

Happiness!

Edited by David Bruce

The is a revised and expanded edition of
The Great American Essay.

Dedicated with love to the Kennedy family

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What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger

By Taylor Baum

My first day of high school was a blur of all things unfamiliar and stressful. This year would take place in a new building with new teachers, new classrooms, and I can't forget to mention a completely new state that I was moving to because my dad was relocated, again, with the United States Army. Freshman year is the "changeover" of your high school days, leaving behind what you think to be your adolescence and finally entering a world of those older and beyond you and your current knowledge. You've heard the horror stories of everyone's first day of high school. Mine is no different.

My last nights of summer I spent countless, sleepless hours awake in my bed anticipating what was in store for me for what I thought would be the most important day of my life. The shocking stories were practically engraved into my head at this point, and I continued replaying them over and over again in my brain like a scratched CD, playing the same part of an awful song until you can't take it anymore. I would dream of tripping in the hallway, entering the wrong class, or making a fool of myself, and I would wake up every morning more exhausted and more nervous to the point that I was losing excitement about attending high school and almost dreading it. Being the oldest child of seven, I luckily had no

one above me to scare me or make me more anxious, but I also had no older sibling to reassure me, leaving me only with the reassurance of my parents. This reassurance came in many forms, but the most popular was the most disturbing.

In my mornings, my parents would often tell me in the mornings when I would complain about what I was dreading the most.

“What I remember most about my first day of high school is getting lost, dropping my books in the hallway in front of a senior, or not finding friends to sit with at lunch. It wasn’t fun, it was horrible actually, but it was a learning experience.” Some reassurance, huh? Hearing this only upset me more and made me think of anything possible that could ruin my first day and make me a loser all of high school. I could make a fatal mistake, leaving me friendless and a social reject for the next four years, the worst years of my life.

Finally, it was the morning of my first day. I had searched for so much time before to find the perfect outfit, perfect school supplies, and perfect hairdo. I and the friends I had met that summer and in the last week of eighth grade would often go to the mall to pick up anything that would restore confidence in us or make us feel like we would be more accepted. Fortunately, we all had the same fears and we all had each other, leaving us feeling a bit more positive, but this quickly crashed when we realized we probably had no classes

together and most likely did not have the same lunch period. All of these thoughts ran through my head as I put on my “perfect outfit,” which I quickly decided was no good when it was finally on my body. I couldn’t find half of my school supplies, and my blow dryer gave out as soon as I attempted to use it. As bad as these things were, it didn’t even matter once I realized that it was already twenty minutes after I had originally planned on leaving my house. When I looked at the clock, I was so worried about scrambling my body out the door that I left my backpack sitting on the kitchen floor, and while I was panicking my parents didn’t realize it either. I was starting my first school day with nothing but my outfit that didn’t fit the situation anymore and a huge mess of hair. Strike one.

I entered the building and looked around. There was no one in the commons area, no one in the hallway, and when I looked around the corner the only person I saw was someone late and running through the hallway, papers flying around like they were folded up and meant as a paper airplane distraction. Crap. I was extremely late. I quickly looked at my class schedule, trying to remember how to read it. My first class was Biology, room 206, upstairs in the science hallway. Sounds simple, don’t you think? So did I until I couldn’t remember where the science hallway was, and even worse, I couldn’t remember where the stairs were. I was in a jumble of

confusion and chaos, and by the looks of it, it wasn't getting any better. There was no one around to ask where to go because everyone was already in class and I was the little freshman left behind. The announcements were already over, the welcome for the new class of 2008 and the senior class of 2004 had already concluded, and I was alone in the hallway, alone with my disappointment that I had fallen into the stereotypical category of a lost freshman in the first five minutes of school. Strike two.

Somehow, ten minutes later, I found my way into the right classroom. I got the typical stares and snickers of someone being late, and as it was my first day of high school, it only felt more humiliating. I managed to find a familiar face and sat down next to her, nervous and shaking from the half hour before. We had a friendly conversation and she seemed to be just as nervous as I was. I hoped that my troubles for the day were over, but they were just getting started. I was late to every class, I sat with unfamiliar faces at lunch that I didn't talk to or get to know the rest of my four years in high school, and like my parents, I dropped my books in the hallway, and with my luck it was the senior hallway. I was humiliated. Many snickered at the "ignorant freshman," and only one stopped to help me pick them up and greet me. This person ended up being one of my best friends although he was four years older than me, and I still talk to him often to this

day. At the end of the day, I missed the bus, had to call my mom to pick me up, missed tryouts for tennis (my favorite sport), and had gotten to know only a few people. I would have to start the next day the same way, probably repeating all of my stupid mistakes. Strike three, and I was beyond out of this ballgame.

At the end of the day, I was humiliated and cried to my parents for hours on end, wanting to transfer schools and start it all over again, hopefully having learned a lesson and doing it right this time. I got what I wanted my junior year of high school when I moved from North Carolina to Ohio, nervous once more. I finally realized, years later when I moved, that the only way to learn is to screw up, which I did many times. I became an expert at butchering your first day of classes. When coming to college for the first time, I made many of the same mistakes that I did in my first day of high school, but I know now that they are inevitable. By making mistakes you can gain something lifelong, such as the good friend I gained by embarrassing myself by dropping my books or the knowledge that people do make mistakes and this is something that cannot be stopped. I believe now that you can learn only by embracing what has at one point let you down. My first day of high school may have been humiliating and unforgettable, but I gained many things from it, such as a topic for my first autobiographical essay in my first English

class in college. Learn what you can from things that distress you; they may be the most useful situations that will ever happen to you.

War

By Mallory Cervantes

“What do you think you are doing?” yelled my father, as the breath coming out of his mouth blew our hair straight back like we were in a speeding convertible. My father’s face was beet red and I think I recall smoke pouring out of his ears. The four of us—Missy, my older sister; David, my older brother; Anna, my cousin; and I—stared at my dad with our eyes bulging out of our sockets. This is how it ended. Our game, which we liked to call “War,” had come crashing to a halt the second we were caught in the act. How were we to explain our actions? Or could we?

Missy, David, and I were nearly inseparable. We played only with each other when we were at my dad’s house. We invented games more often than one could imagine and played them for great lengths of time. By great lengths of time, I do not mean hours—I mean days or weeks. We loved our made-up games.

I cannot quite remember how the game “War” started, but I am certain that it began in an effort to cure our boredom, as most of our games did. Missy was about ten years old when we invented the game, which made David six years old and me five. “War” was self-explanatory. We would demolish each other’s rooms—and occasionally other rooms—while the other was away. However, there was so much more to it.

The last time we played, which was about two years after we invented the game, is the occasion I remember most vividly. “Let’s play War!” Missy exclaimed. David’s and my eyes lit up. How much fun!

“What’s ‘War?’” asked Anna, our cousin who is four months older than me.

“A game,” we all replied. “You get to send messages to each other, then switch rooms when the time is right and mess up each other’s rooms. Then we switch back and see what the other team did to our room.”

Anna looked just as excited as we hoped she would be. The game was on.

We scurried upstairs and grabbed our supplies: a Tonka truck, paper, pencils, books, and any other things we thought we might need. After we gathered our supplies, we picked our respective teams and rooms; David, Anna, and I were teamed up together because we were much younger than Missy, who was four years older than David and almost six years older than Anna and me. Apparently, her age gave her an advantage over us because she had more experience in ways to ruin someone else’s room. This left Missy a one-person team, but she didn’t mind because if it were just the three of us, it would have been that way also.

David, Anna, and I chose David’s room to set up camp, while Missy chose the bathroom. Normally, Missy would

choose her bedroom, but she decided to choose the bathroom because of all the extra supplies (i.e. shaving cream, water, things in the cabinets, etc.).

When the doors shut to our designated area, it began. David, Anna, and I wrote down a message, loaded it into the Tonka truck, and sent it across the hall. The truck crashed into the door, which informed Missy inside that there was a message awaiting her.

Of course, we would receive the truck back after a few minutes. The poor little truck went back and forth, from door to door carrying what we thought were terrorizing messages, such as “Are you ready for what we are going to do to your room?” and “We are going to tear your room apart!” Every once in a while, I would send excerpts from a Disney book, based solely on the fact that it made my sister so incredibly angry. It was fun to make her mad.

David, Anna, and I devised our plan. David suggested our first move once we were in the enemy’s door. “Let’s put Vaseline on the toilet seat and door handle. Then we can put Saran Wrap on the toilet, so if she tries to pee it will spill all over the floor.”

Anna and I nodded in agreement, but since we didn’t have any Saran Wrap, someone had to be the gopher and retrieve it from the kitchen. We had to be careful because anyone caught by Missy in the hallway would be taken captive.

Being the youngest, I was voted the gopher. We cracked the door open and peered into the empty hallway. The truck had just been sent over to Missy's territory and was inside the bathroom. I bolted down the hallway to the stairs. Whew! I made it! I grabbed the Saran Wrap from the kitchen and crept back up the stairs. I sneakily looked around the corner of the wall; there was no one in sight. I ran like a prisoner escaped from jail to the safety of our room. I had made it.

We had received the Tonka truck back with a message telling us to "beware of the things to come." Our plans were almost finished; we just needed a few more ideas of what to do to the bathroom once we exchanged rooms.

"What if we put toothpaste on the mirror and stuck toilet paper to it?" asked Anna. What a great idea! It would create such a mess and would be so funny looking! David and I loved it.

Then I decided that we would cover the bathtub, and everything else for that matter, in shaving cream. That was it. We finished our plan and were ready to put it into effect.

Bang! The Tonka truck hit our door with a message saying that Missy was going downstairs and not to invade her turf. This was it; we had the chance to get her when she didn't see it coming.

"Do not go in the bathroom, guys," she warned us. Obviously, we did anyway. When you tell little children not to do

something, especially in a game, you know they will do it anyway. That is just what she intended. Sly as a fox, that Missy.

Missy went downstairs and stood around the bottom of the steps, listening for our door to open and the pitter-patter of our feet to head down the hallway. We entered the bathroom and found a piece of paper detailing her plans folded up on the countertop. Aha! We had caught her! David, Anna, and I thought that Missy would not be able to carry out these plans because we had her territory and she was clueless—or so we thought.

Click. The door was shut. David, Anna, and I began to put our plan to action. David put Saran Wrap on the toilet so perfectly that there was not a single wrinkle in the material. He grabbed the Vaseline from the cabinet in the bathroom and covered the toilet seat, handle, and door handle in the gooey mess.

I shook up the shaving cream so hard that I thought it would burst open in my hands. I shot it out all over the bathtub and covered the shower walls. The shower and tub looked like it had snowed all over.

Anna and I dabbed toothpaste on the giant mirror above the sinks and ripped little shreds of toilet paper and stuck it to each blob. David stood guard at the door to make sure that Missy did not come barging in and ruin our surprise.

Little did we know that while we were terrorizing her base, she had snuck back upstairs to do a little terrorizing of her own. Rats! We had fallen into her trap, just like she wanted.

In our territory, Missy covered the hanging wall-mirror in shaving cream, put shaving cream on the walls, messed up the beds, threw the toys all over the room, threw homemade paper confetti all over the room, and eventually put a plastic cup full of water on the top of the door. The water was a brilliant idea and we did not think twice when we spied on her and saw her carry that plastic cup into our area. Missy planned on us flinging the door open and having the water fall on top of us.

Back in the bathroom, Anna and I were putting the finishing touches on the mirror when we heard a knock on the door. David answered it, but cracked it just a little in fear of Missy standing on the opposite side. It was my dad! He pushed the door open and saw what a disaster we had created in the bathroom.

“What are you doing?” he screamed. We just stared in disbelief. How could we describe our antics to our hot-tempered father?

“Where is your sister?” he yelled directly at David and me. There were no words. Even if I had tried to open my mouth, nothing would have come out. We both pointed our little fingers directly across the hall.

Of course, my sister had heard my dad yell and was more frightened when he came in the room. The plastic cup dropped from the door and spilled ice-cold water all over my dad's head. I think he might have sizzled. As strange and unreal as it seems, the water only fueled the fire—since when does water *fuel* a fire?

Anna did not get yelled at because she was his niece, but the three of us got an earful. He continued to yell at us as he examined both rooms and the demolition we caused. For once, I did not break down into tears because I thought it was funny. This was one of the very few times I thought my dad yelling was funny. My dad—when yelling—was a scary man.

My father left the room with the warning that we “better clean everything up good enough so that nobody could tell what we did.” We always did this anyway, so it was not much of a punishment.

The four of us cleaned the rooms, after inspecting our own territory and what the enemy had done to it, of course. We had never laughed so hard together while cleaning and thinking about how “fired up” my dad had been about the situation.

Little did he know we had played this game on a regular basis for a few years, but we will keep that little secret to ourselves.

The Other Mother

By Alyssa Christian

Mr. Mothern was my 7th grade English teacher and Accelerated Writing teacher my junior and senior year of high school. In addition to teaching me academically at Mapleton High School, he taught me how to be physically strong through track and field. Throughout the years, Mr. Mothern became a huge influence in my life. Part of the reason I am such a strong person partly because of his teaching abilities.

Another character in this story is my mother. Even though she doesn't necessarily play a role in this momentous story, you must understand how important my mom is in order to understand this story's full content. No one out there can take my mother's place in my life. She has really helped me get through life and has always been there for me. If it wasn't for my mother, I don't think I would be as strong of a woman as I am both emotionally and socially.

It was my fourth year of having classes with Mr. Mothern, so I knew his name and the type of teacher he was very well. He was the type of teacher who would always make class interesting. Mr. Mothern would almost always keep me alert because I never knew what he was going to say or do. As I was sitting at my seat in the back of the room and working on my first article after Thanksgiving break, for the *Advocate*, Mapleton High School's newspaper, I stumbled across a

problem coming up with a catchy title. Under stress, I quickly raised my hand to ask for help.

“Mom,” I shouted without realizing what I had just mistakenly said. The whole class heard that I called Mr. Mothorn, “Mom.” He looked at me and laughed and said, “Do I look like your mom to you?” I was red with embarrassment, not knowing what to do next. There was no way I could cover up this mistake.

The laughter and teasing from the class and Mr. Mothorn lasted for well over a month. As it drew closer to Christmas break, everyone in class including the teacher seemed to have forgotten that tragic day in Accelerated Writing class. To my surprise, Mr. Mothorn had something more embarrassing in store for me.

Every year, on the last day before Christmas break, the entire school gathers in our auditorium for a traditional Christmas play. Santa Claus comes and gives out strange, but hilarious gifts to random students. For instance, if you were a student who was frequently late you would receive an alarm clock, or if you were the one to always get three lunches you would get a free sandwich that was old and gross. As you can see, these weren’t your average gifts that you were excited to receive.

The play drew to an end, and Santa made his annual appearance. The bell was about to ring, and all the students

were anxious to get home for a long, relaxing break. To my surprise, Mr. Mothern walked up to the microphone, a folder in one hand, and announced that he needed me to come up to the stage. As I made my way to the front of the room, I knew instantly what was about to come next. The front row came alongside me as I walked to the stairs. Mr. Mothern began to tell the entire school, yes the ENTIRE school, what I had done.

“Alyssa here is in my class. She was working studiously on a project as she came across a question. Without hesitation, she shouted ‘MOM’ to get my attention.” He looked at me and said, “Thought I had forgot? Well, I am giving you a picture to remember this.”

When I looked at the picture he had just handed me, I saw the words “I am not your mother” in bold black letters. I knew from this point forward, even if I tried my hardest, I would never live this story down. I’m surprised they didn’t make it an article for the *Advocate*.

Up until the day of graduation, as I walked in the halls, people would taunt me about that day. I still have the picture as a reminder of my embarrassing day in Mr. Mothern’s class. My real mom thought it was so funny and even hung the picture on the refrigerator. I get so embarrassed to even look at Mr. Mothern. I’m sure on our 10th year or even 25th Class Re-

union, someone will surely mention me calling Mr. Mothern
“Mom.”

Getting What I Deserved

By Tess Eppley

When I was younger, I was a different kind of girl. At the age of five, I was mischievous and when I wanted to be, just a little bit mean. No one could know this better than my older brother. Ben is two years older than me, and he had his own way of dealing with my attitude. That way generally involved us punching, slapping, or biting the other, along with any name-calling we could work in. Our house was filled with this joy until high school, when Ben graduated and both of us matured a little bit. I'm glad to say we now are best friends and truly love one another, not just because we have to. But some fights along the way still stick out in my mind.

It was a beautiful summer day. A blue-sky-birds-chirping-no-one-can-get-me-down type of a day. Ben and I were outside playing by ourselves. Luke and Jesse, the two neighborhood boys who usually joined us to play during the summer, had better plans that day. Since I was the only girl, I spent most of my time being a cowboy to their Indians, playing third baseman in a pick-up game of baseball, or playing a thief during a game of cops and robbers. But today it was just the two of us, and we had to create our own entertainment. I was zooming around our tear-drop-shaped driveway on a hand-me-down tricycle and Ben, being the seven-year-old he was, did his best practicing hitting golf balls just like our dad had

taught him. Missing the flair and drama a normal day held, I let my mischievousness get the best of me.

Being the stubborn girl I was, I parked my bike right in front of Ben's "fairway." "Tess, get out of the way!" Ben yelled. Determined not to back down, I shouted back, "Make me!" This shouting match continued on for a few minutes until we both got restless; then the real fun began. Ben, trying to give me one last chance, calmly stated, "Tess, if you do not move out of my way right now, I am going to hit you in the face with a golf ball." No one I know would think that a seven-year-old could come through on a promise like that. Even though Ben went on to play golf in high school, he was never this world's next Tiger Woods.

I heard every word he had to say, and feeling quite certain that he would totally miss me, I held my ground. Parked in the direct line of fire, sitting on my black and yellow tricycle, I was not prepared for what happened next. Ben took his left-handed swing straight back, followed through and made contact with the little white ball. Hurling through the air, the sphere came into contact with my nose. SMACK! Before I knew it, the bitter taste of blood was filling my mouth, and tears began to stream down my face.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU DID THAT!" I continued shouting my entire walk to the house, with Ben stumbling behind me trying to register what he had just done. "Please

don't tell Mom. Please, Tess," Ben pleaded with me. Blubbering with tears, and blood continuing to flow out of my nostrils, I paid no attention to his pleas. I finally had something he was going to get in so much trouble for, and I was going to milk it for all it was worth. "Ben, she's going to see my face. She'll just know," I told him. "I can't hide this." The panic in his voice made the pain I was feeling completely worth it. I knew he was going to get in so much trouble and I couldn't wait to see it happen.

Once we got in the house, my mom instantly wanted to know what happened, and who caused it. "Tess, what happened?" was the first question out of her mouth. "He did it! Ben hit me in the face with a golf ball!" I had no problem letting Ben take total blame for what he had done, even though I might've egged him on a bit. "Mom, she wouldn't move out of the way," he combated. "That's no reason to hit a ball at her face, Ben!" Mom was not happy with either of us, but I'm pretty sure I won that fight. I ended that week the winner, proudly displaying a bump on my nose. And Ben ended that week the loser, miserably being grounded to his room.

Ben and I continued to have our differences growing up, and blood continued to be shed for many years. But we had a lot of fun through those years and clearly, even the "bad times" have left lasting memories. Hopefully all brothers and

sisters can be lucky enough to create memories. Memories that make you laugh and help you remember what it was like when you were young. And maybe someday you will have something to pass on to your own children when they bicker with their siblings.

The Dog-Days of My Life

By Leah Finney

Irony is a funny thing. One usually doesn't realize it until the moment has already past, for hindsight is 20/20. That is how it has been with pets in my family. We've had three dogs die tragic deaths (you will soon agree), and one cat live for eighteen years. (I will omit Millie, the Tasmanian-Devil-Dog, whose mouth acted like a meat-grinder on my dad's hand when he tried to take anything from her mouth. She didn't actually see life's end under our roof—we quickly took her to the pound.) It wouldn't be so bad except that dogs are so much better than cats—in every single way... period. Why did our dogs have to live such short, but joyous, lives when our cat plagued our family with her existence ever since I have been able to remember? That is a question, my friends, that still haunts me to this day, and a question I will not attempt to answer in this essay. But before I get too carried away, let me rewind a little... *The following events have been heart-wrenching incidents of my life in and of themselves. However, looking back over the many deaths over the years, I have gotten over the sadness. I now see them in an ironic and humorous light. With that being said, I invite you to feel free to chuckle when inclined.*

The past twenty-one-plus years of my life I have hated cats. I don't know exactly what it is, but I despise them. First of all, whenever I am around cats, I start to sneeze and

scratch my eyes. But being allergic to cats isn't the worst part about them. Cats seem to flock to me—they must know I don't want them anywhere nearby. But it doesn't seem to faze them. Cats and I are like two magnets: opposites attract. You'd think because of my strong dislike for cats, I would only have dogs—or fish—as a pet growing up. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

Throughout my childhood and teenage years, my family had one cat. Tiger was her name. We were given Tiger as a gift from my mom's parents when my brother was two, making me almost four years old. Tiger was definitely a gift that kept on giving. She showed affection in a very special way. When I was little, before I understood that cats were evil, I would start to pet Tiger. You'd think she would like that. However, Tiger was a different sort of cat. When we would come near her, she would begin to hiss and swish her tail. She even spat at us every now and then. Because of how she reacted to my kindness, I began to dislike her—eventually loathing her. I received enjoyment from scaring her or making her mad on purpose. Looking back, I realize I probably should have been a little nicer to Tiger, maybe even tried to win her over. But it is too little too late. She has since deceased. God rest her kitty soul. But wait, I am getting ahead of myself.

The first dog our family ever got was a Dalmatian puppy. I remember that day vividly. It was my parents' anniversary, so my three younger siblings and I were at home with the babysitter while they were out on a date together. I remember them coming home, asking us to come outside on the porch, saying, "We have a surprise for you!" And there he was: small and white with black spots, full of energy, and so adorable! It was love at first sight for all us kids. As it usually goes with new pets, we were over-ambitiously volunteering to take him on walks, take him to use the bathroom outside, feed him, and on, and on. When it came time to name him, all six of us agreed upon Huckleberry. I think it was my mom's clever wit that came up with it. Since our last name was Finney, the puppy's name was *Huckleberry Finney*.

The first 10 months of Huckleberry's life were bliss. We loved him, took care of him, and played with him as best kids know how. Then one day, everything went downhill. He kept getting sick, and was unable to keep his food down. We didn't know what it could be, so we took him to the vet. The vet x-rayed Huckleberry and found a wad of string balled up in his intestines. The ball of string was from his rope toy. Unbeknown to us, he had chewed off the strings and swallowed them. The vet told us an operation was our only option to help him. He had a 50/50 chance of making it through surgery. Of course, we had to give it a try, but, un-

fortunately, he didn't make it. It was the first loss I had to face as a child. It is funny how attached people get to their pets. But this isn't supposed to be a sad moment, so let me continue.

Our next dog was a beautiful black Labrador named Blackberry. (Yes, we were sticking with the name-theme.) Relatives of our cousins gave him to us when he was a puppy. We got Blackberry soon after Huckleberry's death because we loved having a dog so much. Now that we had experienced what it was like to have a pet that wasn't a malicious and spiteful cat, our lives had been altered forever.

Blackberry lived five long years before things turned sour. His death was out-of-the-blue and a shock to us all. I was in seventh grade, and it was springtime. I know that because the night Blackberry died I ran my fastest race in middle school track. I remember coming home, busting through the door, excitedly exclaiming, "I got my best time! I ran a 1:16 in the 400! It was...." My eyes scanned the living room. My whole family was on the couch, with tear-streaked faces, crying and crying.

"What happened?" I asked, worriedly.

"Blackberry died...", my mom answered, followed by more sobs.

"What? How?" I was in shock.

"The school bus...", she trailed off.

My dad, pulling it together, tried to explain, “The electric fence, that’s been broken, Blackberry ran through it when he was chasing the bus this afternoon.”

It was all starting to make sense now. Blackberry despised the big, noisy, yellow monster that ate his masters every morning, and spit them out every afternoon. If we didn’t keep him inside, or the electric fence turned on, he would run and run after the school bus, trying to protect his masters, until he defeated it. Unfortunately, the one time he had his chance, it didn’t turn out so pretty. I’ll leave that one to your imagination since I wasn’t an eyewitness either.

Finally, the last tragedy I will attempt to explain could perhaps be the worst of them all—if that is possible. We waited a couple years before willingly subjecting ourselves to the chance of another doggy-death. When we were finally ready, we found our puppy at the pound. She was a black Lab mix. We named her Lucky, so she would *be lucky*. But *we*, it turned out, were not so lucky. She died after we had her for two weeks. She caught the puppy disease called Parvo, most likely from the pound, and it got the better of her. Talk about irony—she wasn’t so lucky after all.

What makes me the most irate is, while all these deaths were occurring, our cat Tiger was alive and kickin’. Still as mean as ever, she ruled our house on East Scatter Ridge Road like it was her own empire, where she was the queen, poison-

ing and hypnotizing her enemies left and right. I'm trying to imagine her thought process whenever a new dog stepped foot on her turf. It probably went something like this, of course reading it in your most sinister of voices: "Welcome home, little puppy. Here is where you will learn that cats are far superior to dogs in every way imaginable. Don't even try to outlast me. I've got nine lives. You will barely notice me, just like the humans, or maybe even try to oust me, but that will, in the end, be your downfall. I will survive, I will survive, I will survive!" She would finish her thoughts with an ominous cackle, before slinking away to put her master plan into action.

The tables have turned, however. There is a new queen of the empire. Her name is Ellie. Ellie is the first dog to overcome and outlive all Tiger's evil schemes. She is currently alive, and full of energy, and love. Good thing I don't believe in jinxing, or I would have to rush home and say my last words. She's strong, though. I have a good feeling about her. When my cousin found out we got another dog, he said, "That dog is walkin' the green mile!" Maybe she is, maybe she isn't. But one thing is for sure, she no longer has to battle Tiger for queen of the East Scatter Ridge Road Empire. Just in case you were still debating, cats are fools, and while dogs may drool, they still rule!

The Court Jester: My Father

By Molly Gedeon

When I think of my family, I immediately think of laughter. The Gedeons are known for a lot of things, some good and some even better. However, the most common impression we leave with people is one of outlandish pranks and practical jokes. I am the way I am because of my family; my sense of humor and outlook on life is in large part due to my father. My father, a 51-year-old magistrate, is the funniest man I know. Most people can't figure him out and hardly anyone appreciates his humor more than I do. The best way I can describe my childhood and young adult life is to explain my father and his role in my upbringing.

Richard Gedeon, or "Dicky-Poo," as I tend to call him, is much more than a practical joker. Dick's a man with a warped and twisted sense of humor; and I mean that in the best possible way. From the minute I came out of my mother's womb, my father began joking with me. My name, Molly, is not my birth name. My parents couldn't decide on a name: Monica or Molly. Personally, I think they just didn't care all that much seeing that I was the third and last child. They had more important things to worry about than a silly little thing like the name of their unborn baby. From the information that I have gathered, my mother wanted to name me Monica and my father wanted to name me Molly. After

about two seconds of intense discussion (I'm sure my sister was screaming for their attention), my parents simply gave up. My father thought they had made a choice; however, it was not the choice my mother thought they had agreed on. The result of all this was eighteen years of my life with two first names. My birth certificate says Monica; however, my father has called me Molly since the second he saw me. This caused many problems in grade school all the way through high school. My teachers didn't know what to call me and my friends always joked about it. On my 18th birthday I filed for a legal name change. Sure enough, the magistrate my case went before was none other than the Honorable Mr. Dicky-Poo Gedeon himself. Although he had every opportunity to play the most horrible joke imaginable—changing my name to something completely absurd—he followed my wishes. On May 4th 2004 I legally became Molly and the joke finally ended, or so I thought. My father now calls me Monica.

Taking advantage of every awkward situation in my life was my father's forte. From joking around at teacher-parent conferences to "interviewing" every boy I've ever brought home, my father lives for any opportunity to laugh or make others laugh. I have never laughed as hard as I did when my father volunteered to become my swim team's mascot. I was eight years old and probably one of the five worst swimmers on the team. The fact that I wasn't the greatest swimmer

never stopped my parents from sitting on the bleachers at every meet screaming their lungs out. I can still hear my father to this day, “Let’s go, GEDEON—just don’t sink to the bottom of the pool again.” There was, however, one meet my parents and entire extended family didn’t cheer at all. Instead, they had brown paper bags over their heads with small holes cut out for eyes with signs reading, “We’re Not with Gedeon.” This of course would make me look up and laugh uncontrollably and then miss the beep off the blocks. However, sitting on the sidelines wasn’t cutting it—my dad was getting bored. Thus the idea of “Lake Shore Man,” Lake Shore Swim Club’s first and last team mascot. He tells me today that the idea came to him in the shower: “the place where all great ideas are born.”

With my mom as his accomplice, they sewed, stitched, stapled, and glued the most unflattering superhero costume imaginable. Please picture my father, 6 foot 4 inches and 180 pounds, in bright blue tights, a skintight shirt, a red cape, fins, and a florescent yellow spandex swim cap. “Lake Shore Man” was the hit of all the swim meets. He could be found behind the blocks, on the sidelines, and in the bleachers cheering for every swimmer there. Although I hung my head when he first unveiled himself, *all* of himself, in front of my fellow teammates, I eventually grew proud of my dad. No other parent would dare dress up like a raging lunatic in spandex just to

make the long day of sitting on hard bleachers a little more amusing.

“Lake Shore Man” was not the only character my father created to get a laugh from the crowd. Every year for the past 56 years my entire extended family has gone on a weeklong family reunion at Allegany State Park in New York State. Started in 1949 by my father’s parents, Robert and Margery Gedeon, the tradition has carried on ever since. This vacation is my father’s time to shine—nothing is off limits here! From pretending to “accidentally” drop my cousin’s newborn child into the fire pit (it was only a baby doll he had dressed in the child’s exact clothes) to outlandish practical jokes around the campfire, my father is known for pulling the most unexpected and unpredictable jokes during this one week.

The summer of 2003 my father came up with the idea of a game show night while at Allegany. Along with our sleeping bags, food, clothes, and flashlights, my father had secretly packed three full game show host outfits, an entire game show set, and coordinating team attire. One rainy evening everyone was told to gather in the mess hall for a surprise visitor. Once in the mess hall, you were thrown into a cheesy version of *Jeopardy*. With loud music blaring from an old boom box, “Dick Trebek” appeared behind red velvet curtains in the most outlandish outfit imaginable. Dressed in purple pants that were four sizes too small and went up to his

ankles and a hideous floral button-down shirt, he introduced his sidekick, “Vanna,” my mother. In an 80’s blue bedazzled dress with shoulder pads and pink patent leather pumps, “Vanna” smiled, waved, and turned over the cards in such a way that looked like she must have practiced in front of a mirror for hours. That night the mess hall was shaking with laughter. Every person there was bent over with stomach pains from laughing and wiping the tears out of their eyes. With questions that centered around embarrassing family members that ranged from old boyfriends to how many times my aunt has been married—5, everyone there was involved in the questions.

When I tell stories of my childhood and my father, people usually look at me funny. Some people think he’s out of his mind and others think he is just cruel. My father is an amazing man. With a mind like no one else, my father has the unique ability to make any dull situation the most amusing time of your life. Although I have been the butt of countless jokes, I can still look back at my childhood and laugh. My father has given me the ability to laugh at myself, a quality that helps me get through each day. Like my father always says, “If you can’t laugh at yourself, you’re missing out on some of the funniest moments in life.”

More Than a Game

By Jaclyn Goddard

Checking in the full-length mirror one last time before leaving, I made sure I looked first-class in my crisp blue and white uniform. Our high school softball coach, Sandy Cummings, informed us that the mustard-colored bus was here. All of us in the stuffy locker room scurried out the doors. The sun hit our eyes causing us to squint, unable to see for a few moments. We piled ourselves with our excessive amount of equipment onto the bus and got situated for the journey.

Bus rides were always one of the best parts about traveling for games. Everyone talked and laughed, mostly not thinking about the importance of what lies ahead. Occasionally my mind would wander, wondering about what the next couple hours of hard work would entail for my teammates and me. None of us had ever played on a college field before, but here we were, ready to face this enormous challenge. We unloaded ourselves and our equipment, and set up in an open green field for some pre-game practice. While we worked hard and prepared for the game both physically and mentally, we tried to have fun so we could relax and stay calm. After some practice, we headed toward the dugout to unpack our things. Later, we took ground balls on the field to try and get used to how it would feel. When we were done taking infield, we treaded off to go and have a pep talk with the team and

coaches. Coach Cummings informed us, “Approach this game like any of the others and go out there and play like you know how.” When we lined up for the playing of the National Anthem, I felt proud to be standing there knowing many others had done the same and I was a part of something much greater: the sport of softball.

For team members, softball is much more than playing the game. Softball is about the road trips and the friends you make along the way. Personally, I had grown up and played with the same girls for twelve years and made bonds and friendships that could never be replaced. While playing the game was a wonderful experience, when I took the field with eight of my best friends it made the sport irreplaceable. It definitely took a group effort to win a game. My teammates and I learned to work together and become one on the field, so we knew what to anticipate and expect for every occurrence. Thinking back to that important game, I realized that all my hard work had not been for nothing, and that my times spent playing softball were some of my greatest.

For the championship game, my team took the field first. I darted out onto the dusty, brown dirt taking my position at second base. I cheered on our pitcher while the crowd’s liveliness was muffled by my concentration on the batter. The first two girls struck out and the last batter hit a bullet between the first baseman and me. I dove onto my stomach,

outstretched my glove to capture the ball, and threw the ball from my knees. “You’re out!” exclaimed the umpire. With three outs, it was now my team’s turn to bat.

That inning we hit the ball fairly well, but no one was able to score. The game went on with neither team able to put a run on the scoreboard. Finally, in the sixth inning when we were on defense, one of the opposing girls hit a shot to the outfield, scoring another of their players who was already on base. After this disappointing field experience, it was once again our turn to hit.

We got our first base runner on, and it was my turn to be up. My adrenaline was flowing as I looked at my coach to get the signal of what she wanted me to do. I was supposed to bunt, which was my specialty. I almost always got the bunt down, buried into the dirt, and could outrun the throw before the first baseman caught the ball. The pitcher threw the ball, and I brought my bat around just in time to lay the ball down the third baseline. I was safe at first, and my bunt advanced the other runner to put us in scoring position. After a good battle at bat, the next girl struck out. The runner in front of me and I waited to see what our next teammate would do. Watching the first pitch go by into the catcher’s leather mitt, she swung at the following pitch and hit a line drive to the outfield. The runner in front of me crossed home plate with ease while a dust storm surrounded me from sliding into third

base. The game was tied at one. Unfortunately, before I was able to score my team made outs and we took the field for the last time.

During the last inning something went dreadfully wrong. It was as if everything we had learned prior to this game was forgotten. We started making unintelligent mistakes, and the other team took advantage. They ended up scoring another run before we could get out of the inning. It was our final turn to bat, but none of us would pull through and end up scoring that time. We had lost the game two to one. And just like that, our dream of going to the Regional Finals was over.

That day was one of my greatest experiences and definitely one of my most emotional. My teammates and I felt so many sensations: anxiety, adrenaline, exhaustion, and hope. We had tried to put all that emotion into how we moved our bodies, trying with all we had to transfer all those strong feelings to the game we were playing. Regrettably, my team had put in all the effort they could, but still came up empty handed.

There was nothing to be said to make the realization hurt any less. The frustration and pain that came with losing was not easily forgotten. We shook hands with the other team offering our congratulations, trying our best to stay positive. Following the game was a medal ceremony, but we did not want a medal—we wanted our season to continue. After the

ceremony, our coaches took us into left field and we sat in the green grass while they talked about how proud they were of us. Coach Cummings stated, “The act that a person is participating in is not just about what one is performing, but also about all the emotions that come with it.” As she kept talking, I sat there looking around at the group of girls I had grown to care for and love. At that moment it really was not about winning; it was about the experience of the game and how much it had taught me.

Softball offered so much more to me than just a game; it gave me a way of life. The sport allowed an outlet for emotions. As I packed up my equipment for the final time and walked away from the field leaving my footprints in the dirt, I realized that while my footprints will fade away with a soft breeze, my fond memories of the game, and softball itself, will always remain.

Adventures with Baby Grandma

By Christa Hamm

Ever since I can remember, my grandma took care of my baby sister, Melissa, and me every day until we were old enough to attend pre-school. I quickly gave her the nickname “baby grandma,” because she was always taking care of me and my baby sister. My grandma was quite unusual, not how you would expect a typical grandmother to behave. She always carried a can of tobacco around like it was her best friend, because she smoked a corn pipe instead of cigarettes. The pipe was made out of a corncob and was the color yellow; she would stuff it with tobacco and then light a match and start puffing away. She had a boyfriend at the time because she and my grandfather divorced many years ago. The boyfriend didn’t live with her but they were dating; we didn’t get to see much of him. My grandma enjoyed dying her hair often, so there was a tint of purple in her hair at all times. The purple that glowed in her hair came from the chemical reactions with different hair dyes.

My grandmother owned a large property that had two identical houses on it; one was in the front and the other was a few acres behind. She liked to move from one house to the other to change it up a bit. I remember my mother and aunt and uncle coming to help her move all the furniture out of one house and into the other. They would move her bed,

couch, chairs, coffee table and kitchen utensils. Finally, she decided it was time to build a new house way back in the woods for herself and have people rent out the other two identical houses. She began building this new house but found out that she couldn't afford to have it completed, so the builders stopped working on it. It was literally half of a house; all that was built was a two-door garage and a bedroom upstairs. To get to the bedroom upstairs, she had to buy a stepladder on wheels. My grandma lived in a garage for a few years. Her oven, microwave, refrigerator, television, couches, kitchen table, washer, dryer, and dishwasher were all spread out inside her garage. My sister and I loved playing inside the garage with my grandma. It was a space where we could use our imagination to play.

I have several memories of my grandma taking care of us that I enjoy thinking about. I was always embarrassed to be driving with my grandma, because she had an old manual white Ford Fiesta and she would roll down the window to make a crack for the smoke from her pipe to escape from the car. If we were at a stoplight for too long, the car would stall, and she would have to restart it. The car would go back and forth until finally the ignition started up again. "Come on, you old piece of crap, don't die on me now," my grandma would scream while stalled at a stoplight. One day when driving to the market with my grandma, Melissa had an accident and

leaked in her underwear. My sister had a bladder problem when she was younger; she had a hard time holding her pee. “Give me that underwear, Melissa, and I’ll get them dry for you before we get to the store,” my grandmother said, and she took my sister’s underwear and hung them outside of the car from the antenna. There they were for everyone to see hanging from the antenna of the Ford Fiesta. Melissa was screaming with anger, “I want my underwear back, baby grandma. They are going to fly off the antenna!”

My grandma didn’t like to listen to my mother’s rules for when she would watch over us. Melissa and I could convince my grandma to let us do whatever we wanted. We both liked to have pacifiers at all times, and our mom was trying to train us not to use them anymore. Once my mom found out that my grandma was giving them to us behind her back, it got ugly. My grandma decided the best way for my sister and me to stop using the pacifiers would be to gather all of them together and cut them into pieces in front of us. She put the cut-up pieces into a frying pan and lit them on fire in front of us. “Now you can no longer use pacifiers when I’m babysitting you,” my grandma said, showing us the pacifiers on fire. My sister and I started crying, but eventually we learned that we could suck our thumbs to get the same effect as a pacifier.

During the hot summers when my grandma took care of us, Melissa and I enjoyed going for ice cream. Any time we were with baby grandma we had to earn our ice cream. She would tell us, "Let's go into the woods and I will show you girls where you can find some beer cans and pop cans that are worth 10 cents." We each had to collect 10 cans to get a scoop of ice cream. In Michigan each beer or pop can was worth 5 cents more than in other states. We would walk to the ice cream store that was also a general store and give all the cans that we collected to the cashier in exchange for some ice cream. I was always embarrassed bringing in 10 beer cans to the store; I thought everyone would think that we were poor.

While playing in the garage one day, Melissa and I decided that we would make a potion drink for our grandma to have. We used everything that we could find to put in this drink and mixed it together so you wouldn't see what ingredients we used. I remember putting hot sauce, coffee grounds, salt, pepper, ketchup, Sprite, honey and egg whites into this potion drink. My grandma never paid close attention to us, so she didn't know what we were up to. Finally after stirring the drink 25 strokes to get the ketchup and egg to liquefy we gave it to my grandma. "It's a potion drink, baby grandma. You have to try it because we took so much time making it," we

told her. She took one sip of it and her face turned red and she immediately started coughing, then said, “It’s a little bitter, so maybe we should feed it to the dog.”

The best trick that we pulled on our grandma was when we were taking a bath in her house. I was always good at convincing my sister to do whatever great idea came to me. While playing in the bathtub with my grandma’s colorful glass mini liquor bottles, I thought that we should powder the bathroom with baby powder. After having enough fun in the bathtub, we got out and went to the bath closet to find three family-sized baby powder containers that my grandma had bought from Odd Lots. I told my sister to pour the baby powder all over the bathroom floor. We had a blast doing this. We danced around the powder that we were shaking all over the floor. After 15 minutes of fun, all the three baby powder containers were empty. The bathroom was small enough to leave one inch of baby powder on the ground. We just loved the smell and pure white look the powder left on the floor. We ran to our grandma, “Look at what we did to the bathroom!” She was not happy; it took her a week to clean all the powder off the floor. It didn’t help that we were soaking wet while pouring the powder onto the floor; it left a batter-like substance on the ground.

These are the memories and adventures that I had with my grandma and younger sister. I would say that my sister and I were brats when it came to behaving. Out of all the grandkids that my grandma has ever babysat for, my sister and I were the biggest troublemakers. I'm sure my grandma can tell more stories about what we did to her as young children than I can remember. My sister and I enjoyed every day that we spent with her as young children, because we knew it would be an adventurous day.

Starving for Cash

By Louis Infante

It began just like all stupid bets that I have seen begin: five guys sitting around the television, all of whom have probably drank one too many beers. Someone brought up the subject of fasting; I'm not sure if it was someone saying they couldn't go a day without eating or that someone was complaining because they had not eaten. What happened next is a classic example of why you should never make bold statements when surrounded by your friends, especially if you're not in the most sober of states. I made the guarantee that I would have no trouble not eating for a week. Immediately after the fateful words crossed my lips, I knew that my fate was sealed because I was called out instantly.

At this point there was no turning back, but before the bet started the terms had to be negotiated and they were the type of terms you could expect from your best friends. The debate over what fluids I could drink and how I would be monitored throughout the day went on for about an hour before we reached agreement and by then I knew that winning this bet was not going to be easy. The five guys involved decided that if I won the bet they would each pay me \$50 and if I lost I would give each of them \$25 and believe me they thought that there was no chance that I would win this bet. The rules that were agreed upon were ridiculous: I was al-

lowed only water and a ration of twenty ounces of juice per day and had to be in the presence of one of the people involved in the bet at all times except when I was in class and had to be zip-tied to an electrical fitting next to my bed at nighttime. Of course there were other guidelines that were just ridiculous, such as the rule invented by my friend Mike that stipulated I was allowed to eat as much chewing tobacco and toothpaste as I wanted—this was hilarious to just about everyone but me. The only good thing I got out of the whole deal was that before the bet started at midnight I was to receive a rib and chicken dinner from Damon's, which I devoured hoping it would sustain me for a few days. I was sorely mistaken.

After I went to bed on day one, I was zip-tied to my bed and was assured I would be let go before I had to be at class to give a presentation. When I woke in the morning, I expected someone to come get me out but as the time passed I realized that if I wanted to get to class I would have to chew through the zip-ties which I was not at all happy about. Not eating that morning wasn't a big deal since I'm not a big breakfast eater, but by the time lunch rolled around, I was so hungry I began to seriously doubt whether I would be able to do it for two days let alone seven. At dinner time on the first day the heckling really began as my friends started waving food in front of me and telling me that I might as well quit

now and save myself the misery. I managed to convince myself to try and keep going even though I was by now convinced that my chances were pretty slim. It got worse that night as I was forced to sit in the same room with the people betting against me and shove away about every type of snack food imaginable that they were trying to tempt me to eat all the while listening to the song “Hunger Strike.” Day number one had ended with me convinced that I was hopeless and thinking about how stupid I was for making the bet.

I woke up on day two a hungry man but a man determined to prove everyone wrong. As I walked out of the door in the morning, I saw that my competition was not letting up either from the looks of the pieces of paper hanging everywhere in our house with a picture of me and the words “Don’t Feed Lou!” printed on them. I thought the worst was over, but soon afterward I saw that they had posted the pictures on the telephone polls uptown—my friends had sunk to new lows. I struggled through class feeling tired and weak, but it started to seem like I was no longer feeling the intense hunger I felt during day one. The heathens continued to harass me during dinner, but I was starting to learn to ignore them and even began suggesting to them that they better find a way to get 50 bucks ready.

Days three through five were a real test and it was during these days of my self-imposed torture that I decided no mat-

ter what, I was not going to lose this bet. It was during these days that the bet became more than trying to win the money—it became a quest to prove to everyone and myself that I could do anything that I set my mind to. These two days also saw an escalation in torture given to me by my opposition as they forced me to walk uptown with them and stand by the restaurants and smell the food. This was extremely brutal not only because I had to smell delicious food, but I was getting weaker and didn't really enjoy walking around all night. By the end of these two days, I was starting to get a bit moody and I was smoking far too many cigarettes. It was obvious to everyone that the lack of food was taking a toll on me. But with day five in the books, I was feeling fairly confident and I could tell that my buddies were getting kind of nervous.

Day six followed the usual routine with a steady supply of heckling but now it was coming from two directions since some people actually started believing that I could finish. I will admit that at this time I was feeling pretty terrible, my vision would occasionally get blurry, and when my opponents gave me an “official” weigh-in, I was shocked to see that I had lost over 20 pounds in only six days which I am sure cannot be healthy. Another thing about this day that surprised me but also gave me some motivation was that friends of mine told me they heard people had bets going on in the

dining halls whether I would make it or not and people whom my roommates know began showing up to deliver some needed words of encouragement. I was honestly shocked at the number of people who knew about this silly little bet. You could tell by the end of day six that my buddies who were so sure only a couple days before that I had no chance of success were now realizing that I was going to finish and more likely than not they were going to have to pay up.

Day seven was the best day ever; I knew I would accomplish my quest. My friends no longer even tried to get me to cave in—they just resigned themselves to the fact that they were going to lose. The effects of starving myself had begun to set in even worse that day. It seemed that everything I tried to read pretty much blurred together and I looked pretty unhealthy, but at that point I didn't even care—I was just so excited that I actually did it. At about eleven at night, I began to prepare myself a feast to eat right after the clock struck twelve. I didn't even care if I would be able to eat it all. I was just excited to try and devour the heap of spaghetti I had put on my plate. When the clock struck midnight, I ate like a champion and talked smack to the losers the entire time.

This story is ridiculous in all aspects. I still cannot believe I actually agreed to do it, but I believe it had an underlying lesson. After I completed this quest, I have yet to be told by

my friends that I can't do something and I feel a greater confidence in myself than before I did it. It sounds strange, but this stupid bet actually helped me gain a better understanding of what I am able to do and see that if I put my mind to something I will succeed.

There's Something about Seon

By Seon Kim

Two pink baby pigs were following a lady with light and playful steps. A little later, the lady turned around and told them to stop following her and go away. One of the pigs kept on following her, saying, "I wanna come with you. Take me, take me!" and the little pink baby pig jumped into the lady's chest. The lady woke up from her dream right at that moment, and couple days later, she learned that she was pregnant with me. The dream indirectly revealed to my parents that they would have a healthy-chubby-cute baby just like the baby pig in the dream. I'm not quite sure how much my parents were happy and full of hope or expectation during pregnancy while picturing their baby based on the pig from the dream.

Think about a little baby girl like a pig? That doesn't sound like a compliment at all. No matter how pretty, cute and smart a baby pig is, nobody has heard any expression like, "Oh, your baby is so adorable...just...just like a little pig...." Although a pig dream means good luck and money in your future, according to people in my country, South Korea, it sure wouldn't give a pretty picture of a baby.

Anyway, here I am, having been born in a small local obstetrics hospital in the city of Pusan, on a very warm spring day, and very healthy as predicted: 3.5kg, 51cm, ten fingers

and ten toes, and no observable abnormality. Actually, my mom was hospitalized at a pretty big hospital to give birth to me after the expected date of confinement. During my mom's hospitalization, an unbelievable accident happened at the hospital. What a chance! Two babies were switched by a nurse's ridiculous mistake! Fortunately, the babies came back to their biological parents after a couple days, but it was a huge and shocking accident that totally freaked out all the prospective moms, including my mom.

After that accident, my mom began to want to move to a small obstetrics hospital where she didn't have to worry about a babies-switched accident. My poor dad, who finally gave up on my mom's obstinacy on moving to a different, small, not-famous hospital after giving her a long persuasive explanation of how safe she was, had to find a perfect hospital to meet my mom's standards. I think I really respect and appreciate their effort to prevent me from a HIGH possibility of being switched with some other baby. And Ta-da! He found my mom's desired hospital nearby their house, and I was safely born there. And then, Seon's life adventure began.

I'm an only child in my family because, according to my mom, I kept on saying that I didn't want any younger siblings ever since I started talking. As a result of my parents respecting my opinion so much (!) and wanting to provide better

support for one child, we stayed a pretty small-sized family: just dad, mom, me, and puppies all the time.

When I answered, "No" to questions about any siblings, many adult neighbors or friends of my parents told me, "Oh, poor you, you must be so lonely. You should ask your mommy to make a younger brother for you." Well, I actually didn't have much extra time to be lonely because many of my cousins, with whom I grew up and hung out together, lived very close to my house. Plus, I found out that 90% of my friends at preschool and kindergarten were bothered and teased by siblings: a pretty significant discovery for that early age. But later as an adult, I also found out that each of those siblings who used to bother and tease my friends became a B.F.F. for my friends after everyone have grown up.

One day, a couple years ago when I felt pretty lonely, I called my mom and joked to her that now she could make a younger brother for me. "You making a baby sounds more likely!" she said and hung up. That was a pretty clear answer.

Compared to the U.S., the enthusiasm and competition of achieving higher education and developing other talents are extremely emphasized in Korea. I think it is one way to survive and succeed from adverse conditions; many people in such a small country with a not very strong international authority and a challenging economic situation are motivated to work hard. Therefore, people began to think that our children

must have some special talent to compete with others and succeed among them.

Moms in Korea are incredible because they know and they do everything for their children. Their educational information network could beat the F.B.I. information-gathering system. Moms spied on and gathered information from other groups of moms and shared with their group, such as where the best teachers are, who the top students are to have their children study with, how the universities accept students, and a lot more. Luckily, my mom was not too competitive to make me the top-class person to show off. My parents tried to respect my opinion more than their persistence. However, there's always an obstacle, and it is a strict school system for this case.

When I was in high-school, saying "all high-school students lived at school" was not an exaggeration at all. All the high-school students were required to go to school at seven-thirty in the morning and stay at school until nine or ten at night. After regular classes ended at four-thirty, we cleaned up the classroom, had a dinner at school, and began studying again from six until ten o'clock. It was called "self-study time," but it was not even a choice. If we didn't want to take the "self-study time," we had to provide documented evidence of an excuse for the absence. Fortunately, I could stay away from "self-study time" because of my health conditions

and prospective college major; instrument performance major students were allowed to skip it to practice and take private lessons after school. However, it was sometimes a lot of fun when my friends and I played truant to skip a couple hours of “jail-like” school life.

One day, my friends and I decided to skip a couple of hours and go to my home to take a break; by the way, my home was five minutes away from the school. We needed to jump over a wall because the maintenance person was watching the gate in case of students like us. All of my friends safely jumped over the wall, and here came my turn. Unusually, I also landed safely, but right after a second we smelled something stinky. OH MY GOSH! I accidentally stepped on dung that stank the worst ever. We went to a store in front of the school to buy new shoes. As we were getting close to the store, the owner was smiling and getting ready to welcome us. But after she opened the door for us, “Yuck! What the heck is this smell?” she said, gripped her nose with her fingers, and of course blocked us from coming into the store. I felt very embarrassed and upset about the owner’s attitude of making a customer purchase new shoes through the door. But guess what, she couldn’t completely protect her store from the stinky dung smell because I threw away my old shoes with dung in her garbage can right in front of her store. Sweet revenge. Hooray!

My life adventures have continued in the U.S. since I started my study-abroad life. The beginning of my life in the U.S. was exactly what I expected and dreamed: no curfew, living alone, non-stop parties, and FREEDOM. I went to a language school in Chicago for a year, and it was the time that I experienced some stupid and embarrassing English-related happenings.

One day after about three months living in the U.S., my friends and I went to a restaurant. Until that time, I had not been to many restaurants with only my friends, who spoke all different languages, because I always needed to visit my cousins, who immigrated to the U.S. when they were six-years-old, on weekends. So, they usually took care of the English-needed situations for me including ordering food: I was and am still afraid of speaking poor English. Anyway, a waiter came, and all of us had no problem ordering drinks. The waiter came back with the drinks, and he began to take our orders. I competently asked for a well-done steak, and I thought that was it. Unexpectedly, the waiter asked me what kind of side dishes I wanted. I started to get a little nervous, but pretended that I was expecting that question, and fluently asked back, "What kind of side you have?" "Soup or Salad," he said. I was not sure if I correctly heard because he said it very fast and pronounced the words all connected. So, I asked again, "Can I beg your pardon?" very politely as I

learned in class. “Soup or salad,” again, it was very fast, but I thought I got it. Without any hesitation, I said, “Okay, I’ll take super salad.” All of us were blinking our eyes with no clue of what’s going on, and the waiter gave us a look like “what the heck are these people?” After some silence, the waiter kindly asked me again, pronouncing each word carefully, and I finally could complete ordering a dish of salad successfully.

About three months after that silly mistake, I had another toe-curling situation at Burger King. I had recently bought a car, and that was my first time ordering food from a drive-thru. I can tell you that ordering from a drive-thru is at least ten times harder than in person. Well, I wanted to try since I bought a car and needed to get used to it anyway if I planned to stay in the U.S. for many more years. “Welcome to Burger King. Bla... bla... bla...” Uh-oh, she sounded like an African-American lady, which means more trouble to understand. She finished with her turn to speak through the speaker, but I wasn’t able to understand her completely. And now it was my turn, “Number one, please.” I made a very simple and clear order. “What kinda drink you want?” I heard ‘drink,’ so I easily answered, “Diet coke, please.” And she said, “Do you want cheese on your burger?” Uh-oh again, I couldn’t hear her saying ‘cheese.’ “I’m sorry?” I asked, a new expression I had learned at school for asking someone to repeat some-

thing. “Do you want cheese on you burger?” her voice already became a little aggressive. I asked a couple more times, and I believe she really got irritated and said, “Chee~se! Chee~se!” At that moment, I felt a little frustrated and sorry for that FRIENDLY lady. So, I said, “Number two, please.” She didn’t ask me any further questions, and I had to eat a number two that day instead.

I have more life left to live than I have lived. I have experienced many unforgettable moments and events, and I also have met many different people who have taught me good things and bad things about life. I’m pretty satisfied with my life so far. And I believe more adventures will be happening until the end of my life. Bring them! I am ready to enjoy and learn much more and to write other essays after this.

When Chris Met Emily

By Emily Kresiak

“What are you talking about?” he asked. “I did not stalk you!”

“That’s fine. You loved me from the start, though. I know what I know, and you know,” I paused, then joked, “nothing!”

At that moment, as my boyfriend chased me into the living room, picked me up and tossed me onto the couch, I thought back to my days as a freshman, not knowing, or even caring, who Chris was. And now here he is, tickling me until I almost pee my pants. This isn’t your typical love story. It isn’t filled with those movie moments (well, maybe a few, but nothing with pianos and Tom Jones in the background, I swear) and it doesn’t have a normal boy-meets-girl beginning, because I really met him two years after we were first introduced.

I never really had trouble finding someone to be with of the opposite sex. I didn’t date the bad boys or the jocks; I tried to attract men who were quiet and nice. The less drama, the less serious the whole situation had to be. It was my first year of college; I was not expected to marry and buy that white-picket-fence house quite yet. Chris was apparently in the same situation. He dated a lot of people, too, and while most of his relationships were fairly long-term or serious,

some were not. Freshman year of college we both crossed ways, not only in the streets but also amongst mutual friends. Still, we never quite knew each other, just of each other. He was my friend's roommate, some guy who played guitar, was obsessed with movies, and had funky in-your-eyes hair—that and, oh yeah, he had an enormous crush on me. But I never thought much of guys who laid back and watched—chasing wasn't my job.

I had been dating a boy who lived nearly four hours away for the majority of my first year. He was sweet, but a bit of a pretty boy if you ask me, and definitely looked at his reflection while passing mirrors more than I did. He even carried a pocket-sized mirror in his “man purse.” Regardless, it was long distance, and it was nice when he visited once a month. I enjoyed the nonchalant feeling of the whole situation, but not of course his high maintenance—there were too many gifts to him of expensive hair gel and designer jeans.

Chris, on the other hand, had his hands full, very full, with a girl here at school. His roommate Kevin, also my friend, had informed me of their relationship, and the nightmares it was causing him day and night. Apparently she was in a sorority, was tall, fairly thin, with shockingly blonde hair, and a voice that could make Fran Drescher turn her head and stare. She was controlling, judgmental, and nasty. The girl sounded crazy, period. I mean, from what I had seen of

Chris, he seemed like a good guy with his head on straight, but why on earth was he with this, and I quote his roommate, “bitch on wheels.”

The few times Chris and I spoke, we really had nothing to say to each other. When we would be forced to talk, it was only because his roommate had left the room, and the awkward silence was too much to bear. We asked about each other’s classes, exchanged music tastes a few times, and we even once went on an excursion together for a friend’s birthday. Chit-chat here and there went in one ear and out the other. Typically, we never really had an opportunity to speak one on one because either Kevin was in the room already holding my attention, or Chris’s crazy girlfriend was there doing crunches on the floor and rolling around like a fish which had jumped out of its tank.

Since we shared mutual friends, we would occasionally be invited to the same parties during the end of freshman year, beginning of sophomore year. This caused for much drama between him and the fish. “Oh no, she can’t be going—we were invited, hunny! I don’t want to go if she is going to be there,” she would whine endlessly to him about me. I found it amusing—it never much bothered me. On numerous occasions my friends and I would leave parties because the two of them would show up together. They were sort of like Jekyll and Hyde.

I recall a few times being left alone smoking outside on the porch or on the stoop of one of these parties. Chris would come out and join me. I found it strange when we spoke to one another, and the way that he looked at me, or rather, the way he looked at the ground. It was months before I knew he had beautiful brown eyes; I never once saw them. He would sit and chat and shake a little—a nervous habit, I imagined. His cigarette drags were quick and short, as if enjoying this little moment we were having together, but waiting to hurry back inside to catch his breath. It was cute, I must admit.

As nonchalant and fabulously convenient as I thought my long-distance relationship was, it wasn't. It ended badly, and so did my next two relationships. Everything began so quickly and wonderfully, and ended so soon and horribly. I was always fine on my own, but it was nice to have that company, either here with me or at least over the phone.

At the same time as I was mourning over my newly single life and the boxes of memories I had no use for, Chris was ripping out his hair over his supposedly soon-to-be wife, but she wouldn't be if he could help it. He had already ended things with her four or five times, but it just wasn't getting through that blonde shield. There was yelling and arguing around the clock. He would leave; she would chase. He would meet someone new; she would introduce herself, too.

He would lock the door; she would climb through the window. He may have gotten rid of all of her stuff, but there was no getting rid of her.

This was all thrown at me one night during a get-together. Kevin and I had decided to watch *Sideways*, drink wine, and pretend to have sophistication far beyond any advanced wine lover—a typical night, I would say. Chris tagged along reluctantly. He knew his company was originally needed because he could purchase the wine, as we could not. Halfway through the film, we stepped outside for a cigarette and then, all at once, there it came—word after word of hatred toward this female shot from his mouth. I had never heard him speak so much. I don't think I had ever seen this much emotion ever. He shook his arms about, got it all out, and gave a sigh of relief, and a small but obvious smile. I could tell that he had to leave, even if it was halfway through the movie, but at some point, I knew he'd be back.

Fall quarter of my junior year, everyone returned to school with crazy summer stories, lots of money from their seasonal jobs, and much excitement because finally, we were out of the dorms. Kevin and I decided to room with a girlfriend of mine. We were all very anxious to get settled in and throw a get-together for all of our friends, a sort of welcome-back party. For the first time ever, I had returned to school a single lady. The entire summer I told myself that being alone

was what I needed because men were the scum of the earth, and women were better off without them. Better off without them until you meet someone new, that is.

To my surprise, Chris was one of the people who showed up to our party that night, though he was not the same person. He looked completely different, with a much sharper, defined style. He was sophisticated in his mannerisms and edgy with his remarks. We had hours of discussions on my front porch until the early hours of the morning. Not only did we finish each other's sentences, but also we were blurt-ing out each other's thoughts. We talked about everything that night, from bad relationships to good music, favorite foods to worst books. The weird thing was, we did not have one disagreement. The good thing was, I found out his eyes were brown.

Despite our obvious flirting, we held back, again. I'm not sure why, but we both made it very clear to one another that we were done with relationships for a long time. Both men and women were scum, apparently. Starting up a new relationship was a bad idea. Somehow I knew when he left, as the sun began to rise, we would do the exact same thing the next night, and perhaps the following weekend.

Sure enough, Chris and I were together every single night after that party. We learned more and more about each other and could not believe this hadn't happened sooner. The

awkwardness was still there, but I loved it. We would get up from the couch, and I would trip and fall. He would pour me a glass of water, and then spill it all over my lap. I even recall walking down the street once and nearly falling over when I mentioned his name.

Eventually we both got over the awkwardness. Many times a break in our conversation would send my stomach into knots. For two people who were so alike, it took forever for us to not be nervous around one another. I think the defining moment for us was about two weeks after the party. We were sitting out on my porch, as usual, and a woman walked by carrying bags full of groceries. She appeared to be in her mid-forties, most likely a resident of the town, not a professor or student. As she walked by, she waddled back and forth and hummed some old, cheesy television theme song. Chris and I smiled and waited for her to pass before continuing our conversation. She approached our porch and the moment she walked past us she let out one of the loudest farts I had ever heard in my life. I can't remember the last time I laughed so hard with someone else and acted so childishly. It took about ten minutes of pure silence after that in order to catch our breath.

A few months into our relationship, I decided to tell Chris that I loved him. Some people had said those words to me and vice versa, and he had reluctantly said them to other

girls, but never had we really meant it. I wanted it to be special, maybe even a little cheesy like a love scene in a movie. Perhaps I even wanted that piano and Tom Jones. I decided to write a poem and read it to him New Year's Eve. Romantic, cute, and creative, I thought.

Of course, with such bliss there was sure to be a downfall at some time. Little arguments here and there never seemed to threaten our relationship, though. Since we were so alike, we knew how each other worked immediately. This was good and bad. We knew that since we were both so god-damned stubborn, nothing was going to end a fight until one of us grabbed the other and did one of those Hollywood kisses. We both like to be right, so knowing that both of us were going to be wrong was horrifying to accept at first, until you realize loving someone matters more than being right.

Once the awkwardness had been tackled, something else had to plague us. That, of course, turned out to be that everything good would somehow go wrong. It had started small at first, with little things, like restaurants we wanted to go to were closed, or things we had bought each other got lost in the mail. These little things didn't seem to come close to what happened on New Year's Eve. The night started out a little rocky. Chris was late to pick me up, and two of the parties we planned to attend were cancelled. I could not find a perfect outfit, and was somewhat flustered and frustrated. My

roommate's boyfriend had broken up with her. One of my ex-boyfriends approached me in front of Chris and made a scene. The list goes on. What tops it all is that by the end of the night, we were both crying, back on my porch. I thought, though, what better time than now to read this poem. Who cares if things aren't perfect—nothing thus far had been. No matter how well we got along, there was always something, but we just didn't seem to mind because we were always happy with one another.

After I read the poem, I looked up at him with wet, puffy eyes.

"Well, I guess there is just one more thing to do," I began to choke up, "Chris, I love you. And I'm sorry about tonight, and everything went wrong and I wish it had been perfect but here we are crying, and ... and"

He grabbed my face: "I love you, too. This was perfect. I'd like it no other way."

Martha Sightings

By Molly Lambka

My grandmother died on August 8, 2004, and thinking about it now, I should have known that she couldn't stay away. Martha was one of the more opinionated women whom anyone could ever meet, and rightfully so, I suppose. She was the youngest of six in an extremely strict Catholic family. She had many opinions (she did have two parents and five brothers and sisters to help her form all those opinions) and she wasn't afraid to voice them. She had something to say about every possible subject: relationships, what was an appropriate sacrifice during the Lent season, paint colors (that's another story in itself). You name it, and she would tell what she thought of it; however, for as aggravating as she sometimes got, I loved her, and one day she was gone. But it seems like she just couldn't stay away.

About three weeks after the funeral when everything had finally calmed down, my mother asked me an interesting question. I was just getting home from work, and she asked me, "Do you believe in ghosts?" I didn't get a "Hi, honey, how was your day?" or an "It's good to see you." "Do you believe in ghosts?" was the only thing she said. I wasn't sure how to respond to that. When do 47-year-old women ask you that sort of question? At the time I didn't believe in ghosts, so I told her, "No." She continued by telling me a story she

had heard from her sister Tina, the night before. She started by saying, “Uncle Bill thinks he saw Martha last night—well, more like he felt her. He said that he was asleep in bed and felt someone wiggle his big toe. Martha was famous for waking people from naps by wiggling their big toe. He woke up, looked around, but didn’t see anything. Tina was still asleep, and the weirdest thing was, the dogs were growling at the foot of the bed like they saw something. We think Martha is haunting Tina and Bill.”

I left the room thinking my mother had lost it. I found it very hard to believe that my grandmother was haunting my aunt and uncle; however, my views changed very soon. The beginning of September came and so did the start of my sophomore year of college. I remember that day very well. It was Tuesday, and by some miracle, my first class didn’t start until 1 p.m. that day. I slept in while my roommate had to get up for her morning classes. Her alarm went off and I heard her get up and get ready for class. I was almost asleep when I felt her lean over and kiss me on the cheek and then leave the room. When I asked her about this at lunch that afternoon, she looked at me like I had two heads: “I didn’t kiss you. Are you sure you didn’t fall out of bed last night and hit your head?” The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced it was a dream. Then I remembered the past 12 years of first days of school. Martha always called me the morning

school started to wish me luck on a new year. I immediately grabbed my phone to call my mom. I heard the phone click and without waiting for her to say “Hello,” I said, “I think I had a Martha sighting this morning.” I told her the story, and the two of us decided that that was the only “logical” explanation.

From that day forward, we have kept track of the “Martha sightings.” There have been 20 or so in the year and a half since her death, but the most recent ones have come in a big clump. Eight months ago, Martha’s house finally sold and a middle-aged couple moved in. At the time we didn’t know, but we later found out that this couple was not married. Being the devout Catholic that she was, Martha was not a big fan of unmarried couples cohabitating, to put it lightly. For this reason, we think Martha decided to leave us alone and concentrate on this couple.

I loved my grandmother’s house, in particular, the two oak trees in the front yard. They were great to climb and to jump out of—when Martha wasn’t looking, of course. One of the most remarkable things about these trees was, in the 40-plus years that Martha lived there, they never once got struck by lightning. The new owners were not so lucky. Within a month, there were two lightning strikes and they were forced to cut down the trees. We all figured this was a warning from Martha that this couple should have heeded, for this was only

the start of Martha's handiwork. In the next five months, three other separate incidents occurred that we found out about. It seems that the man took the brunt of Martha's efforts. One day during October, he was standing on a chair, trying to remove a light fixture that Martha had put in the year before. The poor man suffered a seizure and was in the hospital for a week. One month later he fell down a small staircase and broke his elbow. Most recently, the woman was backing out of the driveway and ended up in the field on the other side of the road. Having backed out of that driveway myself on numerous occasions problem free, I think she had some help.

Maybe it's silly to think that my grandmother is haunting us and the couple in her house. Maybe it's silly to even consider the possibility; however, as we patiently await the next "Martha Sighting," I pray for the safety of that couple who now live "in sin" in her house.

On the Fly

By Nicole Lyons

I had a routine that was perfected by my senior year of high school. As soon as the last bell of the day rang letting everyone know that it was time to go home, I practically leaped out of my seat, stood in line for an after-school snack, walked with my boyfriend to the band room, sat and talked with friends for a couple minutes, and gathered stuff together to take outside on the band field. I was the section leader for the front ensemble in my high school's marching band, so it was my job to see that everything and everyone involved with the front ensemble got out onto the field safe and sound and on time. I made sure that everyone was helping because people liked to procrastinate. We had to start moving all our equipment out before everybody else even started to think about getting up out of their chairs because it took my section the longest to set up for practice.

On one of these pretty normal days, I was in the middle of packing keyboards onto the cart to take out to the band field when I noticed that I had not used the bathroom all day. I had drunk so much water that day because our school was hot and did not have any air conditioning. It was catching up to me now, and I really had to go. And I mean really bad! So I told my crew that I would be back and to just keep working to get all the stuff loaded so we could still be out there on the

field on time. I went back inside the school, and I literally sprinted to the bathroom. I knocked down a little freshman girl on the way. I would have said “excuse me” and “sorry,” but the precious seconds that I spent talking would have cost me a lot. I heaved the door open, ran into the stall, and slammed the stall door shut behind me.

As I was washing my hands in the sink, I was making sure that my makeup and my hair looked decent for practice because one never knew who would show up to watch the band play. I dried my hands off thinking I felt so much better now that I was relieved. I took one last look in the mirror and walked out into the hall.

As I was getting the few last things to put on the carts to haul to the band field, I stopped and talked to my friend Mary. She was in one of my classes that I was having a little difficulty in, and she really helped me out. I asked her a question about that night’s homework like I usually did. But this time it was a little different. She stared at me with a weird expression on her face. It was like she was trying to hold back a smirk. I asked her what was wrong.

“Is there something in my teeth? Do I have a pen mark on my nose? Is there an eyelash on my face?” I asked. I must have missed something in the mirror while I did my final look-over in the bathroom.

I was always that person who told others if there was something wrong with their appearance. If there was something green in their teeth or if there was an eyelash on their face, I would tell them because I wanted someone to tell me if something like that happened to me. I did not want to be that kid who went around all day with a pencil mark on the tip of her nose because everyone else was too ashamed or embarrassed to let her know.

After I got done interrogating Mary, she did not say a word. She just kept staring at me like I had a dunce cap on the top of my head. Then her boyfriend, Jessie, came over and started talking to Mary. She still was not responding to anyone around her. Mary kept that awkward look on her face for a while until she leaned into Jessie's ear and started to whisper something to him. Their conversation was way too soft for me to hear, but I knew she was talking about me because she kept glancing my direction. Then Jessie looked at me and started to crack up. By this time I was red in the face, even though I did not know what they were talking about.

Then finally Mary glanced at me and said, "Check your door." My hands went automatically to the zipper of my pants. My fly was open! I could not believe it. All this time passed since I was in the bathroom, and my zipper was wide open for the entire world to see. All I could say was, "At least I put on some cute underwear today." Needless to say, the

first thing I check when I get out of the bathroom these days is my zipper, even if I am not wearing anything that could have a fly on it.

The Birth of a Streaker

By Brian Lynch

I'd had enough. I was left with no other alternatives. I had to resort to my last method of attack. There was only one answer: Nudity.

You see, one summer when I was six years old, I had a twenty-something-year-old babysitter named Carrie, and needless to say, we did not get along. We mixed like oil and water. I had a knack of being a little bit of a nuisance, a class clown if you will. I blame it on my older siblings, Kevin and Kelly, 10 and eight respectively at the time. They said jump, and I asked, "How high?"

Carrie did not respond well to such a child. And it seemed as if I could do no right. I shared the room upstairs with my brother, and I would venture to say that in the summer of 1991 I reached the bottom of the steps maybe 30% of the days. The other 70%, before I even hit the landing of my steps, I said something or did something that caused Carrie to send me up to my room for the rest of the day with no television. I clearly remember a day in June when I awoke to Kevin inches away from my face.

"Wanna play the 'penis game'?" he asked.

"How do you play?" I responded.

"It's simple, I will start off by saying 'penis' as quietly as possible, and you say it a little louder. After that, we keep say-

ing it, louder and louder, until someone says it loud enough to annoy Kelly, downstairs.”

Sounded like a challenge to me. I knew there was no way he could take me on this one. I was the king of annoyance.

“OK, I will start,” he said. “*Penis.*” It was nearly inaudible. I did not know what ‘inaudible’ meant at the time, but even my six-year-old self could assure you it was quiet. I responded just as I should, and he did the same, each getting a little louder. After about a minute of this, I knew it was time to seal the deal.

“PENIS!”

“BRIAN, IS THAT YOU?” It was Carrie. Rats, I didn’t even make it out of bed.

“Yeah, it is him. I don’t know why he said it,” Kevin said.

“Well, don’t even *think* about coming down from there. I am gonna set the timer for 45 minutes!” That blasted timer. She set that thing so often that I just figured that time was counted backwards until I was about 11. Not to mention that it seemed to move like a sun dial.

“I hate you, Kevin,” I said. That didn’t matter to him. He had his fun, and now he had the downstairs TV to himself for at least 45 minutes. But I had the last laugh, for the night before I had stolen the remote and put it under my pillow to make sure I would have control of the TV in the morning. He would be stuck watching *Arthur* with Kelly.

That was just one of the many, many, many occurrences in which I was punished. Sometimes it was a minor offense, like forgetting to clean up my mess after lunch. Admittedly, there were other times when I deserved it, like the morning I woke up early to put a trip wire around my sister's bed. I spent three hours in my room for that one. But it was worth it when I heard my sister hit the floor and start crying. Maybe I was an awful kid.

But that brings me to that fated day: the day when I could no longer stand to be in my room, alone, with nothing to do. In the words of Otter from *Animal House*, it was time to “drop the big one.”

The August morning began like any other. I woke up, changed out of my Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles pajamas, and walked downstairs. There, on the kitchen table, was oatmeal and a bagel.

“Carrie, oatmeal sucks.”

“Brian, go to your room! I am setting the timer for ... one hour.”

An hour for one lousy cuss word? George Carlin didn't even mention it as one of the “seven.”

I stormed up my stairs, threw my shoes at my Ken Griffey Jr. poster, and crawled into bed. I contemplated trying to climb out of my second-floor window again. I thought better of it after I remembered that when Carrie caught me in mid-

act last time, I had gotten the timer for two days. But I had to do *something*. The time had come. There were only two weeks left in my summer, and I would not let her dictate how I would spend them. It was time for a revolution. I tried to think of the best way to get back at her. Something that would bother her so much, she would be apprehensive to ever ground me again. What would it be? What would it be?

It hit me like a right-hand slap across the back of my head like my brother always used to do to me. I GOT IT! I tore off my clothes, ready to celebrate downstairs in my birthday suit. No one liked the sight of a naked six-year-old boy.

“AHHHHHHHH!” I bellowed as I ran downstairs, naked to the world. Our neighbors must have thought I was attacking Normandy’s beach. “AAAAHHHHH!”

“Brian, knock it off, don’t make me”

But I could not be stopped, I hit the living room running, and as I turned the corner to our dining room, there stood Beelzebub herself. The look on her face was priceless: the perfect mixture of shock, anger and humiliation. I don’t know if you remember me saying it, but no one wants to see a naked six-year-old boy.

“Holy crap! Run, Brian, run,” I heard Kevin cheer. It was nice to have his support.

I wiggled by the table and passed Carrie’s frozen body. Next was the TV room. Kelly was not so encouraged.

“EEEWWWW!” I didn’t care; I was a fugitive on the run, and loving every minute of it. Carrie chased me all the way.

As I ran past my kitchen and to the basement, even my dog, Buddy, was on my side. He started running with me and barking at the full moon as it passed. Luckily, he did not jump and bite anything. That would have been the end to both my streaking and my future love life.

“BRIAN, I swear, if you don’t come here and put some clothes on *right now*, you will be in so much trouble....” I didn’t hear her, nor did I care. Not only was this the best thing I could have ever done to get back at her, but it was completely liberating.

I hid in our storage room, about to make my grand finale. There was an exit to our front yard from that room, and it was only fitting to get some fresh air. I busted through the door and the sunlight felt warm on my naked body. I headed to the backyard where we own an acre of land. I could be naked in public for days without her catching me. I turned around to see how far behind me she was; no one there. I knew I was too fast for her, I turned my head back around and BAM!

It was suddenly dark. And I was SUDDENLY CAPTURED. It was Carrie and she had a towel over my head and body. The young woman had outwitted me, cut through the house, and caught me as I headed to the back.

“Just wait until your mother hears about this! I am carrying you straight to your room!” Lucky for her, I was too tired from the streaking to fight back. She was equally exhausted and also mortified. I had won. That is all that mattered as she carried me to my room, where I was sure to spend the rest of my days.

She put me on my bed, forced on some whitey-tighties and asked my brother to make sure I didn’t move or he was grounded too. I didn’t care at all. My master plan was completely successful, and completely worth it. That was the last summer of Carrie.

As I started to relax, I reminisced on what I had just done. I was absolutely content. I looked up to see Kevin staring at me.

“Brian,” he said, “that was the coolest thing I have ever seen.”

“Thank you, Kevin. It really was. It really was.”

Fall Down the Waterfall

By Lindsay Petroff

To understand this story, you have to understand what kind of man my father is. He is a multi-talented genius; well, he doesn't have his Ph.D. and he doesn't know the cure for cancer, but he's a genius in my eyes. Also, my dad is the father of three girls, all relatively close in age, and he's married to a demanding, but innocuous woman. So needless to say, he has been stressed for the most part of his adult life. It's amazing he still has hair, although it is grey.

When we were a young family, we lived in a very bad part of town on a street that was ironically named "Rosenberry" and we were not very fortunate. Our house was falling apart and it was constantly getting robbed. The robbers stole random items like our grill from the porch and our Barbie dolls, but that's not my point. Eventually, we came upon a stroke of good luck, and we were able to move into a new house in which I did most of my growing up. I still remember pulling up to the house and dropping my jaw in amazement at how big our backyard was. At our old house, our backyard was blacktopped over with a small tool shed that my sisters and I claimed as our clubhouse. I'm sure you can imagine all the scraped knees and bloody elbows that resulted from playing on a blacktopped backyard. My mom even exclaimed, "Look, girls, grass!" when we arrived at our new house.

Even though we loved our new house and our awesome backyard, one thing we missed about our old house on Rosenberry Street was the clubhouse. My sisters and I started right away on our dad for a new clubhouse. We didn't care how big or small, but we needed somewhere to call our own and escape from the supervision of adults. My dad is an excellent carpenter; it is his passion, so we knew it wouldn't be hard to persuade him to build something. Since up to this point in our lives we were fairly poor, we didn't expect much, but our parents were now able to give us more.

My dad is definitely a go-getter and he usually wakes up with or before the sun. The bedroom I inhabited in our new house faced the backyard, and I will never forget the sound I heard on this particular spring morning. I awoke to the familiar sound of my dad's hammer. The sun was just coming up and was peeking through my blue curtain creating a bluish haze. I awoke with a start with the first smack of his hammer, and I knew that something was going on in the backyard. I raced to my window, yanked open the curtain and I saw my dad in the backyard nailing pieces of lumber together. I wiggled my window open and hollered out to him.

"Dad! Are you doing what I think you are doing?"

"Maybe!" he shouted back. Then he turned and winked at me.

"I'll be right down!"

“No, go back to bed. If you get up this early, you won’t have enough energy to play!”

I knew he was right and slinked back into bed, but I couldn’t sleep. It was like Christmas morning when you wake up at 4 a.m. and your parents make you go back to sleep. I lay there staring at twinkling decorative stars on my ceiling as the sun rose and getting more and more excited with every “whack!” from the hammer and “buzz” from the saw. I’m sure I eventually fell back to sleep, but when I woke, I threw on my play clothes and I barreled down the stairs. My dad was still outside, working quickly. It was more amazing than I could have ever dreamed. So far he had erected a clubhouse high off the ground, but it was more than that—it had a ladder and a slide, too. I could see the sweat glistening off his back, so I poured him a tall glass of ice water and took it out to him. (Of course, by the time it got there it was half empty since I ran to him.) My dad worked hard all through the morning; once he starts something, he finishes because he hates to leave things half done. I planted myself in the grass right in front of all the action and eagerly watched. My sisters learned of the play gym our dad was working on and joined me.

As the morning turned to afternoon, my dad finally finished our play gym. It was glorious, magnificent. He wouldn’t let us play on it until he tested it out so my sisters jumped and

screamed on the sidelines while he climbed the ladder, jumped around, tumbled down the slide, and dangled from the monkey bars. It was equipped with the clubhouse, ladder, slide, and monkey bars already mentioned, but it also had two swings and rings. After it passed my dad's tests, we were unleashed and we played for hours and hours. It was better than Christmas, Easter, and the Fourth of July combined. We were so excited we even slept in it that night.

We created many games, but our favorite was "Fall Down the Waterfall." The idea of this game was to try your hardest not to tumble down the slide and plummet into the manmade mud pit at the bottom. It sounds easy, but there was a catch: one person would lie on the slide and hold on for dear life while the others would dump buckets of water down the slide. This made it nearly impossible to hold on. Our parents were not very big fans of this game, but eventually they decided to make us wear the same clothes when we played it so that way we would be ruining only one outfit. So every Saturday morning, we would get up, put on our "Fall Down the Waterfall" clothes, drag the hose out to make mud, and get dirty.

Years later, my dad decided to re-model the play gym. He built a balcony off the clubhouse that went over top the monkey bars (don't worry, they were still useable), he added a net to climb up, and put in a tire swing. It was even better

than before, but like everything else in life, it came to an end. My sisters and I grew up. I was the last one to use it, since I was the youngest. From time to time I still went out and swung, or lay on the balcony looking at the stars, but it wasn't used as often as before. It was almost sad seeing it stand there year after year looking so lonely and deserted. My parents felt the same way about it. One morning, years later in early spring, I awoke to the similar noises as before. I peered out my window and saw my dad disassembling the play gym. I put on my robe and shuffled outside in my slippers. He told me that he was giving it away to a family he knew who had little kids and couldn't afford to buy a play set. I was sad to see it go because it was a part of so many of my childhood memories, but it felt so good knowing that someone else was going to be able to enjoy it like we did, especially since they were poor like we had been.

Every now and then, when I look out to the backyard, I get a pang of sadness at the empty spot where it used to be, but I'm glad someone else has the chance to make wonderful memories with it as well.

Things Are Never Gonna Be the Same Again

By Robert Prine

“Will you marry me?”

This question has come out of the mouths of many a man when he finds his perfect match and wants to live with her for the rest of his life. Those words always cause men much difficulty, not only with nervousness for worrying about her answer, but with the stress of creating the perfect atmosphere in which to deliver the fateful question. In many ways, I am under the same stresses as those same guys, for I am planning to ask that very question next March. I have already planned most of the details for this process, including asking my girlfriend on my birthday, the 19th, at the place where we first officially met each other: Disney World, Florida. It will be the two-year anniversary of our meeting each other at Epcot, and I plan on proposing when the fireworks start firing. Just thinking about my future plans brings my thoughts back to my 18th birthday, sitting in Epcot with my friends and actually having a good time for one of the few times in my life, and I can only remember the smiling faces of all my friends. The one that really stands out, though, is the radiant smile of Victoria, bathed in the golden radiance of the setting sun.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I have to start at the beginning of my 18th birthday, in order to show just how amazing meeting Victoria was. It was the second-to-last day of the

biannual Darby marching band trip, and I awoke refreshed in the hotel bed. I was the first one out of the four guys in the room to wake up, which was natural, since it was my birthday and I was already running on adrenaline. A few minutes later, the other three were out of bed and awake at least, if grumbling and mumbling can be constituted as awake. We all joined the rest of the band, down in the hotel lobby while we waited for the charter buses to take us to breakfast.

Breakfast was an uneventful affair at the Rainforest Café, just gobbling down the runny eggs, the well-done bacon, and the delectable waffles. After the band finished eating, we headed over to Epcot for the day. I like Epcot the most out of all the Disney parks, just because of the diversity that is represented throughout the park. The park is inspired by all of the countries of the world, and has sections of the park devoted to some major countries of the world, such as Germany, Japan, China, and South Africa. When the band got to the park, I separated from the horde of still groggy individuals, going off with my small group of friends. This group included my best friend, and fellow trumpeter, Charles. We had met my freshman year of high school, and instantly clicked. We have similar interests and moral dispositions. He is slightly taller than me, with close-cropped brown hair, and a square face, with glasses upon his slightly flared nose. His

personality is very welcoming, but he has a temper that flares if you try to insult his friends.

Along with him was his girlfriend, Sara. She is a slightly plump, but still very good-looking young lady, just a little shorter than me, with a pleasant smile. She likes to be a little wild, and currently (September 2008) has purple highlights in her hair. She is very outgoing, and likes being confrontational with those who get in her face. She and Charles had been dating since our sophomore year, and were almost to their three-year anniversary. Beside her were a few more females: a junior trumpeter named Lisa and a junior trombonist named Kirsten. Lisa is about a foot smaller than me, and Kirsten is a few inches shorter than me. Lisa has brunette hair halfway down her back, while Kirsten has shoulder-length curly brown hair. Kirsten seemed a bit reserved to me at first, but it soon turned out that she was very fun to be around, making jokes that would shock the group. Lisa lives on the wild side, liking to be extremely daring with her life, and also making jokes at others' expense. But she was also ferociously protective of those she called friends. Tagging along with her was Cortland, a percussionist who had an Afro the size of a beach ball. He took a joke extremely well, and got along with Lisa as though they'd known each other for years, instead of just meeting at breakfast. The last member of our group was a clarinet in Sara's squad, someone who I'd seen around but

had never talked to. Her name is Victoria Cornell, and at the time, she was dating Charles' little brother. She had and still has blonde hair that reaches past her shoulder, sparkling blue eyes, and a very lithe build. At first, we didn't talk much, because she was friends with everyone else, and talked to them instead of to a stranger whom she was just introduced to.

As we walked through Epcot, though, it turned out that we shared the same interests in the park. We started the day in a group discussion as the form of communication between the two of us, but it soon progressed to the point that we were walking a few steps off from the group, just talking enthusiastically together and catching up with the group from time to time, to talk to our other friends. She and I had similar interests in the Japanese culture, both of us liking manga/anime and other cultural aspects of the Japanese people. We both took German, I found out, and so we discussed our favored chocolates and tried to hold a conversation in German, which didn't work so well, but it ended up making us laugh. Around four o'clock, our group headed back to the main entrance, since we were going to go to MGM Studios for my birthday dinner.

On our way back, though, to my abject humiliation, Charles found a stand that sold giant birthday hats. The hat was shaped like a birthday cake, candles included, and had a picture of Mickey Mouse on the front of it.

“We’re getting that for you,” Charles said matter-of-factly.

“I won’t wear it,” I responded, trying to keep walking towards the exit. Cortland and Charles got in my way and stopped me from proceeding farther.

“Oh, come on, Robert,” Sara said. “It’ll be funny to see you wear it.”

“And that’s exactly why I’m not wearing it.”

“How about if we all buy it for you as a gift?” Kirsten asked.

I shot a glance over at her. “Not helping.”

She smiled sweetly. “Not trying to.”

I looked over at the rest of the group, seeing all of their smiles. Charles was wearing this big grin that said *I will get my way*. I sighed. “Fine. But only if all of you pitch in to get it.” I wasn’t surprised when they all pulled out \$5 bills and paid the attendant.

Holding the hat in my hands, I was sorely tempted to throw it away and run for it, although Charles could catch me. But I gave in and placed it on top of my head. The group let out a little cheer, and I heard the dreaded click of a camera, followed by the others of the group snapping up a piece of my humiliation for their memory books. I looked over to Victoria, who was the first to take a photograph.

“What?” she said innocently. “It looks cute on you.”

I just sighed and rolled my eyes, but felt a little better about my situation. “Can we go now?” I asked Charles.

“Of course. Why didn’t you ask sooner?”

“Funny, Charles. Funny.”

Our group then arrived at the shuttle terminals, where we all piled into the MGM tram. Within minutes, we were zip-ping out to another Disney park. When we arrived, we were met with the extremely large Mickey Mouse magician hat, with the park laid out behind it. We made our way deep into the park, for my extremely fancy birthday dinner at *Toy Story’s* Pizza Planet. We all had a great time there, just celebrating as a group of friends on a joyous occasion. I had a blast, and so did everyone else. The rest of the evening was fairly uneventful as we took the buses back to the hotel. The only major noteworthy occurrence was that both Victoria and I got massive migraines, and I was in so much pain that Victoria sat beside me on the bus ride home, to make sure that I didn’t pass out from the pain.

The following morning, I awoke to a pounding headache, a remnant from the night before. As I got ready for the day, I was replaying the conversations with Victoria from the day before, pondering how to respond to her insightful comments and thought-provoking questions. It truly astounded me that someone could connect with me so completely. She

could finish my sentences for me, and it was if she knew what I was thinking about before I did.

I was so preoccupied with my thoughts that I hardly noticed boarding the bus that took us to Universal Studios, the park we were visiting that day. It was a fairly fun day, but we didn't do much as a group, just kind of wandering the park while we all talked. I got separated from the group for part of the day, and walked around in a half-panic trying to find them. To make this story shorter, I eventually found them, as they were leaving Universal, and we all went to Margaritaville, a restaurant, for dinner.

The schedule that the band had for the Florida trip said that we would be leaving for home after Universal, but because we didn't go to Epcot on the first day of our trip, the directors decided we would go to Epcot until it closed for the evening, after the fireworks were launched. This was a great bonus for our group, since we all decided to go to Japan (the culture-fest area, not the country) for a late snack. We ended up eating at a little restaurant with outdoor seating. Our group snagged a few tables for us, which they mashed together into one long table, when we noticed that Sara and Charles had walked away from the group. I looked around, locating Charles, looking worried, over at the entrance to the eatery.

“Charles, what’s wrong?” I asked, walking over towards him.

“Sara just walked away, completely depressed, and she won’t tell me what’s wrong. She doesn’t even want me to be around her right now.”

I glanced over to where he was looking, and saw Sara sitting on a rock by a little spring, complete with bubbling brook. He was right; I had never seen her looking so sad. Charles sat down on the ground, looking close to tears. Victoria came over and knelt down beside him, looking concerned.

“She’ll be okay,” she said softly. “She’s done this in band before; she’ll be fine in a little while.”

“Yeah. Victoria’s right,” I said. “We may not be able to say anything to help her out, but just watch: she knows that you’re watching, and she’ll appreciate both your concern and the fact that you gave her space. Trust me, she’ll be fine.” He nodded, but didn’t look any happier.

I walked into the restaurant to order my meal, and Victoria followed me in a moment later. “You’re something special, you know that? Right after you left, she looked up at Charles and smiled and waved,” she said.

I evidently had a stormy look on my face, because she asked me what was wrong. “I can’t bear to see anyone in pain, but I refuse to let them see me in pain from it.”

“You can’t help everyone, though. Pain is a natural part of human nature; everyone goes through it at many points in their lives.”

I paused, debating whether if I should continue this conversation. In the end, I decided to continue with it, telling her about my past: parental abuse and their perfectionist ways, things I’d gotten into as a child that have left me mentally scarred, etc. We sat and I talked to her for about an hour, not touching the food that I’d ordered. In return, she talked about her boyfriend history, how everyone had let her down too many times, and she kept trusting them anyway. We just kept talking, until we noticed that the rest of our group had left to go stand by the lake, waiting for the fireworks to start.

We walked over to a good viewing area, a little ways off from the main crowd of tourists, still engaged in conversation with each other. Eventually, though, the fireworks started firing, drawing our attention to the heavens and the radiant splendor displayed there. I looked over during one particularly bright blast, noticing her rapt attention and awe at the brilliant flashes, and wondering what it would be like to see that smile every day. But I didn’t pursue that line of thought too much; she was already dating someone else. But the thought still lingered in the back of my mind.

When we all arrived back at the bus, I overheard Victoria and Kirsten talking about the day’s events and their thoughts

on them. As I drifted off to sleep, I heard them talking about me. I tried to pay more attention, but all I caught was Victoria saying, “Things are never gonna be the same again, you know that?”

Jurasicution

By Brian Richards

Christmas is a magical time for children. My family did not have very much money, so the majority of the toys we had we got for Christmas. I can remember the hot chocolate, shining tree, and pile of presents that always awaited me when I woke up on Christmas morning. For a few moments, once a year, all of the problems of the world had suddenly vanished and the possibilities of this life had no limits.

My parents would go all out at Christmas. I would later learn that Christmas came at the price of thousands of dollars of credit-card debt, but that did not occur to me at the time. My mother loved to see her children in a momentary state of bliss. My father loved to see us get everything we wanted and feel at peace. They both liked to be reminded of the Christmases of their youth. It was time of joy for all and nothing could diminish that feeling, nothing, except for my parents' twisted sense of humor.

It was a family tradition that the night before Christmas my sister and I could open up one present from under the tree. She unwrapped an Ace of Base CD she had been hinting about since October. I unwrapped a Barney the Dinosaur stuffed animal.

I hated Barney the Dinosaur with a passion normally reserved for Hitler. Imagine my disappointment when the

twinkle in my eye turned to a glare of anger pointed at the hearts of my parents. I was not devastated. I was enraged.

My parents laughed, feeling ever so clever. I stormed off to bed, pounding my feet with every step I took. My big sister was soon to follow. She comforted me by saying, "It's only one present. I'm sure Santa brought you all of the ones you wanted."

"Oh yeah," I replied heatedly. "Well, I don't know what I did that was so bad that he would bring me this!"

"I think that was one of the ones from mom and dad. I'm sure Santa knows exactly what you want."

I lifted the doll slowly to eye level, my hand clamped tightly around its throat. Without a word, I turned and headed for my room. My stomping had subsided, but my pouting was in full swing. Then my anger dissipated and I soon began to sleep.

I awoke the next morning full of excitement. The disappointment from the night before had been overpowered by the excitement of presents yet to be unwrapped. I rushed over to my sister's bed and shook her awake. I could see as soon as she opened her eyes that she remembered what day it was and that I was shaking her too hard.

My parents were already by the tree ready to greet us as we came charging down the stairs. It was customary that we

all sit and talk for a few minutes and drink hot chocolate. The hot chocolate was quickly gulped down. We started begging them to let us open our gifts until they finally said that we could.

I knew something was amiss. My parents' normal gleeful Christmas smiles had a devilish grin behind them. I had forgotten the present of the night before, but I still suspected foul play.

We passed out presents and began to tear into them like animals. The wrapping paper came flying off in all directions. I recognized the box under the wrapping paper. It was another Barney.

Instantly, my memories flooded back and a tidal wave of anger washed over me. How could they get me one, much less TWO Barneys! Then, I noticed something. The box had already been opened. Curiosity began to override anger, and I decided to take a closer look. I turned it around and peered through the plastic window at the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle neatly packed in newspaper. I paused for a moment unsure of what to do next. It is a strange thing to be irate and ecstatic at the same time.

Many more packages were unwrapped and all of mine were boxed in the remnants of someone else's Barney collection. Where did they find all of these boxes? There were doz-

ens of Barney boxes in all shapes and sizes. I got the joke, but I did not appreciate the clever ruse.

My dad sensed that I was still upset by the original Barney doll. He said, "I know you don't like Barney, so I'll show you what we can do."

I followed him down the stairs to his workbench. He grabbed a large hammer and then reached underneath the bench and pulled out the biggest nail I had ever seen. It was a railroad spike; where he got it I will never know.

"Come on," he said. "I have plans for your Barney."

We went up to my bedroom. He picked up the discarded Barney from the floor and pressed it against the wall above my bed.

"Right about here?" he asked.

"OK," I responded, more than a little confused.

He then drove the railroad spike into the center of the dinosaur's head.

"There," he said as though he was putting a Band-Aid on a cut, "isn't that better?"

"Yeah, I like it there," I replied unsurely. I was somewhat happy, but mostly confused. Now, I had an artistic display of my hatred for that awful thing.

The dinosaur stayed there for years, above my bed, as if all kids had a stuffed animal nailed to the wall. It's strange

how things can grow on you. You just get used to them and accept them, and then after enough time has passed you come to enjoy them. By the end, the Barney doll was among my most prized possessions.

It stayed there until one warm spring day. I returned from playing with my friend Danny to find only a now rusty spike in my wall minus one Jurassic monstrosity. Where could it have gone? Who would have taken it? MY SISTER!

I stormed into my sister's room to find it lying in a pile of its own padding. David, Danny's older brother and my sister's best friend, had taken Barney down for a game of some kind. Why, I will never know, and I was far too angry at the time to care.

I simply grasped it without a word and returned to my room. I tried to return it to its rightful place, but all that did was cover my bed in little balls of cotton.

Then, eureka! I remembered I still had a pack of bottle rockets and half a box of M-88 firecrackers. I would give Barney the capital punishment that I had given so many of my lesser action figures before.

Danny and I were skilled at blowing things up. We had perfected our technique of packing ten explosive heads of bottle rockets into one M-88 and making a line for detonation of lifting powder to trigger the explosion in the style of the

old Looney Toons cartoons. Who said cartoons can't be educational?

The explosions did little more than singe the outside and create the horrific smell of burning plastic. Had we finally found something that could not be blown up? No, I would not believe it!

"Well, what do we do now?" Danny asked.

"I don't know, but this isn't working," I replied.

"We could try putting one in his stomach."

"No, I don't think that would work."

"Well, we could try shooting him up in the air and letting him fall to his death."

"No, we need to think of something else."

We went inside to plan out a new means of doom for the accursed doll. We each got a Mountain Dew and sat down to think. David and my sister soon came down, still afraid of what I might do.

"Sorry about Barney," David said almost whispering.

"It's OK," I replied. "It was about time he was finally put to rest."

"So you're not mad?"

"No, not really. I was a little mad at first, but it's ok."

"Cool."

We all sat down around the dinner table, pops in hand. I told them of what we had tried and that we needed to come

up with something else. David was always good at coming up with creative solutions to creative problems, but this one had him stumped. We thought about throwing him in the pond, trying more explosives, but when David suggested burning him with sparklers, a flash of inspiration sparked my second evil plan.

When you live in the boonies of Southeastern Ohio, you don't have the luxury of curbside trash collection. My father's solution was to have a compost heap for organics, a trashcan for recyclables, and a burning barrel for trash. It was in the burning barrel that we would give Barney his Homeric funeral.

It was my chore to take out the trash and burn it from about age 7 and beyond. I was skilled at getting it to catch.

The four of us walked out to the trash barrel. Danny took the trash and I took the doll. I could just barely see far enough over the rim barrel enough to see the top of the trash.

No one said a word. I lit the trash and took a step backwards. We all had sad looks on our faces. What had once been a common distaste for a TV show was now the end of an era. I almost didn't want to do it—it was like a piece of myself was about to go up in flames.

"Rest in peace," I said as I placed my hand over the flames and let go of the doll.

We stood silently and watched as the purple dinosaur was engulfed in green flames. That is, until my deranged pyroma-

niac of a friend, Danny, began dancing around the fire and screaming, “Burn, Barney, burn!”

The rest of us laughed as we stood there watching, until every last piece of fabric and plastic had disintegrated.

There are times in life when everything ends up the exact opposite of the way you thought it would. What should have been the most hated present of that Christmas became the best and most memorable, thanks to some clever thinking on my father’s part, a railroad spike, and enough time.

A Childhood, Maybe Two

By Eva Simeone

Let me tell you a little about my upbringing. I grew up with a mom, a dad, a brother and 12 best friends. Two of my best friends lived next door; the other 10 lived down the street in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We all lived on Rihn Strasse, the place of my childhood memories. The summers were the best part about Rihn Strasse.

I woke up at 7 a.m. every morning, eager to meet all of my friends to play kickball or soccer outside with them.

My mom would say, “Eva, wait until 9 a.m. No one is awake yet.”

I would sigh and sit behind our glass front door, hoping that someone would magically appear and rescue me from my boredom.

My mom would yell to me from upstairs, “Eva, come upstairs to put your outfit on.”

Finally, I would sulk up the steps, saddened by my mom’s keeping me hostage. However, I always knew that after mom picked out my outfit, I was one step closer to being ready to go outside and play. My mom eventually told me that I was free to go when the clock struck exactly 9 a.m.

Alex, my brother, would sprint out the door before me trying to beat me to the neighbor’s house. I desperately tried to keep up with him, but he was faster and one year older.

We both eventually made it to our neighbor's house, which was 20 feet away. There, in their huge side yard, we found everyone congregating, deciding which game to play. Some stragglers walked up the street and I could see them from a distance, but for the most part everyone knew the meeting spot and everyone knew the time.

We played sports outside all morning and ate lunch at each other's houses. After lunch, we went swimming in my next-door neighbor's pool, climbed up the swinging rope behind my other neighbor's house, or played basketball in my driveway. At 5 p.m. everyday, we were all called in for dinner.

My mom would yell, "AlIIIIIIIIIIIIlex, Evvvvvvvvaa, it's time for dinnnnnnnnnner." My brother and I waited a few minutes until she yelled again. After all, if she made us wait to go outside in the morning then we should make her wait for dinner, right?

We went inside usually after the second or third calling. Whatever it was on the table, I ate it within five minutes because I desperately wanted to go back outside to play. This habit usually resulted in stomach cramps after eating so fast. However, no matter how quickly I ate, my mom forced me to "let my food settle." So, despite my efforts to hurry through dinner to try to get back outside sooner, I never won.

My brother and I were usually let go around 7 p.m. We met the neighbors again in our usual spot. Every summer

night we played Release. There were two teams: a hiding team and a finding team. The hiding team got 20 seconds to find spots within about 500 yards. The finding team tried to find the hiders. If the finding team spotted a hider, they had to tag them and bring them back to our spot. The best part about Release is that if your whole team has been caught, but you're still free, you have the opportunity to release everyone from the spot. All you have to do is run up to the spot and scream "Release!" without being tagged by your opponent. The game could go for hours. However, as I'm sure you can imagine, we were all called in at about 10 p.m. when it was time for bed.

Everyday pretty much followed this same theme. Up early to play. Eat a few meals. Have a game at night. And then go to bed. Everything was simple. I liked to play games outside, and that's pretty much about it.

Things have changed; I'm older and like to do other things now. In addition, we moved. I also got a sister. She is eight. Mia doesn't have the same childhood experiences as me, so let me tell you a little bit about her.

Mia Hawbaker, technically my half sister, grew up with a big brother, a big sister, a mom, and a dad. She desperately wants to play outside with friends like I did every morning. However, no one waits outside for Mia at 9 a.m. like they did for me. Sometimes she will find a friend to play with, but they

end up staying inside, even on beautiful, hot summer days. But the more I watch Mia play with her friends, the more I begin to see why things are so different for her now.

First of all, Mia doesn't play the same traditional games that I used to do. I realized this one morning when I was babysitting her.

While I was checking my e-mail, she walked up to me and said, "Eva, can I get on the computer now?"

I looked at her for a second and thought to myself: *What could my 8-year-old sister possibly have to do on the computer that could be so important?* So, as you can imagine, I assumed that she couldn't possibly have anything more important to do than me. I said no. She frowned and sighed, looking at me like I was a bad sister.

Being the softhearted and loving sister that I am, I let her get on the computer 10 minutes later. She plopped onto the chair and I stood curiously behind her, waiting to see her next move. Mia opened up Internet Explorer, typed in www.google.com and then searched "Lindsay Lohan music videos." My jaw dropped as I watched her peruse the list of related links while she picked out the one she found most suitable. As she clicked the link, she smiled with excitement, softly singing the words to the song that we were both about to listen to and watch.

Lindsay Lohan is soooooooooo hot!” Mia said. My jaw dropped even wider as I laughed.

Later that day her one and only friend, Madison, came over. They both went on the computer this time. Instead of watching music videos, they went to a site that has a Barbie makeover. They dressed Barbie, put makeup on her, gave her a manicure and re-did her room. After the makeover, they sent Barbie off on a hot date. I found this amusing because I don’t even go on hot dates, but my little sister somehow managed to set up a date for the virtual Barbie she named after herself, “Mia.”

Madison eventually went home after they exhausted themselves from staring at the computer screen. Mia and I sat at the kitchen table, waiting for my mom to get home from work. Soon enough, Mia got bored with me and walked upstairs to find something to play with in her room. Ten minutes later, I faintly heard a familiar song trailing from the steps.

Then, I heard my sister sing, “I’m not ... that ... innocentttt.”

I burst out with laughter again, wondering if I really just heard the words I thought I did. I called for her to come out of her room so I could ask.

“Mia, what are you doing up there?” I said.

“Nothingggggggg,” she replied.

“Oh really? What were you singing?”

“I’m just singin’ with my Britney Spears doll,” she innocently professed.

“Oh, OK,” I said. “As long as you’re having fun, I guess.”

I walked away, giggling to myself again.

I thought back to my childhood, and how I used to have dirt on my face as I sprinted through wet grass and sprinklers as a kid. Now, Mia sits in front of Windexed computer screens with polished fingernails. I used to go to Dick’s to look for mountain bikes. Mia goes to Libby Lui for makeovers. If she’s really lucky, she sneaks into my room when I’m not around and steals some of my makeup. I’ve even seen her try to wear my clothes before. I guess you could say Mia and I are pretty similar. The major difference: I’m 20 going on 21. Mia’s eight going on 18.

Suicide Hill

By Brendan Stewart

“Just hurry up and pick out a pair of gloves,” my dad hollered from a few aisles away in a sparsely crowded Marshall’s department store. “And get yourself a hat, too,” he continued, with a smile slowly forming across his face and in his usual overly enthusiastic tone. “It’s cold out there today.”

My father has always preferred to spend his time outdoors whenever possible. In fact, he is a contractor by occupation, and spends a considerable amount of his workday outside re-shingling roofs, framing walls, or pouring concrete depending on the specifics of his current contract. When this is coupled with the fact that he is, at times, an unnecessary risk-taker, it makes for some interesting stories and even more vivid memories.

Today I was going sledding. For my first time. On Suicide Hill. Now that I was the seasoned age of nine, my father had decided that I was old enough to really begin enjoying “the great outdoors.” Of course I had already been on weekend camping trips and fairly long hikes before. But to him, to my father, outdoor activities were never truly enjoyable unless we put ourselves in danger of some kind. In our later adventures, this danger would include swimming alongside aggressive manatees and sun-bathing alligators in northern Florida’s Black Creek and getting within petting distance of pick-up-

truck-sized bison and elk with antlers as big as I was in Yellowstone National Park. In fact, we got so close that a photographer from *National Geographic* stopped shooting, glanced at us, and shook his head we walked past him to get nearer to the animals. Indeed, ‘vivid memories’ may not be sufficient to describe the lasting impressions these experiences have had on me.

With my recently purchased pair of gloves in one hand and my hat in the other, we left Marshall’s and went to my favorite place to eat, Captain D’s. For those of you who don’t know, Captain D’s is a fast-food restaurant that serves a variety of seafood. I can’t really explain why it was my favorite place to eat, considering I didn’t much care for seafood as a child, but it was. As I munched on my fries and chicken tenders, my dad absent-mindedly ate his fish while he glanced over the daily newspaper.

“Look here,” he said, with an index finger on the article. “It says that four more people were injured on Suicide Hill yesterday. And two of them broke their backs.”

I was originally a little apprehensive about the whole sledding thing, but my excitement had effectively drowned out those unnecessary second thoughts, at least until that point. The notion of broken backs was quite scary to me, and I began to wonder whether this was going to be a day that I would regret for a long time.

After lunch my dad and I picked up my mom and my two cousins, Michael and Edward, from my grandma's house. With our thick puffy winter coats on, my cousins and I were twice our normal size, and fitting in the backseat was as difficult a feat as a 10-foot Sasquatch donning pantyhose without a tear. Adding to my discomfort was the fact that I was baking in my own sweat like a marinated Thanksgiving turkey slowly cooking in the stove, thanks to the fact that I refused to take off the newly acquired apparel.

As we turned the corner onto the final road, I immediately saw it through the space in the tree branches where a multitude of multi-colored leaves would have hid it from view only a few months ago. It was undoubtedly the biggest landform I had ever seen in Ohio. It rivaled the hills on my great-grandparents' land in southeastern Kentucky, in the heart of the Appalachians. People don't expect such a variety of elevation in the western glaciated region of Ohio, and they shouldn't. For the most part, it's nothing but gently rolling hills and flat land as far as a telescope can see, with few exceptions. What I was looking at was one of those exceptions.

Suicide Hill loomed before me, about 350-400 feet tall and with a slope the shape of a line showing the classic example of exponential increase. If you didn't pay attention in math class, imagine a 90-degree angle, then slightly enlarge it to a 95-degree angle. Now round off the corner a little bit,

and imagine it about 5000 times larger. That's Suicide Hill for you—the avid sledder's dream and the beginner's nightmare. Oh, did I mention that this was my first time?

After searching for a suitable parking space along the uneven roadside, my dad managed to squeeze in between a sedan and a minivan on some fairly flat ground, and we all got out and unloaded two plastic sleds and a family-sized inner tube we had rented earlier. Walking like cowboys, my cousins and I slowly moved down the road to get closer to the hill. We weren't trying to look brave or cool or anything; our clothes were simply too bulky and inflexible to allow for a normal gait.

Just as we were about to jump the rustic wooden fence dividing the road from the field at the bottom of the hill, my parents yelled for us to stop.

“Boys, come back. We want to get a picture before we start having fun. Meet us up there by that sign.” Sure enough, a little ways down the road there was a sign. In big red letters, it said ‘NO SLEDDING: BY ORDER OF POLICE.’ Obviously, the sign didn't have an effect on the 30 or 40 people already there, and as far as we were concerned it wasn't going to stop us either. What did a few dozen injuries that year and only a death or two in the past decade really mean anyways? So of course, holding the sleds and the innertube, we all

posed around it in our monkey suits giving the ‘thumbs up’ sign, and had a fellow law-breaker snap the shot.

Trudging up the side of Suicide Hill (it wasn’t nearly as steep there) in more than a foot of snow wasn’t an easy or quick process by any means, but it gave me a lot of time to look around and take in my surroundings. I noticed how quickly the sledders accelerated as soon as they scooted out over the top and then simply nose-dived. They must have been going at least 35-40 miles per hour. That may not seem very fast to the average American who drives 65-70 on the highway at least once a week, but when the cold air is gnawing at your cheeks, you’re trying to avoid smashing into evergreens, and your life could very well depend on the integrity of a hollow piece of plastic with the words MADE IN CHINA written on the bottom of it, 40 mph becomes a lot more meaningful.

It was our turn to go. The hill seemed so much taller and steeper from its peak. By that time, though, my bloodstream was so full of adrenaline that any remaining fear that I might have had was drowned out by the excitement and anticipation. With me in the front and my dad in the back, we used our legs to push us towards the edge, albeit this method was only slightly more effective than a beached whale using its fins to get itself safely back into the sea.

As the front of the sled and then I pierced into the void, I began to wonder what had happened to gravity. A split second later, the nose fell and with a thud hit the face of the hill and we took off like Wile E. Coyote on an ACME rocket.

The first thing I noticed was that the hillside was very uneven. It was likely one of the main causes of all the injuries—a sled would hit a bump, go airborne, and if it landed incorrectly it would violently jar the bodies of all aboard, assuming the riders landed on the sled at all.

I know that I said earlier that the other sleds seemed to be going about 40 mph, but I can assure you that it feels like 120 mph when you yourself are speeding down the hill. A few seconds after takeoff, we miraculously avoided colliding with another father-son sled team. After about 30 seconds of weaving left and right of conifers, the slope relaxed by about 20 degrees and we began to slow down. Lucky for us, because just then the side of our sled slipped into an ice rut made earlier that day and we veered to the left uncontrollably into the woods off the main hill. Shocked and awed, I was unable to move or react in any way—not good. And we were now headed straight for a tree, a very large and solid tree—even worse. Now I knew the second cause of injury at Suicide Hill—trees.

Just before impact, I made a conscious decision to break free of my trance and with my last second remaining leaned

my weight to the left in a lame attempt at steering the wild steed under me. I guess my father did the same thing, because we moved just enough to avoid a fatal frontal collision. We did not, however, move enough to prevent becoming airborne. The right side of the sled had made contact with the tree, resulting in a counter-clockwise barrelroll that threw us off to the left.

We landed, surprisingly, unscathed due to our original inspiration for going sledding in the first place—the 16 inches of snow on the ground that had fallen the night before. It very effectively cushioned our fall and provided an insulating layer between us and the forest floor debris. After reconfiguring my brain for a few seconds, I looked around and saw my dad looking back, nodding his head and with something you could call a smile on his face. “Are you ready to go again?” he asked.

Why I Hate Canada: The Near-Massacre at the Zoo

By Tommy Stumpp

“Tommy, do you want to go to the zoo today?” I heard my mother ask. “We can see the monkeys,” she said in a honeyed voice. My mother knew I loved monkeys. I was only four years old, but I could already name most of the monkeys at the Columbus Zoo. They had spider monkeys, gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees, baboons, and they were all fascinating. I used to wish I could go in the cages with them and swing on their ropes and eat their food and play with them, but my parents always said no. But this is not a story about monkeys.

It was springtime in 1989. Audrey, my little sister, was just under one year old. She always got more attention than me, probably because babies are much more fun than four-year-olds. This particular day started out like any other day. We loaded the car, my dad made everyone go to the bathroom before we went, and we left home. Of course about ten minutes after we left, I said, “Dad, I have to pee.” This was somewhat of a ritual.

When we finally arrived at the Columbus Zoo, my parents’ nerves were wearing thin. This will happen with a four-year-old. We went to the front gate, and the nice lady at the

turnstile to get into the zoo said, "Welcome to the Columbus Zoo. Enjoy your day." Little did she know what horrors the zoo would hold for us. The zoo seems like a nice place to most people, but I have always, since I was very young, had bad feelings about the place. On this particular spring day in 1989, these feelings became reality.

At the Columbus Zoo, most of the animals are in cages. The rhinoceroses are in cages. The lions are in cages. The tigers are in cages. So are the elephants. I understood this at age four. What I never seemed to understand is how the geese evaded this imprisonment. Every time I have ever been to the zoo, flocks of Canadian Geese have been wandering around aimlessly, eating trash and pooping everywhere. I guess it is cheaper to let them roam, but this doesn't compute for a four-year-old boy.

My fascination with the monkeys was temporarily forgotten when we walked into the zoo. At the Columbus Zoo, a large pond is near the front gate. This pond is mainly for decoration, but it is also home to the majority of the Canadian geese that occupy the zoo. I had seen geese before, but usually they were flying in a "V" formation in the sky. Once I asked my father why one side of the "V" was longer than the other side, and he said, "Well, there are more geese in that line."

This was the first time I can consciously recall seeing geese on the ground, and up close. They were majestic, with little white rings around their dark necks, and they all had funny little wings with white at the ends. I hadn't ever seen such a funny-looking bird before; it had such an enormous body with a long skinny neck and a tiny little head, and miniscule feet and legs. It was a comical sight to me, so I wanted to get a better look. I told my mother, "I want to see the geese." My mom declined to answer my polite request. My sister was, once again, occupying all of our mother's attention with her crying. I pulled on the sleeve of my dad's windbreaker. "Dad, I want to see the geese." My dad, in his usual fashion, said something to the effect of, "Uhhh, ask your mother." This was all the approval I needed.

I walked over to the side of the pond. The geese were on the other side of a rope that was probably meant to stop curious young boys like yours truly from getting too close to the pond. I walked up to the rope, and peered over at these marvelous creatures. I must have stood transfixed for quite a while, because my parents actually noticed that I was missing. When they came over to get me, presumably to go and see the monkeys, they noticed my little eyes fixed on the geese. My dad, in his infinite wisdom, said to my mother, "Robin, I think they have corn somewhere that you can feed the geese with. Should we get some?" My mother bent down and said

to me, “Tommy, do you want to feed the geese?” I nodded excitedly, eager for my chance to finally get to feed an animal at the zoo. My dad left to find a corn dispenser. My mother went back to paying my sister all of her attention, and I was left to try and lure a goose over so that I could feed it. My dad came back with a handful of corn, and said, “All right, Tom, don’t throw it at them. Be nice.” With these words, he lifted me over the rope, and into the land of the geese. Little did I know, but I was being lifted into a world of pure terror. What happened next is still burned into my brain, never to be forgotten.

The geese were in a loose circle, with the biggest ones on the outside. There were some medium-sized geese wandering around looking for food or some new place to poop, so I decided to give them some corn. I was delighted when I tossed the kernels and the birds swooped over to eat them. Then I noticed some mini geese at the center of the circle. They didn’t look like the big geese. They were all gray, and their feathers were more like fuzz. Also, I could barely see them, because the big geese were all crowded around them. I wanted a closer look.

So there I was, on a mission to feed the geese, marching right up to the biggest and baddest of the geese at the zoo. The goose that I presume now to be the mother of the young goslings immediately spotted me. I was hard to miss in my

bright red ball cap and my purple sweatshirt. As I walked over toward her new babies, I began to hear a strange sound. It sounded like a balloon was losing its air, but it was coming from the biggest of the geese. Also, the babies were all being shepherded away by another goose. I stretched out my arm to toss some corn to the geese, as a kind of peace offering. Apparently, Canada has different customs than I was raised with. This massive Canadian goose began hissing, squawking, and beating its wings. This scared the living daylights out of me, so I made a beeline back toward my parents. Unfortunately, the same rope that kept me away from the geese was now in my way again.

I ran up to the rope, slipped, and fell backwards. As I rolled toward the pond, the baby geese, the furious mother goose, and my certain demise, I let out a desperate cry for help. My dad looked over and saw an enormous Canadian goose pecking me to death—and he started laughing. I guess he thought it was a comical image, the blur of my purple sweatshirt mixed with the whirlwind of goose feathers. My father scared the goose away, scooped me back to the safe side of the rope, and my mother had no idea what had happened. To this very day, chills run up and down my spine whenever I see Canadian geese. And when people ask me if I want to go to the zoo, I politely answer, “I’ll go to the zoo as soon as they get some cages for those damn geese.

I'm Always Less Mad at You

By Matthew Watson

I was so close to winning. So close. At the point where I would have crossed the finish line in seconds, a green shell struck my kart, and Luigi and the kart went flying. I was blinded by rage and did not see what place I came in. I looked at my boyfriend, Jason. He was laughing.

“You did that, didn’t you?”

“Yeah. And I won!”

This was my first-ever relationship. I didn’t exactly understand what relationships truly mean (I still don’t), but I did know that in my favorite films and television programs that when couples fight over something really ridiculous, it is usually funny and full of witty dialogue. I decided then and there that I was going to start a fight about *Mario Kart 64*. Right here. In the basement of the house of someone I did not know but somehow earned an invitation to the party anyway.

“I am so mad at you right now,” I said as I stormed off the couch and into the area at the bottom of the stairs where one could either go upstairs or outside. Jason caught up with me.

“Why?” Jason asked in the laughing tone of voice he uses when I say ridiculous things.

“You were supposed to let me win. I was about to win and you ruined it.”

“When we first started dating, we agreed to never let one another win. It was your idea to...”

I cut him off: “Yeah, Jason, but you didn’t have to make me *lose*! I’m getting a beer.” I huffed my way to the door that led outside, but then I remembered that the beer was on the upstairs porch. I turned around and headed up the stairs, less dramatically this time. Jason followed.

“Are you *really* mad at me for winning *Mario Kart*? This is insane,” Jason called from behind me. I stopped in the middle of the stairs and turned around. I tried to put on my most savage face. Two minutes into the fight, and I was starting to crack. I had to keep it up! This argument has potential!

“I am not mad at you for winning, Jason,” I poured so much artificial malice into his name. “I am mad at you for making me lose.” I stared at him, waiting for his response. People had started to gather behind me because I was blocking the very narrow staircase. Jason looked around at the people behind me. I knew he did not want to argue with me in public, especially over something like *Mario Kart 64*.

“I’m sorry.”

My eyes narrowed. “I accept your apology, but that doesn’t mean I am not angry.” I wasn’t really sure what that was supposed to mean, but I said it anyway. I turned around dramatically and steamrolled my way through the gathered group. This time, Jason did not follow me. I found my way to

the beer and opened a can. A few of my friends were close by, so I joined their conversation. Since the majority of my irritation was insincere and could therefore be turned off like a hot plate (I *was* mildly peeved that I did not win, but that was merely the spirit of the competition), my friends saw no trace of a fight with my boyfriend. To everyone else, I was happier than a blushing bride on her wedding day. No one had a clue because Jason and I were by ourselves when the fight happened (save for the incident on the stairs). No one knew of the discord between Jason and me—that is, until Jason joined the group. He came up to me, and I went stone-faced. The others noticed the shift in my disposition, but the conversation went on. I talked merrily with anyone who was not Jason. Anytime Jason and I exchanged words, I was cold and stern. Our friend Eugene was the first to say something.

“Is everything OK between you two?”

Jason and I both started, but I let Jason finish his piece before I said mine. “He’s just mad at me because I won at *Mario Kart*. I don’t know what his problem is.” Jason seemed kind of sad when he said this and I wavered for a moment.

I gracefully recovered: “I told him that I am not angry at him because he won. I am angry because he made me lose. I was about to win and the green shell that made me lose was his. He is the direct cause of my loss.”

Eugene raised his eyebrows and Jason rolled his eyes. “Oh ... well ... right. OK.” Eugene had no idea what to say to me. I was making no more sense than an atheist preacher and I knew it. But I could not just give up. What is more ridiculous than fighting with your boyfriend over *Mario Kart 64*? Pretending to be angry at your boyfriend and fabricating a fight over *Mario Kart 64*. I was going to see this through to its bitter, unnecessary end.

The party went on without major incident. I had smiles for miles for anyone who was not Jason. Jason got cold looks, nasty remarks, and no signs of affection from me for the rest of the party. On our way home, our group decided to get take-out burritos from Big Mamma’s. Jason and I made it to the counter (despite being “angry” with him, I still stood beside him). My friend was working that night, taking the orders and handling the register. After some small talk, I ordered my burrito: regular buffalo mama without onions or tomatoes. I told Jason to order his and after some protest, he agreed to let me buy him a burrito: regular chipotle ranch mama with chicken and no tomatoes. I rolled my eyes.

“Why am I not surprised?” I said after I handed my debit card over to my friend, “You get the same thing every time.”

Jason looked confused. “It’s my favorite. Why wouldn’t I get it?”

My friend intervened on Jason's behalf. "Shut the hell up, Matt. You are the king of getting the same thing every time. You don't even have to tell me your order anymore. Regular buffalo mama with no tomatoes or onions." Jason smiled, and I heard him stifle a laugh.

After a brief pause, I offered my response, "Whatever." I left no tip.

It was the dead middle of winter. During the day, the sun melted the snow and when nightfall came, the extra moisture froze. Every walking surface was iced in varying degrees. After saying our goodbyes to the others, Jason and I made our way to my apartment. Things were still awkward. That's not entirely true. At the very least, *I* was still being awkward. We had reached the Riverpark Towers apartment complex with a few slips here and there but no spills. The greatest challenge now lay beneath our unaware feet.

We were walking on the sidewalk that led to my apartment. The sidewalk is on a hill and has a small, but not completely unnoticeable incline. What *was* completely unnoticeable was the fact that under all the snow, a sheet of ice covered the sidewalk. I noticed that my footing was not as sure on this span of sidewalk.

"Wow. This is kind of slippery." I underestimated the slipperiness. Jason was no longer beside me and despite my greatest efforts, I was no longer moving forward. We were

both sliding back down the sidewalk, standing up. We slid to our starting point. I looked at Jason and started laughing. At this point, I was completely over the fabricated argument.

“I bet we can go up the grassy part,” Jason noted.

“No,” I said with my sternness that Jason had become so accustomed to that night. “We’re going to go up this sidewalk. You owe me. If you refuse to go up this hill with me, I will break up with you and reclaim all of my possessions and anything I ever bought for you. Starting with that burrito.”

Jason slanted his eyes at me. “I’m doing this for the burrito.” He smiled when I cocked my head. “Just so we’re clear.” I nodded.

We made unsuccessful attempts for a while. We went one person at a time. While one made the attempt at walking up the sidewalk, the other held both burritos (we saw no need for civilian casualties). One time, Jason fell and slid down on his back. I found it hilarious and I am sure he was surprised when I helped him to his feet. He did not know that I was through with the fight. Playtime was over. We had a hill to conquer.

A young man and woman showed up behind us. As they briskly walked up the sidewalk, Jason and I gave out warnings about the iciness. Apparently they did not need them because those two people walked straight up the path. No slips. No slides. Pure success. Jason and I looked at each other with

confused expressions. We learned from the strangers that one can scale the ice mountain as long as you use sure-footed steps. And we did it. Miracles do happen. We survived the horrible iced hill, and with smiles and laughter we continued our walk to a warm apartment.

That is when Jason surprised me with how well he knows me (he still does to this day). Using a line from one of my favorite scenes from my favorite movie, *Postcards from the Edge*, Jason asked, “Are you less mad at me now?”

Because I had to complete the scene perfectly and it truly was the perfect response, I replied with, “I’m always less mad at you.”

Hell in the Form of a Snow Storm

By Megan Wilkin

It all started with the one annoying habit I had when I was age 10.

As my mom, sister, and I were running around the house packing last-minute clothes, my mom yelled down from upstairs, “Megan, where are your modern shoes? You need them for *‘Mueva La Cadera!’*”

That was the question of the hour in my household. They had to be in my dance bag because where else could they be? I was pacing our spacious living room thinking where my shoes could possibly be in this house because they were obviously nowhere near my dance bag. My mom came downstairs stressed as usual. I knew I needed those shoes because dancing barefoot was one of the many sins in the world of dancing. I plopped on the couch disgusted with myself for losing the two strong pieces of leather that went between my first and second toes and around my foot with a secure strap behind the heel of my ankle. The moment I sat down, I knew exactly where they were. Having had dance practice the afternoon before we left, I remembered that I put my flexible shoes in the back pockets of my dance pants; this was my one annoying habit that turned my supportive dancing mom into a raging stage mother.

Immediately, I told her I had found them on the side of the couch that faced the wall. A white lie would keep her from becoming full of rage. She was in the kitchen getting snacks for the four-hour trip to Cincinnati from our hometown of Dover, and she voiced her approval. Of course they could have easily been tossed carelessly in the gap after I had come home from my usual night dance lesson. I breathed a sigh of relief. We were almost ready to go; my sister and I had *Cheezy-Its*, and my mom had her coffee and chocolate-covered pretzels. All we needed now was to pick up my grandma who lived around the corner, and we were off.

As the three of us stepped outside on the bitter January day with four inches of snow on the ground, I casually asked my mom, “Do you think there will be snow in Cincinnati, Mom?”

She replied positively, “Well, Meg, since it is four hours south of here, I doubt they would have any more than an inch.”

That made me glad because I absolutely hated snow and the wet feeling it gave me when I hurriedly walked through it with my canvas shoes.

In 1999, Cincinnati was home to the National Children’s Dance Competition, and L.A. Dance Force was going to be the special guests who would do a dancing clinic for all of the young participants. Our destination was the grand and exqui-

site Hyatt Hotel in downtown Cincinnati where the clinic was going to be held. The Backstage Studio had been my dancing home since I was a tiny tot in the three-year-old group; my group had always been special because we were the first group the owner Julie taught. Here we were now on our way to show her proud at our first competition four hours away.

“Mom, let’s go already,” I shouted impatiently as she was making a last-minute phone call to my dad’s workplace telling him we were finally leaving.

Driving to grandma’s house around the corner, we picked her up and headed down 77, ready to get the gold.

It had been snowing in Dover when we left, but it was one of those flurries where the snow slowly fell like a seven-foot-tall man letting go of a feather. Mom did not seem to be worried and neither did I. About two hours into the trip, the snow started falling like that same man was dropping gum-balls by the handful.

My mother said, “Damnit, I hate driving in snow!”

As she was saying this, she had the windshield wipers going so fast I could not even see them; they were on the fastest speed, and they were still not doing the job. I had never seen snow like the snow I saw on that January night in my entire life. I knew my mom was worried and stressed about the weather, yet I had the slight urge to laugh; I had no idea why.

My six-year-old sister impatiently asked, “Are we there yet, mommy?”

That was my cue; I laughed on command.

My mom did not appreciate this at all. We were four hours into the trip, and a little over halfway to Cincinnati. My mom knew that it took a maximum of four hours to get there in good weather. This storm was extremely bad. It was as if the sky was holding back the urge to vomit after eating something it was allergic to, and we were the toilet it came into contact with after there was no more holding it in. Sheets and sheets of snow fell down on our '95 Dodge Caravan.

As the night wore on, my mom became even more frustrated and said, “Why did this happen to us? I hope Julie understands that we are going to be a good four hours late to the Hyatt. We better have a nice warm room when we get there or she’s going to meet one very unhappy camper.”

There was absolutely no way we could get off the highway to the gas station to go to the restroom because traffic had been completely stopped. I knew this.

I just had to ask, “Mom, could we please go pee? I have to go so bad it isn’t even funny.”

My mom snapped back in frustration, “Megan Elyse, if I had a way to get to a gas station then I definitely would, but the traffic is completely stopped and it has been for half an

hour. I bet I have to go way worse than you, missy. As soon as I get the opportunity, I'm flying off this road."

Unfortunately, during our seven hours of driving time to Cincinnati we had no opportunity to stop at any gas station, rest area, or store. I was miserable. I twisted around in the backseat and staring at the headlights of the car behind us for long periods of time. Finally, another source of light started to catch my attention, and it was the light of the city of Cincinnati.

I was thrilled to finally see the city lights of our destination, and I let out a yelp of joy. My mom let out a chuckle then immediately stopped because it put too much strain on her already stretched-to-the-limit bladder. Though my mom had told me earlier that Cincinnati would have hardly any snow compared to Dover's, I had the audacity to bring that up.

I told my mom in the most sarcastic of ways, "Um, mom, I thought you said there wouldn't be any more than an inch of snow here?"

My mom did not appreciate my comment was not appreciated in the least as the van was sliding on the city streets from the solid seven inches of snow that had fallen in the last three hours.

She came back with the remark, "Megan, shut your mouth right now! I need to concentrate here."

Feeling the van fishtailing by a parking lot, I knew I should keep my mouth closed and not open it again for a good while, or at least until we got to the Hyatt.

All of a sudden my mom pulled into a parking lot by what looked like a park and said, “Meg, is there anything I can pee in back there? I have to p*ss so bad right now, and I can’t hold it.”

Stunned by this strange request, I rooted around in the back of the van and all I could find was my oversize trick-or-treat bucket, so I passed it up to the front. I will never forget this moment for my entire life, but on that bitter cold, snow-stormy night, my mom peed in my trick-or-treat bucket because she simply could not hold it any longer. I had never seen my grandma laugh so hard, but after my mom got done doing her business she gave the bucket to my grandma and told her to throw it as far as she could.

My grandma said, “Melinda, I am not going to do that!”

Mom retorted, “Mom, do you think anyone can see with this snow, and plus we are already late as it is!” Grandma took heed and chucked the bucket across the parking lot, and mom drove to the hotel.

As we arrived at the Hyatt, we were disheveled, tired, and cold, and I still had yet to go to the bathroom. My mom went up to the front desk and gave the clerk the name of my instructor because she had put aside enough rooms for us.

Mom said confidently, “Julie Margletta,” and waited patiently for the clerk to look it up on the computer.

“I’m sorry, ma’am, but there are no more rooms with two queen beds left. We have one room with one queen bed available,” the young clerk stated.

The moment after he said this I will never forget what my mother did. She leaned across the counter and got within two inches from the man’s face and said, “You listen here, sir, I have just been through seven hours of hell in the form of a snowstorm; you will find me a room with two queen beds or you will give me all of my money back.”

My grandma took my sister and me over to sit in on a couch while she had her hand over her mouth to keep from roaring in laughter, but I definitely noticed what she was doing. I started to laugh and she could not hold it in. After about ten minutes of getting Julie involved, we finally got our room, and to my happiness we got to go to the bathroom. By the time we got our room, it was four o’clock in the morning, and I had to be up for the clinic at eight. When I woke up four hours later, I was rejuvenated and ready to learn new techniques from L.A. Dance Force.

Over the weekend, we not only learned new and cool moves from the L.A. Dance Force, but we also won the gold for our jazz dance to the spicy Latina song “*Mueva La*

Cadera.” I can still remember the sound of the announcer’s voice and waiting on stage to hear the results.

As the fifteen of us held hands and crossed our toes, the booming voice said, “The long-awaited gold trophy and first-place ribbons goes to ... the nine-and-ten-year-old dance troupe from the Backstage Studio from Dover, Ohio!”

As I was standing on the stage remembering all of what happened this weekend and how I got to Cincinnati, I had to laugh as I celebrated being the best in Ohio in our category.

When I looked out into the audience and saw my mom, all I could think of was, “You listen here, sir, ...”

About the Editor

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy—me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine’s brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka “The Joker,” decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name—David—ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn’t been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don’t often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for “sounds like” and “two words,” then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, is the guy who gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn’t let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At OU, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor’s degree with a double major in both areas in 1980, then I added a master’s degree in English in 1984 and a master’s degree in Philosophy in 1985. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled “Wise Up!” for *The Athens NEWS* and I am an English instructor at OU.

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