal" people went off and built a shelter for themselves. Hiding away from the new mutated and gross new world, they tried to live as they had in the old world.

All the mutations knew about these sanctuaries, built around the mid upper part of the country that used to be America. Kensley didn't know if there were any further south, he hadn't bumped into anyone from the south on his travels. Then again, he knew better than to poke around in another's business, so he mostly kept to himself and fled whenever necessary. With Kensley, every situation involving another being of any sort was a necessary time to flee, so the young man did not converse much with anything or anyone. He kept so much to himself, it took him a year to figure out there were other actual "humans" that had special abilities like himself.

As expected, along with humans mutating, any other living organism was susceptible to change. Animals deformed to the point of being barely recognizable, and plants changed drastically. Most of these mutated plants and animals are now foreign and have changed in levels of competency, intelligence, and dangerousness.

While Kensley soared higher into the air the smoke followed, the slime from the leaves on the trees slowed him down, and soon he was surrounded by the ever thickening, dark cloud of air. Inhaling the smoke was like breathing in water. Not only were the toxins in the manipulated air working against his body to induce sleep, but the labor of drawing in enough air to function made Kensley light headed. His vision began to blur, and soon it was impossible to continue flapping his massive wings, sending him spiraling uncontrollably to the forest floor.

Free falling was normally something Kensley did as a bird for enjoyment, when he felt overwhelmed and needed to calm down. This plummet to the Earth's crust was immensely different. Even if Kensley wanted to catch himself, it would be impossible in his state of wellbeing. The only thing the large bird could do was witness as the ground loomed ever closer. In seconds he could no longer see the grey sky, white clouds and shimmering sunlight out of the

corner of his eyes. There was only the green of tree tops encompassing his vision, blurring around him in a spiraling affect.

With the green of the leaves came the brown of the branches, swirling together to create a sort of dully colored, nature based painting. As the branches became closer, so did the inevitable pain of falling. If it were possible, Kensley would swear that he hit every single branch on his way through the overlapping tree tops. Once through them, he felt himself falling once more in open air, but just like his dream, suddenly everything stopped.

A whoosh in the air followed by a thump against Kensley's body forced his limited senses to focus on what was wrapping around him. Falling became faster as he was pulled at an angle to the ground by more than just gravity, fear beginning to settle in the deepest part of Kensley's subconscious. The net surrounding him was gripped tight at one end, squishing Kensley against the thin, rough fabric it was made out of. Faint breathing came from the dark clothed human in possession of the net. It was muffled further by what appeared to Kensley to be a gas mask. Someone nearby was loudly barking out orders, light clothed people shuffling between the dark clothed people. The light coated people seemed to be writing something on a pad of some sort, examining other nets holding other creatures, and pointing in multiple different directions.

The air around Kensley began to thin out once more, the smoke not intended to be long lasting, but the effects intended to disable the monsters/creatures and mutants of the new world. Breathing continued to become easier for Kensley as he was carried across the ground toward a shiny box, which he made out to be a cage. With his ability to breath normal air returning, his vision began to clear, and he was able to better make out what was going on around him.

Before Kensley got the chance to fully take account of his surroundings and situation, the man carrying him thrust him into the cage, net and all. Kensley bounced off the thick, oddly spaced bars at the back of the cage and landed roughly in a lump on the flat bottom. The wind was knocked from his lungs, sending Kensley into a panicked fit of thrashing wildly around in an attempt of freeing himself from the tight net. Flailing his wings spastically, his right wing found the opening of the net and he worked his way out of it to freedom. Once Kensley stood straight up, completely unobscured by the net, the young eagle found he was not alone in the cage. Although, being accompanied by another creature of some sort, he discovered that he was trapped. The door to the cage was closed, and some sort of locking device clamped it tightly shut.

The other creature in the cage with him was of the new world, mutated and disgusting. Kensley kept his distance, fearing the creatures' inevitable awakening. His eyes searched for any sort of escape from the cage, but the only way he would be able to free himself is if he could somehow fit through the bars. The only plausible way of doing this would be to shift into a smaller animal or some sort. Without allowing himself to over think it, Kensley took action. He rushed toward the bars of the cage and jumped at them with all the force he could muster in his weakened state. As his body flung through the air, he willed himself to shift into a mouse and ensure his safe passage through the bars. Instead Kensley was met head on with the hard, cold poles of the cage, unsuccessful in his attempt to shift forms.

Kensley landed sprawled out on the bottom of the cage, a piercing pain thumping throughout his head. 'It didn't... Work?' he thought shocked. It was normal for him to not have control over his powers, when he shifted or what he shifted into, but this feeling was different. In situations where he felt threatened or trapped, his instincts always kicked in to save the vulnerable creature. As he recollected his aching body, Kensley tried to think of what could possibly be preventing him from securing his freedom. The surprisingly rational young man came to a conclusion. It must have

something to do with the smoke's effects, lingering inside him, calming him to the point where he should be asleep, but for one reason or another he remained awake.

At the other end of the cage the other mutated creature trapped with Kensley began to twitch, the smoke now fully passed. Kensley kept a wary eye on the fast, uncontrolled spasms, hoping beyond all hope that it would stay asleep long enough for him to figure a way to open the lock of the cage.

As fear was beginning to overtake his thoughts completely, a quick flash of movement nearby distracted Kensley, turning his attention again to the outside of his encampment. He watched as a quick moving figure dashed around the scientists and guards around Kensley, an unnoticeable slight wind mussing up their clothes. With his "eagle eye", the mutated, trapped bird saw the figure snag a key from the guard standing sentry outside his cage. The lock jiggled a split second later and Kensley turned to find the door unlatched.

Staring at the now completely functional door, Kensley felt a mixture of fear and relief as it swung open. His first instinct was to burst out of the cage and fly as high up and away from the scientists and guards as possible, continuing to run until he determined he was safe. That isn't what he did, however. Instead of acting on his fight or flight response, Kensley took a moment to look around the cage once more, searching for whatever freed him from his trap. It seemed lately that the spacy, rash young man was becoming more and more aware of his surroundings, and became much more curious with everything he found around him.

Stepping forward to poke his head out, something behind Kensley stirred, forcing him to jump. His breath caught in his throat, mid screech, as he turned to see the mutated creature behind him awakening. Before its eyes even opened, it was leaping at Kensley. The eagle acted as quickly as he could, trying to dodge the large creature with the small amount of space he had between them in the metal box. This was useless, for the creatures' claws caught Kensley's wing, pinning him to the side of the cage with a rough crash.

Kensley's first reaction was to flail as much as possible, attempt to get out of the creatures' grip, but the mutated being was heavy and strong, growling as it blinked rapidly, trying to figure out what was going on itself. While the creature's eye sight began to clear, it became confused. This allowed Kensley to take an assessment of what it was. The large thing pinning him down and threatening his existence almost looked like a badger, possibly a raccoon. Its glazed over eyes began to clear as it continued to blink quickly, but before it could lock onto Kensley directly, something out of nowhere came and slammed into the side of the cage. The cage was thrown off the trailer the scientists were using to transport the creatures they caught, rolling as it crashed onto the ground on a corner, and landing with the cage door laying open on the forest floor.

Kensley and the creature were thrown all around as the cage rolled. The creature scrambled to its paws, glaring around and locking onto Kensley as if he were the one that sent them tumbling in every which way. It lunged at him once more, but Kensley was quicker this time, turning and flying out of the cage within seconds.

By this point the guards and scientists around Kensley and the creature were aware that something was going on, and rushed over to capture them both once more. The badger like thing also exited the cage, now surrounded by guards with guns and nets. In its self-defense mode, the mutated badger's skin began to turn green and slimy, much like the leaves on the trees. It closed its eyes and let out a screech, sending its sticky skin flying everywhere and covering everything around it within ten feet. The guards screamed in agony as the sticky, slimy substance began to burn through their clothes and their guns. Guards not hit by the substance stepped forward, shooting the badger with tranquilizers and throwing nets over its now harmless body.

Through this whole ordeal Kensley remained in the area, perched on a branch and watching all the happenings. He found himself curious for the first time in what felt like forever, 'What set me free?' He questioned, looking past the scientists and guards and further into the forest, no sign of anything having come through it but the slight rustle of leaves.

Although every fiber of his being was telling him to turn and fly off into the sky, Kensley couldn't fight the urge to follow those rustling leaves and figure out what was the cause of his escape. As he sat on a branch contemplating his next move, the scientists below became aware of his presence and started shouting for the guards to capture him once more. Panic flooded through Kensley, forcing his immediate decision to dive from the branch and soar just over the heads of all the people below, flying off after the rustling leaves.

The guards, still discombobulated from the badger creature's attack, fumbled around to grab guns and nets, unsuccessful in their attempts to capture Kensley once more. They rushed after the soaring bird, but were too slow.

While flying to safety, Kensley felt his heart beating rapidly, which he normally took to be fear, but this time it felt much more powerful. His heart didn't beat with a tightness that threatened his breath to cease, it beat with an openness that made him feel like he was invincible, which was an odd experience to say the least. Kensley was so used to feeling scared and panicked, not adventurous and excited.

Kensley's mind quieted its confusion when he heard a loud bout of laughter up ahead. The wide winged creature landed on a branch to look around for the source of such a strange sound.

"I cannot believe the look on their faces!" a young male's voice snickered, followed by a loud boom of laughter.

'How much louder could this guy be?' Kensley wondered, looking behind him in hopes that the guards and scientists would have lost him and were nowhere near this outburst amongst the silent forest.

When Kensley finally located the source of the laughter with his gaze, he focused in on the man's features. It was hard to see his face, for the young man was doubled over in his extreme state of amusement, but Kensley noted that the boy was tall, long, and thin. His dirty blonde, almost brown, hair was long enough to just cover his ears, his bangs slightly shorter, but they still seemed capable of hanging in his eyes. Although it was tough to find a good source of food in this day and age, the boy looked far from being malnourished, not fully flushed with health, but toned in a way that he obviously ate on a daily basis.

Kensley couldn't decide what to do now that had found his savior. Before he could map out his plan of action, the man below stood to his full height, no longer laughing, but looking around with suspicion.

"Is there someone out there?!" the mysteriously speedy man called to the open forest around him, eyes gazing through the trees.

With a long pause, the young man's words hanging in the air, Kensley quickly thought, 'Now or never,' not allowing himself a moment longer to think it over before he dove to the ground. The eagle's wings spread to catch himself, gliding over the ground before landing in front of the young man, keeping a safe distance.

The speedy boy jumped at the sight of the large bird, but seemed to be relieved that he wasn't imagining unseen eyes watching him. "Well hello there little guy," he smiled, "Are you the one I freed from that cage?" the question was asked in a way that made him seem not to actually want an answer.

'How can I communicate with him in this form?' Kensley pondered, settling on cocking his head from side to side in response.

"There's a good big birdy," the man knelt down, holding his hand out and rubbing two fingers together. "Wanna come a little closer?" he urged Kensley, unknowing of the odd being's true self. "I'm not gonna hurt ya," the man assured, although Kensley found it strange that he was talking to a bird in such a manner. Why waste his time and sit here, risking the chance of the scientists finding him, to talk to a random bird?

The man took a short, crouched step toward Kensley, to which Kensley remained where he stood. He wasn't sure how close he was going to allow this man to come, but he felt the man deserved to be curious for his valiant act of bravery. Kensley wanted nothing more than to thank him for saving his life, so he let out a high pitched "caw", which made the man freeze in his tracks.

The man stood, not coming any closer, and held up his hands, "Fine, I'll stay here," he shrugged, "I know it's kind of scary now here in the forest, but I am not one of them," his voice sharpened as he pointed back to where they came from. The boys light green eyes glared to where he was pointing for a moment, openly showing his distaste for the scientists and guards they had left behind.

It was clear the young man was mutated, which explains his negative feelings for the scientists and guards, but he could have passed for a "normal" in anyone's eyes. Kensley wondered what had triggered such hate from such an innocent young man. The large bird cocked his head from side to side once more, trying to agree with the man that those people were bad.

A new gleam entered the man's green-hazel stare. "Wait a second," he thought out loud, "You look too normal to be an actual wild eagle," his eyes became clear as he made the connection, "You're a mutant aren't you?!" he accused Kensley, pointing his finger down at the bird before him.

Without any other way of telling him he was right, Kensley let out another "caw". It was true, Kensley's forms only took the embodiment of the animals of the old world. He retained the original look of them, rather than taking on a mutated or deformed state. In all honesty, the scientists should have picked up on this as well. Any eagle in this twisted world would look far different than what Kensley did.

"I knew it!" the man chuckled, jumping and turning in the air in celebration for his discovery. "That's awesome," the boy stopped dancing and knelt down once more, "You have a very powerful gift," he smiled, examining Kensley's form with his stare. "Lucky indeed," the boy remarked, mostly to himself.

Kensley continued to stand before the boy, having no control or energy to shift back into his human form. The boy must have noticed something wasn't right, "What's the holdup man? I ain't gonna hurt ya," he assured Kensley once again, smiling in anticipation of Kensley's transformation.

Again, the bird before him stared at him, not moving and not changing form.

"Oh," the young man nodded, "You can't change to human?" he frowned, standing once again. "Well why don't you come with me?" he asked, holding out an arm. "I know someone who'd love to meet such an advanced power like yourself," his mouth forming a smile once more.

Unsure of what to do or where to go, Kensley decided it couldn't hurt to meet whoever the boy was talking about. It was clear he wasn't working for or with the scientists, so he couldn't be that bad of a person. Kensley lunged forward, opening his claws and latching onto the man's extended forearm.

"Whoa!" the young man marveled, chuckling a bit. "You're heavier than you look there dude," he commented, grinning widely. "Oh by the way, the name's Zack, but everyone calls me Lightning," the tall, thin man introduced himself, turning and beginning to walk at a normal pace into the forest.

Zack, or Lightning as he insisted Kensley call him once he was human, walked and talked the whole way to wherever he was taking Kensley. He didn't seem to be saying anything worthwhile, just random facts about how his week has been going, and the different "creatures" he's ran into. He refrained from talking about where they were going, but Kensley kept his guard up and continuously sought out land marks as they walked along. It was his way of ensuring a quick and safe escape if the need arose.

The walk was a good half hour at least, maybe even forty-five minutes. Kensley lost track of the exact time that passed, but it felt like forever with Zack's non-stop jabbering. Throughout the walk, Zack had to pass Kensley from arm to arm half a dozen times because he insisted that Kensley was getting "too heavy". He also continuously remarked about how weird it was that Kensley couldn't willingly change form on command. Zack insisted that most of the "changed ones" could at least somewhat control their new abilities.

Kensley felt kind of jealous after hearing others could actually handle their powers. By the sound of it though, most of them had smaller, simpler powers that didn't seem to involve their whole being; mind and body. Already Kensley felt angered by this group of people. How could they have control over themselves? He could barely recognize who he was half the time, let alone change his form on command.

Finally the path in the woods seemed to become more beat down, an obvious sign that it is being used on a regular basis. Kensley's head shot from side to side as movement in the shadows of the trees and underbrush danced in the corner of his eyes.

Zack stopped, raising his free hand and calling out, "It's just me," almost annoyed. He continued to smile, however, which seemed just to be a part of the young man's personality. At the sign of defeat, the people that were hiding revealed themselves, some armed with weapons. Kensley froze, eyeing up the various guns, bows, and makeshift spears that were actually just long sticks with knives tied to the ends.

One of the people stepped forward from the rest, keeping her gun pointed straight at Kensley's head. "What's that," she demanded, motioning with her gun toward Kensley to indicate what she was talking about. Her stern eyes shifted from Zack to lock onto Kensley, keeping level aim.

Zack rolled his eyes, "Would you relax Cas?" he groaned, "I found this guy while I was out.... Patrolling," he lowered his gaze, as if he were purposely hiding the truth.

The woman before them, slightly shorter than Zack, but obviously holding more power than him, grunted, "Bull shit," slicing her gaze back over to him. "If you had been on patrol," Cas remarked, "You would have been back an hour ago!" she barked, her eyes tearing into his skin.

The man holding Kensley flinched, also obviously younger than the female. "Alright," he sighed, looking wounded by her stern tone. He raised his gaze to meet hers, her own body language showing she was relaxing already with the

sign of truth, "I was messing with some scientists and their guards and this guy just happened to be trapped in one of the cages I tipped over," he admitted, giving Cas a troubled half frown.

Cas's eyes instantly took flame, literally. The red haired lady's eyes were on fire. "You WHAT!?" she shouted, stepping into Zack's space with a flaming head. She lowered the gun, stowing it in the belt loop of her waist-band and gripping onto Zack's shirt collar.

Kensley, fearful of the fire, took flight and cawed, taking to the air. Some murmuring from the other people who met Zack and Kensley resulted in a number of spears and arrows being shot at him, missing him terribly, but shot at him all the same.

"Wait! Hold your fire!" Zack pleaded, pushing away from Cas and waving his arms above his head in an attempt to block their line of fire. "He's one of us!" the young man cried out, but the final arrow was already flung. This one would not miss.

The mutated eagle was once again free-falling with no chance of saving himself, but this time there was no net to save him either. While falling Kensley's vision began to blur, not in the same way as it had before with the inability to breath, but the blotchy in-and-out that followed after immense pain. He tried his hardest to remain conscious, still wary about whether he could trust this group of people or not, but once his body slammed into the rough ground below, he was finished.

Madelyn Robinson

"From the very first meeting, I was impressed by Madelyn's writing. Many of her strongest pieces were powerful insights into the human condition; no surprise, considering that she once planned on pursuing psychology. Regardless of the path she chooses in life, I am confident that her writing skills will lead her to success. She has a great talent for descriptive language and has proven to be adept at writing both fiction and non-fiction. This particular piece is one that Madelyn seemed really passionate about. Hopefully you, the reader, find it as thought-provoking and intriguing as I did." ~Michael Marichal

A Timeless Love

By: Maddy Robinson

My rain boots splashed against the cobblestone pavement. As I tightened the string around my hood, I lost control of the books I held between my arms. A few choice words escaped my lips under my breath as I bent down to retrieve them. By the time I collected my things I was thoroughly soaked, causing me to shiver. I ran the rest of the way to the library.

I hung my tattered raincoat on the coatrack as I entered the building. I absentmindedly chewed my nails as I wiped my wet rain boots off on the welcome mat before entering.

"Good morning Lilah," Ms. Klein, the elderly librarian, said. "The usual set of books?"

"Yes, please," I said. After swiping my worn-out library card and checking out my books, I made my way over to my favorite armchair in the furthest corner of the library. With a quick scan around the room, I realized I was the only one there. Looks like I had the place to myself for the day.

The second I cracked open the first book in the Harry Potter series, I knew that I wouldn't be able to concentrate. Even reading couldn't distract me from the aching pain in my chest. I was also starting to get warm, but taking off my sweater was not an option. The bruises that formed overnight on my arms weren't close to healing yet. Images of last night flashed through my mind. My head throbbed thinking about it.

I set the book down on the side table and got up to walk around. Maybe I just needed something new to read. I walked up and down the aisles in search of something to read that would allow me to escape my reality for just a few hours. After all, books have a way of making you feel homesick for a place you've never been.

Each aisle had something different-- action, romance, sci-fi, nonfiction. I've read everything. I started to turn and go down another aisle when of course my boot caught the corner of the bookshelf; thankfully I caught myself before crashing to the floor. In the process I managed to knock a good dozen books on the ground.

"Great," I muttered, before bending over to pick up my mess.

Before placing the stack of books back where they belonged, however, I noticed something unfamiliar. Fallen behind the shelf, was a small pocket-sized book. There was no writing on the outside, just plain black. It looked like it was a hundred years old. I've read almost every book in this library, and I've never once seen this book here. Confused, I added the fallen books back to the shelf. Curiosity got the better of me, and I grabbed the little black book. The second I touched the book again, it felt as if electricity sparked at my fingertips. I swear it was like the book was calling my name. The book seemed to mold to the shape of my hand when I picked it up. I walked quickly back to my chair, black book in hand.

I opened the cover and was startled. There was no title page, no dedication page. I turned the first few blank pages not knowing what would come next. But then, I saw it. A delicate, cursive sprawl suddenly appeared.

Finally, I've been waiting for you to come to me. You're here. You're finally here.

I shut the book immediately. I could practically hear the words being spoken to me inside my head. It's like the book was talking at me. To me. No, I was crazy. I'd been hit in the head one too many times-- literally. My hand flew to my mouth to gnaw at my nails, but there was nothing left to chew. Taking a deep breath, I decided to give the book one more chance, to prove I hadn't completely lost it.

I've never had this feeling about anyone before. It's like I've known you for my whole life. Waiting for you is like waiting for a rain in a drought. Like living with a hole in my chest. But now you're here, and I feel as if the stars have aligned and I see darkness no more. Instead of darkness I now see your eyes. Oh, your eyes. I could look into them all day.

The peacefulness surrounding the edges of this mystery voice was visionary and almost dreamlike. It was soft and lovely and sweet. But what did it mean? This wasn't an ordinary book. The pages weren't numbered, there didn't appear to be an author, and the library itself seemed to have missed it while marking putting their mandatory sticker on it. Everything about the situation screamed to stop reading it, and that's what led me to continue.

People say that a crush only lasts for 4 months... when feelings last longer, you are considered to be in love. What about if you've had feelings for years? Longer? What is it considered then? There must be something more, Lilah, because this feeling I have for you cannot be fathomed by a small word such as love. Without a doubt, you are the most wonderful, perfectly flawed, beautiful and sarcastic person I will ever have the privilege to meet. I owe my happiness to you, Lilah.

The book had my name in it.

The book had my name in it.

I needed a moment. My shaky hands dropped the small book onto the floor and I stood up from the overstuffed armchair. My breath came out in uneven puffs and I ran my fingers through my long hair repeatedly until I decided to tie it up with the elastic I kept around my wrist. It was getting hotter in here and I was more confused than ever. What kind book was this? I knew I should have gotten rid of it right there; there was something about it that wasn't right. But the thing was...I felt nervous, but not the kind of nervous you feel when you're walking home alone or are caught doing something wrong. It was an entirely new feeling of nervousness, and I knew that no matter what I told myself, I would pick the book back up off the ground, and continue.

You've been hurt, Lilah. And you're not healing. How do I make this better? How can someone possibly be that stolid or moronic to even start to think that it is okay to hurt you? I want to help you, love. You're a clock, Lilah. A broken clock. The thing is with broken clocks though, is you can always tell exactly when they stopped ticking, but with people, it isn't so easy. And sometimes, you can't even tell they're broken. My time with you is limited, and when the time comes that the cover once again closes, I hope to God that you are no longer broken. I don't know how I will do it, but I will. I want to hold you and stroke your hair and tell you everything is going to be alright. I want to, but not everything is how it is desired. I can't be the person you need me to be. If only I could. If only...

Thunder rumbled loudly, ripping me back into reality. It was then that I noticed the ink smearing the page and the wetness of my eyes flooding my face. It was raining outside, and so were my eyes.

I was past wondering how this book knew my darkest fears. He seemed to know everything... maybe even more than I knew myself. We all carry these things inside us that no one else can see; they hold us down like an anchor and drown us at sea. And in that sea, I can feel surrounded by people, and still feel so alone. But with him, it was different. My pistanthophobia was something I hadn't shared with anyone ever. Yet he knew...

I wiped my face to rid it of the emotion pouring out of me. This room was becoming too much for me and I felt the need to escape it. I collected my things hastily, and snuck the little black book into my pocket. I avoided eye contact with Mrs. Klein on way out, and didn't even bother responding when she questioned my early departure.

The second my feet hit the pavement I let out a sigh of relief. The now misting sky turned a purple color, and a slight rainbow had formed. The overcast from this morning had disappeared.

I didn't know where I was going. Home? That was out of the question. I liked to avoid being at home as much as possible. I let out a noise of frustration. My emotions were frazzled and my body was tired, but my brain was wide awake in anticipation.

I found a small coffee shop at the edge of town and decided to go in. The place was empty, except for the barista who was sitting at one of the tables playing a game on her phone. I sat in the booth farthest away from her.

The second I sat down my hand reached for the book. I reopened it and lost myself in him.

I read for hours. The sun had set and the candle in the middle of the booth I was sitting at was the only thing lighting my vision. Time had no meaning while I read. I found myself completely engrossed in the sound of his voice. I was completely attuned. His reality become mine, and mine his.

My rib cage feels bruised because my heart pounds harder and harder every time you talk to me, every time you see me or touch me or hear me. I don't want you to forget me. But then again, hearts are wild creatures, and that's why ribs are cages.

Our end is near, Lilah. Will you remember me? I hope you will. I've waited an eternity for you, and even though I've only gotten a few hours of you, it was worth the wait. I'd wait a thousand eternities just to be with you. It's okay, Lilah. I understand. I can't give you what you need. You'll move on, meet someone, live your life. You'll get through it. You always do. You're strong, Lilah. I believe in you. It's okay. I want you to be happy.

I closed the book. I couldn't see anymore.

Why did I have to continue reading this book? Why was I doing this to myself? I know that I always got too emotionally invested in everything. I've been like this my whole life. I either eat too much or starve myself. Sleep for 14 hours or have insomniac nights. Fall in love hard or hate passionately. I don't know what gray is, I never did. I can't handle this-- I don't know how. My problem is that I fall in love with words, rather than actions. I fall in love with ideas and thoughts, instead of reality. And it will be the death of me.

There's only a few pages left, Lilah. You'll be okay. Me? I'll be fine, I think. This has never happened before. I don't really know what happens when you...close the book. But I'm not afraid though, not really. I mean, whatever happens, you can just open me back up right? The words won't change, but I'll still be here. you can meet me all over again, and everything will come back to me... Are you crying? I'm sorry. I know we don't have a lot of time... I just want you to know that you are the most beautiful person I have ever seen in my entire life.

I turned to the last page.

Before it's all over I want you to know that everything, all of this... even though it's almost over, was worth it. Even if I disappear when you close that cover and I disappear-- it was all worth it. I love you.

"I love you too," I whisper. I did. And I didn't care how crazy it sounded. I did love him.

I closed the cover.

Yamili Rodriguez

“Yamili has been a delight to work with this semester. She has proven to have a very creative mind and a dedication to writing. Working with her and observing her process of writing has made me have a new found appreciation for poems. She always put forth an impressive amount of effort and kept an open mind to experimenting with new forms of writing, and incorporating new ideas into her pieces.” ~Kevin Mohawk

The Rock That I Lean On

By: Yamili Rodriguez

This is where I sit,

The rock that I lean on.

This rock supports me and I it.

It feeds off defeat and emotion.

My defeat and my emotion.

Before I know it, I'm back where I started.

Time slows to a stop.

When it'll start back up again, I can never tell.

I cover my eyes and nothing else matters.

Nothing good comes of it.

Loneliness creeps in and settles.

Madness builds and collects

so much so that it belongs, it's ingrained.

I keep coming back to it.

Wordplay Fall 2015

It's magnetic, hypnotizing.

It is my friend, this rock that I lean on.

It is my enemy, it knows my secrets

And whispers them to me.

Mikaela Skalmoski

“Mikaela is one of the most unique writers I have ever worked with. She treats her work like research, and the end result is something that has the depth and understanding to accurately reflect the crazy, challenging, yet often funny, world that we live in.” ~Michael Howard

Charlie and Lucy

By: Mikaela M. Skalmoski

Charlie

God knows that I tried to make my relationship work with Lucy. I tried what felt like every approach in existence to resolve conflict, including shredding every ounce of dignity I had to make her happy. It took losing part of myself for me to realize that no matter how many arguments she won...or how many times I would bend over backwards for her... she wasn't going to make half the effort to make our relationship last.

When I broke up with Lucy, I made sure we were in a public place so she:

A. couldn't make a scene and

B. I would have eyewitnesses in case she felt like flying off the handle and verbally assaulting me.

Lucy was known to have “strong emotional reactions” when she got angry during the last few months of our relationship. For instance, one time I stepped on her eCig while she was trying to quit smoking (one of her many obnoxious vices), and she blamed me for wearing my steel-toed boots in her apartment even though it was left on the floor for anyone to step on and break.

“Lucy, your room is a mess and it was an accident. I'm sorry,” I tried to reason as I saw her face flush with anger.

“What the hell, Charlie! I could seriously and literally smack you right now. That thing costed me like, five hours of slaving my ass away at the store. You better replace it! Right now. Go down the street and get me a new one now before I lose it.”

I stared at Lucy as she stood fuming, pointing toward the door for me to leave so I could quickly meet her demands. This “new Lucy” wasn't the girl I fell in love with, and I could never understand why she was getting upset so easily. In addition, I always felt like a dog when she barked orders at me, even if I knew she was going to cool down and apologize later. However, unlike before, I didn't expect her to apologize for any spewing and angry text messages that were sure to follow the conversation that was about to take place.

I met Lucy in the library after her last class of the week. I felt like breaking up with her on a Friday would be most appropriate because it would give her the weekend to accept the news and emotionally recuperate. As I sat waiting for her at our usual study table, my heart began to race. What if she still “went off” at me even though we were in public? I'd be known to anyone listening or witnessing as “the guy with the crazy girlfriend.”

Wordplay Fall 2015

“Charlie?”

Shaken from my deep thoughts, I looked up. There stood Lucy, holding her backpack by one strap with a look of concern on her face.

“Charlie, are you okay?” she asked gently.

“Uhh, yeah. Thanks for meeting me. I was wondering if we could talk about something,” I said as my voice began to shake.

“Sure,” said Lucy as she swung her backpack to the ground and took a seat across the table from me. “What’s up?”

“Lucy, I...you see...it’s just that...” I shifted my eyes and focused them on the A-C book aisle behind our table.

“Charlie,” Lucy said as her voice broke. “Are you trying to break up with me?”

I focused my eyes back on Lucy and studied her face for a minute as if I were trying to memorize it. Her gorgeous porcelain skin that she acquired from her Hmong paternal side never broke out, and her honey colored brown eyes she got from her maternal Polish side always stood out because of her skin tone and dark hair. She was beautiful, and even though I knew we needed to terminate our relationship for both of our benefits, I wanted to always remember her in this way; calm and collected, despite looking worried and confused.

“I really, really care about you,” I began, “and I think you are an exquisite, enthusiastic woman who is going places. I just don’t feel that you and I are compatible as a couple anymore. I’ll always care about you...I just think we are better off apart.”

I paused. The words seemed to have rolled off my tongue even though I was truly speaking from my heart.

“I...I understand. Goodbye,” responded Lucy as she got up and left me sitting at our study table by myself.

I stared into space in disbelief and silence as she disappeared around the corner of the library. No harsh exchange of words? No tears? No way.

I left the library a few minutes after processing what just happened. How did Lucy seem to have matured overnight? Was she drunk or high when she came to the library? Would she text me later with verbal assaults, or worse, be waiting at my door when I came home, knife in hand?

Crazy thoughts continued to race through my mind as I made the two mile walk back to my campus apartment. Maybe it was an ego trip, or maybe I was a little hurt she didn’t even try to put up a fight to keep our relationship, but whatever it was, I felt completely uneasy about the breakup so far.

After returning home, I made plans with my buddies to go out to the local bars for a classic “brofest.” If there’s anything that keeps your mind off woman issues, it’s booze, beer, and hormonally charged friends who want to go out on a the prowl to pick up other single people.

“So you legit broke up with Lucy Screws,” my friend Kevin said as he reached across the bar to pay for his third beer of the night. “Lucy Screws” was the nickname Kevin and the guys gave Lucy after the first time she and I had a fight and she threw a box of cards at my face. “Dude, she was nuts. We all know it. Sure, her hotness probably compensated for it quite a bit, but there are a million other fine, SANE women in the world.”

“Well, maybe not a million,” snickered my other friend Scott as he downed a shot of whiskey.

We all chuckled and I rolled my eyes.

“The weird thing, though, guys,” I said as I felt my words begin to slur, “is that she seemed to take and accept the break up so well. Like, really well. I don’t know. I was expecting her to text me in rage later on, but nooo text yettt.”

“Oh, just wait. She’s probably getting wasted off wine with her wine-o bitches, and then you’ll get some sort of pissy text. I give it until midnight,” scuffed Scott. “All’s it takes is a little Moscato to loosen those screws in that pretty little head.”

“Maybe,” I replied. “But see, see she was more than just a pretty face. She was smart too. She has a freaking 3.8, guys.”

“Uh-oh. Sounds like you’re beginning to romanticize her now, man,” remarked Kevin.

“No, no, no. No. Let’s go somewhere else. I need a long island from somewhere else,” I said, getting up and stumbling toward the door.

The next day, I woke up on my friend Craig’s couch with a pounding headache and sinking heart. Blurry memories of the night before faded in and out of my mind. I looked across the living room at the other couch to find Kevin passed out with one leg on the floor, snoring loudly.

“Kevin!” I hissed, gently shaking him. “Hey, where’s my phone?” Kevin abruptly stopped snoring and popped his eyes open.

“I took it last night,” he answered, clearing his throat. “It’s on the counter.”

I shuffled my heavy wool socks over to the counter, and snatched up my phone. Who did I call last night? Who did I text? What did I do??

I thumbed through my phone’s call history. Oh, gawd.

“Kevin!” I exclaimed. “I called Lucy 22 times??”

“Well, that’s probably a fraction of what it would have been if I didn’t take your phone away from you halfway through the night.”

“Did she pick up at all?”

“I don’t know, dude! You kept talking to yourself. It’s hard to tell.”

I slapped my hand over my forehead and groaned. This sucked. On top of Lucy seeming not to care about my decision to terminate our relationship, I made a fool out of myself by letting her know how much I did care. There was one text message on my phone from her asking me to leave her alone. How did we reverse roles so quickly? If anyone had “loose screws” now, it was definitely me.

Lucy

I met Charlie when we were sophomores in college at a small garage party. We played on each other's beer pong team and won three games in a row. We spent the rest of the party talking more than we were drinking, and from that day on, we were in sync.

I don't know if it was my parents' rocky divorce that shook my nerves, or the stress of trying to maintain an A average, but one day I woke up and couldn't breathe. My roommate and best friend, Nina, rushed me to the school's health center where I learned that I had clinical anxiety.

"What you're experiencing is a panic attack," the school nurse practitioner told me. "Can you think of anything in particular that could have provoked this attack?"

"No...not really," I said, choking back tears. My hands were shaking and I felt like I was going to puke. "I've just been stressed with some personal stuff. I've been taking it out on my boyfriend, and he seems to be at the end of his rope."

"Well, you said you've also felt more than a few mood swings in the past couple weeks," said the nurse practitioner looking down at her clipboard. "Clinical anxiety can put a lot of stress on relationships, both platonic and romantic."

"Yeah, I can see that," I said.

"I'm going to prescribe you some medication and give you a referral to a counselor here on campus."

I watched as the nurse practitioner scribble down a prescription and handed me a referral card for the counseling center. She was a younger woman, maybe 29 at most. Her long bleach blonde hair was pulled back into a low ponytail, and her eyes were sapphire blue. Her voice was mature but empathetic, as if she had seen a thousand students before me who were struggling with same issues.

Clinical anxiety? Wasn't that just an excuse people used so they could act out and so people would negate their unstable, irrational behavior?

"I'm not...I'm not crazy, am I?" I squeaked. I couldn't hold it in anymore. I began to cry.

"Lucy. You are definitely not 'crazy,'" answered the nurse practitioner looking up. "If you had a cold virus, you would take medication to treat it so you could function better through daily life, right?"

I nodded.

"Well, anxiety is not unlike cold medication. You have a physical chemical imbalance in your brain that you'll be treating with a low-dose medication. "

The nurse practitioner placed her hand on my shoulder and smiled.

"I would like to see you back in about a month to see how the medication is working for you. You deserve to be happy, Lucy. I want to see you and all the other students who attend school here thrive and live long, happy lives."

My spirits lifted a bit and I smiled, wiping away my last few tears.

"Thank you," I told her. "I appreciate it, and I'm glad I came to see you."

After I left the student health service, I met Nina in front of our school Science building where she had just had class.

"Hey woman, you okay?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah. I was told I have clinical anxiety today," I said,

"Oh, that blows, but at least you know what it is now. I felt like you were starting to drive yourself crazy."

"Was I driving you crazy too?" I asked, tearing up again.

"Girl, no. At first I was frustrated, but everyone's got tough shit to deal with at this age. My sister has anxiety and it can really mess with her head. Did they give you something for it?"

"Yeah," I said. "I guess they want me to go talk to a counselor too. That might help. I just feel badly because the person who has been getting dumped on worse is Charlie. He just puts up with it, too. I'm scared he's going to resent me and just call things off soon. Our relationship is starting to get at that breaking point..."

"Well, his loss and your gain," answered Nina as she threw her freshly burgundy dyed hair into a messy bun. "Maybe it would be good for you to take a step back and get to know yourself a little more. You've been with dude for, what? Two years now?"

"Yep," I replied. "Time flies..."

"And people change," finished Nina. "I understand that you feel like you could have treated him differently with your anxiety and all, but I wonder sometimes if you guys are outgrowing one another. He and his friends never seem to mature."

Nina had a point. Although Charlie had always been there for me during my parents' divorce and put up with my mood swings, he always seemed value time with his friends over time with me. One birthday, he even ditched me halfway through the night to challenge one of his buddies in beer pong, then passed out and didn't talk to me again until the next day. His friends always seemed to have a strange, possessive influence over him.

"Guys this age are all the damn same," continued Nina, interrupting my thoughts. "If he breaks up with you, learn to accept the news gracefully. Or maybe beat him to the punch and do it yourself?"

"I'm going to talk confide in a counselor," I said, pulling out the counseling center business card out of my pocket. "I think that will be a good place to start."

For the next few weeks, I attended weekly sessions with a counselor named Lana. Lana helped me sort out the jumbled, unorganized thoughts that always seemed to keep me up at night. She also recommended that I begin journaling so that I would always have a safe place to vent before my emotions got the best of me and I took them out on an innocent bystander.

After the first couple counseling sessions, Lana and I began discussing my relationship with Charlie. I was honest about how I treated him when I was upset. I told Lana that he rarely fought back, and "just took it."

"I know feelings like that can lead to resentment. As much as I care for Charlie and love him, I don't think we are helping each other grow as people," I confessed during Lana's and my most recent session.

"Maybe it would be a good time to take a break in the relationship," Lana suggested. "Take a step back and focus on yourselves."

“No,” I said. “I think an actual breakup would be for the best. He texted me this morning and asked if we could talk this afternoon. I have a feeling he feels the same way...”

Lana nodded and sighed.

“I am impressed with your maturity, Lucy. We are at the end of our session for today, but how would you feel about seeing me monthly from now on? Of course, if anything changes, we can always do a weekly, but you seem to be in a much more stable place now. I am happy to be seeing you improve.”

“Yeah,” I replied. “I think monthly would be great.”

Leaving the counseling center, I thought about the personal progress that I was making. I was beginning to feel like myself again for the first time in a while, and even though I knew Charlie and I were on shaky grounds, I had a feeling that everything was going to be alright.

I met Charlie in the library that afternoon at our usual study table. He was staring blankly into the air, almost as if he were in a trance. I took a deep breath and walked toward him.

“Charlie,” I said gently, not wanting to startle him. “Hey...are you okay?”

Charlie looked up. His dark blue eyes sparkled as he adjusted his baseball cap, which could barely contain his sandy blonde, curly hair.

“Oh, hey, Lucy,” said Charlie, clearing his throat as if he were trying to choke back tears. “Uh, I’m fine. I just wanted to talk to you about something.”

Even though I had been almost expecting this conversation, my heart began to feel a little heavy. The reality that Charlie and I were going to end our relationship began to set in, but I had to keep my head on straight. I had to remain calm and reasonable. I could always cry it out in my pillow or confide in my girlfriends later.

I sat in silence as Charlie stumbled over his words. Finally, I put my hand up.

“Charlie,” I said carefully. “Are you breaking up with me?”

Charlie stared at me like he was looking at me for the first time. His eyes fell on my mouth, then slowly made their way up to my eyes. We held each other’s gaze for a moment before Charlie exhaled and broke eye contact.

“This is difficult,” Charlie began before rambling off about what a good person I was, and how much potential I acquired, but he could no longer see us as a “compatible couple.”

I waited for him to finish his speech before nodding, telling him I understood, then bided him a farewell.

I glanced behind me once on the way out of the library to see Charlie reverting back to his trancelike state of mind.

Once I was outside the library, I took a deep breath. Everything began feeling a bit surreal. Charlie and I were done? What was I going to do with this newfound “freedom?” I began to understand what my counselor meant when she told me that breakups meant needing to adjust your general outlook on life, and learning how to invest energy that was once invested in your former significant other into positive activities.

“Hey, Lucy Goosey. How did your talk with Chuck go?” asked Nina as I came through the door of our apartment. She was standing in the middle of the kitchen in only her underwear, socks, and sweatshirt, drinking straight out of her juice carton with the fridge door left open.

“Uhh...okay. It was calm. To new beginnings,” I tried to say with a smile before my eyes began welling up with tears.

“Aww, Lucy!” said Nina as she closed the fridge door and put her orange juice carton on the counter. “It’s okay, love. Just let it out. Cry it out! Hey, want to do something fun tonight? I just ran out of OJ, and was going to run to the store to get more. While I’m at it, I was thinking of picking up a companion named Vodka for it...”

I smiled through my tears.

“Pre-game with screwdrivers and hit the town?” I sniffled.

“Hells yeah!” exclaimed Nina, waving her arms in the air.

I laughed. Nina was the kind of friend that one benefited from in a time of crisis. One time I received a C- on a Chemistry exam and texted her, freaking that it would ruin my average. By the time I got home, Nina waiting for me with a jug of wine in the fridge, Ben and Jerry’s stocked in the freezer, and a few of our favorite chick flicks from the video store.

“I’m gonna run to the store, then shower and get ready. Let’s drink as we glam up!” Nina squeaked as she pranced off to her bedroom for a pair of pants.

Two hours later, Nina and I found ourselves buzzed and beautified as we hopped into a taxi that was going downtown. We were planning on meeting up with some mutual friends at a run-down, yet affordable dive called Sparky’s.

“I’m so excited to be out,” I said as we paid the taxi driver.

“Ditto, chica. This is just what you need,” Nina smiled as she shut the taxi door.

Nina and I entered the bar and sat down at our usual corner booth. Sparky’s served pub food, so the first thing we did was order a huge, steaming pile of onion rings and curly fries.

“Hey, I’ll text Nora and Andria to see if they’ll come meet us,” said Nina, as she popped her tenth curly fry in her mouth and picked up her phone.

“Good idea,” I said.

Nina frowned.

“Oh, gawd. I guess they’re out with Charlie and his gang of morons,” groaned Nina after she read Andria’s text response. “Well, I guess it’s just you and me tonight...”

I took a deep breath.

“I know that seeing Charlie will be awkward, but we have six months until graduation and I can’t live in fear that I’ll run into him every time we go out. I’ll see him sooner or later.”

Nina raised her eyebrows.

“Okaaayy, well, if you’re okay with it, let’s go meet them at Louie’s after we polish off this grub!”

I’m not going to lie. Although I sounded cool and collected, the thought of seeing Charlie hours after we had broken up stirred my insides a little. Even with a good buzz going, my heart quickened a little more with every step Nina and I took to Louie’s.

“Hey, gals!” squealed Andria as we came through the doors.

“Hey, Andi,” I said, nervously glancing around for Charlie.

“I’m glad you came out! We’re going to do a shot ski if you want to join!” chimed in Nora as she raised her beer.

“You wimps going to do something like Run Chata again?” asked a male voice nearby.

I looked across the bar to find Charlie leaning over the counter. Hair matted in sweat and big glass of liquor in hand, Charlie looked like a hot mess.

“Who are you calling a wimp? You’re wasted off three beers and a few sips of a long island!” yelled back Nora.

“I didn’t eat dinner! The beer was my dinner. Also, I would like to do a shot ski with you peeps,” slurred Charlie as he staggered over to my friends and me.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” groaned Nina. “Charlie, no. This is a woman-only shot ski. There are four slots and four of us. You just stick to your little drink there.”

“Oh, so you and your squad and my ex-girlfriend who doesn’t care I dumped her are gonna tell me what to do?”

“Here we go…” muttered Andria.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Oh, he’s been droning on about you all night so far,” said Nora. “I’m sorry to hear about the breakup, by the way. We had no idea until we told Charlie that you and Nina were joining us.”

“Uhh…it’s okay,” I said quietly. “Where are the other guys?”

“They’re in the can,” bellowed Charlie.

“Hey, do you think you could refrain from yelling so much?” asked the bartender. “If you want to talk to these young women, you can speak in a softer tone.”

“Party pooper!” exclaimed Charlie. “Sorry for disturbing the peace! I am going through a breakup, man. With THAT woman,” Charlie pointed to me.

That was it. I sprang from my bar stool and grabbed Charlie’s sweaty arm.

“Charlie,” I hissed. “Shut the hell up. You’re acting like a fool.”

“But...but you didn’t care,” whined Charlie. “And, I loved you.”

My heart suddenly felt heavy again and I quickly let go of his arm.

“We are not talking about this here, tonight,” I began to say as Charlie’s friends behind him.

“Hey, Lucy,” snickered Charlie’s friend, Craig. “Fancy meeting you here of all nights.”

“Don’t mind her,” Charlie said. “She was just telling to be quiet. You know, just telling me what to do. Like always.”

“Okay, I’m out,” I said, throwing my hands up in the air.

“What, are your screws coming loose again?” remarked Charlie’s other friend Kevin, who was clearly as intoxicated as Charlie.

I rolled my eyes, trying to conceal emotion. Kevin thought any woman who didn’t worship him and had a mind of her own was “crazy.”

“Did you notice I’m wearing the shirt you hate?” asked Charlie, pulling on his “Paradise Gentlemen’s Club” shirt.

“Yeah, you’re wearing your parasite club shirt. You’re cool shit. Well, I better run. As always, it was a pleasure running into you fine men,” I nodded as I rejoined my girlfriends.

“Wow, she IS crazy,” said Craig as I walked away. “Let’s bounce, boys.”

“Don’t let them get to you,” said Nora as I sat back down at the bar. “They’re idiots. I’ve known Craig since I was a kid, but he can be a real moron. He’s just sticking up for his friend, but still...”

“Yeah, and check out the shit storm that is Charlie DeVille,” snickered Nina. “He’s already letting himself go, and it hasn’t even been twelve hours since the breakup. You’re way better off without him. Let’s just go dance at Horatio’s and forget those losers.”

It was a solid plan. I wasn’t going to allow Charlie and his immature gang of little boys spoil the night while it was still young. My ladies and I spent the rest of the night dancing, drinking, and laughing. It was a great distraction from the triceratops in the room, and I didn’t even think about Charlie until we got back into a cab and I pulled out my phone.

“Wow,” I said, staring at my screen. “Nina, Charlie called me twenty-two times.”

“Geez, desperate much?”

“Right? Who’s ‘crazy’ now?” I chuckled.

The next day, I received a call from Charlie around noon. Still annoyed from the embarrassment from the night before, I answered, ready to tell him exactly what I thought of his immature, obnoxious behavior.

“Listen Charlie, I’m not doing this...” I began as soon as I answered his call.

“No, Lucy,” Charlie cut in. “I’m not calling to fight or argue. I was wondering if we could meet around two and have a civil conversation. And also...for what it’s worth...I apologize for last night.”

I paused.

"I accept your apology. Thank you, and yeah. Let's meet up at two."

A few hours later, Charlie and I met at the same place where we terminated our relationship. It had only been twenty-four hours, and I couldn't believe how rapidly things had transpired.

"Hey Lucy," Charlie said as he approached the library table. "Thanks for meeting me."

"You look...nice," I said, surprised at Charlie's change of appearance. His mop-like hair had been neatly trimmed into tight, blond curls, and his face which was once occupied with scruff was now clean shaven.

"Thanks, I cleaned up," chuckled Charlie. "Gotta love those Saturday morning barber shops!"

I smiled politely.

"Well, what did you want to discuss?" I asked.

Charlie exhaled deeply.

"Listen, to say I was an idiot last night is an understatement. I was just really freaking hurt. You seemed to not care about the breakup. It's not like I wanted to see you suffer, but what happened? How were you so casual about ending our relationship?"

I sat up straight and gently placed my hand on Charlie's arm.

"I was torn up inside, but after everything we had been through together, I was almost expecting you to end our relationship. I haven't told you, but I started seeing a counselor who helped me sort through all the turmoil and struggles in my life. Everything from my parents' divorce to maintaining my GPA was overwhelming me. As a result, I took a lot of my stress and anxiety out on you. I was diagnosed with clinical anxiety and put on some medication. I hold myself accountable for my behavior and actions that hurt you, but I'm relieved to get to the root of the problem."

"But...why didn't you tell me? I would have found a way to support you. We could have worked through it together."

"Because I know how you feel about mental illness," I frowned, taking my hand off his arm. "And the way you and your friends attach negative stigma to mental illness and label people 'crazy.' I had to deal with this issue on my own, and continuing our relationship would have made it worse."

"Okay," Charlie said, looking up from the table. His eyes were glistening with tears. "I still love you, though."

I choked back tears. Seeing Charlie cry was always difficult. He worked so hard to try to maintain this carefree, masculine image, but every now and then he'd break down and reminded me that he was just as fragile and sensitive as most people.

"I still love you, too. We were starting to outgrow each other, though. We weren't really making each other happy anymore."

"Okay," whispered Charlie, taking my hands in his. "Even if we stay apart forever, I'm happy to know we still care about each other."

Charlie kissed my hands, slowly got up, and smiled sadly.

“Goodbye Lucy. See you around.”

I waved and waited for him to leave before I broke down right there at the library table. Suddenly, I realized all the things I was going to miss about Charlie and our relationship.

Breaking up meant no more Friday pineapple pizza nights, Sunday afternoon homework dates, or midweeks visits to the local humane society to play with the puppies. Breaking up meant that we would never visit each other’s families for holidays again, call each other late at night just to say “I love you,” or exchange all the inside jokes that built up over the last two years. We would both need to adjust our outlook on life and find a way to depend on ourselves more for happiness and company.

For the remainder of the time in college before graduation, I’d see Charlie here and there around campus and downtown. We’d smile and nod at each other, and each time I saw him, the wound in my heart hurt a bit less.

The more time went by, the less I thought about Charlie. I stayed busy with school, writing for the campus newspaper, and frequently made weekend plans with Nina and our friends. I also continued counseling and taking anti-anxiety medication. I eventually reached the relationship grieving stage of acceptance when I felt ready to fully move on from the relationship.

In May, I graduated with a Bachelor’s in Journalism, and moved back to my home area, where I began working for the local newspaper. I found out that Charlie graduated the following semester with a degree in Waste Management, and moved out of state after receiving a phenomenal job offer out West.

Though we were able to see brief updates on each other’s’ lives over social media for the next few years, Charlie stayed distant from my mind until this past year, a week before Christmas. I was at the local mall, Christmas shopping with my sister, Cassie. We were coming out of the mall when we saw Charlie standing outside, ringing Salvation Army Bells with a girl who looked like she was about four years old.

“Oh, hey Charlie!” I exclaimed. “What are you doing here?!”

“Hey Lucy,” Charlie nodded at me, and then turned to my sister. “And hey, Cassie! How are you ladies doing?”

“We’re good, Chuck...just doing some last minute Christmas shopping. And who is this?” asked Cassie as she nodded toward the dark haired, freckled little girl who was standing next to Charlie.

“Oh, this is Anabella, my niece,” grinned Charlie. “She’s my wife’s sister’s little girl. Isn’t she cute? Say hi, Anabella.”

“Hi,” squeaked Anabella as she grabbed onto Charlie’s leg.

I glanced at Charlie’s hand to find a gold band on his wedding finger.

“You got married? Congratulations!” I said, trying to hide my surprise.

“Yeah, I met Chloe in Portland where I’ve been living. Her family is from this area, so we’re visiting. Chloe’s sister isn’t feeling too well, and asked if I would cover her Salvation Army spot for her today. How have you been?”

“Oh, I’ve been great,” I said. “I’m actually working for the local newspaper now...”

As Charlie and I caught up on each other's lives for the next few minutes, I couldn't help but notice how much he seemed to have changed. He was no longer the goofy, scruffy, barfly of a college student I once dated. He seemed to have evolved into a patient, kid-loving husband with a buzz cut and small silver specks.

"Well, we better be getting back to our Mom's and help her with the Christmas tree," Cassie cut in. "But it was nice seeing you, Charlie. Your niece is a doll. Have a great holiday!"

"Yeah, bye ladies," waved Charlie, still grinning from ear to ear.

As soon as we got to the car, I let out a huge sigh. I was about to ask Cassie what she thought of seeing Charlie, but before I even had a chance, she let out a girlish squeal.

"Holy crap, what a hunk! Do you miss him even a little?" asked Cassie as she poked me in the arm.

I laughed.

"No. I just can't believe how much he's grown up. He seems really happy, though, and I'm glad," I smiled as I started the car. "We both have seemingly stable lives now, and that's all that matters."

"You'll find a guy soon enough," said Cassie as if she were trying to assure me.

"I'm not worried," I said. "It'll happen when it happens. Charlie was the only serious relationship I had ever had, but he taught me so much...the relationship itself was a good learning experience. We were just kids then. I'm proud of us both for graduating and establishing careers and stable lives. I personally have been off my anxiety medication for the past two years...I think everything worked out for the best, as cliché as it sounds."

"Wow, I wish I were as positive as you," Cassie snorted. "I can't think of one ex I had who I wouldn't want to punch in the face if I saw him again."

"It all about your relationship with yourself," I explained. "Once I accepted my own flaws and was honest about what I needed to do get to a better mental state, the less anger and resentment I felt toward Charlie. How we feel about ourselves is often impacts how we feel about others."

"Wow, when did you become so wise and mature, oh master?" Cassie asked, half joking.

"The coming of age, young grasshopper," I joked back with an exaggerated accent.

We both laughed and threw around inside jokes the rest of the drive back to my mom's house.

Five years ago, I thought that Charlie and I would find a way to stay together forever, like a romance movie where two people meet young, struggle with the pains of early adulthood, but manage to find a way to create an everlasting love. However, what the romance movies often fail to show is how people and their values change drastically over the course of your twenties. Young adulthood is a time of self-discovery and learning. Though most relationships and friendships acquire expiration dates, not one enters our life without purpose. Each one encompasses a valuable life lesson, and as long as we don't allow ourselves to become engulfed in bitterness and resentment, we can utilize them to help us grow in the people we are meant to become.

Katelynn Volz

“Katelynn was a pleasure to work with this semester. I could always tell how connected she was to her writing. As the semester went on her writing became an extension of her own emotions, fears, doubts, and joys. The result is truly something beautiful.” ~Michael Howard

Grandpa is Still Here

By: Katelynn Volz

“Ready or not here I come!” Brad yelled as he was running through the small, plain carpet store. The rest of us kids were hiding in the carpet rolls or somewhere up on the second floor. I always hid in the shaggy carpet rolls, it was more comfortable. If you were a customer you would hear random giggles as you would walk through the aisles and wonder what was going on.

“Kate, I see you, come out now.” I got up, but instead of helping Brad find the others, I went by my grandma and grandpa; they were the owners of the carpet store. My grandpa saw me standing there and he asked me why I had quit playing. I looked at him and proceeded to tell him that I sucked at hiding and was always found first.

“You’ve got to be creative with where you hide!” my grandpa exclaimed. I had thought that I was being creative by hiding in the rolls; I could not think of anywhere more creative to hide. My grandpa looked at me and asked, “Would you like me to play with you?”

“Well, grandma, could grandpa play hide and seek with me?” My grandma just giggled and told us to run along. My grandpa always had the heart of a child. The two of us were running through the store when we heard that I had to go count while the rest of them hid. I counted and then went on my search for the first person.

While I would look for someone my grandpa would hide and jump out, and scare me to make the game more fun. He and I always made a good team; we always found someone right away. Everyone else claimed that it was unfair that I had him to help me. The game would go on for about another hour before us kids would decide to call it quits. Hide and seek at my grandparents’ carpet store will forever be one of my favorite memories with my grandpa.

There have been many memories made with my grandpa, but the ones that will stick out the most are when my family would go to his house for Easter and when him, and my grandma would come over for Christmas or our birthdays. Those were the good ol’ days.

Every year for Easter it was a tradition to go to my grandparent’s house and eat lunch. Whenever we would go, us kids would go out to their musty smelling barn and shoot the sparrows while the food was still being prepared. The barn was white and at least 50 years old and it was so big that there was a mini basketball court at the top. When we got bored with shooting sparrows or playing basketball, we would play with the kittens my grandpa and grandma had, or we would drive around the battery powered jeeps. The kittens were my favorite part, they were always so fluffy and soft. No matter what, there was always something to do at my grandparent’s.

When the food was ready, my grandma would yell out to us and we would run into the house to try and get the best seat. The best seat at the table was right next to my grandpa and all of us wanted to sit by him. Usually our parents would kick us out of the chairs and they would sit by him, occasionally they would let one of us sit next to him. Whenever I got to sit next to him, before even sitting down, I would have him stand next to me to see where I was on his body, my grandpa was about 5 feet and 10 inches tall. Another thing I would do was inhale his scent. As creepy as that sounds, my grandpa smelled like fresh laundry all the time and that was always relaxing for me. Another thing I would do was study everything about his face, like the little wrinkles that formed at the corner of his eyes and forehead whenever he smiled or laughed. Same with the little twinkle in his eye, which he had bright blue eyes. Then I would always look to see how much hair he had and how much of it was gray compared to the last time I saw him. I always enjoyed memorizing how he looked or how he smelled because then I knew I would always remember him in a special way after he passed away. As I already mentioned for Easter we went to my grandparent's house, but for Christmas and any of our birthdays, our grandparents came and visited us.

Every Christmas around lunch time my grandpa and grandma would come to the house and hand out our presents. They would watch us rip open our presents to see how excited we were about what we were given, and we would then get up to hug and thank them for the gifts. As we got older they started to give us money for part of the present and then we would get a smaller gift with that. It was the same deal when any of us kids had a birthday.

My grandparents would come over and give us our present along with a card. The card was usually one that made noise to help make our birthday more fun. Again, as we got older, we got money as part of the present. Birthday visits were pretty much the same and they were always memorable.

One birthday I will never forget is when I turned 11. Since my third oldest brother and I have birthdays in August my grandma decided to take us out to eat at the Fox River Mall in Appleton. After we ate she took me to pick out a cookie cake because it was my birthday that day. I picked out a really simple one and we paid, and left. On our way back to her car I started running and my brother was chasing me. While we were running I started to feel sick and well, I ended up puking as I was running. I stopped to look down and see what I had eaten as a liquid; which doritos and burger in liquid form is not appetising. My grandma felt really bad so she took me back into the mall to get new clothes to change into. After we got home and told everyone what happened it was a story to laugh about.

A majority of the memories with my grandparents are happy and there was usually something funny about them. My grandpa was nothing but a fun, happy, loving guy. That started to get harder for him when he was diagnosed with stage four cancer. Even though he had cancer he still tried his hardest to be happy and loving. The only difference was, my family barely started to see him around when his cancer got really bad. We didn't find out he had cancer until four months before he passed away. The Easter before he passed my family went to my grandparent's house for the traditional Easter lunch and we didn't even see my grandpa because he wasn't feeling good. I got to say bye to him and he didn't even look the same. The twinkle in his eye was gone, his skin was pale, he barely had any hair left, and he didn't have that fresh laundry scent anymore. If you saw him, you could just tell that he was dying. That summer I had only seen him once for my brother's graduation party, I didn't even get to see him for my birthday, which broke my heart. On August 25th, 2012 Heaven gained another angel. I will never forget any of the amazing memories with my grandpa. He will forever always be in my heart, I love and miss him. Although he may be gone, the memories of him make it feel like he's still here, which is something I will always cherish.

R.I.P. Russel L. Volz (1947-2012)



Wyatt Weiler

“Wyatt is a first semester freshman with a positive sporty attitude. He is a part of the UWSP football team. He is undecided right now but he is browsing his interests. This is the first poem he has ever written!” ~Apoorva Sarmal

UWSP Football

By: Wyatt Weiler

Came into the program knowing few
Coach told us that he wanted us to water the bamboo
Long practices during the day, long meetings at night
Spending time with the guys and are friendships grew
To get the starting spot we all knew we had to fight

First game we had to travel far
We came up short to a team we should have beaten
Short of elite, but still good
Working hard all week and still watering the bamboo
Knowing that next week would not have the same result

Mediocre year to say the least
I can't wait for my chance to get on the field
I have been waiting all year for my chance to feast
Watering the bamboo every day
I finally get the chance to play

Many memories were made this year

Wordplay Fall 2015

Not playing in the playoffs is hard for the seniors

However they encourage us to get better for next season

Watering the bamboo in the offseason

Making it to the post season is our reason



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