

Through the Eyes of Ourselves

An Anthology of Literary Non-Fiction



EDITED BY ROBERT G. MAY

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Queen's University at Kingston.

First edition.

Printed in Canada.

Preface

ROBERT G. MAY

THROUGH *THE Eyes of Ourselves* is an anthology of literary non-fiction produced by WRIT 295 students during the 2013-2014 academic year.

WRIT 295 is an online course offered by the Faculty of Arts and Science at Queen's University, Kingston. About one hundred students enrol in the course each year. Students are asked to read a number of representative works of literary non-fiction, arranged by broad themes such as people, travel, and culture. Then, they complete a number of online exercises—such as quizzes, discussion forums, and short analytical writing assignments—to engage with and think critically about the literary non-fiction works. In the second half of the course, they are asked to develop and produce their own work of literary non-fiction, beginning with a proposal and outline, proceeding to a rough draft, and then to a final, polished draft. At each stage of the process, a team of teaching assistants reads and evaluates students' work, offering them advice and suggestions for improvements.

The idea for this anthology came about last year, when the WRIT 295 TAs and I were discussing the variety and quality of students' literary non-fiction in the 2012-2013 class. Our only disappointment was that so few people beyond ourselves would ever see these pieces after the class was over. It would be so useful, we thought, if students and other interested readers could access these works, to which students have devoted so much of their time and effort. I decided that this year I

would collect students' work together and publish it online in this e-book anthology. It is available for anyone to download and view on my Queen's University Web site (<http://post.queensu.ca/~mayr>).

The works of literary non-fiction published in this anthology represent students' final draft of work, with very little further editing or revision. I have made some silent, very minor corrections to spelling and formatting, but generally speaking I have published students' final drafts as submitted at the end of the course. Students who wished to opt out of having their work published here had the opportunity to do so if they wished, but I am pleased to say that most students participated in the project. I look forward to continuing this project in future years of WRIT 295 classes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the teaching assistants for WRIT 295 for the past few years, Ellie Barton, Jane Russell Corbett, and Julia Savage, who helped shepherd students' pieces through every stage of the writing process, from conception, to outline, to rough draft, and to final draft. I appreciate their insights and ideas, and I'm sure the students appreciate them, too.

Thanks as well to WRIT 295 students Gabby Altman, who designed the cover of the book, and Jasmine Nichols-Piesik, who suggested the title *Through the Eyes of Ourselves*. I appreciate their contributions very much. The cover art is terrific, and the title is evocative and appropriate.

Queen's University at Kingston
Spring 2014

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Through the Eyes of Ourselves

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Barbie

BRIGID ALLEMANG

WHEN MY grandma Barbara, or “Barbie” as my family and I called her, was on her final days in the hospital, I was too young to understand what was happening. Aged only six years, death was somewhat a mystery to me, and when I saw my parents or two older siblings struck with grief, I was confused. In my mind, it was exciting that we were able to spend so much time with Barbie in this hospital filled with family, new people, and, most importantly, a cafeteria. I would constantly entertain my grandma by singing, dancing, and making up plays (much to the chagrin of her bedmate). Looking back on this scene, I find it so perfectly descriptive of grandma Barbie’s character. Even though she was dealing with immense pain and was not always lucid, she laughed and applauded and cheered until my very last visit. Her undeniable love of life and exuberant joy never left her, not even on her final day, and that is how I will always remember her.

From a young age, Barbie expressed the same character as when she left us. She was extremely intelligent and worked as a nurse at a hospital in North York, where her compassion could be passed on to dozens of patients each day. Her younger years were filled with swim competitions, track meets, and cheerleading, each activity gaining her countless friends through her warm heart and grace. She married my grandpa Bill when she was 25 years old, and together they raised four beautiful children, keeping their love strong year after year. Bill was

just as kind-hearted as Barbie. Working as a gynecologist, he would take girls into his home who were pregnant and had been shunned by their families and would care for them until they safely gave birth to their child. I always thought of this as an accurate depiction of the kindness of Barbie and Bill. At the age of 37, however, tragedy struck, and Bill died rather suddenly of lung cancer. Naturally, Barbie was absolutely devastated by the sudden loss, but being her optimistic self, she used this misfortune to develop an even closer relationship with her children. The loss of a family member is never easy, but Barbie overcame it. While everyone, including my Barbie, thought that this would be the biggest challenge in her life, only three years after Bill passed away, Barbie suffered a stroke, which left her paralyzed from the waist down and unable to speak. This traumatic event would cause many individuals to give up and live a closed off and resentful life, yet Barbie did just the opposite. I do not remember a moment when she was not smiling or filled with joy. Reflecting on these intense barriers that Barbie overcame with such grace gives me the confidence and strength to get through anything that I am faced with in my own life.

The most vivid memories I have of my grandma are the visits that my siblings and I would make to her retirement home. We would take turns recklessly pushing her around the halls of the building in her wheelchair, almost knocking her out on several occasions. Other residents and nurses would look on in disgust, but Barbie never made us stop, and she would fill the room with laughter whenever we were around. Even though our parents rarely allowed us to indulge in sweets, we would be greeted with boxes of cookies and tubs of ice cream upon each visit. In the six short years that I knew her, Barbie was never able to speak to me with words, but her expressive nature and radiation of joy spoke for her. I never struggled to understand what she was trying to communicate, even though I was so young.

When I speak to my family members about Barbie today, they regale me with stories of her courage and perpetual happiness. They all agree on the fact that feeling the pure joy she radiated made it impossible to be upset. The fact that I was so young when my grandma passed away, yet she remains an inspiration in my everyday life, is an

indication of the kind of woman she was. Her passion for life touched everyone she knew. She was so filled with courage to live through what she did, and she continues to inspire me, even though she has been gone for so many years.

Drift

GABBY ALTMAN

IT WAS approximately 28 August 2012 when it started, the drift, the drift of a long high school friendship into a non-existent University one. The memory in my mind pierces my thoughts every day and follows me around like a shadow. While I have never been “in love,” I have been “in friendship,” and drifting away from a strong friendship for almost no reason at all was one of the hardest experiences I have had to endure in my life. Older friends who were already in University had told me that my friendships would drift, that everything would change, but I didn’t want to believe them. How could I have been so naïve to think that our friendship was stronger than that?

Her name was Gabi—well actually her name was Gabrielle Beth, so from the beginning we held a bond of sharing the same name. From the moment we met, we instantly became best friends. We shared the same interests, the same hobbies, and most importantly, the same favourite TV shows. We would go shopping, see movies, and gossip all day long. We discussed school, our crazy teachers, and the assignments we were stressed out about. We chatted about the new shoes we had just bought, our vacations, and the funny articles we had found online. We were best friends, but the memories are now already turning into distant recollections of the past.

The last night I saw her with a glimmer of friendship in my eyes, my friend Lianne and I came to visit her at her house. She had just

come back from a month-long trip to South Africa, and we were so excited to see her. We sat on her porch steps late at night, promising to stay friends forever. We spent hours reminiscing about all the good moments we had shared together, like our senior Prom, and our Washington and New York trips. We promised to Skype, to see each other whenever we could, and to visit each other at University. This moment has replayed itself over and over in my mind like a cassette stuck in a VCR. The promise was ingrained into my mind, and I thought it had been ingrained into her mind, as well. While this promise did hold true for a little while, eventually the promise melted like a popsicle would have on that hot summers night.

In the first few months, we kept our promise to each other through phone calls almost every night, updates, texts, and tweets. She told me stories of orientation week, how she was making new friends, and her new experiences. But then, almost out of nowhere, it stopped. The communication was cut instantly, with not even a “hello” in sight. I had to find out about what she was doing through her status updates and her tagged photos, rather than through her mouth itself. I sometimes try to rationalize why it all suddenly stopped. Was I just jealous? Was I mad that she was becoming friends with my life-long camp friends? Or were we just changing, becoming more and more different from the way we used to be? I tried so hard to hold onto the last thread of friendship that remained, but even that severed.

After having lost connection for about two months, we ran into each other during Thanksgiving break in October 2012. That night, I had forgotten that I was invited to my friend’s birthday dinner, so I mindlessly made plans with my two other friends. Unfortunately for me, we ended up at the same restaurant that the birthday dinner was taking place. And who did we see? Gabi. For some reason, I felt as nervous as a mother who cannot find their child. I was just so angry, I did not want to see her after she had completely dropped me as a friend and had forgotten that promise we had made to each other that cool summer night. However, in almost slow motion, she started walking towards our table. She seemed like an alien. Physically, yes, she was the same person, but emotionally I felt like I did not know her at all.

“Hello” she said. Her green eyes were peering at us from behind her oversized, thick rimmed glasses.

“Hi.” I responded, staring blankly at her.

The next thirty seconds was followed by a dreadfully long silence.

“We need to catch up sometime,” she said. Her voice seemed to resonate with a tinge of insincerity.

Perhaps she actually did want to know how I was doing, but after feeling betrayed, I could not go back to the way things were. I could not bring myself to just giggle and tell her about everything that had happened to me while I was at school. Instead, I could only stare at her blankly, not knowing exactly how to respond. After what seemed like a horrifically long and awkward silence, she walked away. It is one of the few times I have seen her since. Despite trying to remember her in the light that I used to, the light has dimmed, and I don’t think it will ever return bright.

However, while the truth of losing a friend will never quite set in, life continues to move on, and University is not all that bad. I have made new friends, endured new experiences, and the ebb and flow of life continues. The old Yiddish proverb “man plans while god laughs” could not be more true. We think we can make promises, and plan the destiny we decide, but life does not happen that way. Sometimes, it is important to let go and wait for the new experiences and people to come into our orbit. While it may be difficult to go through these tough moments to find out who your true friends are, one hopes that is for the best. I am not friends with Gabi anymore, but I have come to accept it. I planned to stay friends with her forever, but instead, God laughed. If it is meant to be, perhaps our paths will cross again in the future, and that old flame will reignite. Either way, as the journey of life unfolds, one needs to think that everything happens for a reason to endure the hardship. Ultimately, that is what underscores the transition between childhood into adulthood.

Finding the Open Road

SPENCER BELYEA

HIT THE road. The road less travelled. Off the beaten track. Usually I'm not a fan of clichés, yet sometimes they come in handy. Travelling, and driving in particular, produces an abundance of descriptive clichés. They all have a point, in the sense that what they illustrate is true. The expressions are clichés, but the actions are not, and that is where the clichés should end. Going on a road trip and taking the road less travelled produces tremendous experiences, ones that simply can't be found elsewhere. Go out, hit the open road, and experience something new. Go to places you haven't been before, or, better yet, places you didn't know existed before you got there. The best way to do this is by car. Car travel allows you to experience places in a unique way, to take turns on a whim without knowing what's beyond them. I know this from experience. My family and I have driven all around North America, especially the United States, and have had experiences possible only when travelling by car. And while those trips can be characterized by clichés, the experiences we had were anything but.

Expect the unexpected was certainly a truism on our trip through Erick, Oklahoma, a dusty, one-stoplight town on Route 66. We stumbled across what we thought was a souvenir store, only to discover something completely different. We walked in, the lights turned on, and our eyes were immediately assaulted with a bizarre, slightly frightening

image. Out from the back jumped an old man, Harley, clothed solely in overalls, with shaggy, grey, shoulder-length hair, and a thick Oklahoman drawl emanating from a mouth with less than a full set of teeth. Right behind him was his wife Annabelle, who is best described as a female version of Harley. We quickly realized this was not a souvenir store; yes, there were various Route 66 historical artefacts, but the real attraction was Harley and Annabelle. They were very proud of their store and of Route 66's history—we saw many of their prized possessions, and they performed several traditional Route 66 songs for us. After at least an hour we emerged, wondering what had just happened. However, when we look back on it now, this experience sticks in our minds, as it is the exact opposite of a cliché: genuine, unique, and unrepeatable—and it was only possible because we were on a road trip.

Now, just going on a road trip does not automatically make it successful. Like everything, there are right and wrong ways to go about it. The important thing is to enjoy the drive and see something new. The advent of Interstate highways has made cross-country travel more efficient, but also more boring, as they bypass some of the most historic and interesting communities America has to offer. The wheels go round, and the car moves on, but the scenery simply shifts from anonymous suburban area to nameless rural area and back, with only billboards and oasis-like fast-food joints dotting the landscape. This is the real-life objectification of a cliché and serves only to blunt the excitement of the journey. Ideally, the drive is not just the means to get to a destination—it is itself part of the journey. In fact, sometimes the road *is* the destination. The Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway through the Shenandoahs are great examples. They are some of the most beautiful drives I've ever done, winding along the ridge of the Appalachians, verdant forests on all sides, with rocky promontories showcasing grand vistas over the landscape below. The point of driving is to see sights like that. It should be more than just a way of going somewhere—it should be a way of seeing how you get there.

While taking a plane is the fastest way to reach your destination, it isn't always the most practical—sometimes a car is the only way to

reach a place. These places aren't always just tiny, no-name, and insignificant. Look at Mount Rushmore. It's in a remote corner of southwest South Dakota, wedged between never-ending, buffalo and prairie dog-inhabited grasslands and dinosaur bone-filled badlands, and is hundreds of miles from a major urban centre (sorry, Rapid City). It's not even close to an Interstate. Yet, it's Mount Rushmore, one of the iconic images of Americana, and a highly recognizable, not to mention impressive, memorial to great statesmen. Its sheer grandeur and stature can only truly be appreciated when seen in person (and early in the morning before the tour buses disgorge their loads). And, it is only possible to get to by car. While Mount Rushmore may be high in the national consciousness, getting there can lead to the discovery of hidden gems like the buffaloes or the badlands. Restricting yourself to air travel is not only a boring way of travelling; you miss out on seeing some of the great attractions the world has to offer.

One of the greatest benefits of travelling is experiencing other places and cultures first-hand. It's necessary to burst out of your bubble and see the differences between where you live and where everyone else lives. What travel does is open your eyes to different cultures, and maybe even influence your own, breaking down the clichéd barriers and thoughts you had about other places. I know this because it's happened to me, particularly with respect to food. One of my favourite types of food is Southern-American, thanks to my extensive travels in the region. Fried okra, pulled pork, barbeque anything, mashed (or whole!) sweet potatoes, fried green tomatoes, and pecan pie are some of my favourite foods that I discovered solely because of my exposure to them south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Sure, maybe I would have tried them in "southern" restaurants elsewhere, but, let's be real, it wouldn't have been the same. Whether it's a big-city kid going from small town to small town, or a northerner exploring the Deep South, going out of your comfort zone to experience something new is a necessity.

There's a reason that virtually every trip we take involves driving. Whether it's a road trip starting from home, or flying somewhere and then jumping in a car, driving has allowed us to see and experience so

many parts of the world that wouldn't have been possible any other way. What I've discovered is that it's necessary to be different. Use clichés to inspire your travel, but don't let your travel become clichéd. Go out, hit the road, take the road less travelled—you never know what you might find.

A Portrait of the Muralist

My Experience as Pierre Hardy's Studio Assistant

EMMA CALDWELL

“SHE DIED doing what she loved,” is what I think my obituary would say as I balance on top of a milk crate on top of a plank of wood that is resting on two more milk crates, stacked on a table. The crate teeters as I reach over to my palette, and I can feel my pulse in my eyes. When I was told I was going to work on scaffolding, I pictured something a little more safety tested, or at least something that was in one piece. I have been on this crate for four hours. I go to make my descent, and Pierre looks up at the button-down shirt I have just painted at the top of the 12-foot panel.

“Wow, that looks good,” he says in his Québécois accent. I am stunned because it’s rare to get an outright compliment from Pierre. I thank him, and he replies with “Yeah, I am really surprised.” And there it is.

People ask what Pierre is like to work with on the mural. I never know what to say. I usually tell a short story like the above, but there is no way I could neatly explain what it like. He was a chain-smoking French Canadian who wore a leather vest even in 30 degrees. Once, he told me he thought I would be the next Emily Carr. Another time, told me he thought I would be fat before he had met me. He was annoying, arrogant, and incredibly self-conscious about his work. He was my boss, and one of the best teachers I ever had.

Pierre Hardy is a master muralist; he has work across the globe and is widely respected as one of the top in his field. His best-known works are the Giant Tiger murals that can be seen across Canada. Last May, I was hired to work as his studio assistant on the 92 ft. x 12 ft. mural celebrating the 150th anniversary of Carp Fair in Carp, Ontario. I didn't want to take the job. I had just finished my third year in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program at Queen's where I spent a semester on abstract art. I have no intention of becoming a muralist, and my main subject matter is cows. Pierre had offered me this job after finding me through a Google search. How could he possibly know if I was good enough?

Despite my doubts, I took the opportunity. My first day in the studio, I am overwhelmed by the size of the panels that make up the mural. We have four months and 92 feet to go. The next two weeks are awkward. I feel like I'm making more work for Pierre. I am constantly asking if I'm doing something the right way. Sometimes I did it wrong anyway and he had to do it over. He constantly hovers and checks on my work.

On top of this, Pierre is obsessed with keeping the mural shrouded in mystery. I am not permitted to discuss the mural outside the studio. My sketchbook while working on the mural cannot leave the studio; I am not allowed to take any pictures. Pierre is paranoid about secrecy. The studio is always locked; I have to call him to come down to open the door for me when I come to work. Having been working in a studio with fifteen other people and professors looking over shoulders for the last three years, I am baffled by this behaviour.

By June, Pierre finally trusts me enough with some real painting. I am in my element and begin to feel like I can do this after all. I pick up Pierre's artistic style quickly, and I can see his confidence in my work growing. However, I still have my doubts. At Queen's, we were encouraged to make mistakes and be messy. On the mural I had one accidental paint drip and heard about it from Pierre for the next four days. I'm also not even sure if he likes my own art. And then I have a Bad Painting Day. I have these every once in a while, and there is nothing I can do but paint through it. Normally, I can accept that I will be unhappy with whatever work I do on those days, but I felt like I

couldn't do that with Pierre. I tried to push my work and the more pressure I put on myself the more my work suffered. It feels like when you're trying to untangle a shoelace: the more you tug at it the tighter the knot gets. I went home that day and I couldn't stop thinking about it. I could sense that Pierre was unhappy with the quality of my work that day, what if he didn't trust me enough to work on big pieces anymore? What if this went on for longer than a day? What if I just couldn't paint at all anymore? The next day at work when we were reviewing our tasks for the day, Pierre looked at the section that I had worked on and shook his head. I confessed about my Bad Painting Days, I expected him to be dismissive of my frustration. Instead, he looked at me stunned and told me that "It is okay to have bad painting days, because when you are having a good painting day, damn girl, your work is magic." After that, I never had a Bad Painting Day while working on the mural. I realized that I needed to trust him just as much as he needed to trust my work.

After three months of working on the mural, I am settled into my routine. However, the deadline for the mural completion is looming. Pierre becomes more and more frazzled, and I begin to see where his obsession with the secrecy of the project comes from. Despite his inflated ego about his abilities, he cannot stand to have anyone see his work before he is satisfied with it. During one visit, the mural committee chair asked "So, are these portraits done?" I took it as an innocent question. Pierre took it personally.

"Yes they're done, what, they look not done to you?" For the next week he constantly asks if something looked finished, and sulked around the studio muttering, "Are they done. Jesus." I am now part time assistant/part time therapist to a muralist. These days when I come into work, Pierre has surrounded himself with walls of palettes, tables and photos; he looks like a giant bird in a nest. When I leave for lunch, four hours later, he is still in his nest.

The month of August is unbearably hot in the studio, especially at the top where the lights are. We cannot have the air-conditioning running, because it would dry out the palettes too fast. Pierre no longer hovers over me. Often I go to work as soon as I arrive, without needing

him to tell me what to work on. I can completely imitate his style, and I have full creative control over decisions such as palette and textures. The mural is almost done. In May, I was so excited for the unveiling but now I almost don't want it to happen at all. I am so proud of it, and feel so lucky to be a part of something that I know will have such huge impact on my community. But at the moment at the end of August when no one but three other people have seen it, it belongs to me. As soon as it is unveiled, anyone is free to project their memories and ideas and feelings onto it, and I don't want to share it.

In September, when it is finally unveiled, I am amazed by its size. Having only ever worked on it in sections, I had never seen it as one piece. It is a strange feeling when I see it like this. It is like reading a diary as I walk along the length of the mural. When I look at the very first thing I painted, a plaid shirt, I can remember how doubtful I was of myself. And then when I reached the end, I see the very last thing I painted on the mural, a grey rabbit perched on top of a pumpkin, and I remember how I didn't even think twice about doing it. I grew with this mural; it has left its mark on me as an artist, as much as I have left my mark on it.

Who Am I?

ERICA CHAN

IN THE 1950s, the term “Third Culture Kid (TCK)” was coined to describe a person who spent most of his or her development years outside the parent’s culture. Third Culture Kid builds relationships in multiple cultures but do not have ownership in any of these cultures.

I am waiting to cross the road while chatting with a friend, when I suddenly realise that, rather than speaking English, I am speaking Cantonese. My friend stares at me with her face composed in an expression of utter confusion. I turn away from her and unexpectedly realise that a boy whom I do not recognize is standing next to me. In a harsh, raspy whisper he says, “You do not belong here. Go back to where you came from.” He then aggressively shoves me off the sidewalk as he walks past, leaving maniacal laughter in his wake.

This slightly racist dream is my subconscious reacting to a concern of my cultural identity. I am a Canadian-born Chinese who has spent the majority of my academic career in a British school system. When I tell people this, they often reply with a surprised “oh!” that unsuccessfully masks their confused expression. What follows is a series of questions and observations, such as and not limited to, “So that’s why you don’t have an Asian accent!”, “Your English is very good!” These observations have never offended me, but they do annoy me. When people comment on my English abilities, I feel almost

defensive. These social interactions have made me realise I am far more confused with my cultural identity than I am comfortable with.

My confusion is not solitary. The fact that psychologists have done multiple studies on cultural identity proves that this concern of social interaction between multicultural individuals is something worth studying. The scientific term to describe my situation is “bicultural,” which is defined as “individuals who have internalized two cultures and these cultures take turns in guiding their perceptions and behaviour” (Mok 884). Psychologists Roccas and Brewer have done studies that examine the social interactions of bicultural individuals. They suggest strategies on how bicultural individuals manage social identities and interactions. The “dominance” strategy is when the individual identifies with one primary social group. Second, the “compartmentalization” strategy is when the individual identifies with either social group depending on social context. Third, the “merger” strategy is when the individual identifies with both social groups simultaneously.

Through my experience in both an international-school setting and a boarding-school environment, I have witnessed these social strategies put into use. I realise that the majority of my Chinese friends, who are also TCK, from International School partake in the compartmentalization strategy. As we are in a Chinese-dominated culture, we automatically identify with Chinese society. Our ethnicity and family demanded us to do so. We participate in public holidays and family traditions. We eat traditional Chinese food and speak Cantonese to each other. When the social context changes, for instance, at school, surrounded by our International schoolmates, it is as if we shed the “Chineseness” and adapt an International façade. We put down our chopsticks and pick up forks and knives. We speak fluent English and recognize Christian holidays. We are the whitewashed Chinese.

Many TCK can sympathize with me when I claim the hardest question to answer is “where are you from?” This question requires bicultural individuals to identify with one specific culture. The answer to this question will alter the questioner’s impression of me. If my answer is Hong Kong, I will have set myself a part from the Western identity that I strive for. If my answer is Canada, there will probably be

the unasked question of “where are you actually from?” lingering in the air. The answer to the question “where are you from?” also depends on where I am being asked. There is a great paradox that follows bicultural individuals. Eddie Huang, a Taiwanese-born American, shares this bicultural paradox. He states, “When I visited China, they considered me American. When I visited America, they considered me Korean.” The paradox here is that a bicultural individual is too much of one culture to be accepted into another. In Canada, I am too Asian to be white. In Hong Kong, I am too white to be Asian. Studies have shown that “cultural norms affect personality,” and as a bicultural individual, my personality obviously differs from monocultures’ (Mok 884). Social psychologists have observed that East Asians have a lower need for uniqueness and are more introverted than Westerners (Mok 884). Despite not being Western, I strive to be different; I need my uniqueness of being bicultural to be noticed. To make up my lack of whiteness, I often find myself as an Asian spokesperson. I try to correct Chinese assumptions and stereotypes, mostly so I will not be identified with these characteristics.

I often soft-pedal my Asianness in hopes of being accepted into my Canadianness. My journey to figuring out my bicultural identity will take more than the psychological analysis of my social interactions. While science can explain the cultural differences, this is a matter of self-reflection. I have come to the conclusion that a passport or racial attributes cannot define culture identity. The definition of TCK itself emphasises on the lack of identity with any specific culture. Perhaps this confusion is part of my bicultural identity and that I should not attempt to identify with a single culture but rather I should accept the diversity of cultures as a TCK. Eric Liu asks, “How faint the aroma of your own kitchen has become, how strong the scent of the street?” (60). In my desperate attempt to be part of the street, I find myself opening windows and doors, unintentionally letting the familiar smell of rice and steamed dishes that dominated my cultural kitchen disperse. I am torn between maintaining the nostalgic smell and being part of the world outside. About to climb out the window, I remember the

unpleasant boy that sneered at me, and I am caught between falling and standing. All the while the maniacal laugh still rings in my ears.

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An Act of Mourning

ANNA CHEN

THE PLACE reeked with the scent of lilies; bouquets of flowers were arranged artfully around the portrait of Grandmother Chiang, as if this were a wedding rather than a funeral. The August sunshine lit up the chapel like a stage, and outside the cicadas chirped dutifully along with the sombre music. The seating divided the room in half—family on the left, friends on the right. On the left side, a family reunion was in progress; hugs and gossip were exchanged, and cheeks were pinched. Though we were all dressed in stiff clothing of varying shades of black, formality was trumped by festiveness. There we were, laughing and teasing my cousins about their penguin suits, occasionally glancing surreptitiously at the half-raised podium and whispering, “Is it starting yet?” On the right side, a flock of frail church ladies perched on their seats, their claws clenched around packets of tissue. Oddly enough, it was these strangers who were burdened with the duty of mourning. There we were, side by side, like the two acts of a tragicomedy.

In June of 2011, before anyone discerned that death was in the forecast, my mother sent me to Taiwan as an ambassador of sorts. A couple of years ago, my mother and my uncle had an unpleasant falling-out. According to Aunt Zo, the long-suffering spouse of Uncle Kent, the dispute originated from Grandma Chiang, who apparently enjoyed pitting her own children against one another. My mother and

Uncle Kent ceased communication, and my mother stopped calling her mother, but Auntie and Uncle were still stuck with taking care of Grandma in Taiwan. My mother explained all of this to me back then, more or less; my stay with Uncle Kent was supposed to be an olive branch, a white flag on my mother's part. At that time, all of this seemed absurd. How would my visit resolve anything? Why was my mother being a hypocrite, using me as a tool when she should be the one crossing oceans to mend their relationship? I had my moral qualms, but in the end, the promise of a pre-paid trip to Taiwan was too tempting.

Outside the airport terminal, a late afternoon rain sprinkled over the city. The droplets sizzled and evaporated into steam as they hit the scorching asphalt; a balmy mirage began to form, blending the horizon with the bustling midday traffic. Lost in this foreign city, I desperately searched for my uncle among the throngs of drivers circling the arrival gates. Finally, I found him—or rather, he found me. “Over here!” he barked through the lowered window of his car. As I doggedly unloaded my luggage and folded my dripping body into the passenger seat, he coolly remarked, “Only an idiot would have waited around this gate.” And that was my first taste of Uncle Kent's infamous cattiness, a mixture of roundabout malice and sarcasm that exasperated everyone around him. There I was, thousands of miles away from home, being insulted by a stranger—and yet, the same strain of blood coursed through both of us. The tangles of kinship spun around us, binding us together. “It's nice to see you too,” I retorted, and Uncle Kent cracked the tiniest of smiles.

The next day, Uncle Kent dutifully took me to the nursing home to visit my grandmother. For the longest time, I was not aware of the family feud; Grandma Chiang had always been the quintessential granny to me and my sister. Even her sidekick, Tudor the pug, reinforced her grandmotherly image—she loved children and dogs. Perhaps the hostility skipped a generation, or maybe old age had softened even the meanest of spirits, but we grandchildren were never on the receiving end of her malice. How could this wizened old lady have been the tyrant of the Chiang household? Surely there was some

sort of misunderstanding. The older generations have always spoken love as a second language; maybe Grandmother's good intentions were obscured by her harsh diction, perhaps her love was mistranslated and misinterpreted by her embittered children. One thing was for sure—she had long ago depleted her power along with her health. Grandma Chiang lay there, half reclined on the mechanical cot, faintly acknowledging our presence. I could practically hear Uncle Kent silently counting down the seconds until it was socially acceptable for us to leave. As harrowing as it was to witness this abyss between my uncle and grandmother, scarier still was the realization that my mother was headed down this path. Suddenly I understood my role as her diplomat—my presence was a reminder to Uncle Kent that not all was lost between him and his sister, that they were still linked through the thin veins of kinship. For Grandmother, it was too late; there would be no eleventh-hour redemption, no tearful reconciliation between mother and son, no King Lear-esque bedside vigil. How sad it was, to be in the throes of death and have nothing but the emptiness of your child's filial duty for company. Grandmother Chiang had even lost custody of Tudor to Uncle Kent, since the nursing home forbade pets.

Tudor the pug, however, remained faithful to my grandmother until the last quiver of his feeble heart. Like a literary device in a Shakespearean play, the ancient mutt foreshadowed his mistress's death by dying just days before her demise. Later on, Auntie Zo, ever the sentimental spiritualist, would say that Tudor left early to save a spot for Grandma—to which Uncle Kent would snort and say, "I don't know where *she's* going, but all dogs go to heaven." Anyway, the superstition around the Hour of the Wolf proved to be true; both Tudor and Grandma passed away during the unholy hours between midnight and dawn. While Tudor's passing procured minimal fanfare, Grandmother Chiang's death caused a chain of events to be set in motion. After the profusely sympathetic phone call from the nursing home, Uncle Kent proceeded to dial a transatlantic number he had not called in years. Two days later, my mother landed in Tainan. The death of their mother was like the cutting of a taut rope; suddenly, the tension was released, and they had stumbled upon a catharsis. Is a death still a

tragedy if no one mourns for it? Or does it become all the more tragic? I still don't know. But sitting on the velveteen-lined chair in the chapel, I witnessed my mother and uncle fanning each other with funeral programs, and I felt an inexplicable wave of peace; maybe some truces can only be obtained via death.

The Tragedy of Star-Crossed Lovers

Fear and Race

NAN CHEN

H E HAD tears in his eyes as people rushed past us at the Gay Pride Parade.

The signs foretelling our relationship's failure were present when we first met. Sadly, I did not have the eyes to know that they were there.

The scenography of the first night we met—the small, lonely stars; the flat beer; the way my grey cardigan clung to me for dear life—predicted it all: the tears in his eyes, the confusion in his brows and the terror in my heart the last night we saw each other, the night of Pride. The portents had simple things to say. They said that I was falsely carving out the role of hero for myself, that I mistook fear and internal racism for confidence and power; that Eric and I would never work out.

On a barstool at Toronto's Sailor's Bar a few months before officially ending our rapport, I sat sipping my beer with a calculated air of distinguished indifference. As a 19-year-old gay Chinese man of colour with the prestigious privilege of having attended his first year at a world-class Canadian university, I knew a lot of things. I knew how to get good grades. There was safety in being correct, in knowing what idea fit into which category. I knew who I was and who I was to those around me. I knew my chances of picking up. I knew what I was

incapable of and capable of with my average, thin, wiry, and boyish body.

And so I sat, my face taking on new masks as I felt necessary: from James Dean stoic to James Franco wry, hoping to catch someone's eye, but also hoping for no one to bother. I wished for an unlucky night, for the satisfaction of having my social experiment and anxieties be proven correct. A plus. Perfect. 10/10. Stronger than my longing to be loved was my desire to be right.

I tried to blend in perfectly with the summer terrain of gay male society. All of the lavender television, books, and movies that I consumed, studied, painted onto my consciousness up to that point prepared me for that night. I wanted the entire bar, the entire world, to think that I was just another seamless element of Sailor's interior design: the suggestively warm lighting that cast leisurely shadows everywhere; the rock-solid, hardwood floor; and the pale, lascivious nudes, hanging pleasurably on the walls.

I was nervous, but I did not allow my face to betray my thoughts. I knew my role well.

And so did Eric. We both knew each other before we had said anything to each other. His tall, thin form appeared before me. He had a pretty air about him. I recognized his type immediately. He was emotional and sensitive. He had a homely face.

His Forty-Something French Accent: *Intriguing*. "Have I met you before?"

"No," I said. But I did recognize him. I've seen it all before: his shiny green eyes, conditioned brown hair, exfoliated skin the colour of milk or paper. Paper scrawled with hidden messages like "rich" or "hireable" or "fuckable." His collared shirt and expensive shoes expected something of me; they expected a neat reply to the words in his skin. Little did he suspect that I had the Enigma Machine in my experiences, clearly laid out in my gender studies courseware. I knew whiteness. I knew privilege. I knew my natives.

Ah, if only I knew a little more Achebe and a little less Fitzgerald then.

"Yes," I said.

I went over to his place after a little conversation. I was winning. I was sure of it. I felt nothing; Eric was a tower of need. His eyes were those of a dog pining for his master to come home through the front door. This master was present. I had the upper hand. This master had a feminist background. A plus. This master had a radical bone to pick with him. He didn't have a clue.

I cared little for him, for his nice shoes, his feminine gait, but I said, "Yes." They told me where they were going before we arrived at his bourgeois condominium. Wealth manifested itself in polished floors, dim lighting, and sleek furniture. Ethnic props lined the bookcase of the living room: a Buddha, tropical photos, and a wide assortment of street-vendor knickknacks were arranged in perfect visual order. They whispered useful sound bites for the story I would tell my friends: tourism, Asia, old, globalization, exoticism, consumerism, Orientalism. I laughed inwardly.

I'll play this part because I want to. I'm having fun.

His monstrously bushy eyebrows and eyes glistening like plastic beads asked me about my schooling. We were engaged in cultural warfare. I tried to surprise Eric with my level of education. I showed him how educated people like me could be. His soft, dainty hands needed to grasp the idea that my people can master knowledge just as well as he can. I felt a need to prove myself to him. I slipped in cultural references like knives into flesh: *Le Petit Nicolas*, *Le Petit Prince*, Charles Trenet, Édith Piaf (naturally), Molière, Camus. His eyebrows were impressed bridges. Or rigid brown arches supporting hundreds of years of imperialism.

I saw right through his patronizing surprise.

We did not have sex the first night we met. I guess when we did commit the act, it meant much more to him than it did to me. I screened all of his infrequent calls to my cellphone. I much preferred the simpler images and feelings I had at my disposal on my computer screen to the time spent with a man who made me slightly nauseous. I wish I could say that I was smelling the decay of his soul, but it was really the decomposition of my own.

I could not project my own rankness onto Eric the mild evening I saw him at Pride a few months later. He was too human that night. His face told his own story too loudly for me to carve the one I was imagining onto his skin.

He had tears in his eyes, in his sensitive eyes. He tried to smile, but could only grimace. I could only say that I was sorry, but the words sounded harsh: cold and dead. The pain of his wrinkles and sincerity of his tender voice reached into the pit of my stomach and stirred something akin to disgust that I could only direct it at myself. I was ashamed for putting Eric through what I was most scared of experiencing. I saw myself in Eric's heartache. I heard myself in Eric's soft voice. I felt Eric's desire to explore, to love, to be loved. I saw that he was happy to see me even after I rejected him countless times.

I saw him, but I didn't know him. I couldn't know him because he was a story I told myself, a parable to shield my heart from collapsing under my utter lack of certainty, at my fear of being wrong. I realized that couldn't have known him properly because I didn't know myself. I put us into the same categories I learned to question, wanted to destroy. I saw that, but it was too late. We never knew each other.

Up The Hill Backwards

The Spectacular Failure of the Men's Rights Movement

IAN CLARK

WHEN I was new to YouTube, I described the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) and its followers, Men's Rights Advocates (MRAs), as "one of the strangest I've had the... pleasure of encountering" (Clark 1st min.). I meant this as, "I'm not yet familiar enough to understand this." I wish I'd remained that unfamiliar. There's nothing wrong with advocating men's rights, as the MRM and its website, *A Voice for Men*, (AVFM), claim to do. Just as I call myself feminist, I'd like to identify with a movement that advocates on behalf of men, if only I could find one. Instead, AVFM is a carnival of misogyny.

AVFM affiliate Register-Her.com argues that false rape accusers are never punished. A banner on their front page reads, "Why are these women not in prison?", with five female mug shots, each linking to a news story. Apparently, they couldn't find five actual examples, as three of the women shown did in fact serve time. A paragraph down, it asserts 41% of rape accusations are false. This comes from a study (Kanin 1) employing a sample group of a single town. Worse, the police employed polygraph tests on accusers, a practice widely condemned for causing false recantations (Lisak et al. 12). Both are such giant methodological errors that the study may as well be scrawled

on a Taco Bell men's room, yet both Register-Her and AVFM founder Paul Elam parrot the conclusion unquestioningly (*On Jury Nullification* par 17).

Whenever I've heard junk stats like this, it's always allegedly to protect men from false imprisonment. I've been told feminists want to give women the ability to incarcerate me with just the word "rape." This is for the protection of all men—in fact, for my own protection (YesIAmJames 32nd min.). I believe that the person who said it believed it, but I don't.

According to the Innocence Project, eyewitness misidentification is the cause of nearly 75% of false imprisonments, making it the perfect target for any activist genuinely concerned. Disappointingly, a Google search for "A Voice for Men Eyewitness Misidentification" turns up only one mention on the site itself—in the comments section (Franklin).

"Women lie" would prove a common motif, particularly once I learned of MRA author Warren Farrell. While Elam and the rest of Register-her argue that women lie about being raped *afterward*, Farrell argues that, in many cases, the lack of consent itself is a lie, and if she says no but still expresses sexual interest of any kind, the man should interpret this as a secret yes and proceed, consequence-free (page 315).

Prolific as the "women lie" myth may be in the MRM, the fact that rape is so frequently a focus points to something much worse. Farrell asserts that not getting sex at the end of a date can be as bad as date rape (page 314), and he advocates that date rape laws should not involve whether she said yes or no (page 340). Elam eclipses this by asserting that rape really isn't as bad as people make it out to be (*The Scourge*), and finally goes full daytime talk show villain by suggesting feminists would be happier if they were raped (*The Unspoken* 12th par.).

Their point is to diminish rape itself, to assert that it almost never actually happens and that, when it does, it isn't that bad anyway. Fortunately, the extreme majority of MRAs only internalize these rape apologetics a small amount. They keep the true intent of Elam and Farrell's words, as well as a host of other MRM extremisms, at a

manageable distance with a steady course of denial and cognitive dissonance.

Usually, MRAs assert they are anti-feminist because of incidents that, if they really cared, would lead them to not be MRAs either. For example, the Enliven Project asserted 2% of rape accusations were false. The actual number is 2-8% (Lonsway et al. 2). For someone surrounded by people who regularly assert the number to be 41%, AVFM editor VictorZen seems less forgiving about the Enliven Project using a stat that might not even be wrong (Gerard 7th min.).

MRAs also hate people breaking laws to silence critics, unless it's their people. A feminist protestor pulling a fire alarm recently halted a Farrell seminar (genuinewitty). Unacceptable though that may be, it cannot compare to dozens of MRAs putting pictures of protestors online, with personal information including home addresses, and sending death threats (Baker 3-7th par). One protestor, Charlotte, became somewhat famous, not for the threats, but for the number of times she was recorded saying "Shut the fuck up" (18upper). One feminist was targeted so harshly, the FBI advised her to leave home (Friedman 15th par). Still, in the MRM mindset, one false fire alarm is a greater injustice than dozens of death threats. In the MRM mindset, Charlotte being unpleasant is a greater injustice than having her life threatened. In the MRM mindset, nearly anything any feminist does is a greater injustice than anything, or everything, any MRA does.

The MRM perpetuates a team mentality in which feminists are "the enemy" and fellow MRAs are inherently allies. They accuse feminists of ignoring or perpetuating gender inequalities such as workplace deaths. They accuse feminists of ignoring domestic abuse against men (Gerard 2-7th min.). Regardless, I've seen local feminist Krystle Maki discuss workplace safety in public. I've also had a feminist friend ask male victims of sexual assault to share their stories (ExtremelyBoring). I have yet to see any MRA advocate any issue on behalf of women. Instead, Paul Elam says there is "little social hypocrisy unfavourable to women actually exists" (*On Studs* 2nd par).

This borderline mentality is how MRAs ignore the used needle in the onion dip that is the blatant sexism surrounding them. While most

MRAs are misogynists to some degree, most of them probably don't believe that rape makes women happy. Further still, I've come across a sizeable enough minority of MRAs who aren't misogynists at all. The vast majority of MRAs would probably be horrified by Paul Elam if they hadn't been driven by their mutual distrust of feminism, a distrust that leads to an unwarranted trust of anyone who shares it. If it wasn't for people like Paul Elam and Warren Farrell occupying positions of authority within the MRM, there's a good chance a lot of MRAs, with very valid things to say, might prove themselves invaluable voices in the conversation about gender equality.

Despite all the fodder for outrage, my main reaction to the MRM is disappointment. Traditional perceptions of gender are awful for men as well as women, which makes it vitally important to have both male and female perspectives represented, yet the MRM serves neither. Men's Rights Advocates should spend more time actually advocating men's rights, and seeking others to do the same. Many who are willing to advocate for men are feminists, including Gloria Steinem, who has opposed male circumcision for decades (NO HARM 6th par). When a lack of willingness to work with feminists outweighs the desire to see actual change put in place, "rights advocates" is a lie. When a desire to insist your entire side is right outweighs a desire to actually *be right*, go home.

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Debating to Participate

TAMARA COUTINHO

AS I stand in the doorway of the restaurant I fear I have lipstick on my teeth, and wonder if I've got enough time to just turn around and head back home. He hasn't seen me yet, I don't think, and I can avoid this whole awkward engagement if I come up with a valid enough excuse. This anxiety never ends it seems, I won't relax until this is over. My extensive internal beforehand debate resulted in my attendance, but did nothing to make this event any more appealing.

That moment I was standing alone in my bedroom, surrounded by my entire closets' contents on the floor, was the moment I questioned this whole social activity, and again I recall it. The conscious agreement to participate in the most awkward of social events confuses me as much as dry land would confuse a whale. The romantic date: a prescheduled period of time, where two individuals, possibly complete strangers, meet one another, often to speak solely of themselves, in efforts to gain some form of intimacy, just doesn't make sense. The participation in this social rite of passage is ultimately inevitable apparently, but as I had searched my always ill-prepared closet for an outfit appropriate enough for the occasion, I could not help be question why anyone would ever willingly choose to do this, and yet here I am.

The choice of attire alone was a mission of its own. The ability to leave a positive impression, merely through visual assets, is a requirement everyone aims to excel at in the game of dating. As my

very insightful sister would say, “when you look good, you feel good, and you do good,” which she applies to everything and anything. Questioning whether the outfit is appropriate enough, or if I look just casual enough to act as if I’ve just rolled out of bed this way is an ongoing struggle. As my frustration about the outfit grew, the overarching fear of the possible life-altering night crept upon me like smoke, thickening as my thoughts deepened. As I stood in my tornado-stricken room, cursing myself for not doing the laundry, I questioned how the night is going to go and whether it is worth the anxiety of it all. Not only did I lack the necessary physical presentation at that moment to act confidently, I predicted possible unavoidable bumps of the night and think debated on how I should handle them.

The arrival, for one, that I was now in the midst of, is the most intimidating of them all. The lack of knowledge about one another will not only create an awkward initial greeting, but the sincere confusion as to which form of greeting is appropriate at all. A handshake is formal, as if meeting for a business exchange, and an enthusiastic hug is somewhat an invasion of physical space and possibly too friendly. If he is Italian or French, maybe he would greet me with casual kisses on the cheek, and if that is going to be the case, the need to Google the appropriate number of kisses specific to that culture had trumped every other thing on the to-do list, of course that is with the high hopes that I would even be able to determine his ethnicity within that first 5 seconds. Still standing in the restaurant doorway, my palms get sweaty as I scan the dining room for my date, praying I see him before he sees me, allowing me time to decide which greeting seems most appropriate and least awkward.

The first impression is the key to success in any situation that I cannot simply brush aside as unimportant. As I had sat in my room, surrounded by my clothes, I refused to have a bad first impression, and most logically, I decided to Google the restaurant’s menu. I most definitely, do not want to be caught taking my sweet time ordering my meal; my indecisive qualities can wait to be exposed another night. As I had scroll through the virtual menu on my laptop, I debated between entrées, searching for a reasonably priced option that won’t make me

look like I am a pig and at the same time, be a good meal. As I stood still searching for my date and casually scanning every other guest's meals, I am thankful that I settled on a tasty sounding seafood Penné earlier. From my choice of meal carefully pre-chosen, my mind automatically wondered over to the horror show that is often that of paying for the bill.

As many believe, the individual who initiated the date has the responsibility to take the bill, but I question whether that is fair, especially in the case of the individual not enjoying him or herself. For that reason, I have come accustomed to always offering to pay for my half. It seems most fair and gives my date the opportunity to agree or reject my offer. Because I rely so much on my offering, I prayed, sitting on the floor surrounded by clothes, with my meal choice selected, that the wait staff hands my date the bill or that he reaches for it first. I dread the improvisation I would be forced to perform if I were given that little black leather pamphlet first. Now thinking of all of this that is going to occur within the next few minutes, in this little innocent restaurant, I debate whether I've got enough time to run away. Why put myself through this?

Not only will the end of the night bring about the awkward paying of bills but, further so, the saying of goodbyes. If the date goes badly and the paying of the bill is a "team effort" as some may say, the possible goodbye could be short and mildly awkward; a situation easily able to overcome. If the overall date goes relatively well, then the intimacy of the goodbye is unpredictable. Is it appropriate to hug? Should I shake his hand and say "I hope to see you soon?" or will I have a glass of wine with my meal and have enough alcohol in my system to be forward enough to go in for a kiss at the doorstep. I debated the unfolding of these small episodes, inevitable in the series show of a first date and came out of the debate as ill-prepared as I went in.

Finally spotting him, he greets my eyes with a smile and a wave and I smile coyly in return. He stands, waiting to greet me when I reach him. As I make my way slowly to him, careful not to trip on my own feet, my mind races. Why do people agree to do this? Why would

anyone agree to sit in front of a stranger and allow him or her to silently pass judgements? Why would I, and him, for that matter, say yes to this? I suppose all in the hopes of finding some kind of intimacy, long-term or short. People do this to change their lives; to find someone to love and someone to love them. This rapidly approaching event could change my entire life, or just be a waste of my time. This man, I am walking to, whom I barely know and yet have agreed to meet with could be my uprising or downfall. He could be the future father of my children or the jerk that breaks my heart.

As I walk toward him, I notice he quickly adjusts his collar in an obviously nervous manner and it occurs to me, he's debating his choice to participate as well. He, this stranger to me, is fully aware that I am a stranger to him. He must have questioned his outfit choice and hoped I find them attractive too. He will be just as confused as to how to greet me, either with a handshake or a kiss/ kisses. He probably fears, as I do, of the one wrong move, question, or answer that will render the whole preparatory efforts completely useless. He will prepare to pay for the bill as I have, and he will have to gauge the appropriate goodbye as I do. His entire life could change because of me. I could be his lifelong love, or his heartbreaker. So there is a consensus then, we all say yes to this, but why? I suppose for the possibility at love, intimacy and the companionship. The ultimate goal of every human being; it is our nature. So we forget about the anxiety of being physically attractive and the economics of the date, and put ourselves out there to find something real and sincere. As I finally reach him, his smile widens and my debate to participate is over.

The Life Unknown

BRITTANY COX

LIFE IS a journey, not a destination. It is common, for many, to validate their successes in life based on how many milestones they have hit, rather than looking at the small victories accomplished. We categorize our lives into “firsts” and “lasts” in order to establish a start and an end point. What fails with this system is we do not reflect upon the struggles faced along the way, thus skipping the journey. This process is the most important, as it defines individuality, and fosters personal growth. By overcoming obstacles one can enjoy the finish line more as the effort to reach the goal proved to be more difficult than expected.. This lesson can also be established during one’s postsecondary career, specifically my own. My battle with mental illness during this pivotal time has made the closing to this chapter even more satisfying. Although my journey has not been easy, it has been more life-changing than I ever imagined.

I am currently in my final year of University, and I can happily say that I am going to graduate, this summer. This was something I did not think was possible four short years ago. It has been a hard journey dealing with depression and all the obstacles that accompany it. In an effort to graduate on time, I have made special arrangements and sacrifices such as, enrolling in summer classes to gain back failed credits due to lack of effort and wiliness to succeed. I put myself on a

academic schedule to ensure assignments got completed on time, and to account for my down days. I did not know the challenges and different techniques people with depression have to endure in order to get through a day. This being said the changes are manageable if you really want something. You can achieve your goals with a mental illness. I am proof of that.

The first day of university is a landmark for many young individuals living in the twentieth century. It is a time in which you can start over and decide who you want to be. To a young person, this is such a liberating feeling. Although there are many freedoms that come with university life, there are also many expectations and social pressures thrust upon you. When referring to their university days, people tend to reflect upon their social lives, the friends they had, and all the amazing parties they went to. Although these are great elements of the experience, it puts a lot of pressure on people to fit into this mould. I for one, like many others, did not fit in. I was not the partying type, and because of this felt like I was alone. Along with the many changes that came with moving away from home, I now had to deal with the fact that I was different. This longing to belong affected me emotionally, and it also challenged me academically. My motivation to complete my schoolwork became harder and harder to find. I attributed this to the social segregation and it being a year of big changes. This was not the case. For me, these were my early warning signs of depression. The commencement of my first year left me in poor academic standing and an even worse emotional state.

People dealing with depression find each day harder than the last. Thus, as years progressed dealing with my illness became more of a struggle. For most people, the second and third years are easier, as they have got a handle of the course load, they know how to succeed, and they know their place within their groups of friends. Often times those suffering from depression, this is not the case. It is not until they have hit their pivotal moment, do they reach out. Everyone's lowest is different. Personally, mine was when I stopped attending classes, and was in jeopardy of being kicked out of school. As someone, like others, who has an end career goal in sight, it is difficult to fathom giving that

up. After speaking to many of my professors about my feelings, many of them recommended I go seek help from a professional. This is a very vulnerable move for anyone in this situation because it requires them to share one's feelings as well as slap a "negative" label upon themselves. The weak stigma that is associated with depression was not one that I wanted to bear. This being stated I tried speaking to someone and was prescribed medication. For me, this did not help my moods or motivation level. In fact, I felt worse than I ever did. What was more frustrating about this situation was that, without these aids, medications or doctor's notes that no one would help me. I understood that the professors has policies to follow as far as extensions and accommodations were concerned, but those methods failed me, and yet I was still being punished by the educational system for not being a malleable object. This forced me to work harder on myself, in order to succeed personally and academically. This journey was hard, as I often felt defeated, not motivated and hopeless. With time and trying to push myself to do activities I enjoyed I eventually started to become happy, and thus overall became more successful in all aspects of my life.

Becoming the person I am, despite my struggles, has given me some insight into the minds of those dealing with depression. Thus, I would like to leave you, the reader, with some lessons that I acquired along my journey. First is that university is an adjustment. It comes with many social pressures and expectations, but ignore them. I believe it is important to run your own race. Do things at your pace and at your speed. Your biggest competitor is not the student sitting next to you but yourself. Break down your barriers, and push your own limits. I also learned that it is OK to fail. This does not make you stupid, or a failure. It makes you stronger, as you have to work harder to get back up. I believe, it is natural to be upset when you do not do well, but make sure you do not let that pain hinder your potential. Finally, I would like to say that this is my experience. Not everyone who has or will have a mental illness with deal with it the same way, experience the same feelings, or discover it the same way, but it is important to know that you can get through it. Seek help and never see that as a weakness. Be proud of your journey along with the destination.

Queen's Commerce

Growing into Yourself

KAREN DAO

I AM carefully brushing my teeth and staring at my reflection in the bathroom mirror. There are dark bags under my eyes, but I had promised myself I was going to be productive and have a nice long date with the library. I spit out the mint-flavoured toothpaste, and wipe the excess foam from the corners of my mouth. I pull my messy, brown hair back to hide the bed-head, and splash cold water on my face to appear more refreshed. I hear the familiar ringtone of my iPhone calling out to get my attention. Reaching across the sink counter, I pick it up and put it to my ear.

“Hello, Karen speaking.”

“Hi, Karen, it’s Becky! I am calling regarding your interview last week. We are happy to welcome you to our team with a full time position starting in September!”

“Oh! I was *not* expecting a call so soon. Thank you so much! Wow!” My heart was pounding with enthusiasm and delight.

“I want to congratulate you once again. I will be sending you a confirmation e-mail and the offer package through the mail in a couple of days!” she said.

“Thanks again, Becky! You don’t understand how excited I am!” I squealed. A huge smile comes over my face as I took a leap onto my bed and started jumping up and down on my springy mattress, leaving

wrinkles in the once smooth white linen sheets. How many twenty-year-olds can say they have a full-time job lined up six months before graduation? Not many, I assumed. I sat down on the corner of my bed and looked out the window. The sun was peeking out behind the mass-produced suburban units; red and orange leaves were falling from the aging maple trees. Even Mother Nature was happy for me today. I can also see a large stone building in the foreground, Goodes Hall. I move my head closer to the window and open the latch to stick my head out. This building holds so many memories of my last four years: where I have pulled my first all-nighters, made my closest friends, and attended some life-changing classes. Am I actually ready to leave yet? Is this job in Calgary one I want to leave my friends and family for? Should I have told Becky yes?

The first time I found myself in Goodes Hall, I was taken aback by the intricate architecture, airy 14-foot ceilings, and dark wood panels like that of an ancient castle. I felt like Harry Potter entering the Hogwarts School for the first time. This was very different from my high school. I was used to punched-in lockers, mismatched coloured walls, and uneven flooring. It seemed that both institutions of academia mirrored the educational calibre of their students. I am not indicating my high school was full of drop outs or drug addicts, but none of the students were even qualified enough to *apply* to the Queen's Commerce program. With that being said, as I've gotten to know my peers, I know I am not the scholar of this program either; in fact, I was quite surprised to be offered admission, as I know some of these students have the ability to attend Harvard Business, but chose not to. I felt honoured to go through this journey with some of Canada's brightest minds. The Queen's Commerce degree was established in 1919 as the first business degree in Canada (Deub and Buchan, par. 3). Since then, many successful individuals have enrolled in the Commerce program such as Elon Musk, founder of PayPal and Tesla, as well as numerous CEOs from companies such as Deloitte, Royal Bank of Canada, PricewaterhouseCoopers, to name a few (Keats, par. 5). Like many of the past students, I found the first couple months were strenuous, with constant demand from my professors, and a never-

ending workload, but with the help of a consistent schedule and my peers, I soon settled in and found my place in the animal kingdom's social hierarchy.

Returning to Goodes Hall for my second year of Commerce, I knew I was in for my most difficult year yet according to the wise upper-year students. The courses were twice as challenging and the professors were exponentially more demanding. I heard rumours, many rumours that I would have two professors in class this year I would never forget. Just when I had thought I'd trekked through a sandstorm, I had been given warning for a year long draught. After sitting in class with each professor for twelve weeks, I can confirm that I truly understand how these two have permanently stamped their names in the commerce program. I had been taught how to work with opposite personalities, strict deadlines, and live off cups of coffee for weeks as I tried to stay within the ranks of my peers. I had those two professors to thank for the copious amounts of theoretical material and life lessons learned.

Palm trees hovered above the buildings and the sun's bright rays bounced off the cobblestone walkways. This made it hard to stare at the floor for more than a few seconds without feeling burning sensations towards the back of my retinas. I loved that in Lisbon I was able to go to school in October in a sundress and sandals. While on my way to class, I thought, perhaps I had taken a lot for granted in the past nineteen years, but this private school was nothing like I had imagined. This building did not have any of the remarkable aesthetic qualities of Goodes Hall. It resembled my high school, as did the education quality; however, I knew the tuition fees were similar to those back at Queen's. Despite the less-than-appealing building, I was more than happy to spend five months in this foreign country for my third year in the program. Coming back to my home in Goodes Hall, I would have a new perspective on my schooling; I want to thrive, and to learn, while appreciating the quality of education I receive back in Canada.

I quickly turn my head away from the window and come back into reality. My tense shoulders slowly relax as I exhale. I know this new job is 3000 km away from my friends and family, and I don't know a

single person, but I also did not know anyone going into the Commerce program four years before. I have started from the beginning before, and I would just be doing it again. I felt a little more relieved and confident about my decision to take the position in Calgary. This job was going to be a huge step for me, and a huge change for me, but provided the best opportunity for me. The Queen's Commerce program and the comfort of Goodes Hall has allowed me to realize I can adapt to change similar to how a chameleon can blend into its surroundings.

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The Other Side of it All

GRACE DI CESARE

I MADE a point not to be there the day the men came to transport my grandmother from her suburban home to the palliative-care centre on the other end of town. I wanted to avoid having to watch my grandfather's reaction to his house becoming bigger and bigger as they inched her out the front door in her wheelchair. I buried myself in my studies on the day of the transfer, never fully able to ignore the ticking of the clock as I played this displacement through my head in ceaseless succession. Around four o'clock, I received a call from my dad who said ever so calmly, "Nonna has made it to her new room. It's much larger than we thought it would be." While I appreciate the forced positivity, I wasn't buying the idea that anyone was happy with this arrangement. Knowing that she had safely arrived to the centre with few punches thrown, I decided to make my way over after school. Pulling into the parking lot I saw my father's, my mother's, and my grandfather's cars parked close to the door. The lady at the front desk asked me to sanitize my hands and make my way down the long hallway until I met room number four on my left; that's Nonna's room. The smell of the building was almost *too* clean. It made you wonder what possible odours they were aiming to cover up with such a thick cloud of Febreze in the air. All the doors along the hallway were open, making it a little harder to find room four, and also allowing for the unintentional gawking of each sickly resident. That may sound obtuse,

however, the sound of sixty year smokers dry heaving into a bucket doesn't put anyone in a comforting state of mind. I quickened my pace, and to my left I noticed a woman with little green eyes, a perfectly rounded face with wisps of grey hair that sat in disarray over her forehead. I could see a stack of pillows elevating her engorged right leg while another stack functioned to keep her head upright. With the murmuring of the nurses and the sounds of dry heaving disappearing into the background, I looked lovingly down at Nonna, and felt at home when I saw her look back at me.

After a blissful five minutes of hugging and kissing Nonna, I was interrupted by the sound of my Nonno's frustration with the television as he yelled in his thick Italian accent, "why this no turn on!" As I calmly walked over to point out that the reason it wouldn't turn on was that he was pressing the volume button, I noticed something a bit bizarre. Nonna hadn't yelled at him out of annoyance that he was unable to complete a task, as she would normally do. In fact, since Nonna had been diagnosed, just about every conversation they shared was a pleasant one. Coming from boisterous Italian backgrounds, I had always known the relationship between Nonna and Nonno to be a loud one, full of arguments, and without any overt forms of affection. I thought back to Christmas one year where my mother and I devised a plan to place holly in the entryway so when Nonna and Nonno arrived for dinner they would have no choice but to kiss. My memory is foggy as to whether or not they actually went through with it, though I doubt it. In fact, one of the first words I learned in Italian was "zitto," meaning "shut up," as Nonna would so often shout at Nonno. I was more distracted with my revelation about their lack of confrontations than I was with the sharp smell of vomit that began to waft through the door from the next room over. Why weren't they fighting? It seemed rather backward that my concern surfaced at a time of tranquillity rather than combat. I couldn't help but draw the conclusion that the reason they weren't fighting anymore was simply because there was nothing left to fight about. She fought to get well, he fought to keep it together, and when that didn't work there was nothing else to say.

I continued to visit Nonna every day during my lunch break from school, even if it was just for five minutes, or even if it meant missing a class. Consciously, I knew that it was because I was overcompensating for the lack of visits she was receiving from my sister and brother. My chest would tighten after all of their missed visits until, finally, my entire upper torso began to feel like an extra ligament that I struggled to carry. Eventually, my visits all ended with Nonna trying to pay me for my time. Literally every time I would (out of my own volition) visit my beautiful Nonna, she would try to coerce me into going over to the closet on the opposite end of the room, open her purse, and take out her wallet so she could give me ten dollars. This generosity was not a new character trait, but still, I felt that she was pleading with me to continue to visit, in place of her only other two grandchildren who had not. I would try to bring up my aggravation to my father, however this illness had affected him that I would never truly understand until years later. As the only child of his dependent immigrant parents, dad had taken on far more than a working husband and father of three had time to manage. So I stayed silent, and my parents and I continued to visit Nonna on a daily basis, fearfully waiting out her elapsing time in palliative care.

A year after Nonna was admitted into palliative care she broke the record for what can callously be called “longest time a patient has gone without dying in palliative care.” That being the case, they essentially tossed her out and transferred her to a semi-private room in a nearby hospital. A week later, however, I received a distraught call from my mother while I was at school, as she told me that the priest had been at the hospital to give Nonna her last rites, and moments later she passed away. Unfortunately for my new roommate, he got the brunt of my unrelenting sobbing, a moment he still considers to be a defining moment in our relationship. He asked what he could do for me, and ultimately my only need was to be with my family, despite the resentments that had been festering since her diagnosis. He took me to my parent’s home where I looked right into the faces of my brother and sister in a moment I had always pictured ending with my complete disownment of them as family. When I looked at them, however, they

were both swollen-faced with pain in their eyes that I had never seen in them before. At the wake, I saw my Nonno wrap his arms around her open casket and shake it back and forth to the point that it almost fell over as if he was trying to wake her up. During the funeral, my father stood up to say a few words about his mother, which were cut off by the cracking of his voice as the tear began escaping his eyes. The bells concluding the ceremony made my heart fall into my stomach as I watched my brother and my sister rest their heads upon Nonno's shoulders, soaking his Italian suit in their salty tears. I wasn't mad at them. I wasn't even thinking about them. All I was fearful for my days without her, and thankful that I was not alone in this. Even now, years later, I keep a ten dollar bill handy so when I see a flickering light or a gust of powerful wind I can leave it on a nearby counter knowing that now it is now her turn to visit me.

Canada

Cottage Country Culture

HOLLY DICKINSON

MY MOTHER rolls down all four car windows and suddenly turns the volume of the radio as loud as it goes, jolting me out of my nap. As I open my eyes and look outside, I see that we have turned off of the highway and onto the winding dirt road that leads us straight to the lake. Before shaking out of my sleepy daze, I find myself joining my mom and older sister in singing Madonna's "Holiday"—a harmonious trio, if you ask me. The lyrics come naturally to my six-year-old self, as our annual road trip to the cottage has been shared with Madonna's 80s hit for as long as I can remember. The wind blows my curly, white-blond hair around the backseat, and my stomach grows excitedly anxious with every passing verse. Coming to an abrupt stop, I have a brief moment to catch a glimpse of a tree standing at the side of the road, its trunk inhabiting a series worded signs. Without a glance at the labelled tree, or a falter in her lyrical recitation, my mother turns left and follows the arrow that reads "Duggan Island." For the remainder of the journey, our car crawls over tree roots and rocks while avoiding potholes and low-hanging branches, inching our way further from civilization and closer towards paradise. Madonna sings her final note as we pull into an overgrown parking spot—perfectly timed! Before we proceed to unload the car, my mother prompts my sister and I to take three deep breaths, "Fill your lungs with the fresh cottage air,

girls!” she shouts enthusiastically. I find this ritual silly, but I follow her lead anyways. Once satisfied with our participation in her breathing routine, we proceed to unload the car and wait (patiently) for my grandpa to paddle across the lake in the rickety, yet sturdy, canoe that would transport us from the mainland to the family island.

Lake Nipissing has provided my family with a summer escape for generations. In 1938 my great-grandparents purchased two-acre “Juniper Island” for just \$130—less than the pair of designer sunglasses that my mother wears for driving. With the help of his sons, my great-grandfather built a modest cabin for his family of eleven—the only sign of human habitation among the rocky terrain and young White Pine and Juniper trees. The island bears much resemblance to its original state from over seventy years ago, with the exception of a gradual growth of wild life, and the exponential growth of the Duggan family. With each of my grandpa’s siblings having four or more children, two acres no longer seems as vast as it once did when my grandpa first visited the island at the adventurous age of twelve. With a growing family and a seemingly shrinking island, it has become a community—a place for a family to interact without the distractions of reality. With no electricity, running water, or cellphone service, island dwellers must resort to entertainment methods that are foreign to my generation’s modern way of life—a rustic approach that defines my family’s interpretation of cottage life, providing a connection between the four generations of Duggans.

“Always step in the centre of the canoe!” my mother reminds my sister and me as we clumsily take our seats on the floor of the unstable vessel. After neatly organizing suitcases, food coolers, and water toys around us, she confidently settles into the front seat, while my grandpa takes the rear seat to steer. When we arrive at the island, my uncle and grandma greet us at the dock and help us haul our things up the rugged paths to the cabin we were claiming for the week. Before long, we are sitting on my grandparents’ deck, enjoying the intense afternoon sun and the cooling lake breeze—there’s only one thing...I’m bored. I don’t want to admit it, I wish I was content with a book and small talk like everyone else, but this is not the case. I hold it in for as long as I

can, but the confession slips out and there's simply nothing I can do to stop it. Without glancing up from her book, my mother calmly states: "That's what the cottage is for—being bored."

The cottage—commonly known as a rustic getaway home immersed in nature to provide city dwellers with an "escape" ("Cottage Culture: The history of cottages in Canada")—is not a concept exclusive to Canadians, but it has become an integral part of Canadian culture. However, a rudimentary building lacking modern amenities does not define every cottage. According to anthropologist Julia Harrison, author of the book *It's Just Good Times: The Canadian middle class at the cottage*, "There's an intense emotional connection to a cottage...involving social, financial and psychological investment by owners," (Hepburn).

My exasperated sigh draws a sympathetic look from my mother, as she knows the feeling of island boredom all too well. My grandparents are both teachers and held their seven children hostage in nature every summer of their childhood. A fate that my mother and her siblings did love, but inevitably grew tired of, as they longed for a hot shower and Sunday morning cartoons by mid-August.

Harrison also notes the sharp class-based differences between middle-income regions such as Haliburton and the Kawarthas, and Muskoka with its million-dollar luxury "cottages." It's no wonder that Muskoka has been deemed one of Ontario's most famous cottage country regions, its breathtaking lakes and close proximity to the Toronto area warrants its desirability as a summer escape destination. However, does it justify the over-commercialization of cottage culture? Perhaps not. As an adult, my mother's childhood boredom has transformed into an appreciation for the unique peace and quiet of the isolated island—a peace and quiet that is not attainable with the buzz of Wi-Fi and jet skis roaring across Lake Muskoka.

Summoning me across the deck to where she is basking in the sun, my mother claims to have a "special adventure" for me, proceeding to whisper the task in my ear. Curiosity and excitement flutters inside of me as I wonder why she needs me to collect the most original rocks from the island's shoreline. The mystery of it silences any further

questions I have, and I fasten my sandals, pull on my hat, and set off to explore the perimeter of the island. When I feel that my rock collection is sufficient, I return to my grandparents' deck to an assortment of acrylic paints and a cup full of various sized paintbrushes.

It is not only my artistic rock masterpiece that remains on the island today, but also my great-grandparents' legacy. The island continues to serve the purpose that it did when it was first acquired so many years ago, a timeless place to escape reality and spend time with family without any modern distractions. With over one hundred first and second cousins, a weekend summer visit to Duggan Island will surely re-establish a connection to both nature and old family ties—truly encompassing Canadian cottage culture.

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The Game of Life

CLAIRE ENDICOTT

WHEN PLAYING the board game Life, the intent of the game is to mirror life events (going to university, raising a family, purchasing a home, working, and retiring) with the goal of having the most assets at the end of the game in order to win. Aside from a handful of choices throughout the game, most of winning is based on hope and good luck. Not only was this my favourite game growing up, but the game also gives a practical look at what real life can be like. For example, a square on the board is labelled “Life-saving operation, pay the Doctor.” However, this game does a poor job in teaching empathy. In an example such as this, when playing the game, your opponent may be happy, hell, even thrilled that you landed on that square and now have to pay them money. But what happens when you are outside of the board game and the man you look up to the most, your father, is diagnosed with cancer? You would not consider yourself lucky that he now must undergo a life-saving operation, and you definitely wouldn’t be glad that this was happening to someone you love.

A retroperitoneal sarcoma is at its most basic level a rare tumour. It is so rare in fact, the treatment plan is not determined. When diagnosed, a team of doctors must plan a variety of stages of treatment unique to the individuals’ health conditions and based on how aggressive the tumour is. For my father, his head doctor decided on chemotherapy, followed by radiation, and finally a surgery to remove the tumour. With

both radiation and chemotherapy, the goal is to shrink the tumour as well as kill off cells that risk spreading. Radiation and chemotherapy work more efficiently as a tag-team; however, chemotherapy can only be recommended for individuals with good health. This is due to the fact that chemotherapy kills the body's healthy and cancerous cells simultaneously. The six-inch tumour located in the free space of my Dad's stomach (touching his kidney, pancreas, spleen, and back muscle wall) radiation and chemotherapy were vital before the surgery to shrink the tumour as much as possible to prevent the cancer's return as well as provide a safe size for respectability during surgery. With a survival rate of anywhere from forty to sixty percent and a recurrence rate of seventy percent, my family had a one way ticket to pain and suffering.

As my older sister was graduating from university, I from high school, and my younger sister from elementary school, 2012 was already gearing up to be a stressful year. My dad's diagnosis was in January, and chemotherapy began two months after. To say that watching my dad undergo chemotherapy treatments was hard is a huge understatement. Dissimilar to the normal patient, my dad decided to shave the hair on his head as well as his moustache before losing his hair. As if the hair loss wasn't enough, from treatment to treatment, it was obvious that my dad was becoming weaker, as if the body was aging at an extreme rate. Wrinkles began to form around his eyes, he lost a lot of weight, and sun spots began to form on his skin. Along with his skin being sensitive to sun exposure, the chemotherapy was also hard on his stomach, causing him to throw up the food he was eating, and food soon became tasteless. After two months of chemotherapy treatments every other week, radiation was next, with weekly visits to get radiation. Although not as violent on the body, radiation caused an emotional toll as the progression of the tumour shrinking seen in the first two months began to slow down.

Finally, in December of 2012, my dad had his surgery. What should be a six-hour surgery became a ten-hour one, with immediate and extended family in the waiting room. The four hours extra wondering what was going on in the surgery room was excruciating.

Walking the thin line between staying informed and trying not to bother the nurses, my Mother was often leaving the room trying to get updates. Eventually, a nurse came to the waiting room and informed us that he was out of surgery and that we could visit him in his room. The room we entered was full of empty beds made specifically for patients just out of the operating room. As I approached my dad's bed I could tell his physical appearance was much different. The fluid in his body was making him very large, which was a shock compared to the frail body type he had entering the surgery. He also had a hard time speaking to us, typical to someone coming off anaesthesia. With four nurses assigned to watch my dad for the night, we were told to leave and return the next day. The following days went by quickly, all hours spent in the hospital unless it was time to run out and get food for everyone. It seemed like I had no time with my Dad before I was on the train returning to Queen's to write the exams I had deferred because of the surgery.

Coming back to Queen's was a whirlwind. Looking back, I am unsure how I finished my first year without needing to take time off and return home. I recall spending hours worrying about the future, worrying about whether or not the cancer would return, or an infection would take over. One year after his surgery, I finally broke down releasing my anxiety and stress that had built up over the time as a defence mechanism to protect myself in case of losing him. It was this release that made me realize that not everything is about the game of life. Life is more than just watching things happening to other people and worrying about your own outcome. It is about obstacles being thrown at both you and others and supporting each other through this game of life.

Disability in Disguise

BRITTANY FITZGERALD

A DISABILITY can be visible and easy to acknowledge, like someone who is quadriplegia, paraplegic or has Down's syndrome. When we see these disabilities we are aware of the challenges and difficulties one may go through with the disability. There are also the invisible disabilities that can go unnoticed and uncared for in the public eye. Like a scientist trying to look into an atom, a doctor cannot determine these invisible disabilities unless the specimen is put under a microscope. A disability that goes unnoticed by the naked eye is autism. It is a spectrum disease and affects more individuals than one may think. It is becoming more and more common in children, and especially in boys; Autism Speaks Canada did a survey a few years ago that found "Autism now affects 1 in 88 children and 1 in 54 boys" (2012).

I've cherished living and growing up in a big household and it comes with many great opportunities and memories but also hardships and poverties. My parents have six children, including my five brothers (Blake, Shane, Tom, Brett, and Brian) and myself. I have two older brothers and three younger brothers, and I grew up having a different relationship with all of them. My relationship with my brother Brett, only six years younger than me, was specifically different, as was everyone's relationship with Brett. Brett is affected by Autism the disability that affects millions of children all over the world (Health

Canada). It was very evident that Brett had some form of each of these symptoms. Autistic people are like snowflakes they are all unique and you will never find two that are exactly the same.

Brushing your teeth, watching your favourite television program, walking to school, talking to your mother, and saying goodnight to your family can all seem like simple tasks to you and I, right? Well, for Brett these tasks had to be done in a specific time, order, and way. If Brett missed a step in his daily routine and something went wrong, it would distress him in ways you and I could not imagine. Brett's specific detail for attention and repetition came at a very young age, but in a household with five other children, this sometimes mistaken for Brett throwing a temper tantrum, and not a disorder. At just the age of three, when getting Brett dressed every day, my mother had to tuck his shirt tag in, even if it was not sticking out; if my mother did not pretend to slip the tag gently underneath his shirt, he would stand there and cry and fuss until she did so. Starting at the age of four, Brett started having an attachment to me. I would wake up every morning and look down to see by my feet the golden blonde locks of my four-year-old brother, sound asleep. Brett continued to sneak into my room for months until my parents decided to move his bed into my room. As a young teenager, I didn't understand why my brother was so different and why my mother and I had to sing him the same song every night before bed and why we had to do everything Brett's way. Brett also possessed the ability to perform tasks no one else in my family was even capable of. Looking back now, it is clear that Brett possessed many signs of autism from a very young age. Our family was able to realize Brett's disorder as he grew older, and his different social cues and need for repetitive tasks grew stronger.

Brett's disorder is one that is never going to go away since autism has no known cure. There are ways of coping and progressing, but he will always deal with symptoms of this disorder. There is no medical way of diagnosing the disease; doctors cannot test your blood, urine, or scan your brain to tell you that you have Autism. Doctors and parents analyse a child's behaviour to determine whether or not a child has a form of Autism. When my mother was trying to determine whether

Brett's behaviour was irregular, she would go on websites such as Health Canada that would state autistic people "have trouble communicating with others or difficulty with regular social interactions. Other signs include a tendency toward repetitive behaviours, and unusual or severely limited activities and interests" (Health Canada). Brett as an autistic child went to see specialist at Queen's University located in our home town, who would simply talk with him about his behaviour and help him better cope with the anxiety and stress that he would regularly go through because of this disorder.

Brett is now fifteen years old and as my family members and I grow older we will continue to deal with the hardships that this disorder brings. Growing up with Brett was difficult because he got a lot of attention that my other brothers and I did not receive. Autism has affected all my family members, as we all had to cope with Brett's behaviour, social issues, and anxiety. It was hard for me to understand, and still is, why something so little, like the changing of a season or his favourite football team losing, could affect him so emotionally and physically. Brett also has amazing talents that I believe are a result of his autism. Brett could name every Dallas Cowboy player and their position, salary, years played, etc. and he can do this for many of his favourite sports teams. Brett holds an amazing memory and a love for obsessing over statistics and filling his mind with knowledge. Brett is aware that sometimes his anxiety attacks are unnecessary and blown out of proportion, but he usually cannot reflect on this until after this situation. The best way for our family to deal with him is to calming respect that he sometimes does not have control over his emotional responses to situations.

It is important to realize that people with disabilities surround us, and that autism is a silent disorder that can go unnoticed by peers and family as it did with my brother. Autism doesn't have a cure and most likely never will. Autism has such a wide spectrum, making each individual an unique case. I worry about Brett as I hope that he can overcome the anxieties that he faces on a regular basis and live an amazing life. He is a very smart individual who possesses the knowledge and determination to something that he loves with his life. I

am watching him go through the toughest times of any teenager's life, high school. Brett still has many life-changing moments ahead of him, and autism is only going to make these a bit harder for him. With the loving support of my family members, Brett has been able to live a normal and an amazing life with opportunities to live and grow with his disorder. Brett's disability, along with many other individuals, will go unnoticed by many in his life, as autism is a disability in disguise.

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Buying Culture at the Musée du Louvre

BRIANNE GASCHO

IN A study conducted in 2001, in which participants were asked what they thought was the most famous painting in the world, 85.5% of people responded, “the *Mona Lisa*” (Sassoon 7). Painted in the early 1500’s by Leonardo da Vinci, the *Mona Lisa* has evolved into a cultural icon on a global scale (Sassoon 9). While art critics such as Giorgio Vasari admired Leonardo’s work at the time of its creation, the painting only came into the institutional hands of the Louvre under Napoleon in 1797 (Bazin 152). Moreover, artists of the nineteenth century utterly disregarded Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, and instead looked to artworks by great masters such as Raphael, Titian, Delacroix, and Michelangelo for inspiration (Sassoon 47). The *Mona Lisa*’s rise to fame was late, rapid, and somewhat inexplicable. Today, this painting draws crowds so immense in number that they spill out of the gallery like displaced water in a glass too full. Leonardo’s painting is a must-have item, an experiential-cultural commodity. The *Mona Lisa* is part of a transaction in which the buyer purchases a cultural experience as if it is simply on the market; mass produced and one-size fits all.

After entering the Musée du Louvre, those who have come to see the *Mona Lisa*—as all too often this is the only reason people visit the Louvre—begin their pilgrimage by heading to the second floor. The stairs from the first floor bring the visitor into the hall of French Painting, a spectacular three rooms of art that is wholly ignored. Red

arrow signs affixed to walls and pillars glare at visitors, demanding them to enter gallery space 6, the room with the *Mona Lisa*. This space is unlike any of the others in the Louvre because no matter what time of day, or day of the week, or time of the year one visits, gallery space 6 is like a mall on Christmas Eve.

Without any specific route through the Louvre, I found myself carried by the undertow of cultural purchasers and ended up at the threshold between the French Painting gallery and gallery space 6. Sounds of shoes scuffing across the hard floor blended with a thick mix of voices. Sharp noises from camera shutters reverberated from the walls, making them sound like the hissing air breaks of transport trucks. It was auditory chaos. From the back of the room I could see the dense crowd of people condensing to move closer to the *Mona Lisa*; a monolithic mass moving faithfully towards their god.

If you plan to get close enough to actually see the *Mona Lisa* in any detail, don't. I found myself skirting around the edges of the crowd to get a closer look, only to find that I was pressing my cheek to that of a total stranger's, and looking at a dimensionally warped *Mona Lisa*. Even if one waited long enough, and used enough elbow to propel towards the front of the crowd, there are a number of obstacles waiting at the front. Two guards in black suits stand on either side of the painting. These guards are visually intimidating and detract from the small oil painting hung alone on the wall. As if the guards are not enough to deter the viewer from approaching, the painting is also roped off so that you are physically restricted to an over-cautiously prescribed distance. This, I believe, is part of the draw; the *Mona Lisa* is coveted because it's hard to get a hold of. The *Mona Lisa* is also set in concrete and covered with two panes of triple-laminated, bulletproof glass. They might as well toss the painting in a Brinks truck and call it a day.

What is most striking about gallery space 6 is not the noises, the bulletproof glass, or the guards defending their client from the paparazzi. Instead, it is the response to the *Mona Lisa* by the visitors. Once visitors finally make their way to the front of the crowd, they stand beside the painting and smile, or hold their fingers in a peace sign, or point to the painting as if they've discovered a freak-show at

the circus, and then they take a photo. Taking a photograph of oneself standing beside a work of art—not to be confused with taking a photo of *just* a work of art—is a document. A photo of oneself and the *Mona Lisa* is a piece of evidence; it is a receipt of the cultural experience purchased. Those photographs scream, “Hey! Look at me! I’m cultured! I’ve seen art!”

The sad part about all of this is that the commodification of the cultural experience is utterly reduced to a monetary exchange for a tangible object (purchase of admission fee for a photograph of oneself and the *Mona Lisa*). Art theorists explain that experiencing a work of art is exactly the opposite. Experiencing a work of art should enlighten the viewer both socially and morally (Duncan 17). Art historian and theorist Carol Duncan explains that a cultural experience requires a sort of contemplation in which the viewer reaches a state of liminality that exists outside of “day-to-day cultural and social states” (11). Surely the photographic justification of a cultural experience does not fit with Duncan’s theories, and is very much entrenched in the “day-to-day.” Visitors forget to actually look at the art; they snap a photo and leave. Contextualizing a work of art is also paramount to understanding the work, and this sort of comprehension can only be achieved through a contemplative viewing supplemented by auxiliary knowledge (McMullen 7). I would love to ask all the *Mona Lisa* photo-holders what colour the woman’s dress is, or in which century the work was painted.

Today you can buy a variety of kitsch *Mona Lisa* items: T-shirts, mugs, flip-flops, earrings, oven mitts, ties, and sippy-cups for children. The *Mona Lisa* has become a visual plague in contemporary popular culture, and has given rise to the “cultural experience as commodity” paradigm, in which people believe they can simply buy a cultural experience. Cultural experiences are not ours to take, but instead something we must engage with, in which we gain something that becomes intrinsic to us, something that leaves an impression, not a souvenir.

The last time I visited the Musée du Louvre I headed to the second floor and entered gallery space 6. This time, instead of walking forward

towards an inevitably doomed viewing of the *Mona Lisa*, I turned my back to the painting and admired the spectacular *Wedding at Cana* on the opposite wall. Here is a painting that must watch people come and go, day after day, cringing at the endless documentary photographs, and disheartened by the bright red arrow signs that lead the herd of buyers to their item.

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My Grandmother

ANDREW GILES

MY GRANDMOTHER is dead; she died when I was ten years old. I am now twenty. When my grandmother was twenty, she was a prisoner in Auschwitz. I never had a chance to talk to my grandmother about her experiences during the war. I was too young when she died and Auschwitz was just a name in the history books. But now that I am the same age as my grandmother was when she was imprisoned in Auschwitz, I cannot help wondering what her life must have been like. How did she find the strength to survive? Would I be able to find that same inner strength?

My grandmother lived a privileged childhood. She was the only child of a middle class family in Czechoslovakia. After completing grade school in her home town, Grandmother moved to Prague where she attended the private Ladies English College. She studied languages, including French and English. Of course, Grandmother had no way of knowing that her knowledge of English would one day save her life.

In March 1939, Hitler and his troops marched into Prague. With help from her mother and her mother's friends, Grandmother escaped along with her mother in a horse-drawn cart, hiding under some loose straw like a fugitive on the run. Sensing that Czechoslovakia was no longer safe, Grandmother and her mother moved to Budapest. For four years, Grandmother lived with the constant fear of being discovered. I would think that this fear would have slowly incapacitated her;

haunting her everyday existence. Although her life had the semblance of normality, a sense of trepidation must have coloured everything that she did. Finally, her fear manifested itself in the shape of the German police. Grandmother's boyfriend had betrayed her. When I was younger, this act of betrayal sickened me. But with time I have come to realize that I cannot judge this man. The police had threatened his family. If I was in his position, would I have acted differently? His punishment came from living with the knowledge of the choice he had made. I will always wonder whether Grandmother ever forgave him. I will never know. I may not fully understand his motives, but at least I can offer his memory the comfort of my forgiveness.

Shortly after their arrest, Grandmother and her mother were herded onto a cattle car with hundreds of other Jews and transported to Auschwitz. The train was cramped and filthy. The police treated the prisoners like pigs. None of the prisoners cared if they lived or died. Grandmother knew that her mother was going to her death, as all the elderly were separated upon arrival. To comfort her mother in her last hours, Grandmother gave her some brandy that she had managed to smuggle on board. When the train came to its final destination, they had arrived at hell on earth. Grandmother never saw her mother again. She was left alone in a world that had been turned upside down, a world dominated by horror and hatred. I cannot even begin to comprehend the pain and anguish that Grandmother must have felt. It makes my own feelings seem so trivial in comparison. Although I have not lived through an event like the holocaust, I have known fear and I have felt dread. In fact, on occasion I have felt so depressed and afraid that I was frozen; I was utterly incapable of taking action. But Grandmother did not have the luxury of allowing her feelings to take control. She needed all of her energy just to survive.

For eighteen endless months, Grandmother lived in concentration camps, first at Auschwitz and later at Bergen-Belsen. History books and websites contain numerous descriptions of the living conditions in these camps. The barracks were overcrowded, infested with rats and lice. They were damp and cold. The prisoners had no warm clothes and only limited access to either running water or electricity. The food was

pitiful, and many prisoners died of malnutrition. Regardless of these inhumane living conditions, the prisoners had to work for ten or more hours every day. Grandmother worked at a factory that supplied the German army. How did Grandmother endure such hardship? I can read these descriptions, yet I cannot comprehend what her life must have really been like. My life experiences have not prepared me for this level of human suffering and degradation. For that I am grateful. But Grandmother's life had not prepared her either. When I close my eyes and try to imagine her life during those terrible months, I picture only unending pain, desolation and hopelessness. And, of course, fear. Grandmother must have lived in constant fear. How did such all-consuming fear not eat away at her very soul? I do not think that I could have done it. I would not have survived. What is worse, I would not have wanted to survive. For me, the will to live connotes hope and desire. From my vantage point, Grandmother had no basis for either. Yet somehow, stripped of her dignity and her humanity, Grandmother was still able to build a life for herself.

When the war ended, the prisoners in Bergen-Belsen were freed by British troops. As Grandmother spoke English, she assisted the British army, acting as a translator between the English liberators and the prisoners. Although the war was finally over, Grandmother had lost everything. Her family was gone, her family home and business confiscated or destroyed. Despite her suffering and her tremendous loss, Grandmother found the determination to build a new life for herself. She had conquered fear, and she drew her strength from it. Perhaps I too could have found, deep within myself, the strength to go on if faced with such a horrible situation. I am a better person for having known her. Grandmother will always have a special place in my heart.

Education of a Savage

The Canadian Residential School System

BRENT GORRIE

MASS ABUSE, government failure, cultural annexation, and the death of thousands. We have all heard the horrors of the genocide of the Second World War, but I am not writing to talk about the massive genocide that happened overseas. No, I'm bringing it to your home, to your own backyards, putting it all out in the open for you to see. Yes, today you will be reading about the massive black stain on Canada's history. Let me introduce you to the shocking and horrific events known as "Canada's residential school system."

The road to indecency has to begin somewhere, and the school system started its journey when the Indian Act of 1876 was brought into fruition. However, the act as a whole was not indicative of any intentional malice towards the First Nations. In fact, the Department of Indian Affairs made it possible for Native American children to gain access to the Canadian public school system. Alas, a problem quickly arose as the enrolment in these schools was not high enough to sustain a proper teaching staff or facility. The problem reached its peak by the end of 1877. By then the Dominion Government (now the Canadian Government) sponsored a report done by the parliamentary correspondent, Nicholas Davin, known as the Davin Report (1879). The report stated that Canada should adopt a stricter policy on schools

for Native children. The Davin Report further stated that children should be removed from their communities because the “influence of the wigwam was stronger than that of the school” (McColl and Davin 8). The Davin Report was ultimately brought to the Imperial Government, and an amendment was made to the Indian Act in 1884 making Native American children’s attendance at residential schools mandatory.

In the 1890’s, when the schools became a mainstream organization, the majority of educators were white Roman Catholics. The educators were under strict guidance from the priest to enforce education, as well as their religious doctrine. The majority of the problems in residential schools stemmed from this forced religious influence. When students arrived, they were stripped of not only their clothes and belongings, but their entire identity too. Students were given a “proper” Christian name to replace their birth names, had haircuts forced upon them, and were scrubbed viciously clean to remove any lice and diseases they had brought with them. To further provoke issues within the system, families were segregated amongst the schools and siblings were forbidden to speak to one another. Finally, to top it all off, the administration workers would inform the children that they could no longer speak the language they were brought up with. These decisions seem like a fairly logical decision to some. That it would only make it easier for children to be taught if they all speak the same language, and it only makes sense to take lice out of their hair. But, the awful truth of the matter is, a student’s hair was cut off whether or not he or she had lice, and the more shocking fact is that if caught speaking their native language, children would be ferociously beaten.

Throughout the years that the residential school system was run, the number of atrocities steadily rose. One of the more appalling schools to be created was the Mohawk Institute. The students faced cold and unloving caregivers who were both physically and sexually abusive. But, after the Indian Act was passed the school’s enrolment grew to 185 students, which caused major overcrowding issues within the school. Many children did not survive the year (Milloy 95). Duncan

Campbell Scott, the head of the Department of Indian Affairs, ignored the many warnings of the Chief Medical Officer regarding the rate at which tuberculosis in the schools was spreading. At its peak enrolment, the institute had a mortality rate of 69% and the residential school system had a rate of just over 55% (Milloy 55). The deplorable conditions lead to many of the students attempting to flee. Students who were caught trying to escape the schools were hunted down by the staff and if found alive were dragged back to the schools, beaten, and more often than not, would suddenly disappear once again. While this treatment may seem like speculation to many, on September 2011, researchers uncovered several mass graves on the property of the Mohawk institute.

The atrocities continued until the school system was forcibly shut down in the early 1970s, with the last school closing in 1996. Many First Nations leaders believe that what they had faced was very much so a genocidal conflict. Article II from the genocide convention of 1946 states that:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (Kunz 738)

By all means of the definition, the residential school system committed the very serious crime of genocide. Because of this, myself and many other Canadian's have called for the government to speak out against the school system.

And so, after many settlement deals and lawsuits filed against the Canadian government in 2008 the Conservative leader of Canada, Stephen Harper finally acknowledged the crimes committed against the

first nations people. Quickly following suit, the Vatican also expressed their deepest sorrows. They stated:

His Holiness recalled that since the earliest days of her presence in Canada, the Church, particularly through her missionary personnel, has closely accompanied the indigenous peoples. Given the sufferings that some indigenous children experienced in the Canadian Residential School system, the Holy Father expressed his sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church and he offered his sympathy and prayerful solidarity. His Holiness emphasized that acts of abuse cannot be tolerated in society. He prayed that all those affected would experience healing, and he encouraged First Nations Peoples to continue to move forward with renewed hope. (Benedict 1)

To some this was too little too late, as the lasting impacts of residential schools have already been seen by the ripple effects in the Native American culture. The neglect faced by the students in the school system has raised an entire generation to become parents who only understand neglectful parenting styles. However, as a country, we can move past the sins of our fathers. We can never remove the stain on our history that is the residential school system, but if we as a culture are able learn from our past mistakes, coupled, forgiveness and a helping hand, it may be possible to move forward. The scars left on the Native American population will never fade, but the opportunity to unite and create a Canada where none of its citizens has to face the atrocities of its past is still available.

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My Mother

May I Inherit Half Her Strength

CAROLYN GROSSER

MOTHERS TOLERATE, overcome, and survive many things from simple daily challenges to unbelievable tragedies that forever change their lives and break their hearts. Everyone is born with a mother; simple biology makes it so. Many mothers have extreme strength, a sort of superhero strength, and an incredible ability to inspire, care for, and support others, including their own children. Those who are or were close to their mothers know just how important they are but for those who aren't, I'm sorry, and please bear with me.

Mother (verb): to bring up a child with care and affection.

In my eyes, my mother is the most significant woman in my life. She has an unconditional love for me that is indescribable, yet she has gone through enough hardship in her life that would have given her a reason to break. However, she has not given up. She has not allowed her misfortunes to render her damaged. Her childhood, teenage years, marriage and immigration to Canada, and her ultimate fight against cancer, have all contributed to her superhero strength, her optimistic attitude, and her love for life.

Overcoming challenges and pushing past obstacles adds to our strength as people and mothers are no exception. *My* mother is no

exception. Her name is Margaret Moreau and this is the story of what makes her so special.

My mother, Margaret, was born in New Iberia, Louisiana in 1964 and was the third daughter of five girls. She had a pretty normal upbringing in the south; her family didn't have much, but enough to get by. It was on May 22, 1980 that her life would change forever. Breast cancer and eventually metastatic bone cancer took the life of her own mother, leaving her father to take care of five young girls. She was only sixteen years old and at the point in life when the support of a female role model is vital. Dealing with the death of her mother was painful to say the least. How do you go on after that sort of loss?

No child should ever have to go through something as traumatic as the death of a parent at such a young age. After a tragedy like that, one's heart can never truly recover but even though the worst had occurred, my mother persevered. She graduated from high school with a 4.0 GPA, only a year after her mother's death. She attained a full-tuition scholarship to a university in New Orleans, three hours from her hometown; she studied biology and had the goal to attend medical school.

My mother wanted to make a better life for herself, so after her first two years, she transferred to a university in Texas to continue her undergraduate degree. It was there, in Texas, where she met the love of her life, a man by the name of Peter Grosser, whom I now call "dad." A few years into their relationship, my father proposed, my mother said yes, and before long the perfect couple was now happily married, like a fairy-tale. A couple months later, my father was offered a job at Health Canada in Ottawa and because my mother was so in love with him, the two of them packed up their belongings and moved to Canada. My mother, the most selfless, loving, and generous woman, would do anything for her husband's success. Although this meant putting her medical career on hold, she was optimistic and figured that anything she could do in Texas was also possible in Ottawa.

After a period of time where everything seemed to be going smoothly, yet another obstacle presented itself in my mother's path. In 1991, my mother discovered lumps on her neck, and although she

prepared for the worst, she was told the lumps were benign (phew!). The next year doctors performed surgery to remove the tumours. A few short months later, my mother became pregnant, and on December 31, 1993, she gave birth to perfect, cute little bundle of joy...me! While I showed up, so did the tumours once again. After many more surgeries and radiation treatment of the benign tumours, the little suckers still persisted. Knowing they would keep coming back, the doctors declared a “watch and wait” where they would continue to monitor the size of the tumours, and if something needed to be done, it would be.

In 1997, my mother gave birth to a second (slightly less) perfect daughter and continued to get the tumours checked regularly. Ten years later the tumours on her neck had gotten to be too large that a surgery was crucial. In 2008, the tumours were removed again but something had changed. The pathology results came back with world shattering news...cancer. My mother, my amazing mother, had cancer. Even though the world kept going, everything in my life had come to a halt. The news shocked me. What would I do without my mother? How could I go on? One of my best friends reassured me and said, “Be strong for her, that’s all you can do.” Adenocarcinoma of the parotid glands in my mother’s neck was caught early but an invasive surgery was needed. A year later, she underwent her final surgery to remove all the cancerous tissues.

My mother made it out of the twelve hour surgery alive, but with the left side of her face paralyzed. She mentioned that dealing with the semi-face paralysis was the hardest part; she worried that her appearance would embarrass her children. Honestly, yes, it was a different to see but I was just thankful she was alive, face paralyzed or not. Today, my mother is unfortunately not in remission but classified as “NED,” no evidence of disease. She is about to hit her five year mark and *that* is something to be celebrated.

There are few roles in life that demand someone to have self-sacrificing perseverance and commitment constantly like motherhood does. After all she’s been through, all her hardships, and so many reasons to have given up, my mother still manages to smile, to love me and to inspire me every day. She has put her own grief aside in order to

be there for her children and husband, *always*. Her motto in life is “carpe diem,” seize the day. She has taught me to be optimistic in everything I do, to have no regrets, and to cherish each day. My mother is, and will always be, the biggest influence in my life. Her love, her faith and her strength influence me daily. It might sound cliché, but someday I hope to be just like her.

Untitled

JACOB HALPENNY

Those who died are justified, for wearing the badge, they're the chosen whites. —Rage Against the Machine

IT'S SUMMER time and I am in the backyard with my older brother. We are sitting on Muskoka chairs that my father painted the year before. They are peeling already. My brother Jeff sits in the red chair and I in the blue. I pick the paint chips off with my finger nails.

"Don't do that Jake, I'll catch shit," my brother scolds. He is only thirteen but he speaks like he's forty—a result of his experiences. I sit quietly in the summertime air and I look deeply into the red of my brother's chair. It's a bright fire-truck red and it blazes in the July sun. My brother cursed when he sat down I guess it had been cooking there for hours.

"How do I know what red is?" I ask Jeff.

"What?" he pants, overheated and annoyed.

"I mean, what looks like red to me, might be brown to somebody else. All through school somebody would learn that brown is red and because it says red on the label they would spend their whole life believing a colour looked a certain shade and they would be wrong."

"You can't read minds," my brother says and covers his eyes with his baseball cap.

*

In 1997 we lived on Westmount Avenue our house sat just north of St. Clair Avenue West; what was unofficially “Little Italy.” Every time Italy won a soccer match the neighbourhood erupted in honking as the fans raced their trucks, sedans, and grandmother’s station wagons down our street at top speed. My dad said it was reckless so I guess it was.

I had friends in the neighbourhood, lots of friends. I would go out and play with anyone who had a ball, a net, or on the odd occasion a secret to tell. It never occurred to me that the kids I hung out with were different from me. I mean I *knew* I was white and they were Turkish, Jamaican, Italian, Portuguese, or Oriental. But it never got in the way of playing with toys or games, or inventing new ways to utilize the awesome powers of superman. If it did I think it would have violated the sanctity of being children. I was white, but I wouldn’t learn what that meant until years later, until history class and rap music would inform my white friends and me of the reality of our historically dominating and blood-thirsty race. William Blake wrote in his poems that the recognition of innocence is innocence lost forever. He was a white Christian.

On one occasion after I had been romping around the neighbourhood I came home with more than bumps and bruises. I remember returning to the backyard of our old house where my Dad was stationed with a beer.

“Dad?” I ask.

“Yes Jake,” he responds, listening.

“We speak normal right?”

“We speak English son.” He says without condescension.

“Oh. It’s just that I was talking to Saleem and he said he spoke Turkish with his parents, I said I spoke normal with my parents.”

*

The decision to leave your home country and come to Toronto is a big one. But, now that you have decided to come to here,

it is important to learn what you need to do and bring before
you leave home. —City of Toronto Immigration Portal

Welcome to the Jungle. —Guns and Roses

“No Immi’s!” Brandon laughed. It is 2005 and we live in Guildwood. It’s a suburb with indistinguishable houses and two cars in every drive-way. We are red-eyed mealy-mouthed teenagers cackling and hissing the afternoon away: our parents’ pride and joy, tad-poles, neophytes. I am in the Backyard of my parents’ new house—twice the size of the old house—with seven or eight of my friends.

“Sean, Jason, Ian and I were all at shinny last night.” Brandon says. “And one of the guys had a jersey on that said ‘No Immi’s.’” They all laugh hysterically at this and I laugh with them, not because it is funny but because I am fifteen, and because I am afraid of losing their respect. It is a laugh of fear.

Sean’s phone begins rapping “Go! Go! Go! Shawty it’s your Birthday!”

“Shh, it’s the Russian” he whispers and begins trolling on the phone. Our mutual friend, an immigrant from Russia, would spend his entire high school career trying to identify himself alongside the rest of the white students from various Anglo-Saxon ancestries. He would become excluded not because of where he was from but because of his obvious attempts to be something he was not. The backyard turned into a boardroom as we all waited for Sean to pull the wool over The Russian’s eyes. As he hung up the phone we all burst out laughing again. We were a pack of ravenous hyenas in the backyard of my parents’ house.

It was a private escape where we were free to accept the realities of our identity. Whether sought or unsought we invariably took it upon ourselves to inhabit the cruel and loathsome single-mindedness that had been foreign or unbeknownst to us in childhood. Being proud of who you are, acknowledging the reality of your culture, was obstructed by the patterned behaviour we inherited. As young white males we were destined to repeat a history of the violation, deception and exploitation

of other people. In some cases decimating entire civilizations for competing against us, in others manipulating those wished to emulate our behaviour. How could we acknowledge that and be proud? How could we acknowledge that and be anything but the racist bigots, the horrendous generals, and the ubiquitous and condescending conquerors that had conceived us?

After my friends left that day I walked up to my bathroom. I took a shower, and looked in the mirror. I was ashamed of things that I had no control over. I was more disgusted with the fact that I used it to justify my boorish behaviour. Looking in the mirror I saw myself and felt truly afraid.

Hip-Hop

Not The Same Thing It Used To Be

JAKE HONG

IN MY opinion, hip-hop violence peaked during the 1990s feud between Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur and their respective recording labels, Bad Boy and Death Row Records. Side note, Puff Daddy and Suge Knight, CEOs of each label, managed Smalls' and Shakur's careers, respectively. This feud ignited an East Coast versus West Coast conflict that pitted fans against each other and ended with the murders of both artists. I wondered how two legends of the industry could oversee that they were predetermining their own futures. To me, it seemed like they almost predicted their own endings in songs like *Suicidal Tendencies* by Smalls and *N***** Done Changed* by Richie Rich, which Shakur contributed to. Most people regard their deaths, including myself, as the peak of violence in hip-hop because it involved Bloods versus Crips gang violence, two of the most infamous and most dangerous American gangs. These murders devastated the hip-hop community. After Smalls' death in 1997, a peace pledge was made between the East and West Coasts, formally ending the feud. Since then, there have been minor feuds between artists, but I don't include them in the same category. New York artist 50 Cent participated in multiple feuds with other artists. 50 Cent's conflict with New York rapper Ja Rule escalated to physical violence; however, neither were

killed. Another feud between hip-hop icons Jay-Z and Nas received similar recognition, but again did not spark the same cultural implications. I believe the year 1997 was momentous because this is when the peace pledge marked the end of the East Coast/West Coast generation and began to lift the cloud over hip-hop music.

50 Cent and Ja Rule had the most eventful feud since the East Coast/West Coast conflict. For the first time since Bad Boy and Death Row Records, this feud extended beyond the artists and involved each artist's label: G-Unit and Murder Inc. Lyrically, both artists expressed physical threats: "It's nothing for me to assault 50," Ja Rule said in an interview with MTV. I consider this a double-entendre because he referred to the physical altercations between the pair, as well as claiming lyrical superiority. These threats eventually came to fruition. 50 Cent was shot at and stabbed during an altercation in New York. However, this feud never sparked cultural or gang related hatred between any each coast. New York/California fans would blindly hate each other based on the Smalls/Shakur feud. 50 Cent and Ja Rule were both New York based, rather than hailing from the East and West Coasts.

Later in his career, 50 Cent sparked a feud with California-based rapper and one-time label mate, the Game. Although this had the potential to become a New York/California based feud reminiscent of Smalls and Shakur, this feud did not trigger coastal conflict; if their feud was apple or pear, the Smalls/Shakur conflict was more like apples and oranges. Like the Smalls/Shakur conflict, 50 Cent's label was involved with this feud; however, this conflict revolved around an internal argument between 50 Cent and the Game while both were members of G-Unit Records. Their feud was about the G-Unit label, rather than the label being a third party, like Bad Boy or Death Row Records. Lyrically, I think this marked a new era of hip-hop that seemed more reflective of the present. Both artists attacked each other in their music, but they focused on their own careers' outshining their opponents rather than on physical threats. In *300 Bars & Runnin'*, the Game raps, "I'm Elvis in there, they can't believe you dropped." The Game compares himself to the King and acknowledges 50 Cent's

shortcomings. Despite producing similar characteristics to the Smalls/Shakur feud, these artists averted devastating violence and focussed on promoting themselves.

Jay-Z and Nas, who each reside on hip-hop's Mt. Rushmore, had the highest profile feud since the peace pledge. I find it difficult to compare them to Smalls and Shakur, because Jay-Z and Nas battled for the empty New York throne left by the late Biggie Smalls. Like 50 Cent and the Game, Jay-Z and Nas attacked each other's labels and social lives. In the song *Ether*: "My Child, I've watched you grow up to be famous," Nas uses a play on words by implying Jay-Z is the student and himself, the teacher. This feud was again between two New York artists. In my opinion, this feud actually benefitted hip-hop and I believe that it will be a milestone for future artists because they exemplified a new style of rap-feud that was public and marketable, but not violent.

In my opinion, we have no seen the same level of violence as the East Coast/West Coast conflict. Although Jay-Z and 50 Cent h run their own labels, they do no equate to Puff Daddy and Suge Knight because their labels became involved with the Smalls/Shakur feud as third and fourth parties, rather than being the original participants; just like an ant has no quarrel with a boot, until stepped on. The lyrical direction of hip-hop has changed. This new generation is egotistical and humorous unlike gangster rap. For example, 2 Chainz, one of today's hip-hop icons claims, "[He'll] be fresh as hell if the feds watching," in the song *Feds Watching*. Hilariously, 2 Chainz prioritizes his wardrobe over a police investigation. It is important to note that no deaths have been linked to the above cases, let alone high profile celebrities like Smalls and Shakur, the Beatles and Stones of hip-hop. I don't think hip-hop will return to such a violent nature because it will not develop cultural repercussions. Today, gang violence is more policed. A Bloods versus Crips standoff in downtown Los Angeles, which occurred between Smalls and Shakur will never happen again, particularly in the presence of A-List celebrities, constantly followed by paparazzi. The deaths of Shakur and Smalls evoked a fear in the hip-hop community of further murders.

I hope that I have depicted the ending of a violent era in hip-hop. Although the transition from the '90s to the 2000s seemed to me to be very gradual, I find the transition from 2000s to the current decade to be more of a drastic revision. Despite interpersonal feuds being celebrated by the media, hip-hop artists have taken a new direction. The humorous, academic and cultural insights of 2 Chainz, Macklemore, and J. Cole are the future of hip-hop. Thus, I think that this is the best time for people to spark an interest in hip-hop. I hope that the lyrical-dominant nature of hip-hop impacts other listeners it has resonated with me. The future of hip-hop is bright.

Unplanned and Unexpected Blessings

EMMA JONES

TEENAGE PREGNANCY has its difficulties; it can rip a family apart whilst simultaneously bringing them together. There is a stigma attached to the process, and while social services are available, the social stigma that comes with an incident of teenage pregnancy is still quite significant. Only a few decades ago, the idea of a child being born to a set of parents under the age of twenty was not stigmatized. The child's birth would only an issue if the child had been born out of wedlock, and this was easily fixed. Marriage was a "simple" fix. However, now, when marriage is very rarely the answer to a relationship that had accidentally created a new life, the burden no longer falls on two people. It is a family affair.

It's a unique phenomenon, whereby each person who is directly and indirectly related to that child, whether through blood or love, is affected. In tenth grade, my brother, only one year older than I, announced that his girlfriend at the time was pregnant. The decisions that followed, the stress, the heartbreak and the eventual glee could never have been predicted by anyone. The process is difficult and often unprecedented within a family.

Abortion is often swept under the rug as a nonentity, never really talked about, sometimes implied and sometimes hopefully forgotten. For my brother's girlfriend, it simply wasn't an option. Then there were questions surrounding adoption as the best option. The question was

whether these two people, who couldn't even vote, could deal with the idea that someone else was raising their child. In the end, that was a "no" as well.

At fifteen, sitting on the stairs at home, I realized, that I shouldn't have been put in this position. There wasn't anything fun about hearing your mother cry; there wasn't anything fun at your father yelling at a seventeen year old boy who had no idea what to do. It wasn't fair.

I remember when my brother first told my mum. Our family friend was over, a second mother that we loved as our own and knew we could always go to. "Mum, Abby's pregnant." My mum had no idea what to do. She broke down crying. Our family friend had been our saving grace, as I sat there in shock and my mother's sobs racked her shoulders. She didn't even try to keep quiet and, my brother was soon as wet-faced as she was. "Mum, please don't tell Dad," my brother had begged.

"I have to," was her response. "A baby can't be kept a secret. It's your responsibility for the next eighteen years, if not longer, so you may as well claim responsibility now."

I could've sworn I heard my brother murmur, "I'm only seventeen" but it was neither loud enough for me to be sure nor the place to ask for confirmation.

It turned out, despite our fears, that my dad took it well. It wasn't the blow up that could sometimes happen if you forgot to mow the lawn, or if he'd asked you clean the cars and you complained. "Are you sure?" was then followed by "I am going to recommend that you do not keep this baby; abortion or adoption. However, I will stand by you whatever your and Abby decide and I will help you give this child the best life anyone could wish for." It was hard to see my dad feel as if he had failed; he yelled afterwards more to express his disappointment in himself than in my brother.

How do you deal with it? How do you deal with the unravelling of your family, even if they were all amazing, incredible and resilient people in their handling of the situation? Part of you wants to run away, part of you wants to hide and another part of you wants to tell them to shut up and deal with it by themselves. You didn't do anything wrong,

so therefore you shouldn't have to deal with the consequences. How nice life would be if that was, in fact, true. When situations like these enter your life, whether it is through your own actions or just someone you are unwilling or unable to ignore, maturity is not a learned concept. It is a concept that is thrust upon you.

After my beautiful baby niece was born, the nine months proceeding her birth were nothing but a fading memory. On one hand, our hardships had brought us together. The love my brother showed for that baby girl, not even letting my mum hold her unless it was to change her diaper, was unforgettable. Yet, on the other, the family was still unravelled; the comfort was no longer there. Nights were no longer filled with a glass of wine over dinner as my father discussed what I wanted to do with my university degree in a couple years time. Did I want to go into engineering? Did I want to go into nursing, or political science or be a writer? The nights were filled with a crying baby; the days were filled with diapers and Dora, pacifiers and poop.

Though a baby can be the world's greatest gift, it can often also be the world's greatest wake up call. Life happens when you turn a certain age. Your parents can no longer protect you from everything and sometimes things drift off course. In the blink of an eye "Don't drink and drive" or "Use protection" drift away. You end up doing something stupid. Suddenly you have to deal with the consequences. Sometimes you only have to deal with a couple hours of regret, thanking god that you hadn't been caught. Other times, you face the consequences for life, like my brother. It is important to note, however, that sometimes consequences can bring joy and happiness, like my brother. In this respect, a baby was both a blessing and a curse.

Through it all, the good times and the bad, the one thing I realized is that I was not alone. Every person, every group of friends, every couple, and every family has their problems. No one is perfect and no two people go follow identical pathways. It is from within yourself, your friends, your significant other, and your family that you have to find support and comfort. They're the ones when we need a babysitter and the ones we call when we're stranded on the 401 and desperately

need someone to pick my niece up from daycare. They're the ones who truly matter enough to make a life beautiful.

Playing on Thin Ice

RYAN KASZUBA

WITHIN THE last two years of playing junior hockey I have developed a much different relationship with the game of hockey than I did growing up. Before, the game was simple and fun and you were guaranteed to play and be on your team for the whole season no matter what. When you get into junior, however, everything changes and you need to win to stay on your team. In junior hockey you are no longer guaranteed anything, and even though you will have tons of fun when winning, between the road trips and the team parties when celebrating, it all can change so quickly. Then all you are thinking about is how bad you played, and have no confidence. You begin to develop a love-hate relationship with the game that you once loved wholeheartedly.

Being around hockey for fourteen years teaches you a lot. It starts with pure joy, playing hockey on the street with our friends and counting down the days until the weekend so you can practice and play for your Timbits team. You get to play the same amount as all your friends and you get to try every position at least once. For me, as soon as I put the big pads on I knew I was hooked. Every young hockey player, to some extent, becomes enchanted with goaltending. The cool masks, colourful pads, and huge glove saves makes goaltending a draw to any young kid, well, until they try it, which usually sends them packing. Some are different, and I was one of those crazy kids who all

they wanted to do is jump in front of the pucks using every limb possible to stop it.

Being a goalie has brought me some great experiences. The higher I have gone in hockey, the better the good times have been. In the last two years of playing hockey in the small town of Gananoque for their Junior B hockey team, this year I have won a division championship, had articles written about me in the local paper, and probably drank more celebratory beer than any person should. As a starting goalie this year I have had some pretty awesome times; getting three shutouts in 13 games, having all of the home team fans chant my name after making a glove save, and being interviewed on TV. For a goalie there is nothing better than completely robbing an opposing player with a huge glove save, over-exaggerated to the point where your glove almost falls off because of the windmill motion you add to the save. The biggest moment of my hockey career was a few weeks ago, when after battling for 78 minutes and stopping 43 shots, our team scored in double overtime and we became the Gill Cup champions in front of 700 fans. It was by far the highlight of my hockey Career as I got interviewed for the local TV station, and had a segment done on how well I have done, and carried my team through the playoffs. Then I proceeded to enjoy the Champagne shower soaking me from head to toe in the celebration of our accomplishment as a team. It is pretty amazing how unbelievably great hockey is when your team is doing well, and you're playing at your absolute best.

In the months before I raised the Gill Cup high above my head the only feelings I had for hockey was that of frustration that my coaches caused me. During this year, the same one where I have been alluded to as the team MVP, I have had many arguments with my coach. When I met my coach for the first time two years ago he was nothing but nice as he was giving me compliments about how great I was and how I was going to save their season. According to him it sounded like I was the next Patrick Roy. Then the switch flips. You struggle to play your best, the team isn't doing well with you in the net, and the backup is playing better than you. Then those compliments from the coach have disappeared but instead are filled with comments of doubt and threats

to “Get your game back or you’re gone.” I sat on the bench for every game for an entire month, and then the team signed a third goalie, so eventually I wasn’t even going to games anymore. As soon as I got back in net I won six straight games, I got my job back and suddenly the coach was my biggest fan and talking about how great I am playing, and how he always knew I was their starter. Then flip switches again. I had three loses in a row, the coach was telling me that he is going to play our emergency backup goalie because he doesn’t believe in me, and that I am not good enough. It is crazy how quick your coach can go from biggest fan to biggest doubter.

While playing junior hockey, I started to experience the bad sides of being a goalie. You realize when playing junior hockey that it is all about getting the wins, and all about what you have done lately. During this last season, the low points seemed to be especially low. At the beginning of the season the deal was that I would be the starter. I had played the year before and helped the team get to the second round of playoffs. Enter a goalie from Quebec who stole the show and wowed the coaches and suddenly I found myself sitting on the bench game after game. I finally get a shot but let in six goals, so my time on the bench continues. When you’re not playing it is probably the most discouraging thing ever as a goalie. As much as you are a part of the team, you aren’t playing or helping. Instead you’re just a very cold cheerleader sitting on the bench hoping that you’ll eventually play. You miss the days of second chances every other game like you had in minor hockey. As the struggle continued, I kept being fed the same bullshit of “if you win you’re in.” Even as I finally started to win back to back games, I still got to enjoy more time on the bench because in the eyes of my coach I was still a liability between the pipes. Then I get to enjoy rumours of me being traded or cut, because the team just signed another goalie for “insurance,” which essentially means your coach found an upgrade from you on the bench. It crazy how quickly everything can change.

When you’re not playing, not getting any support from the coaches and sometimes being deemed not even good enough to come to the rink, it is pretty easy to wonder why you even strapped on those pads in

the first place. Every struggle seems to last an eternity. Even with all the struggles it is my love for stopping a small black piece of rubber that keeps me coming back season after season.

My Grandmother's Strength

HILLARY KERR

“BE CALM, be strong, and hope for the best” is a statement of reassurance that I constantly found myself repeating over three years ago. During this time my family and I had received the news that my once healthy and independent grandmother would be receiving a dramatic surgery on her heart that would ultimately change her life.

Independent and healthy my grandmother was. Born into a middle income class, a native to local Wolfe Island and born the eldest of four sisters my grandmother naturally took on the role of the nurturer. She was always motivated to succeed and enhance her studies and made her dream of becoming a nurse come true at a young age. My grandmother grew to working late nights at the Hotel Dieu Hospital in the Emergency room, to moving on and working tiring long hour shift work at local Retirement homes. Her career was everything to her, it was her life.

My grandmother loved being a nurse, but she would always put family first. My father is the eldest to my aunt, and from the ways in which my father has raised me I know for a fact that my grandmother and grandfather did everything they could to raise two amazing kids. Though through their success in raising a healthy and happy family, my grandmother and grandfather soon divorced. However, this did not hold my grandmother back or keep her from doing exactly what she wanted with her life.

You see, my grandmother is unlike anyone else. She went out of her way to take care of my brother, cousins and I by taking care of us on sick days, bringing us to sports practices and so much more. Not only that, but she was able to balance online studies and getting degrees from both Waterloo University and Laurentian University up until the ripe age of her mid-fifties. She was always so intelligent, which is something I have always loved and admired about her. She always strived to learn more, and even if it was too much for me to listen to sometimes, it has always been something I will always cherish.

We all know that what follows success and a career is retirement. Some of us are lucky to retire early and healthy but unfortunately this was not the case for my grandmother. I still vaguely remember the day that my parents told me that my grandmother would be going into surgery for a replacement of seven of her heart valves. Being young and uneducated about the human body, I was not even sure what a heart valve was or the seriousness of such a surgery. I did not think it was something I should worry about at the time. I mean why would I? My grandmother was always a smart and health women, and being a nurse I was convinced she knew how to take care of herself well enough to avoid anything like this from ever happening.

The day her surgery took place, my whole family was there for her. Her slow recovery was unusually but in no time she was back at her house and her normal life... or so we thought. What some people do not understand is that Alzheimer's damages the mental and physical well being of a person. The disease takes over your life and it is often difficult to conclude that someone may have this disease due to confusion as to what may be a sign of the disease and what may just be someone simply forgetting to do a task.

My grandmother began to forget simple things. Everyday tasks such as keeping the floors clean or changing the garbage was ignored and soon her house turned into somewhat of a dumpy living environment. My family began to slowly notice these unusual events, when we would visit for dinner and half of the meal would be unprepared, something that my grandmother would never do. Seeing

her like this was frightening because we did not know what was wrong or what to expect next.

My father found it especially hard to get a grip on the reality of my grandmother's situation. Frustration was one of the main emotions that took over his every thought and action in regards to helping my grandmother. My grandmother soon became unable to drive, and the task of grocery shopping was something she needed assistance with. My father would come home, mopping around and quite honestly mad because my grandmother needed to be looked after, as if she were a child. My father just could not understand it, and he would become irritated when my grandmother would forget, or have a difficult time in social situations. "Dad, this is the disease that is talking. She has no control and maybe it would be best if you educated yourself more to avoid unnecessary irritation," is what I would often find myself telling him. Even to this day I have to remind my father that it is not her fault and that he needs to be with her as much as possible because one day she may just forget him too.

It got to a difficult point of moving my grandmother out of her house because it was simply unsafe and not the right healthy environment for her. She currently lives at Providence Care, here in Kingston directly on the Alzheimer's floor. It took me a while, but I am able to accept that this is her new home, and the reality that visits to grandmother's house will not be the same. I am fine with this though, because she would have died had we not caught onto the clues of the disease, which still scares me to this day.

It is hard to see someone so strong and intelligent fall so fast and turn into a completely different person not by choice. It makes you think about how fast life can take a turn for the worst, and as a family we need to stick together to build each other up.

My grandmother is calm now. She is happy in the sense that there is still a smile on her face, and she is able to do normal every day things such as celebrate holidays and go to church and still remember the purpose of doing these things. I visit her as much as I can, and thought our conversations are short and dull; her presence is still something that I cherish. She has taught me to continue through life being the best you

can be, and to fight of anything that tries to hold you back. This struggle has proven that life is short and fragile and friends and family are something that you should always take care of and hold close to the heart. Never take anyone for granted.

Fighting Inevitability

IMAN KHAN

I SAT on the sofa in her bedroom and stared at the unoccupied hospital bed in front of me. I thought maybe staring at it would somehow help me accept that she was gone. It didn't. It was certainly strange to see the bed that she rested on continuously for the past month empty, but more than that, it was a gloomy reminder of all she had been through in the last year. It was a reminder of not just the cancer but all the pain, suffering and heartache it had brought with it. I sat alone in the bedroom that once belonged to my grandmother. It was filled with memories, both wonderful as well as painful. I can't exactly describe the emotion I was feeling. I felt sad that she was gone but at the same time I also felt a sense of relief that her pain and misery was over. If I were to be completely honest, I had lost my grandmother months ago, shortly after she was diagnosed. Death just made it final.

"I'm going to be fine. I'm sure as hell tough enough to fight this damn thing," she said as my dad, my aunt, and I sat round her in the living room in my grandparents' house to discuss the frightening news. That afternoon, the oncologist had regretfully informed us that my grandmother was suffering from bladder cancer. The diagnosis seemed to have scared the whole family more than it scared her. I sat next to her in the living room, resting my head on her shoulders. She sat there calmly with a vodka and tonic in her hand, exuding confidence like always. Her positive attitude toward the cancer was not enough to offer

me any kind of assurance. I didn't know an awful lot about bladder cancer, but I knew enough to know that no matter how determined she was to "fight this damn thing," there was going to be an enormous change in her life.

Not so long before she passed away, I sat on the same sofa as I watched my grandmother get ready for her first chemotherapy treatment. The oncologist had suggested she try chemotherapy, and if that didn't work, then surgery was the only other option. I stared at her while she applied her makeup, sprayed perfume on herself, and tied her blue floral patterned silk scarf around her neck. I don't think I ever saw her leave the house without lipstick or one of her many scarves. Her calmness and composure confused me. She acted like she was getting dressed for one of our shopping dates. I always enjoyed going shopping with my grandmother despite her brutal honesty about my taste in clothes. She would say, "Oh darling, do you really want to spend your money on that tacky, hideous piece of rag?"

As we stepped out of the elevator onto the oncology floor, I felt a sinking feeling inside of me. My grandmother was the one being treated, yet I was the one feeling anxious and nervous. The gloomy hospital environment didn't help the mood either. We sat in the waiting room for my grandmother's name to be called. I silently took in my surroundings. Everyone there either was suffering from cancer or had a loved one suffering from it. Most of the cancer patients had shaved heads. It saddened me to think that the next time I came here, my grandmother would be as distinguishable as the other patients. It was difficult for me to imagine her without her curls. She loved going to the hairdressers and getting her hair done. "It's important that your hair looks nice and presentable ducky," she would say after returning from the salon, always feeling pleased with her new hair. I wondered if she was going to use her scarves to conceal her lack of hair after the effects of chemo had kicked in. I glanced at my grandmother to see whether the situation had affected her yet. I was amazed to see she was still as calm and collected as she was earlier. This worried me. It worried me to think that she had not fully grasped the magnitude of the situation and would not be able to cope once it hit her. I was right.

Soon after treatment started, she gave up on fighting the illness and I began to see a drastic change in her. It was terrible to watch her condition deteriorate. She lost a significant amount of weight and it was obvious that the illness as well as the treatment was wearing her down. She had no willpower or energy left in her. Her cheeks were no longer rosy, and her beautiful grey eyes lost their sparkle. However, the transformation of her physical appearance was not as upsetting as her mental state. She quickly became depressed and alienated herself from the people she loved and activities she thoroughly enjoyed in the past. I desperately longed to go shopping with her, watch our favourite TV shows, or discuss books that we both enjoyed while she cooked. The cancer put a permanent end to all that.

Despite all the destruction it had caused, chemotherapy did not work, and my grandmother had to be operated on. Her bladder was removed, essentially killing any hope of a decent quality of life. After the surgery, she spent most of her time sleeping on the hospital bed that the doctor had insisted we buy. It was difficult to accept that she was no longer the same person whom I had grown up with. It was rotten watching her suffer in such agony. Shortly after the surgery, she started to develop other problems and gradually most of her organs stopped functioning until one morning, she never woke up.

Untitled

NARAE KIM

I REMEMBER that day clearly. It is imprinted in my memory like some kind of a stigma and when I touch it, it still aches a bit like an old scar. After having taken two years off school, I had been wandering in different countries. I still couldn't decide what to do with my life, whether to go back to school or just eat away at my meaningless life gradually. That day, I was on my way to Toronto to visit my parents, whom I hadn't seen in two years. Nothing seemed to have changed, including the view that slithered past me through the taxi window. A ray of sunlight glistened off the corner of the car window. The consecutive rows of pine trees embroidered the window like splotches of green paint moving on a conveyor belt. I could hear brakes screeching as cars came to a sudden stop and faintly, somewhere outside, children giggled and screeched with their mother in front of unknown buildings.

A few minutes later, the car made a few smooth turns to the right and a huge shopping mall came into view. The shopping mall was located in a very conspicuous spot in the suburbs—it was my parents' new workplace, where they had been working for six months as cleaners in Chinese grocery market. The car soon reached what appeared to be a front door, and I stepped out of the car after briefly thanking the driver. I slung my backpack over my back and walked toward the entrance, with my black suitcase dragging on the asphalt.

Although it was not yet dark, there were not many people sauntering around. As I got closer to the door, I could make out two petite figures sitting on the bench inside the front entrance of the mall. They stood up, and I finally recognized mom and dad. I offered an awkward hug accompanied by a short greeting to both of them. Mom hurriedly led me inside the building while dad left to put the baggage in our car. Mom and I ordered coffee in Tim Horton's and took a seat in the corner while waiting for dad to come back. Dad joined shortly after, and it was then I finally had the time to see them up close.

It had been awhile and I could see the passage of time on their faces. What grabbed my attention was how much my father had changed. He had lost more than 8 kilos since the last time I saw him and his hair had turned salt and pepper. His face was engraved with deep creases and when he talked, I could see through the hole in his front teeth.

As soon as that realization seeped into my head, something began to undulate in my mind like a wave. It began very slowly and then all of a sudden it hit me hard, as if two crustal plates diverged undersea and let out a gigantic amount of energy to create devastating tsunamis on the surface. Why did I think that mom and dad would always stay the same? While Mom and Dad went back to the grocery market to wrap up their work, I just sat there.

After a few hours, even when we were going back home in the car, we did not say much. Within 10 minutes, we got "home." It was a place where my parents paid monthly rent to use the basement. The floor was carpeted, but the surrounding walls emitted the chilly breaths of early winter. I could see my ghostly face through the circular mirror in the room. Mom was coming down with a cold, so she got in bed early. It was only me and Dad. I sat with the blanket on my knees and Dad sat at the desk, scribbling something down the yellow legal pad that he always used as a journal. I felt tired but couldn't bring myself to sleep. Looking around the room, a dusty old photo album caught my attention. It was relatively thin and was isolated from other albums. I fetched it off the shelf and opened it to realize it was a collection of pictures of my father. The first page started with pictures from his high

school. His face was tanned and his guitar was present in most of the pictures, either slung on his back or placed on furniture. His colourful bell-bottom pants suggested his former interest in fashion. I could tell that he weighed much more back then. But his smiles in the pictures were so bright, ones that I have never seen before. He looked so different. Why hadn't I seen him wearing a smile like that? Had I shut my eyes and ears without even trying to think in his position at least once?

My eyes were fixed on his back. I couldn't help but notice his emaciated backbone, pressed against the white sleeveless shirt. I could feel a sudden burn searing my heart and hot tears welling in my eyes. Although he is my father, I did not know him well as I should. My father never openly talked about anything. Even when he landed after more than 13 hours of flight to visit Mom and me in Canada, when our souvenir store had to be shut, when I showed him the awards I got at school, and when I had to take two years off because we could not afford the tuition fee, he said nothing. He never said a word. Because he did not say what he thought and felt out loud, it made it difficult to consider his position or the situations he was going through. His silence made it harder from me to fathom what he might be feeling. Maybe I didn't even try, because I thought I was the only one who was going through turmoil.

But seeing the old pictures of him made me come to realize the most basic fact that I have been forgetting. He too, is a human, a person who is capable of feeling all sorts of emotions. His duty as a father and husband pressed him with so much force that the brightness in him was squeezed out. I regretted not getting to know him better. I felt sorry that I let all those years pass by. Yet I felt thankful because it was not too late.

Since that day, there has not been any significant change in our relationship. When just the two of us are left in the room, we still feel awkward and my father does not give me any compliments or make any affectionate comments. Nothing much seems to have changed, yet my perceptions of him, and my understanding of him, have changed entirely.

I wish I could write more but there is nothing else to write. Plus, my head is dizzy with hundreds of fragmented ideas. It is like a rough draft, unpolished and incomplete, like my relationship with my dad.

Onions

CHELSEA LAM

IT STARTED and ended with an onion. My boyfriend, John, and I were chopping onions for our dinner, when he started telling me his story about onions. I listened as he told me of his grandfather's incredible tale of escape during WWII.

*

It started with an onion. John sat on the porch one breezy afternoon, looking up at his grandfather he so admired. It was mid-summer, and John was over at his grandparents' house for a visit. John lazed back into his white lawn chair that overlooked Grandpa Luigi's garden. He noticed with growing curiosity that his grandfather was eating a whole, raw onion, just like someone would an apple.

"Grandpa Luigi," John said, "Why are you eating an onion like an apple?"

"So that it reminds me of what I have endured, and what I have to be thankful for," Grandpa Luigi said, with a distant look in his eyes.

Finally noticing the confused look on John's face, he went on and described the story John has never forgotten.

"During WWII, when Italy was still allied with Germany, I was fighting in Yugoslavia as an Italian soldier. Around halfway through the war, Italy switched sides and joined the Allied forces, so we were

now fighting against the Germans.” As Grandpa Luigi started explaining the history of Italy’s role in WWII, John’s passion for history drew him into the story and captured his undivided attention.

“With all of the knowledge I’ve learned about WWII in school and on my own, it’s amazing to hear a story about WWII, from my own grandpa!” John exclaimed.

Grandpa Luigi explained that after Italy switched sides to join the allied forces, the Germans began taking Italian soldiers as Prisoners of War. He was captured by the German Forces and spent what felt like the longest week of his life as a POW. Unable to handle being a POW any further, he and his friend plotted to escape their living hell.

One early morning in March, while the German guards were distracted, Grandpa Luigi and his friend quickly slipped out of the POW camp and headed into the forest. It all had to happen fast, as any moment of hesitation would have meant their lives. They kept running until they knew they were safe from being recaptured by the German soldiers, at least for the time being.

After their initial elation of escaping from the POW camp started wearing off, they realized that they were stuck in Yugoslavia with no money, no transportation, and no food. They were fugitives, in enemy territory, and if they were seen or caught, they would be forced into a concentration camp. Or worse, they might be killed. The two friends knew then their difficulties in getting home to Cosenza, Calabria, were only just beginning.

“Our first goal was to find a local village where we could rest and get food. This was a lot more difficult than we would have expected. We thought people would want to help us for the sake of humanity, but I guess not.” Grandpa Luigi’s shoulders slumped as he recalled this memory from his journey. He described how, being Italian soldiers, many villagers were not willing to help them, especially after Italy switched sides. Many people were too afraid of the potential consequences if local German soldiers discovered they had aided two Italian soldiers. John could see the sadness and hurt in Grandpa Luigi’s eyes when he said, “People would run inside and lock their doors, ignoring my pleas for just a sip of water or a piece of bread.”

After a week without having food or shelter, walking towards Italy and constantly fearing they would be discovered by the Germans, they began losing hope of ever making it home again. Until they found hope in onions—an onion patch, to be more exact. The two soldiers stumbled upon this onion patch, manna from heaven. Overcome with joy, they ran into the field and grabbed as many onions as possible. They began eating the onions like apples, not caring what they were eating or how it tasted, as it was the first taste of food for so long.

During this week of walking, starving, and hiding, Grandpa Luigi and his friend would talk about the things they couldn't wait to have once they got home. They did this to force each foot in front of the other, and to keep alive their desire to make it home.

Grandpa Luigi became very animated as he told John, "All I could think about was getting home to my favourite food—gnocchi! Never did I expect to be excited about onions though, I'll tell you that."

"I can't ever imagine being excited about eating onions either," laughed John.

Grandpa Luigi smiled at his grandson, and continued his story. As Grandpa Luigi and his friend frantically ate onions and stuffed their coats with them, the land owner came charging out. Ready to run, the soldiers thought the man was going to chase them off of his lands or worse—report them to the Germans. The man began to slow and then smiled, which made them hesitate. To their surprise and joy, the land owner gave them a warm welcome and offered them rest for the night. In the morning, he gave the soldiers a care package to help them on their journey home.

Finally, after twenty-seven long, difficult, and scary days of walking and eating the onions they took with them, they finally made it home. Home, the one thought that drove them onward through their plight.

As John listened to his grandfather wrap up the story of his escape, he thought about what he knew of his grandfather's life in Calabria. Life in Italy wasn't very pleasant for his grandfather, as he was very poor, and life was difficult. Yet somehow, his grandfather was happy to be back and wanted nothing more. Even though he never had much,

essentially just the clothes on his back, Grandpa Luigi was happy on his small farm. It was home. And now that he was free, he was free from the war and back to the place he loved—home.

*

It started and ended with an onion. As John and I stood there, the thought of making dinner long gone, he ended his favourite story about his Grandpa Luigi.

“Even though he’s gone now, this memory of Grandpa Luigi keeps him alive. Every time I think of onions, I always remember this story. His story now lives on as my story—the story of onions.”

The Tree House

TIFFANY LIU

Love makes you see a place differently, just as you hold differently an object that belongs to someone you love. If you know one landscape well, you will look at all other landscapes differently. And if you learn to love one place, sometimes you can also learn to love another. —Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*

WHEN FIRST observing this photo, you notice a beautiful massive house with lush green bushes and trees framing an arched decorative doorway. This was where I grew up, among the homes of “The Grand Durand” in Hamilton, Ontario. Built in 1930 and considered one of the oldest homes in the neighbourhood, it was designed by William Souter, architect of the Cathedral of Christ the King. William Souter’s own home was just down the street, among the homes of John Stuart, Patrick Bankier, and Henry B. Witton. If you look a little harder at the photo, you will notice a ladder underneath a tree, leading up to a tree house. For me, the main focus of this photograph is an apple tree, the very same one supporting the tree house. I know the photo was taken mid summer because the apple tree leaves are fully-grown and if you squint, you can see ripened apples scattered on the ground below. I remember sitting under the tree on

sweltering hot summer days, closing my eyes and waiting for the apples to drop down from the sky and seeing how many I could catch with my bare hands. And those rose bushes circling the walkway, those are the same rose bushes Mom told me not to touch because they had prickly thorns. “Always look at beautiful things, never touch them,” she constantly said. “You will ruin them or you will ruin yourself.” Many of the old photos we see as we find them in lost dusty photo albums, shoved in cardboard boxes, have lost their true meaning. These photos remain the same, frozen in time, but their meaning is lost along the way. Some speculate the meaning while others take it at face value and look at the photos in its two dimensional content. Perhaps when I am dead and gone and my children or children’s children stumble upon this photo of an old Tudor house displaying its abundance of wealth, they will think nothing of it except that whoever lived there, lived a charmed and happy life. That is genuinely fine with me, as long as the true meaning of the photo stays with me until the very end.

You see, this photo has captured more than its two dimensions can hold. For me, this photo is a snapshot of the happy memories as well as the sad. Why would a dingy old tree house and an apple tree mean so much more to me than living in one of the prestigious homes of the Grand Durand? The tree house will slowly decay in time and the tree will live and die, as everything does. Flowers bloom in their splendour and slowly their petals lose life, turning dark with death. Yet we do not remember flowers in their dismay; we remember them as beautiful, vital. This is how I see my tree house and that apple tree to this day. To me, they are timeless.

I had always wanted a tree house. Before it was built I made a list of things I wanted the tree house to have. Running water, a toilet, three bedrooms (one for me, my sister, and our dog Max), and Christmas lights. I got none of those things, but I still loved my home. My stepbrother Thomas and his best friend Michael, who was like a second brother, built the tree house for my younger sister and me. After witnessing my mother’s manic highs and lows and realizing that we were always caught in the crossfire, they built a place for us to run to. A place for us to hide until the storm passed. It had shelves where I

placed books and pictures, and the walls were lined with beautiful handmade Chinese lanterns. When my mother would drink herself into a stupor, my sister and I would climb up there and hide out underneath a sea of blankets. I would finish series upon series of books, flashlight in hand, while my sister slept soundly, our bodies hidden among our magical mountain fort of pillows. On the days when things were really bad, I would quietly tuck my sister in and stroke her hair while she cried, reading her books like *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* until she drifted off to sleep. Those days made me ache, a painful and chilling kind of ache that eats you down to the bone.

I have driven past that house many times since then. A cherry blossom tree now stands beside my dear apple tree. The tree looks smaller now, not as vibrant as I remember it to be. The tree house is no longer there and the ladder has been removed. No longer a child's sanctuary. I guess the house, too, has grown. I like to imagine that the new owners kept the tree house after they moved in, realizing that its quirky charm and dilapidated state were more than enough to fulfil a child's dream. I like to pretend their children never outgrew that tree house, and were forced to let it go after a series of natural and unpreventable accidents. And I like to think that those children have grown up since and have children of their own, and have created silly little tree houses on top of apple trees for their little beloved ones. I read somewhere that apple trees live between 80 and 120 years. This tree has seen many things over its lifetime. It is still there, worn but meaningful. When I was a kid, I would reach out and touch the trunk of the tree, trying to find its heartbeat. I swear it had one. I know it sounds crazy, this attachment I have to a tree, but this tree knows who I am. This tree, the tree house, this home, is everything I am and used to be.

Every photograph has a meaning behind it. Through day, this photo will continue to hold my home and through night it will continue to hold me. Now when you look at this photo again, maybe you will see a seven-year-old girl underneath an apple tree, squinting at the sun with her arm held up against her forehead. Or maybe you just see a girl who

has lived a charmed and happy life. Look again, and tell me what you see.

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The Not So Purrfect Summer

KATELYN LOVELESS

JD WAS my beautiful orange tabby cat who held the most memorable and quirky traits. His huge, speckled eyes seemed to get darker as he aged. No matter what I was eating he would mooch at my feet, especially potato chips. He would wait patiently for a whole minute before pouncing at the bag and drooling all over it with his little pink tongue that often hung out of his mouth. Although he was our family cat, he was *my* cat. He would often curl up on my bed and would on occasion sleep on my face and purr incessantly into my ears.

Boo on the other hand was a quiet, prissy cat that made you earn her attention. She was black with little tufts of white fur on her belly. She was badly injured by a car at a young age and was never really the same. She soon became inactive which lead her to become a fat little blob of a cat. Although her tiny head looked disproportionate to her body she was still incredibly cute, despite weighing a solid 25 pounds.

Around mid-April, I received a phone call from my mother letting me know that Boo had been diagnosed with a tumour. Due to her age, the only option would be to put her out of her misery, and sadly she was put down. Seeing as I was attending university three hours away in Kingston, the possibility of a good bye was non-existent. As I returned home for the summer, her absence was incredibly disheartening as she was often at the top of stairs in my way when I came home. It was peculiar feeling to come home to be greeted by only one cat, not two.

My parents told me JD had searched for her, and after a while I think he understood she was not going to return. I think he knew we missed her as he became even more affectionate and clingy to the members of my family. He had taken on a new role to help us grieve our beloved cat, Boo.

It was a warm and sunny afternoon in May when I walked up the stairs and looked out my sliding glass door to a beautiful garden and pool. As I was standing there, my wonderful orange cat strolled up the stairs and sat down like the laid back cat that he was. I opened the door, patted him on the head and he entered our back room and sauntered into the kitchen. I noticed some blood on his back leg and quickly grabbed a towel to clean him off, thinking nothing of it. I carefully moved him into our backroom and put him onto a towel. As I tried to tend to him, he hissed and snarled and eventually collapsed. The look of pain in his eyes was almost unbearable and heartbreaking. I couldn't believe it, he had seemed fine, but he must have been in shock. I sprinted to the phone to call my mom and informed her of what was going on. I stayed with him for the majority of the afternoon, petting him and attempting to reassure both myself and JD that he would be all right.

As my mom arrived home we packed him up as carefully as possible and sped to the vet to get him checked out. My mom and I were both hysterical as the doctor examined him and told us he had severe internal tearing and damage. They performed immediate surgery but the damage was too extensive. After a night of misery, we arrived at the clinic the next morning and they told us there was nothing left to do. They brought him in, and he was no longer this cheerful orange spunky cat. We were both incredibly distraught as they put him down which left us feeling emptier than ever.

The vet had told us it that it was most likely a large animal that attacked him. He assumed it was a coyote, but I was angered as my instincts pushed me to believe it was my neighbours rescued German shepherd. That summer I went through the grieving process for not one, but two beloved pets. I didn't want to be around anyone and cooped myself up in my room. Whenever I saw my neighbour I was reminded

of the pain JD probably felt in those last moments. My neighbour's presence brought me back and reopened the wound I'd been trying to heal. The sadness in my heart lingered for months as I found his whiskers and toys scattered throughout our house. At one point I even tried to convince my mom to get another cat, or two. We knew that JD and Boo could not be replaced, but my family longed for the happiness that pets had brought us.

It was in October when I received the news that my mom had adopted two kittens who were sisters from the Humane Society. When I returned home for Thanksgiving, I was pleasantly surprised at how happy my parents were. I could tell that these tiny hyperactive kittens had filled the void my family was experiencing. Their rambunctious personalities were revealed as they tore through our house, attacked each other and once they were too tired they would jump onto our lap and pass out. Not only did these wonderful creatures provide endless entertainment and happiness but they proved to be just what my parents needed.

Although this summer was tough, it reminded me that time does heal all wounds. My bitterness towards my neighbour might be unwarranted, but it is still something I must work on. One of my favourite quotes is "let your past make you better, not bitter," which emphasizes that the past does not define your future, and that you must look back at hard times to learn and grow from them. Due to the unexpected nature of their passing, I plan to get a memorial tattoo of two paw prints representing JD and Boo. Whenever I look at that tattoo, I will remember my love towards these two cats that were such a large part of my life.

Sacrificing For The Dream

SCOTT MACDONELL

Combine

STANDING AT the marker, staring down the forty-yard hallway, a feeling of calmness has taken over me. Attempt number one was a mere seconds away. Letting out a sigh, I began to get into my stance. *Alright, right foot back, shoulder width apart. Check. Remember to push out off both feet. Head down, arm at ninety degrees. This is it. Now explode out and think fast,* I thought to myself as I ran through the checklist. It was time now, one last deep breath and it was go time. Throwing my arm forward as if to block the metaphorical sun, I shot out like a cannon, trying to channel my inner Usain Bolt. “Glute. Glute. Glute,” I repeated, as I stared at the ground. Twenty yards down, now my head comes up, as I began to open up my stride, much like that of Clydesdale in the last leg of the race. Thirty yards down, “fast arms!” I thought to myself as I finished out the final three steps, making sure to run through the finish line. Putting on the breaks, my momentum ceased about fifteen yards passed the line. Approximately three minutes had gone by and I find myself, yet again, staring down the hallway. “Alright, right foot back shoulder width apart. Check. Remember to push off both feet. Head down, arm at ninety degrees. This is it. Now explode out and think fast,” repeating the same mantra to myself. Crouched down, like a tiger ready to pounce, sweat dripping

down the side of my face, a judge looks on ready to start the clock at the first sign of motion. “Throw the arm forward. GO!”

Training

It was six forty-five in the morning, and the first workout leading up to the combine was imminent. I looked over to my friend Matt, as I entered the car “Man this is early, you’re telling me I have to do this three more times this week? Why do I do this to myself,” I began to question my motives as I exited my house. A few of the boys were putting in the work, trying to improve their running mechanics for the March twentieth deadline. A series of two workouts per day comprised of running in the morning and lifting weights in the afternoon defined my life for my final semester at Queen’s. It wasn’t quite the final undergrad term I expected to have when I was in first year, but it was the only one I wanted now as a fourth year. As each week passed, my friends and I tagged on another six to nine workouts, trying to increase our strength, speed, and master our football skills. Like a circus juggler, I learned to keep more balls in the air: first my social life, then school, and now the combine.

The word sacrifice took on a whole new meaning this semester, as it seemed the outside world ramped up the peer pressure to stray from the plan. I had to subside my fear of missing out in order to ensure that I would punch my ticket to the big leagues. So what did I do? I picked up the three balls and I began to do what I knew best, I juggled. Three differently weighted balls symbolized the three aspects of my life I would have to juggle this semester. Just as I thought I had it figured out though, one ball would seem heavier. I began to feel more pressure from within to give up. “Listen man, this is tiring. I’m sore from these workouts and it’s been weeks since we went out and had fun, let’s go let loose, it won’t hurt,” I said to my training partners. Without fail they were able to convince me otherwise and keep me focused on the task at hand. I would have to adjust and work harder to suppress the weight of this ball, until football became a bigger part of the cycle. As soon as I had gotten my head back to normal, school became a greater pain.

Assignments seem to flow faster, classes seemed to get longer, and I grew more tired as the weeks went by. Ball number three would alter on me as well as the others grew larger, football would decrease in importance. However, I knew to stay stubborn, stay committed. If you drop the ball there is only one thing to do, pick it back up and keep going. I snapped out of my trance, nearly dropping the baseball, I adjusted and got back on track. It had hit me, the combine was mere weeks away and so I had to ramp up my training and my focus.

Combine

Lining up to compete in my first one on one, much like a Mexican standoff, I would have to ensure that my moves were quicker than his. I began my run up to the line. The distance between us closed as I ran up to the line and he shuffled only slightly away. “No way, he’s not trying to press me right now. I’ve got thirty pounds on this guy,” I thought to myself. Five yards apart, he still hasn’t moved. Three yards apart, hasn’t budged an inch. “Alright, I guess he wants the noise.” Our two bodies collided, letting off what sounded like a gunshot. He bounced off me. Startled, I thought “Oh shit! Keep going.” I continued to run, and trying to track the ball, I began to pump my arms like the pistons of an engine. Making one last attempt, I reached out to try and grasp the leather and missed. During my jog back to the line, it had hit me my worst nightmare happened, I had failed on my first one on one. However, this feeling of serenity overcame my body, I felt almost aloof about the whole thing. As I jogged back, I made the sudden realization that this rep didn’t matter. It was on to the next one. The white 80 bounced up and down as I jogged back to debrief the rep and prepare myself for another battle, another opportunity, another chance to show that this was indeed my time.

Anxiety in Wonderland

ALYSSA MACGREGOR

Alice thought to herself, “I don’t see how he can never finish, if he doesn’t begin.” (Carroll 27)

“ALYS, YOU will be singing the solo song during the performance.” My head jerked upwards, trying to process what my vocal teacher had just said. Solo? The world turned upside down, yet my feet were bolted to the ground. My brain tried to urge my legs to move forward. My voice tried to escape the confines of my throat to declare, *No! I can’t do it!* Yet, all I could do was stand there as she continued to run off the list of songs for the Grade 11 Vocal Concert. I barely uttered a word in class; how was I to sing in front of a hundred people—all by myself?

As a child, I grew up thinking that worrying about everything was the norm. I thought about what people thought of me or what I could have done differently. I even worried about leaving the house to go anywhere with my mother, in fear of who I would run into. During school I would rather have my head deep inside a book, than speak with my peers. I was—and still am, to a degree—the definition of a quiet child.

So imagine my shock when, at the age of ten, I developed a love for the theatre. Having seen my first Broadway in New York, I became enamoured with the singing, dancing and acting. I wanted nothing more

than to be on that stage with the performers, singing my heart out. I have always been in choirs and sometimes even in the chorus of a play, yet I wanted something more. But whenever the chance arose for an audition or a large part, my mind would dash down a deep, dark hole. Like Alice in Wonderland, I followed my worries willingly down and succumbed to the madness of my fears.

I barely slept for days before the concert worrying about little things that could go wrong. Every day I would try to get up the courage to tell my vocal teacher that I could not possibly go on, yet something stopped me. Call it fate, or whatever you wish, but even through my fright, I knew that this had been a part I have longed for ever since I was ten. Now at the age of seventeen, this was my chance to step out from the shadows. Perhaps my curiosity got the better of me. Could I actually do something this crazy?

“But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.”

“How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the Cat, or you wouldn’t have come here.” (Carroll 24)

Five minutes before the performance, I was certain that I was going to either pass out or just run from the theatre all together. There was an endless stream of worry within my mind. The voice—which sadly does not have a volume button—grew louder and louder, creating a mighty echo within my skull. I visibly winced at the pure volume of my fears. *What if I fall off the stage? Will I forget my lines? Will people be able to hear me?*

I could catch a glimpse of the audience from behind the curtain. All awaiting for the next performance—*my* performance. My heart thumped erratically against my rib cage as my name was being announced to the expectant crowd. My thoughts and emotions were like a tidal wave as they crashed into me, almost knocking me off my

balance. The microphone they had given me became a lifeline as I clutched it tightly to my chest, trying to normalize my breathing. It became a struggle to just breathe normally. I barely realized that my introduction was finished. A forceful nudge in my back from a classmate, accompanied by a hushed voice whispering, “*get out there*” caused my legs to shake even more, yet I managed to take shaky steps onto the stage.

She was only ten inches high... First however, she waited for a few minutes to see if she was going to shrink any further: she felt nervous about this; “for it might end, you know.” (Carroll 10)

The moment I stepped onto centre stage, my perceptions changed. Suddenly, my whole body seemed small. I was in front of so many people. Even though they were seated, and the stage was considerably high above them, I still felt like the smallest person in the room. Yet, once I began to sing, my body grew. Just as if I had eaten the “Eat Me” cake that Alice had to make her grow larger. It was like the whole world slowed down when I sang. The fears in my head grew silent as the song took over. I got lost in the moment, for lack of a better phrase. My dream came into the light.

Everything went extremely well. Once the song was complete and I was off-stage, I was stunned at my confidence. When I look back on the actual performance, I am shocked at how much I worried over a three minute song.

I think back to my favourite book as a child, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. A young girl who was curious about the world, Alice was held back by her questions and fears. But it took that one moment when following the White Rabbit, to bring her to a place she never thought was possible.

That’s how this experience was to me. I was curious about my dream, yet always too afraid to fulfil it. However, in that one split second when I took an opportunity and went far out of my comfort zone, I realized many things. There is absolutely nothing to be afraid

of. If I had listened to that horrid voice in my head, I would not have made it onto the stage. Now, the stage is my home and I never want to change that. I believe Alice said it best,

I cannot go back to yesterday, for I was a different person then. (Carroll 50)

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Inside the Mind of Depression

MICHELLE MACLEAN

THE MIND of a child is so unique and beautiful. A child resides in a bubble of ease where the frightening realities of this world neither threaten nor intimidate. Children do not fear possibilities, but instead embrace them. With age, this mindset fades just as memories do. It was at the age of fourteen and the beginning of my high school career that my perceptions of reality began to change. At the time my social life was crumbling before my eyes, as my closest friends were developing new friendships and taking part in social trends such as drinking or smoking pot. I considered these behaviours too mature for kids who were only fourteen years old, and thus my popularity decreased due to my resistance to peer pressure. I found it difficult to make new friends, as I was very shy and fearful that they would not like who I was. I became somewhat of a loner, left with nothing but my own thoughts. The confidence I once wore like armour was ripped apart and my once optimistic outlook crumbled into a pessimistic mentality. It was not until my yearly doctor's appointment that I was told I had the mood disorder known as depression. Many people do not understand the thought process of a person battling depression; they do not see the self-hate, the negative outlook or the anxiety. Through this essay, I hope these concepts will become clearer.

Imagine getting a haircut. You've flipped through countless styling magazines and you finally find the perfect style. Confident with your

choice, all the hairdresser has to do now is cut. However, once the styling is finished you realize it doesn't look as good on you as it did on the model; you're not up to par. All your previous confidence is gone as you realize you will never be as perfect as the model you now share a hairstyle with. This is the mindset I face on a daily basis: I am not good enough.

This lack of self-confidence and acceptance affects almost everything in my social life. It has prevented me from fully participating in any social situation. In academic situations, such as a class presentation or even something as simple as peer editing, I am physically unable to participate. Rather, I am overcome with the fear that someone may ridicule me for being unintelligent or judge me as ignorant. These situations usually result in a breakdown. In the last year and a half of university, I have dropped three courses and skipped multiple classes. The first thing I do upon receiving the class syllabus is to scan for the word "class presentation." If a presentation is required, nothing will sway me from dropping the course, not even my intense interest in the material. It is as if someone comes up to you after your hair cut and says, "Hey, doesn't this celebrity have the same hair style as you?" This judgment is what I fear and dread. It's not that I am being compared to my peers, but to an unobtainable perfection. Your hairstyle is being compared to the celebrity it originated from. You feel nothing but foolish in your impersonated hairstyle.

You may rationalize that a hairstyle is not permanent. Hair grows back so life goes on, it doesn't look that bad anyway. You'll get used to it. This positivity often gets people through bad situations; however, positivity is a continuous struggle for me. Positivity is strenuous when satisfaction is not guaranteed. Disappointment is perhaps the most devastating experience. For expectations to be crushed and denied is disheartening and discouraging. I have made it a personal goal to avoid any uncontrollable disappointment by adapting a self-defence mentality. My mind is physically incapable of approaching a situation with a fully positive outlook. My coping mechanism is that if I expect the absolute worst then whatever the result, it will be equal to or better than my initial expectation. For this to work, a negative mindset must

be in place. It is a method to soften any blow of disappointment that will cause distress. A prime example was when I did my G driving test. Despite my mother's constant reassurance, I told myself there was no way I was going to pass. This way there was no room for disappointment and when the outcome was positive, it was a pleasant surprise.

My coping mechanism not only prevents disappointment but also reduces anxiety. Anxiety is a monster that feeds off of social interactions. Humans are social beings. We require interactions with others. Yet the monster of anxiety awakens during these social exchanges. As a film major and a person who hopes to make a successful career in the film industry, I know the importance of communication is extremely important. Part of this career requires the expression of thoughts and feelings to groups of people. Imagine that you are not only appearing in your ridiculous imitated haircut but also standing in a room full of gruesome monsters waiting to pounce at any sign of weakness.

It has been almost eight years since I was first diagnosed with clinical depression. My overall mood has improved, though I still struggle with certain things. While some days I am able to keep my anxiety monsters at bay, other times I am overwhelmed with the urge to hide in a dark room where no one can see me. As professor David D. Burns stated, "Depression can seem worse than terminal cancer, because most cancer patients feel loved and they have hope and self-esteem." Many people cannot fathom the mentality of a person with depression because the illness isn't visible to the human eye. Depression is a feeling, a mental state, and since everyone's mentality is unique, understanding depression is difficult. The best that I can do is put it into words.

Finding Hope

LEANNA MANN

MY THREE friends and I are sitting around my grandparent's dinner table after enjoying a much needed home-cooked meal. I notice a twinkle in my Nana's eye as she begins to tell the story of how she first met my Papa. "We were in church on Sunday morning," Nana says. "I knew who he was, but he did not know who I was. After the first song we sang at church, I turned to look at Donald and smiled, and he smiled back...."

As my Nana continues to tell us the romantic story of the how the two of them met and fell in love, we all sit quietly watching her become teary-eyed. The happiness on my Nana's face is obvious and we can tell that the love my grandparents have for one another is everlasting and truly one of a kind. We feel inspired by their story. Meeting someone at church, going on romantic dates and walks, and getting to know someone before your first kiss are so unheard of in today's youth culture. The whole car ride home we talked about their love and how it seems so unachievable now.

Since that dinner, my Grandparents' love story has remained in my thoughts and that is especially true on this cold Thursday night as I walk to Stages Nightclub. After waiting in line for about half an hour with no jacket on and paying the five-dollar cover fee, I am finally in. Every Thursday I always ask myself why it is that I continue to come to Stages. From inside the bar, all I see is people either furiously

attempting to get drinks at the bar, dancing, or pretending the dance floor is their bedroom. Then there is me; standing in the corner casually sipping on a vodka cranberry, desperately hoping someone will come up and talk to me. It doesn't happen. Whenever I find myself in this position I think back to how my grandparents met. Innocent first encounters at church used to be a common occurrence. Now, meeting intoxicated at the bar and barely remembering the person's name is the norm. Standing in the corner of Stages I think to myself, "Hey! I recognize that guy from my class! Maybe I should go talk to him about our next assignment...Or should I wait to see if he approaches me first? Do people even talk here? I think I'll just go and grab a poutine and call it a night."

The next morning I wake up feeling like there is a construction site in my head. I start the day off with my usual Friday morning hangover routine. Grab some Advil, chug a giant glass of water, look for my purse, and hop back into bed. I begin reflecting upon my "eventful" Thursday night, but it's a blur. I recall some of the useless conversations I had (most of which I cannot remember), before opening my computer to check out all my new Facebook friend requests and pictures of me from Stages. This is how people meet each other. I have Facebook friend requests from people I have never been formally introduced to and recognize only from seeing them across the bar or from my friend's pictures on Facebook. I wonder what my Nana and Papa would think of this. I laugh as I picture myself walking down the wedding aisle to the song by Rihanna, "We Found Love in a Hopeless Place."

A week passes and next thing I know it is Friday morning once again. I wake up with the same pounding headache I had the week before and begin with my weekly Friday morning routine. However, this Friday feels different than the previous week. I have plans to go to my Nana and Papa's for dinner, and I know that they will ask if I have any newfound love interests. They would be scarred if I told them everything that had happened the night before. They are under the impression a night out involves a few friends, a few glasses of wine, and some good conversation. To me, that kind of night sounds ideal. I

no longer have a desire to drink copious amounts of alcohol before going to the bar only to wake up not remembering the night I had.

After another dinner at my Nana and Papa's and thinking more and more about my experiences at Stages, I realize it is time for me to make a change. Today, Friday February 28th, is the day I decide to put my phone and computer down. I write a goal to myself on a sticky note stating that I will go a week without using my phone or Facebook. Today is the day I will start looking at the world around me instead of constantly staring down at my phone. I will start having real, genuine conversations with people and making an extra effort to smile and say hi to complete strangers. As I make my way to class I say hi to two people I have never met and have a long conversation with a boy in my biology class. The way I feel after these conversations reminds me of the feeling my Nana described when she told us about her first encounter with my Papa in church that Sunday morning and begin to have hope; hope that people can relate in person and not over text or Facebook, hope that one day people can innocently meet and form long-lasting relationships filled with deep emotion and respect for each other, just like my Nana and Papa.

Rekindle

NATALIE MARCHAND

ON MY nineteenth birthday I awoke to the sound of bells ringing out from St. Stephen's Basilica. It was late morning, the sun already high in the sky and beaming through the window. My new friend Laura lay asleep beside me—we had fallen into our bunks late the night before, leaving a trail of chicken nuggets and beer cans through the city behind us. She stirred a little as I propped myself up to look out through the open window. I saw blue sky and red roofs. It was Budapest, mid-April. Another year of my life had begun.

I reached for my phone and flicked through my messages. I had some from friends and family, a couple from old teachers and bosses, and far too many from people I'd barely met who only knew it was my birthday because Facebook had told them. There was nothing from *him*. Of course there wasn't. Our last conversation six weeks ago had likely been our final one.

As I put the phone down, feeling suddenly anxious, Laura rolled over and smiled widely.

"Well, birthday girl. Should we head to the baths?"

*

It seemed that the entire hostel had the same idea that morning, as a large, raucous crew of travellers joined us on our walk to the

bathhouse. As the group forged ahead, laughing and gossiping, I hung back on my own and took in the city. The place was replete with contradictions. Decrepit buildings and foreclosure signs countered the majesty of old palaces and grand hotels. Erstwhile Soviet apartment blocs had been converted into bars and nightclubs. A kind of excited nervousness hovered in the air. It radiated both freedom and angst; for this reason, it was the perfect place to spend my final birthday as a teenager. Budapest didn't know what to do with itself any more than I did. I was travelling on my own through Europe, making plans on a day-by-day basis. I was trying hard not to think too far ahead, and harder still not to look back. I didn't want to remember *him*—the pain was still too fresh. Yet as I gazed out at the city, I saw his face, a door slamming, his car backing out of my driveway...

I refocused my eyes on the group ahead and hastened to catch up.

*

The baths were outdoors, perched on a hill on the *Pest* side of the city. From the pool you could see the entire *Buda* side stretched out like an oil painting, resplendent to behold, the blue of the river colliding perfectly with the green of the parks and the whites of boulevards. Opera houses and state buildings lined the banks of the Danube, their gold leaf embellishments catching fire in the sunlight. The bath itself was filled with people shouting and drinking beers, laughing as their toes wrinkled in the warm water. I smiled lazily as I floated on my back, gazing at the clouds above me, feeling no obligations, no sense of time. It was sublime.

Laura waded over to me sometime in the afternoon and delivered a pint of lager. "From Alain, the French guy," she whispered. "He likes you."

The gesture made me uneasy. I felt flattered, yet guilty; the guilt made me frustrated. I reminded myself I didn't belong to anyone, not anymore. There was no reason to feel bad now about a little flirtation. I forced a smile at Alain and downed the beer as the sun began to set, burning orange over the hill.

*

We made our way back to the hostel soon after that, leaving trails of water droplets behind us. The place was in a frenzy upon our return as everyone ate and drank and made themselves beautiful in anticipation of the river cruise later that night. There would be 150 people on the boat, and each of us would be given a bottle of champagne upon boarding. Mayhem was assured.

As Laura curled her hair in the bathroom, I checked my phone one last time before leaving for the night. There were no messages. I wasn't surprised, but my stomach still panged to see the inbox empty of his words.

*

The cruise delivered on its promise of madness. Everything was literally soaked in champagne, corks popping dangerously in every direction, while inflatable toys and beach balls flew haphazardly around the deck. The music pulsed loudly, prompting people to climb up on tables to dance along. In the background the parliament buildings were lit up along the banks of the Danube. The scene was so overwhelming, so entirely chaotic, that I couldn't quite believe my eyes when I actually saw someone familiar.

It was Mackenzie, a friend from home whom I'd met through my now ex-boyfriend. I'd had no idea that he was traveling, let alone in Budapest. His appearance was a total shock to me, yet I couldn't find any trace of surprise in his expression as he made his way towards me. He grabbed me in a bear hug to greet me.

"I thought I might see you here!" he shouted over the music, grinning. I must have looked puzzled, because he elaborated: "He told me you were in Budapest right now. He guessed I would find you at some party."

I couldn't move.

Mackenzie looked as though he was trying to hold something in and was going to burst from the effort. For a moment he was quiet, looking around to distract himself; then he changed his mind and turned back to me. He grabbed my shoulders and looked me in the eye.

“Listen. I know it didn’t end well, but there’s no way you two are done for real. He misses you, Nat. He talks about you all the time.” He paused. “You should write him.”

I stood paralyzed, feeling like I’d seen a ghost. Somewhere behind me, fireworks started to go off.

*

By the time the boat docked it was already starting to be light out. The group walked towards the hostel, quiet with fatigue. I carried my shoes in one hand, my phone in the other, exhausted from the night and yet unable to stop thinking about what Mackenzie had said.

He was right. Things *had* ended badly, suddenly. And though I’d tried to move on, the truth was I regretted that last fight more than anything—the things I’d said and hadn’t meant, the way I’d let him walk out the door without asking him to stay. Finally, my mind was clear.

I love him, I thought, stopping suddenly on the path. *Maybe things aren’t over just yet*. I resolved immediately to let him know.

When I pulled out my phone to write him, I noticed that I had already had a new message in my inbox. A feeling of excited nervousness pulsed through my body.

I took a deep breath and pressed “open.”

The Sport of Kings

BRITTANY MARDON

AT 4 A.M. the sky is a blanket of darkness, and the air is fresh, trailing a sharp streak of coldness through my chest every time I take a breath. I have my knees tucked to my chest, and my feet braced on the dash in front of me, my cotton socks slippery. The bitter scent of my mom's coffee saturates the car, and a guitar whines from the radio, its harsh twang muffled by the sound of slick tires, flicking rainwater off the asphalt. This is all simply a part of the early-morning horse show routine that consumes practically my entire summer. I peer out my window, watching the Vancouver rain stream past the darkness, waiting for my favourite part of the commute to the showgrounds. An enormous oval of lights illuminates tiny silhouetted figures, galloping, circling the path counter-clockwise. It goes by in a flash, and I crane my neck behind me, straining for one last glimpse, before I settle into my seat, satisfied. Like me, they're awake, moving in the dark, while the rest of the city slumbers.

Several years later, I'm home from my first year of university, of independence, and breathing in the sharp air of the morning feels exactly the same. My boots splatter through a puddle, the ground lit only by the track floodlights, and I wonder if people speeding past on the overpass can see us. The city has grown up around the track, surrounded by highways. I got a job here with one of my best friends from high school, Carolann. I'm the swing groom, meaning I take care

of horses, rotating through everyone's day off. By the end of the summer, I know every horse in our barn inside out. Each morning follows the same routine. For the first few hours, every task is punctuated by sips of steaming coffee. Horses are tacked, exercised, untacked, bathed, and cooled out by an assembly line of people. The day is a blur of the prickle of hay against skin and the clatter of horseshoes on cement. The track is the domain of the gallop riders, jibing back and forth, challenging each other to impromptu races and trying to whack one other with their crops.

The backstretch is a community, bound together by a mutual passion for horses, and a toughness that comes from years of early mornings and hard work. Good morning shouts are tossed back and forth across the shedrow, the kitchen staff know your regular order, and you spend as much time in the barn as at home. The backstretch is also a place of routine and superstition. Cutting a bridlepath on the day of a race? Bad luck. Not bathing a horse on race day? Bad luck. Leaving hay in the tines of a pitchfork? More bad luck.

For the spectator, racing is pure adrenalin, the spray of dirt as hooves thunder to the wire, people cheering, voices hoarse, for their winner; however, on the backstretch, race days are dominated by waiting. We nap and fuss over the horses, inhaling the scent of leather and piny sawdust. One of Carolann's horses is Classy Kiridashi, or Nibbler, a big, talented two year-old filly. Her body is reddish brown, black below the knee, with a puff of white on her face; just under the forelock, as if someone had tried to shape a cottonball into a star. We used to sit in front of her stall to have lunch, a soft breeze blowing over our legs, listening to the rustle of the horses settling down for the afternoon. Nibbler would abandon her own lunch in favour of investigating ours, trying to drink from our Coke cans and snuffling the backs of our necks, huffing warm breath into our hair.

Late August is big stakes race season and today, the barn is swamped. I am running Chesty, a small chestnut filly, built like a porcelain doll, and Carolann has Nibbler in the futurity, the 2 year old championship. It's a warm summer evening, and by the time Nibbler is entering the starting gate, a thrum of excitement has overtaken the

placid contentment of the afternoon. I'm isolated from the rest of the backstretch in the shade of the test barn, cooling out Chesty. We walk a small loop and every time we pass the office, I catch a glimpse of the TV. The bell rings and Dan's voice is booming through the backstretch speakers, "And they're off!" I picture the horses exploding from the gate. We are too far to hear the shriek of metal on metal. I knot my fingers in Chesty's mane, listening, "And there's Classy Kiridashi finding another gear in fourth!" Then I don't hear her name anymore. When I turn the corner, she's not on the screen. Dan's voice crackles over the speakers, announcing a Stewards Inquiry into a "mishap" with Classy Kiridashi. I crane my neck back at the TV as Chesty drags me to the water bucket, but can't see anything. I feel as if I've just been punched in the stomach.

It's an hour before I can head back to the barn. Our boss fills me in, checking Chesty's legs. "She took a bad step, went down hard after the turn." His voice is cracking, not its usual rumble. "Jockey's fine." I nod numbly and turn the corner, Chesty prancing beside me. I let my shoulder press against hers and inhale the warm scent of shampoo mixed with horse.

Carolann is curled up on the office couch, her face buried in the ancient grey corduroy, shaking. The others watch as I choke out a sympathetic hum, leaning over to pull her phone from her pocket and call her mom. The rest of the evening is a jumble of tears and chores, before lukewarm coffee is replaced by the liquid burn of something stronger.

The next morning is painfully familiar, the air still cold, our boss's "good morning" gruff, and the routine too easy to follow. Each time I pass Nibbler's stall, I feel tears pricking at my eyelids. The sawdust is still furrowed and her haynet tucked into the corner, as though she had just walked out. I volunteer to pack away her bandages and tack. The calluses on my palms scrape against the leather of her halter, warm from the sun, as I fasten the buckle. All day, people whisper reassurances, patting us on the back, and the kitchen sends a package of cookies. I suppose this is part of the world of the track, the close knit

community and camaraderie that gives each person the resilience to survive the realities of this sport and of life.



Photo credit: Patti Tubbs

Trees and Tranquillity

BRITTANY MATIYEK

BUSTLING BUSY city streets and giant skyscrapers slowly shift into luscious, green forests that follow the highway north. I'm immersed in wilderness and warm temperatures; beautiful Algonquin Park is just what I need after a stressful semester at school. My plan is spend one night here while trekking through trails, visiting the beach, and relaxing by the campfire.

Upon my arrival I step out of the car into a new world. It is something most people forget exists—complete and utter silence. After all, I am no longer in the GTA. There's no traffic buzzing by, no horns honking. Every May, when the snow has melted and the temperatures begin to rise avid campers and hikers alike come out of hibernation. Incredibly, I feel a sense of calmness now that cell phone service and Wi-Fi are surrendered. I know people who would die from such technological isolation.

At the registration gate I am greeted by a man named Charlie. He offers me a few safety tips. "Hide all food in your car," he says. "Make sure you dispose of your garbage properly." Charlie then warns of recent bear sightings within the campground, stating sternly, "Be aware of the bears." I nod, yet I've never encountered a bear myself. But I would love to see one someday.

Once I arrive at my campsite, I take a deep breath of fresh air as the sunlight warms my face. I let go of stress the school semester

brought me. Encircled by brush and trees, the campsite provides me with a sense of solitude.

As soon as I finish setting up, dark clouds slowly envelop rays of sunshine. Through the woods and canopy of trees, a crack of thunder breaks the serene silence. My heart jumps, rain begins to trickle down, and lightning causes the sky to flash. The whole event is overwhelming as if the world is about to end. Every avid outdoor enthusiast is familiar with lightning safety tips, but I still feel nervous. *And Charlie was worried about the bears*, I think to myself.

Everyone knows that tents are not safe when lightning strikes. My car is just a few meters away and the safest place I can be. Prepping for a university exam does not compare to the nerves I feel in the presence of lightning. Towards the car, I break out into a full sprint remembering that most injuries by lightning happen to campers and hikers. The rain is heavy and I am soaked from head to toe. The car feels comfortable and safe, plus I can listen to the radio for weather updates.

The rain eases, the storm passes and the thunder becomes fainter. My partially set up campsite is soaked. Luckily I left some dry clothing and blankets in the car. The storm ruins my afternoon and I am disappointed as evening moves in. The day passed too quickly.

The smoky smell of campfire fills my nose as it travels from other campsites, reminding me to start my own. At least the wood didn't get too wet and I have just enough newspaper to start a fire before the night fully engulfs the day. A coolness sets in and I realize the temperature is dropping, yet the warmth of the fire is enough to feel comfortable. A large, comfy blue sweater and a pair of black track pants keep me at ease. Looking more alive and vibrant than ever, the stars shine in the clear night sky.

Nothing can beat hotdogs and marshmallows roasted on a fire. Roasted hotdogs especially beat out the school cafeteria food I had to force down all year. The unpleasant cafeteria food—I was surprised by its poor quality when I first arrived at Queen's. For a full six months I could only choke down limp grill cheese and dull salad. Included in my array of cafeteria choices were rock-hard desserts, greasy fries, and

cold pizza. Thankfully, I won't be eating at the cafeteria again this upcoming year.

In the morning it is damp and humid inside my tent, one of the things I hate most about camping. But I am looking forward to the best part of my camping trips—the hike through the trails nearby. My favourite, “Mizzy Lake Trail,” provides hikers with the greatest chance to see wildlife. My backpack for the hike contains trail mix, a water bottle, my camera and pepper spray, just in case I encounter the bears Charlie mentioned. It's mid-spring and the rough, dirt trail is bordered with the wild flowers just starting to bloom. Small creeks run along the hiking path while beams of sunlight break through the canopy of trees every so often.

After several hours of walking, I reach an opening that reveals the landscape. I can see for miles and the view looks like a perfect postcard picture. I feeling exhausted but it is exactly what I needed, some exercise and fresh air after a long, hard school year. At this lookout, I find my inner peace and calmness.

Who doesn't enjoy the wilderness? I'm a sucker for nature's beauty and peacefulness. Having enjoyed six straight years in a row, I couldn't imagine missing Algonquin Park in the spring and summer months. I don't think anyone could be disappointed; after all, there is something for everyone. Everyone has their own specific, special place—an escape from reality, and this is mine.

A Tribute to Love and Memory

MEGAN MAZZONE

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. —Corinthians 13.4

They say it takes a village to raise a child. —African Proverb

IT WAS a sunny, calm, Sunday morning, and I'm sitting in the backseat of my grandparent's Oldsmobile, coming home from mass. This was one of the conditions when staying over at Nana's house: you can stay overnight, but you have to come to church the next morning. This was never something I protested, it simply came with the deal. As we approached an intersection, my grandpa slammed on the breaks. As I looked up, I watched my nana give the other car the finger. Immediately I started to laugh. Did my devout Catholic, rosary-saying, sweet, tiny old grandmother just give someone the finger? At the time I figured that I was witnessing something uncharacteristic of her, but really, she was just following the words of Corinthians: "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." I guess there was a lot of truth behind that finger.

“What do you all want for dinner?” my nana asked us. Seven words that caused instantaneous chaos. Myself, along with my brother, sister, and three other cousins, started chiming back with various, disjointed responses. “Pasta!” “Hamburgers!” “Hot dogs!” “Cereal!”. Clearly all wanting different food, a few of us compromised, but we still did not have one unified answer. My grandmother, knowing she needed to get dinner on the table, set off in the kitchen tending to the requests from her grandchildren. The final result: pasta, for those who wanted pasta; a hamburger, for the one who wanted a burger; and a selection of cereals on the table. When dinner was over, we brought our dishes over to the sink filled with warm water, and ran outside to play. It was then that my grandma had her dinner, which I did not know until much later in life. What I also did not realize was that she was maintaining a culture of infinite love: “Love is patient, love is kind.”

When I was thirteen, I entered my grandparent’s front door to see an unfamiliar person sitting on the living room couch. Dressed in ragged, mismatched clothing, the person resembled a sort of misfit childhood doll, carrying a dishevelled look about him. Confused, I stepped in to take off my coat, and walked into the kitchen. “Who is that, Nana?” She explained that she had found him as she was walking home from grocery shopping. “He’s just going to spend a few hours here to eat and relax.” Because I did not know this person, I was feeling a little apprehensive about his visit. My grandma, however, looked completely at ease. She brought him a cup of tea, and set out a plate of cookies. “It always protects, always trusts.”

It wasn’t often that my grandma got angry. In fact, it was so rare, that when it did happen, all of her grandchildren cowered like baby lion cubs. When I was fourteen and my sister was twelve, we went through a phase where we would bicker like hyenas. We would often fight over petty things with venomous words. It was only in instances like these that my grandma reacted with such detestation that it stopped us in our tracks. “You two better stop fighting this instant!” she exclaimed in a raised voice which completely quieted us. “You two need to love each other! I’m sure whatever you’re fighting about is over something small, and won’t matter in the bigger picture. I don’t want to have to come

back here again.” When someone who doesn’t interject chooses to speak, their words are more heavily weighted. Her words rang true to the importance of family and love and how they are infinitely connected: “It is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs.”

They say it takes a village to raise a child. It does not. Rather, it takes my grandma to raise a village. By emulating love and the lessons from her faith into everyday life, my grandmother’s memory persists in the minds of many. The lessons taught through her love resonate in the memory of each individual touched. Collectively, one might call us a village. My grandma’s influence does not only remain in her family but extends to a wide range of people. It extends to the priest whom she listened to weekly, the homeless man that she clothed and fed, the neighbours down the street, the in-laws, the friends of her children, and so many more. Her influence is generational, as the lessons that she has passed on to her grandchildren are then emulated through them to children of their own. While she no longer lives on, her ability to shape and affect the village she raised continues to permeate our lives each and every day. They say it takes a village to raise a child, but rather, my nana has raised a village.

A Calm Front

ADAM MCQUEEN

I'VE NEVER been one to have a weak stomach or feel queasy, however at this very moment every fibre in my body is battling to prevent my gag reflex from triggering. Here I am, standing in a tunnel next to professional rugby players and legends that I've looked up to my entire life, yet not an ounce of excitement ran through my veins. I don't belong here; the coaches definitely have selected the wrong guy to be representing Canada. Surely there was a mistake and they'd intended to sign some other guy called Adam McQueen and not the scrawny eighteen year old who is currently set to run out onto the field. I can hear the murmurs of the crowd outside, drunken and excited to heckle at my impending failures. The tunnel provides protection for me. I don't blame them though; how is a kid that couldn't make the under-20 team six months prior suddenly fit to represent Canada at the senior men's level? I never took notice of my opponents before a game, however tonight I glance at the opposition beside me to see what's in store for me. It wasn't pretty. Each player is massive, incapable of shaving, and although they are a reasonable distance away I swear there is foam dripping from their mouths. I don't intend on visiting Uruguay anytime soon.

My teammates and I inch closer and closer towards the field. I'm on a death march with no alternative than to serve out my sentence

now. The field suddenly looms larger and larger. I'm nothing more than an insignificant fish within a vast, green ocean. The only other time I'd experienced this degree of nervousness was during a conversation I had not too long ago with my high school principal.

"I hear you were awarded captaincy on the weekend Adam," Mr Healy said, hovering over me. "I hope you're aware of the responsibilities that come with such a title. This school's rugby program is storied."

"Umm yes sir, I'm more than excited for this season. We've got some great athletes and hopefully everything can click once provincials kick off."

"You're right. I'm more than confident that you'll end this season on a far higher note than the last few years, but between you and me if we don't bring home a provincial title, then we've failed. No pressure," he winked. "We need bigger and better things now, can't keep being the big fish in a small pond, right?"

"Well we're just going to keep training hard and um, I mean hopefully the results will take care of themselves." I replied backing away slowly.

"Good to hear, you're a calm character and I know you'll meet these expectations," Mr Healy said, staring at me like a hawk.

The end of the tunnel was near, the floodlights shone brightly down upon the stadium, the stage had been set. My stomach was settling, but not without a few butterflies still fluttering around. Mixed within the flurry of cheers and boos I can see a group of young kids in the corner of my eye decked out in red and white clothing holding various signs that I can't quite read. As I start my ascent towards the field, each of them dangles their hands out desperate for a hi-five, smiles permanently cemented on their faces. Well, maybe a select few people are rooting for me, albeit under the age of eight. I creep out of the tunnel and stare directly in front of me, refusing to acknowledge the fans behind. Their gazes still manage to pierce the back of my head, sending shivers down my spine. It's weird to think that only a few months ago in a hotel only five minutes from here I was packing up to go home and ready to call it quits on rugby altogether.

I didn't even bother cleaning my training gear before chucking it into my suitcase. I just needed to get out of that hotel and hit the airport as fast as possible before any of my teammates noticed me. That way I wouldn't have to face the embarrassing hugs and insincere encouragement. "Tough luck man, you didn't deserve it" or "maybe next year." I knew I didn't deserve to be cut, yet I'm still stuck trying to make a 6 a.m. flight back to Calgary while those guys are getting the lotion ready for sunny old Chile! My phone wouldn't stop vibrating on my desk. I knew who it'd be.

"I got the news, you should've told me. Is everything okay?" Dad x

"Sorry, been busy packing. Everything's fine, disappointed but fine." Adam

"You've got next year too, don't worry about it things happen for a reason." Dad x

I felt weird responding, I'm not sure why. I mean it's not like the first thing I want to do is inform my Dad that I've failed on one of my lifelong dreams is it? Hey Dad, so cancel your vacation to Chile, lets hang out in Calgary instead! I went into the bathroom and brushed my teeth. I still felt dirty so I hopped into the shower to rinse off before I left.

As long as I never look towards the crowd I think I'll be fine, I'll get through this. Just focus on the game like nobody's watching and maybe I'll make it off the field alive. Then a booming voice suddenly echoes throughout the stadium speakers. "May you all rise to sing the Canadian national anthem O Canada." Shit. We all link arm in arm and stare straight at the thousands in attendance. There's no hiding now. The music blares as a small girl who barely makes it to my knees in height bellows out the opening lyrics. The stands erupt with passionate singing. This is special; no choir could top a performance like this! Adrenaline races through my veins. The stage is set. I'm ready for this. I can swim with these fish.

Belly's People

SCOTT MURRAY

THE STRETCH of businesses on Yonge Street in the “Yonge & Lawrence Village,” as it has so been dubbed, used to offer shoppers a unique array of goods and services. In the last ten years or so, the neighbourhood businesses have been transformed into a centre of quaint-poshness that caters primarily to the baby-boomer demographic. One business in particular has not transformed at all and defiantly stands in spite of its changing environment. In such a high-rent area, one address may see three businesses in three years, a testament to this one particular business’s endurance. The Yonge and Lawrence Village stretches 1.2 kilometres and runs from Yonge and Yonge Boulevard all the way down to the title intersection. On this stretch there are now six nail salons, twelve hair salons, eleven coffee and/or teashops, and three submarine shops, one of which, happens to be this previously mentioned business.

The name of a business is a crucial factor in determining the potential popularity and, therefore, the success of a business. The shop just previously mentioned is actually an immensely legendary sub shop in my neighbourhood that has the official name “The Belly Buster Submarine Shop”; however, it is more commonly known as “Belly Buster’s” or simply, “Belly’s.” The regular customers of the last forty years have graced the business by personalizing and shortening its name, similar to those who refer to McDonald’s as “Mickey-Dee’s.”

Again, like McDonald's food (though I am sincerely not trying to directly make the comparison), the smell of Belly's subs wafts into the streets, inducing cravings even a block away from the shop. When one walks in the front door, the smell is wonderfully overpowering, and the entirety of the store is taken in within seconds. Everything—the counter, the booths, and the walls—is orange and yellow. At the back of the shop lies “The Wall of Fame,” which has Polaroids of customers going all the way back from the seventies to the present, immortalizing these regulars and allowing them to stroll in ten, twenty, thirty years later and show their son, for example, what they looked like at fifteen years old eating their favourite local snack. Now, due to a lack of space on the “Wall of Fame,” every single last photo has been scanned and a digital slideshow of Polaroids, old and new, plays on repeat on two TV sets. Though patrons have lost the tangible experience of finding their photo amidst hundreds of others, the new digital “Wall” allows for every photo that has and has not been taken to be seen; according to Chris, longtime customers frequently watch the slideshow, which is on shuffle, for an hour or so, waiting to see if their picture will grace the screen for five seconds. People watch the “Wall of Fame”—half surprised, half-not—that this submarine shop has stood the test of time—especially, in the ever changing “Yonge and Lawrence Village.”

Since the first owner/manger, named Mario, opened the shop in 1974, *very* little has changed. In forty years, Belly's has had three owners who have all been religious when it comes to preserving the physical, traditional qualities of the shop itself, as well as the crucially apparent relationship with the regulars. From 1980 to 2004 a Greek man named Armis owned Belly Buster's and the shop's place as a neighbourhood hub was cemented. When Armis had to leave to go back home, he sold the precious institution to Chris Passilidis, who, by keeping up Belly's legacy, has seen an entirely new generation of regulars yearn for such legendary sandwiches as the Bacon-Combo and Meatball sub. While interviewing Chris, I was astounded to learn that one of the only things that has changed since he took over the reigns was the installation of a new wooden menu frame; the original menu options and pictures still remain. Even this seemingly trivial update was

met with playful hostility, as longtime regulars have always been quick to protest any change, whether overt or not. A strong level of conviction is a quality that any regular customer expects of a Belly's owner. Since he has no reason to have to defend his choices, Chris elaborated on the importance of preserving the shop and its history, most likely, for the sake of theatricality: "I go by that old saying: 'If it's not broken, don't fix it.'"

The patrons who are indebted to this commitment to tradition act as personally appointed ambassadors of Belly Buster's. When someone from out of town is visiting a group of friends in the Yonge and Lawrence neighbourhood, they will more than likely pose the question to the group that filters right through any otherwise trivial conversation: "What's Belly Buster's?" To those not familiar with the simple-but-elegant submarines and, in turn, the culture that accompanies purchasing them, Belly Buster's can seem like a quasi-religion—or at least, a sort of harmless cult. This notion is understandable when one compares a Christian's visit to church every Sunday to a teenager's weekly Friday night debrief at Belly's after a night on the town. When I was a first-time customer in my junior high school days, I likened the line-up of customers waiting for their glorious meal to churchgoers patiently awaiting communion. While Belly Buster's does see what Toronto Star writer Michele Henry calls an "older, well-heeled set who dine at more respectable hours, like lunchtime," the late-night rush of far less coherent customers consistently surprises the less-seasoned customers. It is a pleasant surprise, as the intoxicated exhibit their communal sense of discipline and control while waiting patiently for their meal. In his ten years of managing Belly's, Chris has never seen a single fight take place in the shop. A year ago, when a customer who was not a regular started a serious argument in line, Chris was free to continue taking orders while long-time patrons were more than willing to encourage the argument to be taken outside. Up and coming food stores cannot buy this level of respect and admiration.

I talked with Chris about the changing neighbourhood:

"So it's insane how many nail salons, espresso bars, and sushi restaurants are coming in, eh?" Chris chuckled and simply said, "You

think?” Even though he is fully aware of the growing chi-chi-poo-pooness of the local area that he has come to know so well through its residents, he is able to laugh at the transformation. And why shouldn’t he? Amid this new neighbourhood, Belly Buster’s can stick out like a mirage in the desert of sameness: a beacon for those who are nostalgic for the neighbourhood they grew up in.

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Thawed Ice

MARIA NADEEM

OPRAH SAID in an interview once “Biology is the least of what makes you a mother.” There were times in my tainted childhood where I often felt my mother was my mother by default and nothing more. I was an introvert as a child and nothing was more perfect to me than being left to my own devices alone in my room. My parents were usually impulsive in temperament which led to me shutting them out and wanting as little interaction as possible to save a headache. Each argument with my mother led to my anxiety going through the roof and her looking cold, confrontational, and from the “other team.” Ironically, around the same time—when I was about ten-years-old—I developed a phobia of my mother dying. It all started when a childhood friend lost her mother, and it went as far as me dreading my mother going to sleep because then I’d have to stay up all night checking to see whether she was still breathing. I grew out of this fairly quickly, but our volatile relationship only drew us further apart. Our fights would begin over the silliest of things and end in silent treatments lasting days, leaving us both raging. My father was caught in the middle of it all and it almost felt like a game to see which side he’d be on, which of course, left me feeling betrayed when he chose the “wrong” side.

This awkward and cumbersome relationship lasted until I was twenty. What changed it all was telling her about my boyfriend, Saad, whom I had been dating in secret for almost four years at that point.

That Valentine's Day, Saad had sent some flowers with an anonymous note which resulted in me scrambling to come up with countless coverup lies about how my best friend had sent it as a surprise, amongst other things. Eventually, unable to keep up with my lies—and my mother, being as clever and witty as she was had started to become suspicious—confessed to being with Saad for almost four years.

Saad became the topic of discussion every time we were alone and every afternoon we'd sit together to discuss just how amazing he was. She would ask how he was and how he treated me. "He is amazing, Mom. He's the best thing that happened to me." She would smile and say she was happy for us. Saad became our little secret since I had forbid her from sharing this with my father and three younger brothers. This all started to develop an overall closeness between us and I felt the ice thawing as we grew closer together. Typically I would dread waking up and having to deal with her, whereas now I began to look forward to her company. The occasional misunderstandings or silly fights with Saad were discussed and she would often talk about her relationship with my father and how early-on things are always patchy but with time the bond grows stronger. My mother and I were finally on the same team but what we did not realize was how much our lives were about to change.

That year my father accepted a dream-job offer from Saudi Arabia. It only meant that we were now relocating from Wisconsin to Saudi Arabia. It also happened that Saad would be visiting family in Qatar, a country within driving distance from Saudi Arabia. My mother decided this was the perfect time to meet Saad and arranged with my father, who was very strict about dating and so-called "boyfriends," to meet Saad. We moved, hesitantly, to Saudi Arabia and a few months later my parents drove to Qatar to visit Saad who would be leaving the next day for England to complete his engineering degree. My parents spent a weekend with Saad and the trip was a success. I was extremely grateful to my mother, the mastermind behind the big meeting, and was thrilled for Saad and I. Twenty-one days later, a few months before my twenty-second birthday, my father suddenly passed away.

The aftereffect of losing my father was gut-wrenching and physically painful. We had never seen this coming and my mother was a mess. The first six months were the hardest months of my life and I was devoted to being there for my mother and younger brothers. The aftermath of losing my father brought together the nuclear and extended family and became the glue to hold us together. Saudi law made it very difficult for expatriates to stay in the country without a sponsor, and since our sponsor was no more, there was very little time to wrap up our new life we so excitedly had begun. We had two uncles and their families who were settled in Saudi Arabia and we were fortunate enough to be able to move in with them. I went from someone who wouldn't stay in my bedroom unless the door could be locked to someone who had to share a room with cousins. I was forced to break down my walls and doing so surprisingly did not break me.

The few months before Father's demise my mother and I had begun to fight again. I had been back to locking my door and not coming out unless absolutely necessary. The ice, which had once thawed, had re-formed and had been as thick as ever. But going through the first death together and that, too, of our father—along with witnessing first-hand the effect of losing a life-partner of twenty-three years—changed something in me forever. My mother was no longer intimidating or cold, but vulnerable and delicate. My siblings and I stayed around her every moment and our collective goal had become to never let her cry. Seeing her sobbing uncontrollably made me realize how unfair life had been to her; she had been only fifteen when she lost her father, so she had seen first-hand what I was seeing then coincidentally at the same age as my grandmother lost her husband at the age of forty-five. Life had been very unfair to her and my siblings and I made it our mission to keep our mother as happy as possible. I realized in the process of having to stay strong for my family how much they, and she, needed me.

Life went on and we learnt to be happy again. It's been just over a year since my father's death and although it all comes back from time to time, she is better. I know just from a quick glance when she's about to cry or when she is uncomfortable. Seeing her in that stark human

state of grief made me realize how vulnerable and fragile she really was. Long gone was that intimidating and cold mother from my childhood. Instead here was my best friend. She is my rock but most importantly my mother, this time not just biologically or by default but in its purest sense. This was the mother who was born to be a mother and was the best at it. This was the mother with the heart of gold and as I now realized, did the best she could. Here was my hero.

Tipping Your Server

Unwritten Rule or Optional?

MELISSA NGUYEN

TODAY A girl told me that she does not tip because it isn't necessary. Not because the service was poor or that the food was bad, just simply because she did not consider it a necessary part of eating out.

Being a server, I didn't take this lightly.

I agree, she is right; it isn't necessary. It isn't necessary on the basis that no legal action will be taken against someone if that person does not tip, but it is necessary if said person doesn't want to seem like a horrible person.

First I'm going to start you off on some facts because not many people know this: a server's wage in Ontario is \$8.90/hr and minimum wage is \$10.25/hr (and about to go up). This varies from province to province and state to state (in America); however, the difference between a server's wage and minimum wage anywhere is significant. Why? Because the government believes that we, as servers, will break minimum wage with tips. 80% of our income comes from our tips because when the time to do our taxes rolls around, the government takes most of our paycheques. There is also the topic of tip-out. Servers at the majority of restaurants must tip-out a percentage of how much they sold that night. (No, not on the amount of tips we made, the amount that we sold.) For example, if we sold two thousand dollars in

one night and only made twenty dollars in tips, we'd be tipping out a certain percentage (usually around four percent) from nineteen hundred and eighty dollars. That is almost eight dollars—eighty dollars out of our own pockets because the tips we were given that night did not cover the amount that we had to kick out.

Serving is a difficult job; it is not as easy as many people who are not in the industry think it is. It isn't just pouring drinks, taking an order, and bringing the guests the food. It is that—times 20. We are doing all this for up to 10 tables, and there are at least 2 people per table. You can do the math. We're running around like a chicken with its head cut off trying to keep everyone happy: our guests, our managers, the kitchen staff, and the other servers. On top of all that, we've got our ongoing side duties to perform as well. I am not asking you to make up for non-existent tips; however, just cover for yourself and keep your eyes open to the reasons why your server may not be at your table every second. We also do a lot of behind the scenes work, such as cleaning and stocking the kitchen and server pantry.

If someone says that they cannot afford to tip then please, do not go out to eat! Save your money, and go buy some instant noodles for dinner! Nowadays, when going out to eat, a typical meal ranges from ten to thirty dollars, depending on where and what you ordered. If someone cannot be bothered to add the additional one to four dollars onto the bill, then that person probably should not be spending that money in the first place. Not only is that person spending money that said person should not be spending, that person just wasted an hour of my time. If in fact someone is paying a bill of over a hundred dollars, I'll admit, that is a lot of money to be paying for a meal; however, that person can clearly afford it and therefore, that person should be able to afford tipping.

Some people say that if tipping were necessary, then it would be included on the bill. Actually, some restaurants do do this, in the restaurant industry it is called gratuity and is a set amount that is included at the end of the bill. The majority of restaurants, however, give the guests the opportunity to tip according to the level of service. Contrary to what some may believe, gratuity and tip is not the same

thing. Gratuity is mandatory, whereas a tip is “not.” However, regardless of the service, you should still tip. An average tip is around fifteen percent. Exceptional service often results in a twenty percent tip or higher. However, if the service was poor, there are still fourteen numbers in between zero and fifteen. Tip somewhere between five and 10 percent. Servers need to live too. Do not, however, ever leave a one to twenty-five cent tip. This is considered a huge insult. I would much rather receive nothing than that; it is like a slap in the face. However, if the service was exceptionally awful, then leave a penny and a comment card to let the server know how to improve. There is really nothing worse than receiving nothing and not knowing why.

Some people don’t tip their friends and believe that if their friend is their server, tipping is not really necessary. Folks, your server friends are afraid to let you know this, but that is an unfortunate way of thinking. As your server we’re thinking, “Hey! They’re our friends, let’s try to keep them as happy as possible!” As your friend, your server will try even harder to impress you and keep you happy. We may spend even more time at your table than we should, leaving other tables to suffer. We will adhere to everything you ask because you guys are our chums! So all this, and you decide, “Well thanks buddy, see ya soon, here’s five dollars on an over hundred dollar bill of beers we just racked up.” Oh, and also, “Can you get us a discount?”

Let me tell you a story about a type of guest that I’ve come across many times in my line of work: The “The Customer Is Always Right” Guest. When a guest complains about the prices on the menu—which happens pretty often—my job is to smile and agree with exactly what they are saying (no matter how ridiculous). There was a woman I met the other day, when working a breakfast shift, who was complaining about our “overpriced menu.” I smiled politely and waited for her to finish. She then went on to say that she did not want toast, but however would like to know if she could substitute toast for avocado. I bit my lip as to not laugh at how ridiculous her request was. For sure she could substitute toast for avocado—for a price. That did not please her in the least. I’m sorry ma’am, but toast and avocado are not the same. There was a man the other day that came in and asked for a specific dish—a

dish that we did not have. I smiled politely and tried to explain to him that we did not have that particular dish and suggested a few similar alternatives. He then tried to convince me that he had seen the dish on the menu just last week and asked me to go check again to see if actually we did not have the dish. I decided to give him a minute; however, once I returned and told him again that we did not carry the dish, he demanded to see a manager. I'm sorry sir, but I do know the menu by heart—it is my job.

Next time you go to a restaurant look around for the neediest, loudest, messiest tables that you can find and they are usually the ones that tip the least—think about how you would handle being their server and having to remain peppy and calm with all of your other tables at the same time.

Thank you to all those who tip your servers and I hope that this has put tipping into perspective and gives you a more informed decision when tipping.

House of Dreams

JASMINE NICHOLS-PIESIK

THE HOUSE I grew up in was an important place for me. It was a home full of magic and wonder; dreams came alive there, fantasy was real. It was my house of dreams. That is what I loved about being a kid; you could be anything and do anything in your mind, the possibilities seemed endless. I remember this so well, in fact, I remember it like it was yesterday.

When I was younger I wanted to be peter pan; I wanted to fly and be young forever. There was something about being grown up that I didn't like. The adults around me always seemed to complain about life; nothing seemed to go right for them. There was an old lady who was friends with my mother, she would come to our house. Her clothes were prim, yet the coloured patterns on her dress were faded. She always wore these old rustic shoes that tapped whenever she marched into our kitchen. She told me once, "Don't grow up *too* fast. Before you know it, you're my age with nothing left to do but think about the good old days." Her words got ingrained into my mind. Being old sucked and I better hold onto my childhood, because it comes and goes and before I know it, I'll be her age.

I did grow up. I could no longer hold onto this idea of being peter pan. The magic world that I created as a kid slipped away. My house of dreams came crashing down; all the pieces faded away into nothing. This is how I felt when I was fourteen. I realized that I had to take

responsibility for my life and my actions; being carefree would no longer be an option.

There was a conversation that I had with my dad. It changed my pessimistic, bleak outlook on life. I remember it well, it was a summer day. I was fourteen and I was going to start high school in the fall. Time would go by fast and soon after that I would graduate and then go to university; after that I would enter the real world. It all seemed too overwhelming for me to think about. I tried to picture myself in some office dressed in all black being professional, being adult like, but for some reason couldn't. It didn't seem like a life I wanted, in fact I feared it.

My dad saw me sitting by a sandbox; one that I used to build sandcastles in. "What are you thinking about?" he asked me. I answered solemnly "life." I reached for the sand, playing with it in my hands. It glistened in the sunlight, there was something intrinsic about it. I used to pretend it was fairy dust, but now it was just sand. "I wonder what I will be like when I'm older. Will I still be me now, or will growing up change who I am?" I dropped the sand back down, it hit the sandbox hard. My dad looked at me, "of course you will be different, hopefully a little wiser," he laughed. "I'm just kidding, you can be whoever you want to be when you are older. No one said that growing up meant you stopped having fun." My eyes shifted from the sandbox to him, "really? I thought all adults hated life, or it seems that way to me." My dad told me this isn't true. Not everyone who is an adult hates life. In fact he said to me, "I enjoy my life and look how old I am," he laughed again. There was something about his sense of humour that made me feel better. If he could find things in life funny, then maybe being grown up wasn't so bad?

He explained to me that when he was growing up a lot of things had changed. The values of his parents' generation were being questioned. My dad said that the hippy counter-culture had a huge influence on his personal beliefs and values. "It was about questioning your parents, what they believed, trying to find your own sense of self. It was about utilizing creativity, and most importantly living your life," my dad said to me. Being creative was important to him and it was

something he wanted to instil in me. “Don’t stop being creative. When you do, you stop living, stop making things that are new. Some say it’s all been done before, but it never is. Your imagination is unique to you.” Being creative was something that I was good at, and my dad encouraged it. I loved to paint, draw and make up stories with my younger sister. Maybe that’s why I always gravitated towards activities that pertained to the arts more than anything else.

I realized that maybe I was wrong about this whole growing up thing, maybe it wasn’t so bad after all. “To be an adult is to accept responsibility for your actions, but you can still have a youthful spirit,” my dad told me. He looked back at me, his facial expression had become more formal. “You know when I was your age, I was *very* serious. I didn’t have a sense of humour; I wasn’t a funny person.” I started to fiddle with the sand again, I avoided his eyes. It was strange to picture my dad as a very studious, serious, by the book type of person. “I guess you could say I was an adult when I was a kid, and a kid when I was an adult.” He laughed—I laughed too.

There was something comforting about that conversation. I realized you didn’t have to be this serious unhappy person as an adult. The way you live, the way you act is *your* choice. Bitterness comes from trying to go back, wanting things to be the way they used to be. Being happy and carefree was accepting who you are now, and loving that person. My dad taught me that being grown up and being responsible were two different things. Growing up didn’t mean letting go of being spirited; it was more about attitude, the way you handle things in life. I smiled and continued to play in the sand. I started to build mini castles, my little houses of dreams.

Following A Day Unlike Any Other

EMILIE NOLAN

IT WAS May 11, 2009. It was a day like any other: I arrived at school a few minutes too late, I floated between my classes, chatted with the girls who I considered to be friends, glared at those I didn't. Lunch time was the social hour and on this particular Friday, I made after school plans with Emily Rojas. It was that kind of ordinary day that your mind files away and forgets. It was the kind of day that gets clumped into a general memory of one's high school experience.

That afternoon at Emily's house we were likely perusing the new and exciting Facebook. At 4 O'clock my daily phone call came from my mother, Fiona. I have been talking to my mother at 4 O'clock every weekday for as long as I can remember. This is the lull in her day between meetings that she lends to touch base with her three children. The questions usually include, but are not limited to: "Where are you?" "What are you up to?" "What do you want to do for dinner?" These questions would roll out naturally and in a manner that I expect. Her tone would vary from pleasant to harsh depending on the day. At this time, Fiona was an executive director at ABC News. This was no easy position and she regularly came home exhausted and if my selfish teenage brain allowed it, I would occasionally feel bad for her. The pressures of her job made her difficult and sensitive on the weekdays so, most of the time I was less than empathetic.

The 4 o'clock call rang in and I picked up quickly. I answered, armed with my responses, but was stricken by her words. "I need you to come home." Usually this sort of demand would signify that I was in trouble but, today I knew I was not in trouble. I probed her about why she was home so early, what was going on, and received no answers. I was simply told that my father was coming to retrieve me. When my father, the usually beaming figure that served as a constant comic relief, picked me up from Emily's, he was nearly silent. I figured someone was dead; I was coming home to be told that someone in my family had passed. I tried to hypothesize who may have passed, which only made me more anxious. We pulled up to our white-washed Colonial home and I rushed in, slamming the Volvo door behind me. I found my mother sitting at the kitchen nook that served as our family's reception desk. This little space housed our phone, bulletin board, and countless messages scribbled on pieces of paper. Although this tiny space was hardly a location, it felt like the heart of our home, the hub of the Nolan family's goings on. And here my mother was, sitting at the nook, at the heart of home, with an expression on her face I had never seen before. Her densely freckled, porcelain Irish skin was not its usual warmth. It was pale and cool. My father joined us in the kitchen, standing close to her. Very simply, and as composed as she could be, Fiona told me, "I have stage two breast cancer."

If any moment of my life seemed like it was plucked from movie, it was this one. Time slowed and I slid down the wall to the ground. In one fluid movement I went from upright to contracted, with my head buried into my knees. This reaction was the most organic and impulsive surge of emotion I had ever felt. There was no processing or understanding. It was the purest reaction to the most devastating news I had yet received as a fourteen year old. My mother and father held me as I sobbed.

The following hours and days were spent learning, digesting, and asking as many questions as I could think of. A few days earlier my mother had taken a day off from work to undergo a minor procedure that she had told me was cosmetic. I had thought little of it, slightly scoffing at the thought of cosmetic surgery, but this procedure was

actually to remove the tumour that had sprung up in her right breast. On this day, that suddenly was unlike any other, my mother received the news it was cancer, and only four days later, she underwent a lumpectomy and lymph node removal. We came to learn that her diagnosis was triple negative. This means that the cancer did not express genes for three common receptors which also means that it is more difficult to treat because most chemotherapy targets one of the receptors. Fiona, this fiery, powerful woman was met with an equally powerful cancer. My mother would have to undergo a combination of different chemotherapies. Chemotherapies. This word went from a foreign concept to something that was discussed regularly in our home. This word, this thing, this disruption, began on July 13, 2007, one day shy of Fiona's fifty third birthday.

One might predict this story to end with me chronicling how our happiness declined because of my mother's illness, or how it turned our life on it's head, or how it seemed to break her spirit. It doesn't. We still fought with each other regularly, and made peace just as often. We still walked around the mall on Saturdays and watched mind-numbing television on Sundays. She never halted her career or put her life on hold because of her illness. My mother's courage never wavered and her spirits never dampened. Even when buzzing her thick hair or injecting herself with needles at home, she did not flinch. But that's just it: That's my mother. Vivacious, vibrant and victorious. Through three different rounds of chemotherapy, thirty six radiations, and a year of uncertainty, she is no worse for the wear. She is the epitome of perseverance and seven years later, she is still serving as my biggest inspiration, loudest cheerleader, and best friend. Friday, May 11, 2007 is a day that will remain in my memory as a day unlike any other. Despite the impact it had, however, the days that followed returned to normal, and that is because of my mother's approach to any and every obstacle. If I could only take one lesson from my life as my mother's daughter, it would be that one single day does not define your life. Your life is defined by the way you approach the days that follow the day that was unlike any other.

I Am Myself

TARA OLIPHANT

I CAN'T remember a time when I didn't follow my older sister. One of my earliest memories is of my dad asking me what I'd like for lunch in a restaurant. I gazed up at him, my thoughts dissolving like snow in sunshine. "What's Melissa having?" was all I could come up with. My mom didn't help matters; she dressed me like my sister, cut my hair like my sister, and took me to the same lessons as my sister. Did she even realize there were two of us?

I know that being the youngest child in my family doesn't make me unique. One thing that everyone shares is that we are either the oldest, middle, youngest, or only child. As the youngest in my household, I initially felt I had a tremendous advantage. I was the cute one, the funny one, and the one everyone wanted to cuddle. I could count on my older sister to break new ground and make things easier for me when my turn came. I played freely in the park, climbed trees like a monkey, and tried new things without fear, all because she'd done everything before me. However, I soon learned that the easy path comes with a price; I was never the *first* one to accomplish anything. The praise I got was more along the lines of "Now you can do it too!" rather than the amazement that greeted my sister's milestones. I needed an identity of my own, and a chance to figure out what that would be. (And it wasn't going to be "the little sister"!)

Many of us have to overcome difficult family situations. Financial struggles, health issues, the loss of a loved one, the breakdown of a marriage; everyone has something. With respect to birth order, there are well-established stereotypes that influence families. We've all heard that only children are like lone wolves and have difficulty relating to their peers. The oldest is the serious, "responsible" one. The middle feels ignored and acts out to get attention. The youngest is easygoing, affectionate, somewhat irresponsible and possibly spoiled and manipulative in their desire to be acknowledged. While there are many issues that can create bias in the way we are raised, birth order in particular seems to predestine us to develop specific traits.

Some situations are so significant that they overshadow the impact birth order has on our personal identity. I spoke to a friend whose childhood was enormously influenced by her parents' troubled relationship. She said she often lived in fear and was forced to relocate and change schools many times. She explained, "I wasn't able to make friends because we moved so much." She found a way through these unhappy circumstances by making a small number of very close friends and involving herself in activities that kept her busy and engaged. Although she is a youngest child like me, the magnitude of her family issues seem to have minimized the effect that birth order has had on her.

I think I was lucky. While some of my peers were coping with major life challenges, I was discovering myself in a safe and happy home. I got to decide how to decorate my own room (pink, with flowers and hummingbirds) and I was really proud of the way I kept it tidy. I had a place for all my books, my toys, and my clothes. My bedroom was my own tiny castle. No one could come in without knocking, not even my parents! I was pretty talented in the playground as well. I could do just about anything the boys could do on the jungle gym. I also loved working with my dad and was always his "little buddy" when he needed help. I could hand him a screwdriver or run for a garbage bag. It was great! He was the first to provide me with special jobs that set me apart from my sister. However, my dad was not the only one who realized I had a need for unique opportunities.

My Grade Six English teacher, who also taught my sister, recognized that I was being overshadowed. She advised my parents to consider putting me in similar, but different activities. She suggested, “When you go skiing, perhaps Tara could try snowboarding. When everyone is waterskiing at the cottage, perhaps Tara could wakeboard.” My parents really took that advice to heart. Suddenly, I was learning the violin instead of the piano, playing baseball instead of soccer and, of course, snowboarding and wakeboarding. I could do things that no one else in my family was doing, and my confidence and sense of self grew as my own capabilities were recognized, nurtured and celebrated. I felt like a superstar!

I didn’t entirely escape my “little sister” identity. At a very young age, I figured out that I could hang around with my sister and her friends as long as it was to their advantage. My sister would say, “Go and ask mom if we can have ice cream. She never says no to you!” (Remember, I was the cute, helpful one, and that probably still works in my favour.) I continued to follow my sister through school, and even ended up choosing the same university and same program as her. (What does that say about my sense of identity?) We still do many of the same things, but I like to think that we approach them in very different ways.

While my role as the youngest child is still very real in the context of my family, it has become a minor part of how I identify myself everywhere else. I understand my own talents and how I relate to others, and I make my own plans for the future. While none of us can avoid the specific circumstances of our childhood lottery, we can have people in our lives who help us discover our own voice and our unique place in the world. I still like to be helpful, but my desire to improve the world around me has become one of my core values instead of a way to follow someone else. I don’t feel that I’m predestined to fit any particular stereotype, and I can now order my own lunch with confidence! I am myself, and I’m pretty happy with who that is.

The Business of Tomorrow

CHRIS PATRICIAN

THREE SHARP blasts from the referee's whistle signal the end of the game; the excitement gets the better of everyone as we rush the field and embrace one another in celebration. An early November win would be a first for many and a memory that unlike the very field we play on would not succumb to the deterioration of time.

Thinking back, I can't remember the exact reason I chose to transition to the contact sport of football from my soccer upbringing. The switch, however, has led to some of the best times of my life. These last eight years have provided me with memories, friendships, and experiences that I wouldn't trade for the world. Something about this sport has kept me coming back year after year and provided a family I can count on. You would think that an eight year stint of the same sport and a five year career of a similar routine would get repetitive and monotonous, but the excitement and anticipation I felt for each Saturday during the fall was something that kept me coming back. It keeps everyone coming back. Although Saturday means game day, some Saturdays are more important than others.

It was Friday, and a Friday in the fall semester means the day before the game. The week of preparations was coming to a close, and all that stood between the team and game day was a light walk through practice to help fine-tune preparations. I arrive at Richardson Stadium in the early afternoon to see the stadium getting outfitted with bright

banners and signs for the game tomorrow. Heading into the change room there is an air of relaxation and preparedness. However, if you sit and observe long enough you can feel the nerves and anticipation around you, even if it is clouded with the distractions of a playful attitude. Being in my fifth year, I know the routine of suppressing the excitement and nerves of game day for as long as possible.

Heading out for practice I can feel the cool winter air and damp ground beneath me; clues to the conditions I will be playing in tomorrow. A warm day full of sun would have been preferred, but the cold reminds me of how far we have come and how close we are. The cold represents a season that began in the warmth and permits only the strong to remain in the cold. All the jokes and relaxed attitudes mask the emotions we feel and live for; game day is close and we can all feel the energy.

Stories of pregame rituals are usually kept to oneself; it's something we do for ourselves not others. The receiver dinners are not as much a ritual as they are a tradition. Going out on Friday night for dinner with your boys is something that not only helps take your mind off the anxiety and anticipation you've been feeling all day, but it gives you a chance to further bond with the guys you spend every day with. The pregame rituals made famous by superstitious athletes can border on lunacy; however, the loony deep within us doesn't breathe air until closer to game time. For now it's still Friday.

Falling asleep before the game is like trying to settle a rowdy child; the tantrum inside my head just won't stop. All the information on the other team mixed with the anticipation and nerves about success, failure, and mediocrity swirl around like a tornado wreaking havoc on my mind. Sleep eventually comes, but it's never as good as it needs to be.

Waking up Saturday morning isn't the same in the fall. There is something intangible in the air that you can feel but can't quite place. The nervousness, however, is a thing that hovers like a heavy morning fog. Making the same breakfast I make every home game is more about the process than actually enjoying the meal. It will be the only thing in my stomach for the rest of the day. I proceed to shower and then don a

shirt and tie; it's a business day. Quoting the 70's band Bachman Turner Overdrive, Saturday is reserved for taking care of business.

I like getting to the stadium early; it gives me a sense of calm. The stadium is all ready for the game busy with media trucks, gates, and volunteers all in attendance. The process of getting ready is more than just putting on equipment; it is a routine that gets you in the right mindset. The rituals, although small, bring that extra level of preparation that get you mentally set to go. Making sure I have the right message written on my towel for the game, have listened to that certain special song that stands out from the rest, and given myself the all important solitary moment to mentally prepare. It allows you to think, visualize, and more importantly get the blood flowing. Preparing for the game is like the calm before a storm; there will be no dramatic acts of emotion out of me. In its place is a state of composure. A state of mind that ignores the stresses in my life and lets me concentrate on the task at hand; beating Guelph.

The quiet I convey in pregame should not be confused with relaxation, rather the opposite. The anticipation leading up to kickoff is something you can only experience; like falling, you just can't explain it. This moment comes closer with the start of warm up. The music in the air, the jersey on, and the opposition mere yards away is like the tremors felt before an earthquake, you know its coming, and when it does, all hell is going to break loose.

The locker room is a different place from 24 hrs ago; everyone's tuned in, ready, excited, nervous. The thesaurus doesn't have enough terms to describe the feelings one has during these moments before the game. Feelings that have been pent up inside me over the last week, the last year, my whole career, seem to skyrocket when your name is called in front of thousands of screaming fans. The culmination of all the hard work is upon me and this is the only place I want to be at this moment.

My grade eight teacher was adamant about remaining still until the last note of the National Anthem was sung. It is something I have held true to; not only out of respect but because once that last note is sung I know its time to go. Time to bring a five-year career at Richardson Stadium to an end. Time to stamp my ticket to the Ontario Finals and

one-step closer to the goal, the dream that I've had for five years. At this moment, in early November, Guelph is the only thing is standing in the way. It's time to go, it's time to play, it's time to believe, it's time to win... it's game time.

An Unusual Immigration Story

MAYA PRABHU

“I SAW it, Maya. I saw Canada before I even arrived.”

I sat perched on the very edge of the creaky oak chair, my ten-year-old ears eager for details or an explanation. “What, Dad? What did you see?”

It was the thirtieth anniversary of my father’s immigration to Canada, and he decided to tell me all about his experience. I, however, was not prepared for such a surprising story. He really did see it. Canada, that is. Though at the time, he didn’t realize that it was Canada.

It was two in the morning in Bangalore, India. My fourteen-year-old father woke up covered in a cold, sticky sweat, clenching his cotton sheets in clammy fists. He had just had the most vivid dream. In fact, it was probably less of a dream and more of an image. A clear, detailed image. He reached for his nightstand, knocking over a silver alarm clock as he scrambled to find his pen and spiral-bound journal. The image was so striking that he felt the need to write down exactly what he saw: a bright blue motorcycle leaned up against a bungalow covered in weathered, peeling paint. A yellowing picket fence lined a property that was overgrown with curly weeds. Two extremely tall buildings stretched towards thick, gloomy clouds. Facing the buildings was a sort of wooden sign that spun like a windmill. On it were two engraved letters: AP. Coincidentally, these were my father’s initials.

My father awoke to the chattering of Bangalorean parrots. He excitedly told my grandmother about his strange vision as they ate breakfast. He provided every detail, from the motorcycle to the tall buildings to the wooden sign. My grandmother nodded, smiling, but did not see that the dream held any significance. She could not even picture the two tall buildings, as they had nothing of the kind in their small Indian town. While she did listen to my father, she thought nothing of the dream.

A couple of months later, my grandfather came home with great news. He had been offered a job at an engineering firm in Ottawa, Canada. A new job opportunity, and especially one that was overseas, was completely unexpected. My grandfather shook his head in both disbelief and delight, and told his family that he had accepted the position. The entire family of six had mixed emotions. While they were upset at the thought of leaving their current lives and their dearest friends, they were also enchanted by the idea of a brand-new, Canadian life. They had visions of huge Western shopping malls, busy highways filled with modern cars, and theme parks like the ones they had seen on television. Within a few busy weeks, all necessary arrangements were made and three large suitcases were packed. My father's family could leave with only seven hundred dollars, as this was the maximum withdrawal permitted by the Indian government. They departed their homeland with bags in their hands and hope in their hearts.

Twenty hours later, my grandparents and their four children arrived at their new apartment. It was situated in a lower class area in Ottawa, but it was all that the family could afford. My father dragged his tattered suitcase up several flights of dusty stairs until he reached his new bedroom, which he would be sharing with his eight-year-old brother. Exhausted from the flight, he groaned as he threw his heavy suitcase onto the bed. He made his way to his large, bright window and pulled back striped beige curtains. What he saw made his lower jaw tremble.

A bright blue motorcycle leaned up against a bungalow covered in weathered, peeling paint. A yellowing picket fence lined a property that was overgrown with curly weeds. Two extremely tall buildings

stretched towards thick, gloomy clouds; my father later learned that these were called skyscrapers. Facing the buildings was a sort of wooden sign that spun like a windmill. On it were two engraved letters: AP. It turns out that this was a sign for a grocery store.

I tightly gripped the arms of my wooden chair, leaning towards my father in search of answers. “Dad, what do you mean?! Is this a joke? Are you psychic?” My dad didn’t quite know how to respond.

I was only ten years old when I heard my father’s story, but I catch myself thinking about his psychic experience to this day. My father often tells this story to new friends, or reminisces and laughs about it with family. As wine is poured or food is served, his story often resurfaces and never fails to attract attention. For me, however, his story has always been more than an outlandish “believe-it-or-not” story told at dinnertime solely for the purpose of entertainment. Instead, the story surprises me because it is the last thing I would expect to hear from my rational and sensible father. My father is, and always has been, incredibly sceptical. He is a man who is rooted in science; he sees everything as true or false, fact or lie, black or white. After his experience, he continued life as a man of science and never looked back. Though he moved on, he still stresses the sincerity of his story. It was not a lie. It happened.

There is no one I trust more than my father, and for that reason I still have trouble passing off his story as a lie. In fact, his experience has even made me consider the idea of fate. Was my father destined to come to Canada? Was it planned by someone? While it is fascinating to consider this, I have accepted that there is no answer as to why my father saw Canada before his arrival. For now, his experience will merely remain an amusing dinnertime tale.

My Big Brother

PAIGE RANDALL

WHEN THE telephone rings in the middle of the night it is rarely a source of good news. In September of 2010 my parents were jolted awake by a phone call at two in the morning. I was on a flight to Japan at this time so when the phone rang my parents instantly felt fear that something had happened to me, but it was a long distance call from my brother at university. He was calling because his university house had thrown a party and police were involved so he wanted to tell my parents right away. When the conversation about the party ended he somehow blurted out the fact that he was gay. My mom instantly burst into happy tears because she was overjoyed that he was finally comfortable enough to tell them. I am pretty sure they already knew and would be totally fine with it. As my mom likes to say, “He’s tall, he’s handsome, he’s gay, he has brown hair, etc., etc.” I knew long before my parents knew through word of mouth at my school, and I longed for the day that he would finally tell my parents so I would not have to worry about saying something to give away his secret. For a time I thought I might be an old woman before he finally got it out into the open. When I found out that he was gay, it did not change anything about our relationship because he was still the same Keenan, whether he liked girls or boys.

On July 1, 1991 an amazing person was born into the world, my brother, Keenan. Three years later I was born. Just like many other

children with older siblings, I looked up to my brother, constantly trying to imitate the things he was doing and always seeking his approval. During my childhood and even through my preteen years, I based my views of the world through my brother's eyes. Keenan was the older sibling so to me he held all of the knowledge in the world. I have always thought very highly of my brother. He seemed to be talented at everything he did, which just added to how great I thought he was. Of course we got into fights, as siblings do, and I blamed him for things that got mysteriously broken or random messes around the house. Despite those typical brother-sister arguments, however, we have always been close since there are just the two of us and we are only a short three years apart in age.

I always like to think that I believed in equal rights for all since the day I was born, but perhaps my fierceness to protect those rights became more pronounced once I knew it was personal and my brother would have to deal with narrow-minded people his entire life. Ever since my brother came out, I find myself sticking up for LGBTQ people, same sex marriage and equality for all. I buy rainbow scarves and when I hear someone say something like "that's so gay" my blood boils. My brother's sexuality has also led me down the educational path that I am on right now, which is a major in Gender Studies at Queen's University. As I am sitting in my lectures I find it interesting and empowering to learn about gay people and gay rights because to me it is a fascinating topic.

Ever since he was a little boy my brother excelled at every sport he ever played: basketball, soccer, hockey, volleyball, rugby, he was amazing at them all. It was like living with an Olympian! He was athlete of the year in his elementary school and high school and he also obtained extremely high marks in all of his classes. Keenan said he realized he was gay in grade six, yet he kept it a secret until he was nearly nineteen years old. Being in school, especially high school can be tough for anyone, especially for someone who is gay. As the captain of every sports team he did not feel comfortable coming out. I think he feared that his friends and teammates would not accept him for who he is. If he came out, would his friends still like him? Would they still

want him to be the captain of their team? Would they look at him differently? When I think back to my high school experience, people were constantly using terms and phrases like “that’s so gay” and “fag” and I cannot imagine how my brother would have felt hearing these terms and knowing inside of him that he was gay. It breaks my heart to think of him, or anyone, walking into the cafeteria and hearing the whispers and snickering of the Neanderthals who still think we’re in the Dark Ages. I have never asked him exactly how he felt growing up gay and not feeling like he could tell his friends and our family, but I can only imagine how difficult it would have been for him to keep something as big as his sexuality a secret.

It is ironic how as a young girl I had this older brother to look out for me and protect me from the injustices of the world, or at least the playground, and now here I am standing up for him. I want the world to know that everyone should have the right to love whomever they choose and everyone should be granted the same rights. Without true equality, what kind of world is this? I also want everyone in the world who is struggling with their own sexuality to know that there are people who love and support them. There are Gay Straight Alliances at many schools in Ontario now, and they should be implemented at schools around the world. These clubs and groups help to provide the support needed for LGBTQ students to be able to be comfortable and open about who they are. My hope for this story is to help someone who reads it know that they are not alone. I want the arms of acceptance to wrap around them in an embrace so they can feel the love and have the confidence to be who they are.

Tailored to Perfection

JESSE REITBERGER

YOU NEVER forget the first time you walk into his shop. The cracked sidewalk on the eastern side of the building tries to swallow your shoe. Then you approach three slanted steps that are surprisingly treacherous during the winter. Overhead there is a forest green sign with golden letters that spell out *Serafino Falvo Custom Tailors*. The letters are spelled out in cursive writing that give the sign a level of sophistication that comforts as well as impresses. You open his door, made out of gold and glass, and a bell goes off. The sound is warm and inviting. The front of his shop breathes simplicity; there are spools of fabric, neck ties hanging on a rack, a glass booth filled with pocket squares, cufflinks and fashion drawings. Lastly, you notice great works of art hanging from the wall: “The Black Pinstripe Banker,” “The Navy Blue Lawyer,” “The Grey Accountant,” and “The Prince’s Tuxedo.” Out from the back room steps an elderly gentleman and with a big smile and a thick Italian accent he says, “What can I do for you today?”

As Serafino greets you, a new customer, you feel like you are the first customer he has ever had. You, along with all of his first time customers that preceded you, ask how much it would cost to get a suit made. Serafino will reply to that question the same way every single time. A small chuckle, a big smile and he will say “It doesn’t matter the price of the suit. All that matters is the quality of the suit.” He says it

in a way that sounds like he is joking, but it is clear he is telling you exactly what he believes. He is a conversational genius and within minutes you are no longer feel like a customer instead you feel like an old friend. He will show you fabrics that he thinks will look good on you, he will show you how to build a wardrobe, and he will show you how to pick a tie that will tie you to his shop for life.

Serafino manufactures suits like Ferrari manufactures cars. While you are there getting measured for your suit you will meet and hear about Winnipeg's "royalty." The conductor of Winnipeg's symphony orchestra can be found there some Saturday mornings. But in his shop Serafino is the one who keeps the conductor looking sharp instead of flat. As you are being measured you realize you still do not know how much the suit is going to cost you. Naturally you ask again this time he says, "This is a \$3000 suit," immediately you want to faint but then he says "We are doing a special today and I'll make it for you for 1300\$." You immediately want an explanation as to why it is so expensive. He will give you the best explanation ever. Like a poet, Serafino will make you fall in love with him and his clothes. His words will convince you that he is the real deal and there is nobody like him in town. He tells you that you can go to Moores, Tip Top Tailors or The Bay and get a suit off the rack. He will tell you that the suit will not fit them properly and will only last a couple years. Within a couple of years the colours will fade and the initial savings you gained through buying a cheap suit off the rack will turn into a headache of sartorial problems. Further, he will tell you that you are not to pay him until you say "wow" after trying on a suit he has made for you. Once you get your suit Serafino will take the fabric out of his store so that your suit is one of a kind and he will inform you that all alterations needed for that suit are free.

From the day you get measured to the day your suit is complete, a week passes. Much like a child's first day at school a man's first time trying on the perfect suit is exciting and scary all at the same time. The second time enter Serafino's store is a lot like the first time. You walk in, the buzzer goes off, suits hang from the wall, he comes out from the back room and like he has never seen you before he asks, "What can I do for you today?" Then he recognizes you and remembers you are

there to try on your suit. His expression as he dashes to the back to fetch your suit puts you in mind of a kid running down the stairs to open presents on Christmas day. Serafino brings you your new suit. The fabric is stunning. You try the suit on. Serafino throws a tie around your neck. You look in the mirror and immediately say “WOW!” At this point you realize you have never looked so good in your life. Serafino will be standing behind you chuckling; he knows he is the master. After you finish admiring yourself in the mirror, you realize you want more suits and shirts and pants made for you by this man. You also realize he is in his later years and will not be around forever to make your clothes. You begin to realize there are no people who could take his place professionally or as a person. He always says “while I still breathe I will keep making your suits!” and they will be tailored to perfection.

Addiction

SHAWNA RICH-PORTELLI

IT'S THE first experience, the first toke, first swig, first injection, first lust, first purge, first anything. That's all it takes—just one and you're hooked. Not because you want to be dependent on something or someone, but because you become addicted to being addicted. It becomes your crutch, escape, lifeline, and place to hide. You cannot help but want to be addicted, although it is the last thing that you want; once you get over one addiction, you become addicted to another, and that is my personality. It is what I deal with every day: the addiction to being addicted, the addiction of control, the addiction of an internal battle between moral and immoral, good and evil, happy and sad, healthy and unhealthy. Each day is a battle and I choose who wins. I choose to either let myself be in control or let my addiction control me. People believe that an addict is someone who continues the repetition of an activity, despite both the physiological and neurological consequences. This fact is true: it's something I cannot control whether or not I want to. Sometimes I sit and I hope and I pray that I can make the right decision that I'll get over my addiction. However, there are other times, darker times, when I cannot wait to get the next fix, and it doesn't even matter what that fix is. The only thing that matters is that I am the only one who can choose to give in or not. I am in complete control, or so I think.

Are you sitting there questioning what I am or have been addicted to? Pick your poison because I've been addicted to it all. I think the worst addiction is that of being addicted to another human being. I'm not referring to infatuation or love, I'm talking about being addicted to the way they treat you, whether good or bad. Being hooked on the way they smell, taste and feel. We all go through it to a slight degree, but others have this addiction heightened by experience, choice, self-esteem, and personality. And I, the girl with an addictive personality, feel the tug and pull of this most dangerous drug; this addiction reaches my very soul, it snakes its way into my brain and bloodstream. It reaches the core of my being. It makes my other addictions look pitiful, or is that just my perspective? I'll never know. All I know is that someone else controls the way I react and don't react, all I know is that someone else can either empower me or enslave me, and they choose the latter every time, whether it be a conscious decision or not.

Does this addiction affect my day? Yes, everyday it does. It correlates with other addictions to become all encompassing. It is as if the weight of the world is on my shoulders but I'm the only one who knows. I hide it well, very well; it's like a ghost. It's invisible to those around me; they cannot see it or tell that I am battling myself every day. But I'm continuously aware of its presence, like a cheap, lingering perfume or a strand of hair floating on the edge of my vision; this secret is my constant companion, an ever-present burden. It is ghostlike until I make it visible and known, until I hit rock bottom and realize that I cannot battle it alone, that I need help. Everyone would sit there and think that opening up is something to be commended for, but I sometimes question my feelings when I express my addiction. Am I ashamed or am I proud? Do I really think I have a problem, or is it just something that happens; am I too dependent on hiding in my addiction? These are all questions that pass through my head: am I really looking and reaching out for help, or is this another way for me to hide in my addiction.

When you are an addict lying is a part of the addiction. Lying is the one thing no addict can go without. They lie to themselves and to others to protect the affliction. Mostly, I lie when I give in. I will do

whatever it takes to seem perfectly fine, to be stronger than I am, to let no-one take control away from me. When others know about your addiction there is an opportunity to lose control; to give them the power because they have the knowledge of my addiction. Knowledge is power. You're held to a certain standard of accountability. That's when I lose control and it gets worse. It is what I lean on, where I hide when I cannot control anything else. I don't know what I would do if I lost control of this demon, if I wasn't the one in control of it and someone else was. The only thing I know is I would not take lightly to those trying to change me. If I am going to be okay, if I am going to heal I am going to do it on my own, without help. Or is that just another brick in a skyscraper of lies? Do I believe that so I can remain in control? These questions only time will tell.

Some say that addictions can be overcome, that they can be beaten. I've overcome multiple before, I know it for a fact, but it's about wanting to. Does a person have enough drive, do they want to face their challenges or do they want to cower away. Are they strong enough? Am I strong enough? Who knows, all I can do is take it day-by-day, step-by-step, and try to push forward. Relapses happen all the time, but the question remains do I want to get better? Do I want the old me back, to feel the way I once felt? Do I want to control my life or would I rather just focus and control my addiction? I guess we'll just have to see who wins, the beauty or the beast.

People Watching

LESLEY SHERMAN

IN A city of 8 million people, someone is always watching. As I navigate through the busy streets of London, my mind wanders and explores as I take part in the very common activity of people watching. Thoughts flow through my head like water flows through a river—*What a nice dress she's wearing. Oh, they look awfully tired. I bet he's cheating on his wife. Where is that child's parent?*—And as I speculate about others, I fail to appreciate that the same is probably being thought of me. People constantly surround us and there are pairs of eyes peeping from every which way without our knowing. I enjoy privacy, which I now know is impossible to have in a public space.

As humans, we're curious and it's very natural for one's eyes to wander. I find that it can happen almost anywhere—whether you're in a restaurant, a waiting room or even walking down the street. But for me, it was a Friday afternoon whilst on the tube. I thought I had been minding my own business, simply glancing about, ensuring I didn't make any significant eye contact, as that is typically unacceptable on the tube. Before nearly meeting a gaze with a man in a well-tailored suit reading the daily newspaper, I quickly lowered my eyes to the floor where they began to wander from one pair of shoes to the next.

I stopped to examine a pair of very weathered and worn brown boots, so worn in fact that there was a small hole at the toe of the right shoe. My eyes travelled upwards to see ripped grey tights and a

tartan skirt with stains on the hemline as if it had been dragged on the floor one too many times. I was looking at an unspeakably sad woman; her hair uncombed and teeth as yellow as the peel of a banana. She reached her brittle arm into one of her many frayed tote bags and pulled out a crumpled brown paper bag containing a glass bottle with a label reading "Smirnoff." She took a rather large gulp. I must have been looking for just a moment too long as she noticed how my eyes were glued to her. "Toothache," she said as she pointed to her jaw; but I didn't believe her.

There had been a shift in observing now. I could feel her eyes bearing into me, as though they were piercing my skin and it made me feel uncomfortable. She gazed towards my wrist, "Now that's a nice watch! Worthy of royalty, I'll bet!" the words stumbled out of her mouth in between coughs and heavy breaths. She frightened me, so I carefully slipped my hands into my purse, unclasped my watch and let it drop to the bottom, so there was absolutely no way she could grab it.

A fascinating consciousness of tension was created when she realized I had been watching her for the past few minutes. It was as if the train carriage was filled with thick smoke but only the two of us could see it. I didn't like this feeling at all; I preferred to examine her quietly in the small and private space in my head. I began to spin an entire backstory about her. I decided that she must live in the underground to keep away from the horrid weather of London, drinking alcohol to suppress her pain of being homeless and stealing and selling other people's belongings, like my watch, in order to buy food and other necessities. Was it complete nonsense or perhaps factual? To this very day, I still don't know.

As I exited the tube carriage, I was relieved but not fully satisfied. I was happy to leave a situation that had frightened me, but this woman also intrigued me. If only I had put aside that fear and started a conversation, maybe both the woman and I would be in better places. The universe seemed to sense my regret, and soon after, on two other Friday afternoons, I saw the woman with the weathered shoes, ripped tights, tartan skirt and frayed tote bags on the tube again. Our encounters were quite similar to the previous; I watched her and she

watched me. I had thought about asking her questions, finding out about her life and perhaps helping her if she needed any assistance; but every time the opportunity was presented, it was as if I had no courage left inside. Her image began to taunt me; it was as if my judgmental mind was reminding me to feel guilty. As I took my final glance at the woman (though I didn't know that at the time), she shouted, "If you look at me for a second longer, I'll end your life before mine!". Frightened, I picked up my things and found a new place, far away, to sit.

A few weeks had passed and I had forgotten about her. I was waiting on the platform at King's Cross, but they had announced a delay. This wasn't a normal delay like most Londoners are used to; it lasted much longer. Something must have been wrong. Rumours began to spread among the people on the platform, but ceased soon after as a woman's body was lifted from the tracks and carried away. Everyone was trying to get a look at whom it was; making sure it wasn't a loved one or someone they knew. I realized that it was Friday afternoon and a horrifying thought filled my mind. I began to move towards where they were carrying the body and though I could not see her face, I caught glimpse of a pair of weathered shoes, ripped tights and a tartan skirt that was almost dragging on the floor.

I stood in silence. I had never experienced such regret. If only I had not dismissed this woman on so many occasions, maybe this would not have happened. The characteristics that I had found so peculiar about her seemed to cause her much hardship and oppression. Perhaps if I had spent the duration of our few encounters getting to know this woman rather than examining her so carefully and so wrongly, she might still be alive today. Yet somehow, I knew I couldn't place all of the blame on myself; there must have been others who encountered this woman as well. And though telling this to myself had made me feel slightly better, at this moment, I had lost faith in humanity because in a world full of eyes so observant, we had all failed to see.

Synchro Dad

AISSLINN SHOVELLER

“**A**IS, ANGELA said to work on your stretching and extension in order to improve your marks in figures. Maybe you can try to do some stretching at home this week, okay?”

We were driving to my synchro practice, my dad and I, when he gave me the advice I had heard many times from my coach. I nodded my head towards him, reassuring him that I understood and would be taking his advice into consideration the next time I was in my room procrastinating on homework.

“How are you feeling in the pool these days? Almost ready to compete? You and Alison looked like you were getting better at your routine in practice on Sunday.”

“Yeah, there are a few parts of the routine that aren’t quite perfect, so we’ve been practising them a lot. There’s a long figure in the middle of the routine with a bunch of cranes and bent-knees, it’s a difficult bit, so we’re focused on that at the moment.”

It was Dad’s turn to nod his head to show his understanding. I was never completely sure that he understood what I was rattling on about but he had definitely learned parts of the synchro vocabulary. With all the various positions and techniques used in the sport, synchro really should have a dictionary all of its own. We continued talking about my goals for future practices until we arrive at the pool, relieving us of our attempts to understand each other through my sport.

My dad grew up on a sport entirely different from the graceful and showy sport of synchronized swimming. Raised in Sudbury, Ontario, a mining town in the northern part of the province with long winters, the only benefit of the colder months for many boys was the return of hockey. As Dad grew up with a brother who was almost ten years his senior, he was quickly pushed into hockey in order to, at the very least, help with target practice.

Dad's first child was a boy, Ben. To my father's delight, Ben took to hockey immediately. My parents claim that Ben's first word was "hockey," a romantic idea that I somewhat doubt. Father and son quickly bonded over the rough and tumble game, analysing all aspects of the sport in great detail the older Ben got. As the younger sibling, I was dragged around to all games and practices, witnessing the connection they found through hockey. Even when Ben became a teenager and there were fights between them, they could easily sit on the couch watching Leafs games and discussing how the Leafs could win the cup if they just did *this*. Hockey provided a common language and interest for them that they could relate over, even during their most turbulent years.

Mom eventually worried about my lack of physical activity during the winter and signed me up to do synchronized swimming. My involvement in synchro replaced them having to drag me to all of Ben's games and practices. Synchro became the first sport I truly fell in love with. I had done soccer and dance, even trying skating classes at one point, but none of them were ever *mine*. I was a chubby ten year old in a bathing suit with little experience and I loved it. My confidence as I grew up directly correlated to my time in the pool. After just 3 years of doing synchro, my family moved to Guelph, Ontario, for a new job opportunity for my mother. It was after this move that I discovered the true meaning of angst, at one point even writing in a journal that I would "never call Guelph home." Leaving all of my friends and teammates behind, the first time I felt a sense of home was in the pool in Guelph.

When my mother assumed her new job in Guelph, Dad assumed the new job of stay-at-home parent. This new position gave Dad and

me a lot of time in the car going to and from synchro practice. My chosen sport didn't necessarily come naturally to my father. In almost every sense synchro was the antithesis to hockey: judged competitions, graceful movements, and artistic style vs strategic plays, physical hits, and points-based games. While synchro epitomized femininity, hockey epitomized masculinity. So it's safe to say Dad didn't "get" my sport right away. This does not mean he didn't try.

Dad and my drives to practice allowed him ample time to learn the new language I spoke. My descriptions of my activities in the pool were likely the equivalent of me speaking Spanish to him; my language used the Latin alphabet but many words had entirely different meanings than what he was used to. But Dad was a diligent student. He took notes from what my coaches told him, relaying their messages to me in the car as if they had given him a cheat sheet of tips they weren't giving me. Dad used the time in the car with me like he used the time in the car with Ben: a chance to analyse and improve on our performance in our sport, whether he knew what he was talking about or not.

Then my dad became an elusive "synchro dad." A few years into my involvement in the sport, Dad joined the synchro board for my synchro club, becoming the only male member for most of my swimming career. Looking up into the stands from the pool, I often saw my dad chit-chatting with the synchro moms. Dad knew nothing about synchro when I first joined but his involvement and my involvement mirrored each other. The higher up in levels and the more hours I spent in the pool, the more involved my dad became, even meeting "the ladies" of the board on weekday nights I know he would have rather spent watching the Leafs play. Sacrificing time watching the Leafs in order to talk about the club's finances and future was a turning point in my view of my dad in my sport.

Early on I saw conversations like the ones we had in the car as silly because Dad didn't know what he was talking about. The more I swam, the more my dad tried to talk about synchro with me on our drives, something that felt like a regurgitation of my coach's critiques. After the first couple years in Guelph when my dad joined the synchro board, I realized that he was making an effort in a sport that had not relation to

his own. He had to learn a whole new language in order to speak to his daughter, but he did it because he wanted to converse with me the same way he could talk to Ben about hockey. My sport connected my dad and me, not because it was something we had in common and could talk about easily, but because it was so different.

The Battle of a Lifetime

SAMANTHA SMITH

BEFORE MY younger sister, Victoria (Vic for short), was diagnosed with depression, I always thought that the people in high school who sat alone in the cafeteria (who obviously had no friends and most likely low self-esteem) or the people that went through a tragedy like the death of a parent or close friend were the ones that suffered from mental illness. I quickly learned that not only was I extremely ignorant towards mental illnesses, but I was also very, very wrong about my assumptions. My sister's ongoing journey with depression has opened my eyes to another world that I honestly would not have experienced had she not been diagnosed. Through Vic's numerous visits to our local hospital and her three month stay at Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, a treatment facility in Whitby, I have had the opportunity to meet many amazing people who are either suffering from mental illness, or dedicating their lives to helping people cope with their illness. Needless to say, although I am not the one suffering from depression, it has had a major impact on my life.

Let me start by explaining to you what my sister is like. Based on my experience, mental illness is not limited to people who have obvious signs of unhappiness. In fact, it is not uncommon for those who appear to have an amazing, fulfilling life to be struggling with a mental illness. Vic is a generally happy person. She has an amazing

sense of humour and has always had a large group of friends who adore her. Through high school (she is now 18), she was actively involved in the school community through Student Council, and volunteered twice a week at our local hospital. She worked, and continues to, part-time as a cashier at Canadian Tire. Not necessarily the poster-child for depression, right? I used to think so, and that is why mental illnesses and the stigma that surrounds them are so frustrating.

I remember the first time that Vic asked my Dad to take her to our local hospital because she was feeling unsafe being at home. It was late at night in mid-March 2012, so not only was it dark outside, but it was also fairly cold. I was so proud of her for reaching out and expressing the fact that she needed professional help at the hospital and a safe place to stay. On the other hand, I do not think I have ever felt so helpless and scared. My heart broke seeing my baby sister, who was not so much a baby anymore, fighting a depression that she was not confident she could beat.

Once my dad and I had left her at the hospital for the night, it was like I was missing a piece of my heart. I knew she was sick and I knew she was struggling, but I didn't know that she was having a hard enough time to not even feel safe in her own house. The drive home from the hospital was very silent. I think my dad and I both had many emotions and questions running through our minds. Was Vic in the right hands at the hospital? Would the doctors take her seriously? Could this mean she would get the help she needed? I was so busy questioning what had just happened and what it meant for the future, that I was too distracted to realize that this would be a pivotal moment in Vic's struggle with depression: a moment that would mark a downward spiral.

The next five months were extremely stressful. Our childhood house was sold as a result of my parents divorcing, and Vic's depression deepened with the separation of our family. Vic was in and out of the hospital about fifteen times from the first time she was admitted to the day that my dad got a call from a lady explaining that she had been accepted into Ontario Shores in Whitby. We moved houses on 15 August 2013, while Vic was staying on the psychiatric

floor in our local hospital. The day after the moving truck had left our new house, we set off for Whitby where Vic would stay for the next three months. What a whirlwind.

The sun was shining on the August day that we arrived at Ontario Shores and the glisten of Lake Ontario could be seen from the parking lot. The building was big, but it didn't look like a typical asylum that is portrayed in horror movies. It simply looked like a hospital. We were welcomed with open arms from the nurses in the adolescent unit, and although it was a horrible feeling leaving Vic there, we knew she was in great hands.

Driving away from Ontario Shores was the hardest thing that I have ever done, and probably will ever do. I felt so helpless as this was the first battle I couldn't help my little sister fight. I cried the whole way home while my dad tried to assure me that this was the best thing for her. In the back of my mind, I knew that what he was saying was true, but it sure was a terrible feeling leaving my sister at a psychiatric hospital, unsure of what the outcome may be.

After three months of driving back and forth to Whitby to visit Vic, and numerous long-distance phone calls, she was finally discharged and able to come home. I was overjoyed to finally see her smiling face again and get back into our routine of weekly shopping trips and movie dates. However, I knew that the depression had not just instantly gone away, and that she would still likely be struggling. Although I was happy to have her home, the thought of her possibly not making any progress in her road to recovery was in the back of my mind.

Vic has been home for almost five months now, and everyday is still a struggle for her. It is absolutely heartbreaking watching someone you love have such a tough time, and not enjoy life or spend time with her friends like she once did. It is my hope that people stop judging those who have a mental illness, and instead offer a hand to help or an ear to listen. My eyes have sure been opened to mental illness, and I find myself more empathetic towards everyone that I come across in life. After all, although it may not seem like it, everyone you meet is fighting a battle, and that battle may be a mental illness.

Family

SAVANNAH SMITH

I HAVE never told my father the rationale behind my definition of “family” or why mine is so different compared to others. Although I was very young when I first understood that sometimes families are broken and love could fade with time, I also learned a great deal about the love shared between a father and daughter and the great lengths a father would go to protect it. “Dear father,” I write in a letter addressed to him, and erase soon after. It seems too formal. I think back to that day in the park when I was seven. I couldn’t understand why my father stood there, scared, as if his world was being turned upside down. My mother was sitting next to me as she explained how my father adopted me when I was three. This was the first I heard about it. My father’s smile faded away, but I hugged him tightly and watched it reappear. My mother’s speech hadn’t affected me; I couldn’t care less. I was more concerned that my father wouldn’t play with my sister and I at the park, but he had promised and he always followed through. For the rest of the afternoon, he chased us around, under and through the entire play structure, as we giggled every time he’d catch us. I want to tell him what I remember most about that afternoon, because it wasn’t the news about being adopted, but rather how effortlessly I managed to make him smile again, and how despite being way too big for the children’s slide, he slid down it anyways, making me laugh.

For a long time I tried to understand why he was so scared that day and I hadn't figured it out until my parents separated and I spent my first night in a house my mother bought across town. For the first time I was scared too; I was scared that the divorce would somehow change how he felt about adopting me. The thought of losing my father terrified me. I cried for an hour before I called him. I was convinced he wouldn't pick up but he did. I could hear the concern in his voice, although he had no idea why I was so upset. Not long after I hung up, he was knocking at the door with a bedtime snack in his hand. I want him to know about that night, and how when I sat next to him, eating my snack before he tucked me into bed, I stopped being scared.

As I continue my letter, I can't help but think back to when my father brought home season tickets for the local hockey team. Every Saturday for the entire season, and the one that followed, we attended every game. After that, we went every chance we got. I learnt a lot about what it meant to win and lose as a team. Hockey gave me something to cheer for when life was a little hard to handle. I finally realized that although everyone in the arena had a different story, for those few short hours, we all came together; we were a team. Eventually I learnt how to apply this concept to my life at home. My parents found new lovers who also had children, and eventually, we became a group of individuals with different stories trying to redefine family. On the days where I wanted nothing more than to fight against the idea of two separate families, I would remind myself that although we were very different, we all belonged to the same team. I want my father to know that going to those hockey games taught me so much more than the importance of spending time together; it taught me to pick my battles.

My life has always been hectic; one family is enough to drive anyone mad, let alone having two. My father will receive my letter right before I get home for Christmas. Somehow over the years, we've created our own Christmas traditions that allow us time to get away from the busyness of the holidays. I think about the times when my father and I would go for long drives, often to escape the craziness of our house. We have this in common; car rides help clear our minds. We

would take the back roads, admire old farmhouses and imagining our lives if we lived in them. We would idolize all the Christmas lights, and took pictures if they really impressed us. We would let the world inspire us before going home to decorate our own house. He taught me how to make the best memories by cherishing the little moments and how you don't have to look far for a little inspiration.

I want to write down all the thoughts going through my head. I want to write them down, in black ink, so permanent. I am lucky that he adopted me. I am lucky that he cared enough to stick around. We don't talk about this often, and sometimes I wish we did. If I could find it in me to write all this down, maybe it would ease his mind on the days where my curiosity gets the best of me. I have no intentions of changing who I am. I stare at my blank paper and what come out are the words I have said a million times before: "I can't wait to come home for Christmas. I made sure not to make any plans for Saturday night. I hear there's a hockey game. Do you want any company on your trip out of town on Sunday? On our way back we take the long way home. Love you." I know he will grasp all my unwritten words. People say I love you in very different ways. I say it when I leave my Saturday nights open for hockey games because we never missed one when I was a child. I say it when I choose to spend my Sunday's travelling along side him, because it reminds me of the times we would drive through every little town, and he would let my sister and I play at every park we passed. I tell him when we drive around, and I point out my dream houses, knowing that one day I will give my children a childhood like he gave me. I say it when I laugh at the tangled Christmas lights hanging from someone's roof and remember the times we would decorate ours. To anyone else, my words would be meaningless, but I know my father will see it as much more. My family will never be the same as those who are bound together by their DNA, and that will never stop changing the way I define family.

Untitled

CHRIS SONG

ON SEPTEMBER 16th, 2013, as I was getting prepared to go to a club meeting, my best friend Tommy from Toronto texted me, “Khowoon. Car accident. Critical condition. Pray.” At first, these six words did not register in my brain. I was soon overwhelmed with questions and thoughts. Was he in the car when this accident occurred? What does critical condition even mean? I fell into my chair and stared at my phone to see it buzz and vibrate with news that would answer my questions.

For an hour, on that dreadful Monday evening, I tried to wrap my mind around this car accident. My initial and hopeful thought was that it could not have been that bad. I looked back to the day when I was hit by a car and only resulted in bruises on my face and limbs. I hoped that Khowoon only suffered something similar, if not less. However, the words “critical condition” were too alien to me; I was desperate for an answer from Tommy. This single hour felt like a decade to me, with each second producing more and more mysteries and questions in my mind. I tried my best to keep my composure and not panic, but my efforts were wasted as Tommy replied, “His brain isn’t functioning, and he’s on life support. He was walking and someone hit him. Doctors are doing final tests, and then family decides if they wanna continue to keep him on life support.” So that is what critical condition means.

I stood in my living room, paralyzed with fear and shock. I have never in my life been filled with such life-draining shock. Another hour, which now felt like a century, slowly passed by me. Each second was filled with a cocktail of emotions, pain, confusion, and regret. At the end of this agonizing hour, Tommy texted me the dreadful words, "It's all over, bro." These four appalling words crushed my heart. At first, my brain tried its best to deny the cold reality. The fact that my brother-like friend is no more did not register in my mind. The shock overwhelmed me and ran through my entire body from head to toe, and prevented my emotions from pouring out from all ends of my body. With my violently shaking hands and unfocused eyes, I contacted two of my friends in Kingston, and we dragged our heavy bodies to The Brass Pub. We exchanged no words, no emotion, and no eye contact. Despite my disapproval of drinking, we sat down and gulped down beer after beer, trying to calm our nerves and our senses. Finally, my friend broke the silence with the words, "Only the good die young, eh?" After some time, we managed to regain the strength to leave the pub, gave each other hugs and encouragements, and left for our own destinations.

Spending time with my friends made me realize that it was always refreshing and comforting to have an older brother figure like Khwoon who can take care of me. He always had a loving heart for his friends, and we were often reminded through his actions that he cares for us more than we realize. Once at the gym, he mockingly laughed at me for not breathing properly, then carefully instructed me, "Chris, you have to breathe better!" As if he were my blood brother, he showed so much concern and love for me that I regretfully did not fully realize at the time.

A torturous week passed by, which felt like a millennium. The days following Monday consisted of desolation and sorrow, which was followed by denial of the event that had unfolded before me. This denial then led to my violent anger and vexation towards the responsible driver, resulting in my imagining the cruel things I would do if he ever appeared before my eyes. After the week passed by, I headed back to Toronto with my friends to attend the funeral.

Receiving the loving embrace of my parents and of my friends had given me a sense of security and comfort that a thousand words could ever do.

However, that sense of security and comfort only lasted briefly. It was hard to bear the sorrow and pain at the funeral. In between wiping my eyes and barely watching a slideshow of his pictures displayed on the screen, the words “I miss him so much” managed to escape out of my mouth, to which Tommy replied with a broken nod. Approaching the open casket to say my final good-bye, I muttered to his lifeless face, “You told me to breathe...” Afterwards, I slowly returned to my seat and returned to my controllable weeping.

Through all this wretchedness, however, I was fortunate enough to have Tommy continuously making sure I was all right, to have parents comforting me and encouraging me, and to have other friends supporting me with love and concern. Coming back from the cremation service, I realized the utmost significance of having a loving support, whether it is physical presence or verbal comfort. I realized that without such support, which helped me fathom this tragedy and helped me to express the state of my heart and emotions, I would not have been able to survive this inconsolable week. I also realized the importance of fully expressing your emotions in times of sorrow and grief. Obscuring such emotions would only result in a heavier burden to the heart and mind. Furthermore, giving the support that my friends needed had helped me stay mentally intact, which also reminded me that Khwoon would have wanted me to be loving and caring as he had been. Even until the end, Khwoon left me these valuable lessons for me to treasure and to share.

Even now I still look at my phone from time to time, expecting to see a text from Khwoon, asking me if I am doing all right. Even now I still look at my inactive Facebook message thread with Khwoon, expecting to see a message from him, asking me if I want to go eat wings. He was the one who first took me to the gym and taught me that I need to breathe properly. He was the one who always asked me if anyone is bothering me at school. He was the one who always made sure I was being well fed wherever I go. Recently I suffered from

pneumothorax, and I was barely able to breathe. For two days I could not eat because of my chest pain. Through all this, I told myself, "Breathe, just like he told me." Certainly, it was a painful experience that I would not have been able to handle without my loving friends and family. Certainly, my life will not be the same without Khwoon. However, knowing he is in peace from the bodily sufferings and burden gives me the peace that I need to live the same loving and caring life he had lived.

Sexual Selection Amongst Species

EMMA STALLWOOD

IT'S THE last day of my grade 11 school year and I come home from school to my mom telling me she has signed me up for a grade 12 biology course in the Galapagos Islands. I think, "Where the hell are the Galapagos Islands?" With the time I would usually use to do homework, I do some research. I realize the islands are near Ecuador in South America, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. I get to go on a vacation somewhere hot while I get a biology credit? I'm in.

It's now the month of July and I am on the beach with my toes in the sand on Isabella Island, Galapagos' biggest island, studying the most peculiar animals and gorgeous scenery with my classmates. We are on the west side of the island where there is a long white sand beach with crystal blue waves splashing up on the shore. The morning sun is beaming brightly, kissing my skin. Our tour guide, Sofia, is taking us around the island to look at the different types of wildlife that live here. As we walk along the beach we cross paths with all sorts of animals: seals, finches, stingrays, giant tortoises, pelicans, etc. We continue to walk and stop when there are about 20 birds blocking our path along the beach. We stop to observe the funniest looking birds I have ever seen in my entire life. The birds have long pointed beaks, beady eyes, brown wings, white stomachs, and bright blue feet! Sofia goes on to tell us these birds are called blue-footed boobies! I could not help myself—I started laughing. Blue-footed boobies.

After a good laugh, I notice the birds are swaying back and forth. I step closer to get a better look at the birds. Like most animals in the Galapagos, humans do not faze them. I could probably pick one up and nothing would happen. As I take a closer look, I notice they look like they are dancing. The birds are literally looking at each other and dancing. As the birds sway from side to side, I feel like I should put on some background music so they can dance to a beat. I asked Sofia, “What are they doing?”

Sofia explained to my class and I that they are dancing as a part of natural selection, more specifically, sexual selection. The male boobies lift their feet up and down in a strut motion in front of the female boobies (De Roy 301). Occasionally a booby will lift up their heads and whistle to a booby of the opposite sex flying above as a form of communication (De Roy 301). Now doesn't that sound familiar? The brightness of the boobies' feet dull as they age; therefore females tend to choose the male boobies who are younger and have brighter feet (De Roy 302). Bright feet represent good health and genetic qualities (De Roy 302). Go figure. I remember learning a little bit about natural selection in grade 11 biology, and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, but to actually see sexual selection is incredible.

As I gaze in awe at the blue-footed boobies and observe them trying to show off for the opposite sex, I had an epiphany about how people naturally select very differently. The qualities in a person that humans find attractive has evolved over the years, and are much more complicated than which one of us has the bluest feet.

As I stand here taking videos and pictures of these happy feet birds, I become intrigued on what kinds of physical appearances men and women look for in each other. Before money, wealth, and status existed, I bet reproduction originally was one of the main qualities a man would look for in a woman—bigger hips, big boobs, and sex appeal. Perhaps women looked for men who would care for their families; maybe they would look for men who would go out, hunt all day, and bring back the family dinner, just like the boobies. Evolution of the human kind then brought in money and status, which based on

my observations, is the next evolutionary “attractiveness.” I am interested to do more research on the subject.

I get back to my hotel room and start to type into Google, “evolution of human sexual selection.” Although I cannot find much research on the origins human sexual selection, it is often compared with Darwin’s theory and animal sexual selection. I found a lot more research studies on the contemporary sexual selection between humans. Research on recent relationships show that most women are more attracted to men with a higher economic status (Rommel 445). The higher economic status is a sign that the male can provide food and protection, which is immediately beneficial for a woman and her offspring (Rommel 446). Unlike the blue-footed boobies, often women prefer males a few years older than themselves because this characteristic correlates with economic capacity (Rommel 444).

Similar to the boobies, when men are looking for a mate, they look for a high reproductive value (Rommel 445). Reproductive value of women is more age-dependent than the reproductive value of men (Rommel 445). Apparently between the age of 15 and 20 is the female’s reproductive value peak (Rommel 444). Characteristics like a young appearance such as smooth skin, good muscle tone, full lips and high energy levels are indicators of a high reproductive value (Rommel 441). Much of this research may be true, but the research on human sexual selection seems to be very superficial. Do people not care about the personality of the person they are physically attracted to? People have evolved into a complex, intelligent species; are people going to spend the rest of their life with someone who can reproduce the best offspring or someone who is going to make them happy? This is where human relationships get complicated—it is never that simple.

Relationships in humans are more complex than most animals whose number one ambition is survival. Us humans look to invest further than the book’s cover. It seems to me that physical qualities tend to be an aspect of why we initially become attracted to one another, but it is the relationships we build, the millions of different types of personalities we withhold, and the complexity of each person’s

individual personality that makes the human sexual selection unique from the animal kingdom.

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A Guide to First Dates That is Exactly What You Would Expect to Read

MARIA STELLATO

NOT TO be underestimated, the first date is that paramount brick in the wall, the stepping stone ubiquitously required to get one's foot through the door and into the wonderful world of dating. The first date segues to a second date. The second date leads to a third date, and before you know it, two years pass and there's a glimmer on your left hand.

Except that first dates fail more often than not. That's okay too; everyone hooks a few minnows before they catch the Golden Trout. On the subway, en route to Charing Cross Station, I heard these American men talking about trawling in Sierra Nevades. Some anglers go their entire lives without finding that vibrant, rare fish. Amateurs establish themselves amongst the banks and blunder as they swim past. Their retinas don't register the distinction before the opportunity absconds, or they trip over their own rods as the fish flee with the rivulets of clear waves. Then, there are those who hook the Golden Trout, peg clasped in its thin brim, but—due to either a gaffe or inaction—the connection severs, and the fish swims on back into the wide, bursting waters. What that angler needed was a line, a method to reel in the game, and friend, I've got you covered.

In the past, you've heard that you should solicit your friends for dating advice. Inquire about what to wear, and whether they know his sport allegiance. The feud between the Capulets and Montagues can't hold a candle to the scenario that imagines bringing home a Manchester United fan. Let's be honest, you shudder at the thought, and you wouldn't hear anything while dancing at a club. But restaurants are a good venue to host the first night of the rest of your life. They're intimate and provide a great stage upon which to audition. Suggest tapas. Your brother told you about a Spanish restaurant near Nelson's monument, and you know the portion sizes are optimal for sharing. The prices aren't bad either, but the number one rule of dating, especially concerning the elusive first date, is to stray far away from conversations regarding past relationships.

That last significant other is a room rented in the past—you were once comfortable with it before that lease expired. You're packing your bags and moving them into a new apartment, but this is just the real estate's open house. What you need is a statement of proof; he doesn't want to see your finances, but he does want to know you're ready to move on. Think of it this way: you put up a wall of confidence as you apply your makeup before you meet him. The foundation that glides smoothly over your features projects an aura of assurance. It will mask your imperfections, but it's your responsibility to paint that wall. Don the mascara, just to give it an extra flair.

Don't be surprised when he arrives first; you are fashionably late. He stands up to greet you, kisses you lightly on the cheek, and says, "It is nice to see you again." Return the gentle press of lips to his opposite cheek, and internally exhale because you were worried he would go for a handshake. People have told you that it is prudent to remember, on a first date, that you are not the only applicant. He is as nervous as you are; it was his clammy palms that advised him against shaking your hand. That's insignificant; what matters is his radiant smile in the dim lighting. The crow's feet around his eyes crinkle with every quirk of his lip when he mentions his three little cousins, all bearing variants of his grandmother's name. Ask him about the town he grew up in, his favourite colour, and the last movie he saw. I've heard that you should

keep conversation as conservative as your Sunday best. It's unbecoming to drink an extra glass of wine or divulge anything that may tarnish the image you project.

Countless editorials in the magazines your roommate orders have dutifully informed to pay no attention to the woman at the adjacent table, she laughs uproariously and reminds you of the outside world that you should neglect. The local artwork on the wall is a distraction, not an instigator for intellectual dialogue. This approach will work the majority of the time, unless, of course, he is an art enthusiast, and seeks stimulating conversation upon its aesthetic merits. In that case, open the drawer and dig out the knowledge you learned from your university's introductory art history course.

Otherwise, outlying elements can only have a negative impact. The good-natured quarterlies at home on your bedside table instruct you to put away your phone. Unplug yourself from the charging dock, where you feel most comfortable, and turn it off entirely. You're not a child anymore and you don't need someone fifty kilometres away to stage an emergency rouse to rescue you. You can afford to devote one hundred per cent of your attention to the man sitting opposite of you; allegedly, if you don't you won't see him again.

Love. You've probably heard this tune: it plays every three minutes on the radio, it's the monologue that inaugurates every romantic comedy, the speech given to you by your mother after that first tumultuous split when you were sixteen years old. Here is some better advice: be yourself, and you may uncover the veracity of the common cliché. Don't check Facebook beforehand; that'll dismantle discussion, but tell your date that story you told me last week, about how you got so drunk you slipped into the puddle on the side of the road, where the curb collected the previous night's rainwater and converted it into a berth. You screeched, you yelled something about it being as deep as the Pacific Ocean, and then some loser's new Corvette sped on past you and caked mud onto your dress, your loose blonde curls. That was funny and this isn't a job interview. Wink at the middle-aged woman sitting at the next table. You're new to the

tournament, but she's an old hand. There's a pale strip on her ring finger that suggests she's won at least one round before.

Save the best for last and butcher the French brand of the white wine that lies in the middle of your table. Its carbonation sings in its bottle. The liquid in your flute is swishing against its glass sides; it is begging for you to drink it. Drink enough so that your face flushes the same shade of red that you wear on your nails. Put your phone on the table, along with everything else you love. Forget what you've read in a dating column, except where they tell you to stop talking about your ex-boyfriend. Not even you want to hear about that again. You don't need to master first dates if this is going to be your last. Every other night-out is buried in the past. Look ahead toward your future.

A Stroke of Misfortune

WILLIAM STIVER

AS A young child I idolized my neighbour Martin Davis. It was a traumatic day when the for-sale sign went up on Martin's front lawn and the realization sunk in that the man who gave me sporting event tickets was leaving my life. Since I liked Martin, I wanted to hate the new couple that moved into his house. These new neighbours, Michael and Sidney, were a young couple. My family and I quickly forgot about our old neighbours and became good friends with Michael and Sidney. I admired the fact that they lived life the way they wanted. They were young, unconventional, and hip. I was young too so we spoke the same language.

Four years ago, the constantly busy house of Michael and Sidney became eerily quiet. Concerned about their well-being we looked into their absence. We discovered that Michael had suffered simultaneous heart failure and stroke caused by a bacterial infection. He was hospitalized for six weeks, throughout which Sidney stayed by his side. The idea that Michael was hanging on by a thread for those six weeks was very surreal and gave me new perspective on life. The middle aged man who had been out and about in the community talking and joking and working was, without warning, accelerated to the head of the line to possibly be removed from this world.

My family runs a landscape maintenance business, so we looked after their property when they were at the hospital and on occasion

when they came back. But no matter how much we wanted to help in some real and significant way, all we could do was cut the grass and prevent the papers from accumulating. Beyond that, we were completely powerless to help Michael. It was a very humbling encounter that forced me to contemplate my own mortality long before I was ready to do so.

Michael is alive and making a remarkable recovery now, but a lot changed for him that day. The right side of his body is now paralyzed and he has Aphasia, a condition which makes it very difficult for him to speak. He also had to give up his small business and rely entirely on his wife to earn a living and look after him.

His will and determination to fight for improvement in his life and in his relationship with his wife only got stronger with his misfortune. I cannot even imagine how hard it must have been for both of them to not give up and persevere. As a couple they appeared to have everything figured out. They were always happy when I was with them, but after Michael's stroke, they had to start fresh and figure everything out all over again. Michael had to learn to walk and talk despite his immobile right side and his Aphasia. As a couple they had to figure out how to communicate again.

I learned a lot about life from Michael and Sidney. Firstly, sometimes disaster can strike at the most unexpected time. It made me realize that I was focusing too much on little things which were unimportant in the grand scheme of things and that I was forgetting to appreciate the bigger more important things like my health and my family. The extra effort that Michael must now put forth to do things like walk and speak will make anyone realize all the things in life that they take for granted. I realized that I was just another person who ignorantly took things for granted.

Secondly, this couple reinstates my belief that some people get married for the right reasons and actually intend to stay together in "sickness and in health." In this society where divorce rates are continuously on the rise like an out of control hot air balloon it was nice to see that some people still think marriage is forever. It gave me hope that one day I too may get married and be able to make it last

forever. Since the day he fell ill, Sidney has worked tirelessly to help, support, and care for Michael. For me, this experience was an eye-opening one. As a young man, I lived my life as most young people do. I felt invincible, I felt powerful and I felt in control of my destiny with the world at my fingertips. I lived my life consumed by the day-to-day. Things like clothing, money, girlfriends and social politics consumed much of my daily thoughts and resources. I was asleep to a certain extent and oblivious to all that I take for granted on a daily basis. The day I learned of what happened to my friends and neighbours Michael and Sidney was the day that I awoke from my stupor. I awoke to the realization that the most important things in life can't be bought. The most important things in life are often the ones that we pay the least attention to but they are things that matter most when they disappear. For example, I used to spend my time worrying about silly insignificant things like being banned from my girlfriend's coffee shop where she works. I took it personally and got really upset and wasted a lot of time stressing about what an injustice it was for them to ask me not to come in anymore. Michael's illness made me realize that this wasn't actually something that I needed to worry about.

Since Michael's stroke I have become much more grateful for many things in my life. I look at prospective girlfriends differently and I cannot help but wonder if they would stay with me through a life altering situation. I realized how important real commitment is in a relationship and that both people need to be willing to change and adapt to whatever challenges life may bring. I try to seize every opportunity and I view procrastination as more of an evil than I used to. I no longer think that I have all the time in the world to do things. After seeing Michael lose his business I appreciate my able body much more and my ability to help run my dad's business. We would lose our business too if we ever suffered such a terrible health disaster. I try to live my life in a much more awake state now and I owe that in part to Michael and Sidney's story.

Love Is a Lesson of the Past

LORNE TANZ

I COULD have sworn she was the one. But in fact, Melissa was just “another one” in a series of failed relationships. To everyone else she was just a nice and innocent girl; but none of them had to go experience her lies and deceit. She cheated on with Hank Mardukis. I mean of all people, did it really have to be Hank Mardukis. The guy is about 6’4, 300 pounds. He probably bench-presses dumbbells that way more than me. Everyone keeps telling me I’ll find the “right” one; but they always end up just being the “next” one. The day Melissa and I broke up I called my mother Maureen crying and asked her why this “shit” keeps happening to me. She said it was because I was, quote on quote, “too nice.” (What does that even mean? Maybe I’ll just go stand outside of the Ale House and yell degrading slurs at girls as they come out of the bar? Maybe then Melissa will take me back?). When I told my mom that love is a farce and anyone who believes in it does not deserve to be in my presence; she told me to calm down and listen to the story of my Great Uncle Ben and Great Aunt Priscilla. (At this point I sat back and accepted the fact that I would be listening to a sappy love story for the next twenty minutes).

My mom explained that Ben was a handsome young man who was forcibly removed from his home in Warsaw, Poland at the age of fifteen. As a result of his Jewish origins, he and his family were deported by the Nazi regime to various concentration camps around

Poland. He worked in the Auschwitz concentration camp until the Soviet Army finally freed him in 1945. He lost his entire family during the Holocaust, and after spending a few years in Israel, Ben decided to move to Rochester, New York in the summer of 1947. One night, when Ben and his friends were playing cards at the local community centre, Ben met his true love. Priscilla captured his attention the minute she walked through the door. It was right then and there that Ben's life changed forever. He knew he would never be alone again. The eleven-year age difference between them didn't concern either of them. Although it was clear that Ben could never have children due to the experimentation he was subjected to by the Nazis; however, Priscilla still agreed to marry him and forgo having a family.

They lived a very simple and routine life: They woke up every morning at 6 am; Ben would get ready for work as Priscilla fixed him his usual breakfast of whole-wheat toast with orange marmalade and a large mug of bold Columbian coffee. Ben worked five days a week from 9-5 at the Kodak factory and he would always come home to a home-cooked meal prepared by Priscilla. At the age of sixty-five, Ben retired and they lived comfortably on his pension. Most nights, they would watch TV or read to each other from their favourite books of poems. (This all seemed a little boring to me but I let my mom continued because I love her. And because she was the only woman in my life paying any attention to me).

My mom went on about how Ben and Priscilla were very content in each other's company. Sadly, at the age of eighty-four, Ben was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Priscilla's whole world was shattered in an instant, but Ben continuously reminded her that everything would work out one way or another. He always knew how to comfort her and make her believe that things would truly be okay. Ben's health declined at a fast pace and the cancer spread throughout his body. As Ben lay in the hospital, he took Priscilla's hand and said with a hazy voice and a heavy heart, "My dear, it's my time to go. You are my love. I will see you again. Hopefully not soon, but I will see you again." She squeezed his hand tightly, and kissed him on the forehead for the last time.

On the day of the funeral, the sky was gloomy as the pallbearers watched their every step to make sure they did not slip on the wet ground. Priscilla followed the procession slowly and ended up kneeling next to Ben's final resting place. My mom told me that as the rabbi recited the "Shema," a Jewish prayer for the deceased, Priscilla whispered her final goodbye to the man that she had devoted the last fifty years of her life to; "Don't be scared my love, just hold on until you see the light. I will see you soon. I will see you soon my love. Just wait for me." (It was at this point of the story that I began to break down. So many emotions just took over me. I'll admit what I find was anger and jealousy instead of happiness and admiration of the beauty of their relationship. I just don't believe that I could ever feel that way about someone. I've never even come close to feeling that way about anyone. I didn't even like waiting for Melissa to come over after a night at Stages, never mind waiting an eternity to see someone again in another life).

In the days and months that followed Ben's death, my mother told me that Priscilla's health began to deteriorate at a rapid rate. She was bed-ridden and began taking medication to alleviate her heart palpitations. However, the medication did not alleviate her symptoms and her condition worsened. Only three months after the death of Ben, Priscilla passed away.

Her doctor was shocked by her sudden decline, and worried that she had failed to properly diagnose Priscilla's ailment. But this wasn't the case. Priscilla did not die of a recognized medical condition. She died of a *broken heart*. (Now I know this sounds a little corny but I honestly believe it is true). See many people believe the heart only serves the physiological function of pumping blood into the body. But Priscilla knew it served a far greater purpose. Her heart was meant to be attached to Ben's. I can only hope one day I can share my heart with someone the way my Uncle Ben and Aunt Priscilla shared there's. Maybe I need to stop trying to find love in hopeless places like the Ale House or maybe I should go to more Card Halls(if those things even exist anymore). But what I do know is that if I can experience a love

that is even half as strong as my Uncle Ben and Priscilla's was, I will have lived a happy life.

Untitled

WESLEY TAYLOR

TRAVEL STORIES are hard to listen to. Trapped by our politeness, we find ourselves at the mercy of rambling friends and family, their vocabulary outweighed by their enthusiasm. The diagnosis is clear: the travel bug has bitten them. They are hosts to the disease, but it is not contagious. It can only be contracted through direct experience. Be warned: as an infected travel writer, it is my goal to spread the disease.

The story of how I was infected begins in the turquoise waters of Little Corn Island, a tranquil beach-paradise off the coast of Nicaragua. This place *is* relaxation. There are no roads, no cars, and no worries. But if you are anything like me, a beach day is a boring day. You need new thrills, and on this coastal paradise my only recourse was the local dive shop. However, my excitement for aquatic exploration was submerged by a tidal wave of reality: I have Thalassophobia, the fear of lake or sea creatures. I cast aside my hesitation with an improvised motto: *Just do it and don't be so scared*. And so I dove head first into unknown waters. But the travel bug was waiting with net in hand.

I was on an old but sturdy wooden motorboat, and it was fast. The bench I sat on ringed the entire boat, and my back was to the sea. The island was consumed by darkness in seconds as we skimmed across the black water. Directly across from me sat two European scuba-addicts and on my left side sat our guide, Miguel. We were headed to “Turtle

Rock,” a dive site with a long strip of reef flanked on either side by sand. It is known for schools of barracuda and southern stingrays. I looked over the side to see the still black water whiz past. I wondered what dramatic pursuit between hunter and hunted was unfolding below. I looked up; there was no moon. The black sky met the water with no distinction. Except for the shimmering of stars that began lighting the sky, it was just blackness. The engine shut off; we had stopped. My night dreaming ended and I realized how tightly I was gripping my respirator—my source of life. It was all I could do to keep the phobia at bay.

And so I focused on breathing. I hung my tank over the edge, my back to the dark water. I put my respirator in my mouth, took a breath of artificial air, and fell backwards, trusting the black water to catch me. Just put yourself in there, I thought, and breathe. We gathered ourselves, turned our flashlights on, and descended into the darkness. I immediately felt different. I felt like a fish out of water. I didn’t belong. My senses tried to grasp something, but there was nothing. I smelt nothing and heard nothing and saw nothing. I could not control this environment, and my vulnerability made me calm. My flashlight caught movement: a barracuda, definitely chasing. Then a nurse shark glided past, its slanted forehead the inspiration for the design of the Aston Martin Vantage; this shark is the alpha male of the reef.

Our guide flashed us a signal, and we gathered on the ocean floor. Now twenty minutes into the dive, I could see the contour of the reef against the light grey patches of sand, onto which our group descended. We flashed hand signals to each other of different animals we had seen: an octopus, a Caribbean spiny lobster, and a loggerhead turtle. We turned our lights off and waited, suspended in darkness, for a few moments. I hung my head and closed my eyes, feeling the pulse of the ocean push me back and forth. It can be such a gentle giant, I thought. When I opened my eyes, I was in outer space.

Sparkles of light appeared against a backdrop of darkness. What looked like Christmas light bulbs appeared in strands of three and four. Each one was no bigger than a baby tomato. They were changing colour, from red to blue to orange and back again. It felt like a drug-

induced hallucination, but it was definitely real. What I was watching was thousands of Ostracods, tiny crustaceans that swim up from the deep on especially dark nights to mate. In a precise pattern, the males shoot out glowing luminescent chemicals to attract females. I was swimming through a massive orgy of underwater pyrotechnics. The local divers call this phenomenon “String of Pearls,” but it felt more like a galaxy of stars, like floating through the Milky Way, stardust exploding off your shoulders as you glide past. I was David Bowie’s Major Tom, a helpless astronaut floating through space. I could see the bodies of the other divers outlined by a multicoloured glow.

My diving instrument signalled that time was up. I inflated my buoyancy control device and slowly rose toward the surface, gazing at the field of bioluminescent stardust below. Floating on top of the water, I looked up. The night sky was putting on a show of its own, and I was the lucky traveller suspended between the two. I climbed onto the boat and relived the experience with the other divers. An hour ago we shared nothing but a boat ride and now we shared a life-long memory. I thought briefly about the countless friends that would inevitably hear my “String of Pearls” story. Maybe I wouldn’t capture their imaginations; maybe they really did have to be here. Either way, I would try. The travel bug had found me, and it had taken a big bite.

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Breaking a Leg and Mending a Soul

MARY THOMPSON

WHEN I close my eyes I can still feel it. Running full speed into a tumbling pass at cheerleading practice, flipping and doing a full twist in the air, and coming down to hear my leg snap like a tree branch while the air was sucked out of my lungs. “You’ve shattered your tibia. You will never be able to cheerlead again. You’ll be lucky if you can even walk in four months.” My lungs twisted into a knot in my chest as I stared at the doctor with a pale face and an open jaw. It was as though someone had reached down my throat and ripped out my vocal chords. Cheerleading was who I was. Memories reeled through my brain. I flashed back to my first time stepping onto the mat at the age of ten, then forward to the phone call I received saying I had made Team Canada—the first time I cried real tears of happiness. Cheerleading was my life. “Mary the cheerleader” was someone I’ve been known as forever, and someone I was not ready to let go.

The first week of my recovery the support was at an all-time-high. I received endless sympathy and care from my nurses and visitors came to the end of my bed like an assembly line. If I wasn’t tweeting something, I was getting sympathetic texts from old coaches, receiving teddy bears and magazines from my friends and the support from my nurses was constant (even at 3:00 in the morning when I had my morphine injections). I was literally *never* alone. At this point in time, my injury really didn’t seem that bad at all. Sure, I shattered my leg,

but people broke bones and bounced back all the time. I felt loved, cared for and finally had the time to take some rest after going full swing for so long. Little did I know I was barely skimming the surface of recovery. I was about to embark on a physical, emotional and spiritual journey that changed my entire life.

Bleak, grey November rolled around and I was set up in a hospital bed square in the centre of the living room of my family home in Burlington. My privacy was gone quicker than the novelty of this injury that was slowly starting to wear away. As a nineteen-year-old university student living independent from my parents, I was not used to having quite simply, *zero* privacy. My mom had to help me shower, get dressed, and eat. During the day, I sat in solitude and reality hit me like a slap in the face. Something so miniscule like having a shower meant tying a massive garbage bag over my entire leg, hobbling up the sixteen stairs (Yes, I counted) that led up to the bathroom and sitting in a shower chair in my shower. I couldn't pick up anything without it slipping out of my hands and crashing to the floor, with me stranded in my blue shower chair like a baby in a booster seat. Flashbacks would whiz through my mind of practices where I would nail my tumbling passes, getting through the entire routine without one mistake. One teammate Jamie, used to call me "a machine." Here I was "a machine," who couldn't even wash her hair without failing. Everything that was once so easy was suddenly the hardest task in the world. I would scroll through my Instagram, Facebook and Twitter applications on my phone like a zombie, watching my peers upload pictures of them with their friends, doing things that *I* couldn't do. I spent my days sitting in my hospital bed, staring out the window and watching the leaves fall. Slowly realizing that my freedom, distractions and ultimately my sense of identity were all gone. One morning I lay on my bathroom floor after bawling, laying in silence, my faced pressed against the cold brick, wanting nothing but to die. I felt I had nothing to live for anymore. Who was I without cheerleading? I looked in the mirror at my lifeless eyes, grey skin and puffy face staring back at me. Shattering my tibia stripped me down to my true organic self and made me ask the question: How comfortable are we when we are truly *alone*?

In December, things were gradually starting to take a turn for the better with small changes I made everyday. Instead of sitting in bed, staring outside the window all day, I found new ways to distract myself that were uplifting to my spirit and my sense of well-being even though I was physically healing from such a traumatic injury. I can't pretend this wasn't a slow process, but I found that trying to do one activity everyday that didn't involve me having a pity party made the world of a difference. On Thursdays, I went to a Yin yoga class that focused on meditation and exercises lying on the back. One Monday, my father took me to the bookstore and I picked up a stack of classic novels that were on sale for only \$5.00 each. I suddenly realized that these little tasks I was doing throughout the day, I was doing for my own pleasure, rather than the pleasure of others. I had zero inclination to boast about it on social media to my peers or to really tell anyone about it at all. I decided to look at the world a little bit differently because I realized our world is whatever we make it to be. Instead of having people sympathize for me, I started to sympathize for others. Steven Stamkos, forward of Tampa Bay Lightning suffered the exact same injury as myself, right after being drafted to Team Canada. I followed that entire story purely out of a fellow feeling for his situation. When I would go to the mall and people would stare at me in my wheelchair, I wouldn't look away and get angry, as that grey-faced monster would have. I'd smile and usually receive one back in return. When I'd sit in my shower chair I wouldn't cry, I'd feel gratitude and genuine happiness because I realized how lucky I was that I only had to experience this temporarily. There are so many people out there who don't have the luxury of standing up and taking a quick shower before heading out the door. The tables had completely turned. Changing my mindset changed my entire wellbeing.

I think of that time on the bathroom floor a lot. That girl is someone who is far stronger than "Mary the cheerleader" or "the machine," the people I once identified with so well. Some days, I would stare out the window, but not out of self-pity or boredom. I stared out the window to reflect on past experiences and think about my life. I was given this extremely rare opportunity where my whole world

was put on pause, with no commitments, and I realized that it was a valuable time to take a step back and reconnect with my true self. When I finally accepted my situation, I found a sense of peace and without even realizing my leg was almost healed. This is not to say there were not still hard days where I felt like the walls were caving in, but deep down I knew this injury happened for a reason. Instead of it being a burden, it became a lesson and I knew it was making me a better person. I've come to find that the most important relationship you can have is with yourself. People, opportunities and experiences will come and go, but in reality you are born alone and you die alone. When all is said and done being happy who you are in pure solitary moments is what is living is for.

Untitled

CASSIDY VAN LEEUWEN

I COME from a family of five with two brothers, but based on my own memories, I never would have known that. My brother Sean is ten years older than me, and the large gap between us is only explained by the loss of my second brother, Ryan. I was only six months old when he died, too young to remember him. Because I can not recall him ever being in my life, Ryan was just a story to me, never physically existing. He was a void of a brother. His loss never really affected me—or so I believed. However, you can never truly escape an older sibling's impression. Ryan's presence will forever live on through the devastating impact his death had on my mother.

Ryan was born with a diagnosis of Down's syndrome (Trisomy 21). He was the second of two boys, born when my mother was thirty-three. Because she had had a healthy full-term pregnancy, my mother was in shock and denial that there could be anything wrong with him. Given his genetic confirmation, she immediately started Ryan on an Infant Stimulation program when he was just one month old. Within this program, occupational therapists and physiotherapists would come into our home several times a week to coach her on how to accelerate his development. They would perform daily exercises and provide him with the speech therapy needed for his intervention. By the age of two, Ryan was sent to half-day schooling to continue maximizing his future growth and development.

Despite, or maybe because of her efforts and high expectations, my mother became increasingly depressed. Ryan was and always would be significantly delayed. He also developed several health issues, including frequent ear infections that required ear tubes to be inserted into his ears. The constant trips to the doctor were mentally taxing and draining on the whole family, but no one could have anticipated what would happen next. At the age of three years old, Ryan was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL).

My mother was shattered. All her walls came crashing in on her. For the first time in her life, she didn't know what to do.

My mother had come from a large hard-working Irish Catholic family. Her strict upbringing had taught her to face life's challenges head-on. She was the first in her family to get a Bachelor's degree, which she had self-financed. She was very ambitious and fashioned herself as a career woman who could have it all. While finishing her MBA at night school and working full time, my mother became pregnant with Ryan. She had planned on writing her thesis during her four-month maternity leave. However, due to Ryan's condition, she had to put her plans on hold.

Ever the optimist, she redirected her energy towards Ryan's cancer treatments. Throughout frequent chemotherapy trips, blood tests and doctor's visits, she never gave up on his speech therapy and other developmental interventions. But soon, Ryan began to have complications due to his Down Syndrome condition. After several relapses and lengthy hospital stays, my parents finally started to accept the possibility that Ryan just might not make it.

Thus, I was conceived. I was planned because my mother knew that if Ryan died, a new baby would force her out of her depression. At thirty-nine years old, she wasn't getting any younger, and couldn't fathom the idea of being the mother of just an only child.

By the time I was born, Ryan had already been diagnosed terminal. Although a newborn demands a lot of attention, my mother was torn between tending to her dying child and me as an infant. Between the hospital trips, cooking, and cleaning, Sean was often left forgotten. No

one was available to take him to his hockey practices, help him with his homework or attend to his other activities.

All this took a toll on my family. I was not given the doting attention a newborn normally receives. My mother regrettably had to stop breast-feeding me after just one month. As she became increasingly more sleep deprived, stressed out and angry, my family began to crumble. My brother became resentful and withdrawn, as my father went into denial and avoided coming home as much as possible. Working late was easier than dealing with having to watch his little boy die.

After Ryan died, my mother cried a lot. She tried to cuddle me as she had with Ryan during so many of those long hospital nights, but I was an independent baby happier on the floor, and would just squirm away. Ironical, isn't it but nowadays I have to beg her to hug me and I can tell she isn't comfortable doing so for long, I suppose that this must be a paradoxical reaction from both of us. Growing up, my family would often talk about Ryan, but my mother refused to look at any of his pictures or videos with me when I was curious. She eventually forgave my father who came out of his denial, but she has always kept a hard shell I've seldom penetrated.

So somehow without really ever having been in my life, Ryan has managed to rob my mother from me. He has left me not only short a sibling, but the woman who is supposed to coddle me and smother me and brush my hair and hold my hand when I have a cold. My mother is the woman who, when I came to her after a bad break-up, told me not to get tears on her pillow. I've been raised on tough love and so I too, have learned to cope.

I did eventually watch those home movies, on my own, and got to see who this ghost really was. I got to see how proud he was to help change my diaper and how his face lit up when he fed me my bottle. I saw how cute he was. I saw how loving he was. More, I saw how much it would've hurt to lose him. I saw how his spirit taught my mother the bravery and determination she needed to get through something not many others could. I couldn't resent him. Her optimism and way of dealing with devastation have taught me more than I can imagine. Ryan

showed us how one has the power to choose how they react to devastation and this can give them the strength to get through it. And for that, I have to thank him.

Untitled

CAROLINE VÉZEAU

I PROGRESSED through my adolescence clouded by stereotypes: only children are spoiled and bossy; only children have imaginary friends; only children are too dependent on their parents. Inevitably, my consciousness of what is “right” was swamped by a general consensus that it is altogether better for someone to have siblings than not. Somewhere along the line a stigma was created surrounding only children. Perhaps it does not appear as a pressing issue, plaguing everyday society, yet it has, for better or worse, loomed over my personal development. So what is it really like to grow up as an only child?

I had never grasped that stereotypes existed about only children until a friend of mine, upon finding out about my lack of siblings, said to me: “Really? You don’t act like one!” What does it mean to act like an only child? Can someone act like they do or do not have siblings? These are the questions that I began to ask myself. When I think about my childhood, I consider what would have differed if I had been granted the “luxury” of siblings. Firstly, I have always been able to entertain myself when others are occupied. As a child, latching onto the creative provided an outlet; playing board games by myself, and turning even the most mundane tasks, like cleaning my room, into joyful activities. I tried to find an element of fun in just about everything. I believe that this ability to be self-sufficient, while also

finding enjoyment in everyday behaviours, has been a big factor in my easily developing comfort with independence as an adult.

Secondly, yes, I did have imaginary friends. Is there anything abnormal or wrong with that? According to Jerome Singer, Ph.D., “imaginary friends serve a purpose of meeting a need—to confront loneliness, to combat a fear, or to compensate for feelings of weakness in relation to adults or other children” (Newman). I, like most, confronted these emotions and responded to them by embracing the endless world of the *make-believe*. It is part of what punches your ticket to the rollercoaster of youthful ignorance, and what shaped my reality as Brett Hull’s best friend. To this day, neither my parents nor I know why the name of the St. Louis Blues Right Wing stuck out so much in my mind, to the point that I named an imaginary companion after him. This is, however, a simple practice, and one wholeheartedly symbolic of the creativity and open-mindedness that run parallel to life as an only child. Imaginary companions aside, not having other children around the house tempted me to make friends wherever I could. I loved meeting other kids and having people to play with. Looking back, it is something that helped to fashion my personable nature and my ability to engage and relate to people in diverse situations.

How should one tackle raising an only child? Speaking candidly, I feel as if my parents did an excellent job. They ensured that I always had opportunities to be around other children. Summers meant going up to our family cottage, where I would spend three months living under the same roof as my cousins of all ages. This is an example of “the best of both worlds”: I spent so much time with my cousins to the point that they felt like siblings, but we also managed enough time apart over the rest of the year that we avoided driving one another crazy. Shifting between the two environments offered a unique experience. I also had the good fortune to be enrolled in extra-curricular activities for as far back as I can remember. I gleefully honed my social skills in dance classes, swimming lessons, acting classes, Sparks, Brownies, Girl Guides, and summer camps. According to an article in *American Baby Magazine*, it is important for an only child to be involved in activities with other children, because they need to be able to relate to people

their own age (Voo). It can also be extremely different for single-child parents to say no to their child's requests. "Only children live to please their parents, so it can be difficult for Mom and Dad to turn down requests and offers" (Voo). I can imagine that it would be hard to say no to your only son or daughter (especially when they are in that adorable kid phase); you are left vacillating between catering to your exuberant child's demands, and laying down the in-house laws. My parents were always there for me, thankfully, ensuring that they taught me to attempt to solve problems on my own before going to them for help. This, along with their ability to say "no" to me, has strengthened my ability to be autonomous, carved out a basic level of resilience, and assured that I did not become the "spoiled brat" that only child stereotypes would suggest.

I am thankful to be an only child. Why waste time bemoaning what is not within reach of one's control? When I was younger, I would have loved to have a sibling, but I now understand that not having any has cleared the path for so many opportunities that simply would not have existed had my parents had multiple children to support. We all begin life with a fresh hand of cards, and although birth order can exert influence in the formative years, ultimately, it is how you play your hand that carries greater significance. No matter how many children a parent is privileged to have, the important thing is to love and guide them, and to allow them the freedom to become their own person. If that is achieved, your child will be just fine.

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A Complex Mind

JESSICA WHITEHEAD

MY ROOM is coloured with beautiful shades of pink and blue. It's almost like a princess's closet: rimmed with shining lights and hanging lace. Staring into the mirror I see an average Canadian girl, with white blonde hair, piercing green eyes, and my favourite Lululemons. I smile into the reflection, reinforcing the image I have set. I provide those around me with a false perception of my reality.

To the outside world I'm a passionate, bubbly, and deeply emotional college student, but inside, I'm a ticking time bomb waiting for my new personality to hit. Let me make one thing clear: I did not choose this life. It would be so much easier for me to walk through the world without secrets, erratic behaviour, and feelings of hopelessness. However, this is my reality, and something I will just have to accept.

*

While applying my makeup, I can't help but I feel so high, things are finally falling into place. I can do anything and be whatever I want to be. I'm thinking about packing up and moving to California to begin my acting career, good thing I have I already started researching realtors. I'm going to be more than just that though, I think I'm going to travel to Asia for a while or perhaps my boyfriend and I could get

married this summer. I'm going to be a leader, a role model, and a millionaire.

I'm so excited, my two hours of sleep last night was a simple waste of time. There's too much to do so I see no reason in slowing down? I pace around my room lightly tapping my face. I shake as my hand suddenly transforms into bleeding red flesh and solid bone. I scream at the sight, but it disappears in an instant. I hear my housemate turn on the kettle; the words "let's get drunk" stumble out of my mouth. It's a Wednesday, I'm free, and the world is whatever I want to make of it. "Guess what?" I announce excitedly, "It's the first day of winter!"

"Your so funny" I hear my friends giggle as I skip around the room. I let them in on my amazing plans; maybe they'll want to be part of it as well

"Calm down girl," my housemate smirks sipping on her chai tea. I guess they really don't understand.

*

The light piercing through my curtains is too much for me to handle. I wish it were winter again; it was always dark until 10 am. "I can't take this anymore" I say to myself as I hide under my covers. My body feels so heavy, and my mind is clouded with empty thoughts. Why am I here? Why am I so weak? I feel worthless. I slam down my alarm clock, 14 hours of sleep is not enough. My cellphone keeps beeping, why doesn't everyone just leave me alone? I feel my eyes swell up, leaving my day old eyeliner streaming down my face. I remember all the Ignorant words I've been told by my so-called "loved ones."

"It's all about perception, think positive." "North Americans are so spoiled, what is there to be depressed over?" "Have you been eating properly? That's probably why you're tired." I don't want to be this way; it's not a choice I've made. Everybody seems to think this is some sort of attention game or adolescent phase.

I finally get up, and walk to class. I've already missed two today, I might as well go. I hear my professor speak, but my brain feels lifeless

and disengaged. My eyelids keep shutting; all I want to do is disappear. I think back to all the plans I made and I feel like a failure. My boyfriend asks me to meet him after class; he says he wants to talk. I stare at his grey polo shirt, numb to the words that come out of his mouth. I don't really care what he has to say, in all honesty. All I know is that it's something about us growing apart. "Whatever" I roll my eyes walking away from him. All I can focus on is returning to my bed. I grab a ridiculous amount of food for the trip home. It feels like the only thing I have to look forward to. This hell will never go away.

I'm staring at his tie, purposely avoiding eye contact. This is the second time I've ended up in the hospital this month. Apparently my behaviour is "erratic" and "concerning" according to campus security. The psychiatrist speaks to me, "Based on your history, it is clear you have bipolar disorder." His voice fizzles in and out of my head as he begins throwing around words like mood stabilizers and lithium. I don't even know what this diagnosis means. Am I crazy? How will I ever function in society? The news gets worse. "Considering your young age, your symptoms will likely increase as you get older, requiring a higher dosage of medication." At that moment, I realized this is going to be a life-long battle. This isn't a phase, and there's no escaping.

I left the doctor's office feeling confused, yet accepting. I suddenly realized my struggles really did exist. I no longer felt the guilt of being a so-called "spoiled" Queen's student. This was real, a legitimate medical condition. The good news was that it could be managed. I could get better, my pain won't always run this deep. Making my way onto the bus I felt a sense of empathy for those around me. They may all be fighting some sort of battle that I know nothing about.

How “Aliens” Took Over My Body

RACHEL WONG

AS I stood, I placed my feet together and winced at the mirror in dissatisfaction. Although my thighs touched ever so slightly, I felt an immense, ocean-sized feeling of failure because of it. I was seventeen, lost, hormonal and a self-professed Internet addict. I would scroll endlessly on websites, striving to be like the shiny celebrities that I saw all over the media. It was a love-hate relationship with my computer. I knew it was bad for me, but I really just could not stop. These pictures would not only make me feel absolutely inadequate, they would immediately make me feel the roll of fat on my stomach hang out my jeans, the pain in the pimples that I had on my face, and my arms flubber. I was always aware that of the influence the media had on me, greatly because we had to learn about it school repeatedly each year. This school curriculum however, never really prepared me for what I was about to see in my teenage years.

Signing up for a “Tumblr” account was like signing my confidence away. This website was my new demon, yet I had unknowingly shook hands with it. I found myself immersed in pictures: pictures of people in beautiful places, adorned in beautiful things. I wanted to look like them. This is when I found the worst of the worst: thinspo (a term describing “inspiration to be thin”). The world of thinspo is a completely different and extreme perception, countless photos of toned tummies, ribs and skinny legs on an endless scroll. Beauty magazines,

“reality” tv, and shiny celebrities have always been a huge force in my struggle, dictating what I should wear, should eat, and should say. I always felt that I had to fit right into this cookie cutter shape. However, I am not alone. I ran into tons of thin-inspiration messages a day from doing everyday activities like checking then news. However, I’m sure I am not alone in this struggle.

Not only I was convinced that I would be happier if I was thinner, I also made my quest to be skinny an absolute priority over everything else. I bounced around from diet to diet, and spent more time deciding if quinoa was actually good for me than reading a good book. One thing that I also realized about myself was that I expected these crazy lifestyle changes to happen instantly overnight, constantly checking my stomach in the mirror to see any difference at all.

Another aspect of “thinspo” that I never realized is all the retouching that happens behind the scenes. I used to believe that I could look like the girls that I saw in print ads, on television and in magazines. This came to a sudden halt; I came across a Ralph Lauren advertisement of a skinny girl in a white bikini. At first, she looked like everything I always aspired to be, and then I looked a little closer. Her hip and leg were completely blurred into one and bent over backwards against a wall. I chuckled softly, imagining myself doing the same (impossible) acrobatic position. I then truly realized, that these images were not humans like myself. The results of these images are disfigured creatures, in reality, no longer looked human; their eyes, like pools of hopelessness. These alien figures were who I aspired to be like, I idolized their every soulless action.

I remember looking at these alien creatures and feeling like they had their life together. The aliens never had to worry about grades, family dysfunction, or credit card debt; they were true perfection in my eyes. Since I was young I flipped through magazines, cover to cover religiously. The advertisements of happy, thin, blonde girls laughing with their muscular clean shaven boyfriends were the epitome of what I wanted. *Soon, that will be me*, I thought.

Flash forward to five years later, nineteen years young—I was nowhere where I thought I would be. Still 5 foot four, 120 pounds, with

long black hair, I looked pretty much the same as I did in high school, give or take a couple piercings. A rookie Tumblr addict, I was still scrolling through endless photos depicting the perfect lifestyles of these “aliens,” but at this point, I was completely convinced that Planet Thinspo was my new reality. A reality I wanted to be a part of. I wanted to join their mothership. Their species had taken over the planet, in a very subtle way: the power of image. I saw them everyday, and they were everywhere. The powers that these perfect, thin girls I saw in print ads and online had a very special alien-like power, brainwashing. Soon enough, my peers were speaking their language: strange terms like “gluten-free diets” and “yogilates” starting making way into everyday conversations. I began to believe and embrace everything that Planet Thinspo had to offer, and these aliens were taking over our world, and the images in our heads.

From the minute I gained light from that Ralph Lauren ad, I began to witness my surroundings in a different light: I saw the aliens for what they were. Their sole purpose in their takeover was to convince us humans that we are not good enough, and never, ever will be. Thus, this began my rebellion against their mothership. My first step against the aliens they never saw coming. In an instant, before their intruding thoughts could swerve my decision, I logged quickly onto my Tumblr account. “ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DELETE YOUR ACCOUNT?” came up in bold letters. I moved my mouse, and clicked “YES.” Thus, year’s worth of their brainwashing from my blog was completely obsolete. I began to feel their intrusive remarks in my head starting to fade. However, this was only my first attack.

Second motion in my fight: to shred the schedules. I started to rip up the strict diet and exercise regimens that I made for myself, and had a scoop of ice cream. I was hungry, frustrated and taking my first bite of cold, vanilla ice cream truly felt like a transcendent experience. The alien voices went from a quiet murmur to a hush.

Just as I was about to initiate my third and final attack—to destroy the alien takeover once and for all—I passed by a whole new Ralph Lauren advertisement, this time, a sullen looking girl with a waist comparable to the size of her wrist. Although I was able to get the

aliens out of my own life, I knew that the alien takeover was not over for many female earthlings. It would be absolutely impossible for me to do this alone.

Unfaltering Sunshine of a Clouded Mind

MADDIE WRIGHT

Spring

BILL CONFIRMED to his daughters what the family had suspected. Their mother had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The faint mist that lingered over Marianne's mind, blurring her memories stealthily and sporadically over the past year or so, had now taken full form. Transformed into a thick veil, its menacing shape was made visible to all. Medications could possibly mitigate the symptoms for a time, but inexorably the disease would advance.

Marianne cried.

Winter

Now that the shadowy fog had become a known predator, it changed the way Marianne carried herself. She became less confident, less willing or able to participate in conversations. She was increasingly aware of her limitations and did not want to slip up in front of her friends and family. She'd forget where she had put her keys and get too easily frustrated with simple tasks. She was less able to manage in the kitchen but nevertheless continued to enjoy baking with the assistance of her daughter Jenny. Marianne prided herself on her Christmas

shortbread and knew the recipe by heart. She began to set out the ingredients-butter, sugar, flour...

Now I just need the....What's that ingredient called?? I've used it a hundred times before.

"Jen, have you seen the...the..."

What am I missing??

"...Almond extract?" Jen said, encouragingly, as she took it out of the cupboard and handed it to her mother.

Right, almond extract. Of course.

Marianne cried. Again.

This disease was a creeping fog which was slowly enveloping Marianne. She began to forget things, yet she was aware enough to know that she had made mistakes. She was constantly on edge, knowing that she didn't know. It was like watching two cars about to crash into each other, and not being able to do anything to stop them.

Summer

The family gathered a few days after one of Marianne's routine doctor's appointments to get an update. "Would anyone like a cup of tea?" Marianne asked. Everyone responded with polite "no thank you's." The daughters listened as Bill discussed the latest concerns. Marianne, tuned out of the conversation, turned to her daughter Judy and smiled, "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"No thanks, mum, I don't drink tea, just coffee."

I know this. I'm supposed to know this...

"Right, right." Marianne began to cry, knowing she should remember this. Knowing she did not. The dark fog was a nightmare, a demon that was gradually but so surely robbing Marianne of her mind. But beyond that, it somehow fostered a weird sense of relief. While it took parts of her away, it also saved her from herself. Upset when she forgot something, she would soon enough forget that she couldn't remember and the upset would disappear into the ether. Silence filled the room. And a moment later, a chipper voice, "Who wants a cup of tea?"

Fall

Dr Gratham invited Bill and Marianne into his office to discuss her care. Marianne was reticent to engage in too much conversation with the doctor in case she slipped up and said something silly. Bill answered several of the doctor's initial questions in his usual affable manner. And then the doctor turned to Marianne and asked her directly, "And how are things at home for you, Marianne? How are you getting along?"

Well I know this is a bit of a test. I just have to stay calm and answer in a clear voice.

"I think things are going rather well at home. My brother Fred, here, is taking great care of me," and with that she pointed to her husband of over fifty years who sat next to her, holding her hand. Through all the frustration, fear and sadness, the thickening fog had now carpeted Marianne's mind to the point where she was blissfully unaware that it was in charge. Previously, had she known she had made a mistake as substantial as this, it would have crushed her. But now she sat there contently looking up at her brother. It is hard to imagine the pain this comment caused for Bill, while Marianne sat there cheerfully oblivious. Bill turned to her and gave her an open smile and a little pat on the knee. "You betcha!" was all he could muster.

Spring

As the months passed the fog thickened and Marianne's self-awareness was chipped away little by little. She and Bill travelled with extended family to Florida, an annual trip to a familiar setting. At dinner one evening, the restaurant was a whirlwind with the clanking of glasses and the grandchildren's loud voices bellowing across the dinner table. Marianne's decline was apparent to all. Overwhelmed by the noise, Marianne sat quietly with a forced smile spread across her face. After enduring this bewildering state for several minutes, she turned to Bill and quietly whispered, "Shouldn't we be getting home soon? I

think we forgot to leave the lights on and it's getting dark." Marianne hadn't a clue where she was at that moment.

"We're in Florida, my dear," Bill replied, comfortingly.

"Oh, right, right," she said, with as much confidence as she could summon.

I'm scared. Why can't we just go home?

"You ok? Would you like some more bread?" her grandson Jack asked sweetly, deflecting the error.

I'm not sure who this kind young gentleman in the black shirt is, but I would like some bread.

"Yes please," she said and helped herself to a slice of bread. Within minutes she was conversing quite happily with her daughters. What this disease had taken from her was incredibly sad to witness and terribly hard on her family. Yet it was comforting to know that in her own, muddled way, she was content. She was safe. She was loved. The dark cloud was smothering her memory, but what she had now was the ability to experience joy in the moment.

Winter

Marianne was fidgety at dinner. Suddenly she popped out of her chair and insisted it was time for the weekly call to her mother. Bill looked at her and in a most gentle voice, informed Marianne how impossible that would be as her mom was in heaven.

Why is this man not letting me use the phone? I just wanted to call...

A few months ago Bill's answer would have sent Marianne into hysterical tears. She would have realized her mistake and cried tears of frustration. But this Marianne simply giggled and sat back down to resume eating. It broke Bill's heart to see that Marianne was plainly unaware of the mistake she had just made: her mother had been dead for over forty years now. But seeing her chuckle and then just carry on rather than suffer tears of frustration and sadness due to her error brought Bill some solace. The giggly, reliant, childlike woman he saw before him had come full circle, reverting back to childhood. Even if she didn't know the date or where she was at any given moment, or

even if someday she didn't recognize him, he knew her, and that's all that mattered.

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Shadow of the Walking Dead

CONG HENG YE

“I DON’T think you should go to university,” a cold and subtle smile on her face, my high school counsellor flings these words at me, when I am petrified in a short state of apathy. She has just told me, unlike what I expected, that I must finish a few more core courses to graduate from high school. When? Can’t be this year. Maybe next year? As long as you can take and complete both the supporting courses and the graduating courses. I find little necessity to talk with my counsellor anymore and leave her office. It was three years ago when I had just entered this high school as a grade 11 student with little knowledge of the Canadian education system, she planning the courses for me during a new student appointment session. “It’s good for you,” she explained, “you need to learn to assimilate. As-si-mi-late, do you know the word?” With a subjective judgment of my vocabulary, she wrote down the word on a slip of paper while she rattled on about why I needed to take so many marginal courses. I was nodding like a pumpjack in reply, my brain preoccupied by churning thoughts about “graduating earlier for university.” I was bored by the talk, which I found not in the least informative, with blithe disregard of the fact that this course plan would delay my graduation. At present, I have the feeling that I have been totally deluded. I am not prepared to await the doom like a sitting duck!

Therefore, I launch a war against fate with awareness of how arduous the campaign will be. I require numerous supporting and graduating courses and still need to decide my goal program in university and then plan my elective courses accordingly. Staying in my school for these courses, however, is not a wise choice. I have heard that in one of our past grade 12 English courses, only 2 students have barely passed with a grade of 51. The schedule is tight, too. Therefore, I apply for grade 12 courses at night school and summer school. But even that's not enough. I manage to find some private schools where I can pay for courses with a more flexible schedule than the one in my school. But conflict still happens. I have a private school course only available at night. I try so hard, and eventually persuade both the private school teacher and the night school teacher to accept my compromise proposal to attend both classes for half of each period. Now, I have to shuttle between two schools and study the missed class contents on my own back home every night. This is a cold and snowy winter, when the streets are illuminated by the pale glow of snow, which has remained pristine on the ground before I march on it.

Offers from different universities coming one after another, I am exhausted in the battles of various courses and language tests. My parents rejoice more than I do, since they yearn for me to accept the offer from Queen's for the Computing Science program. Frankly speaking, my application for this program is a sheer make-do response to their pressure with no prospect of being admitted. Now vexed by the offer, I know I am not cut out for science and mathematics. "We are not so wealthy that you could rely on us for lifetime," they admonish me, "Try to make it, even though you don't enjoy it. Life doesn't comply with your wishes." Then I pack for the 200 kilometres trip to study away from home with an enormous load of luggage and a full course load selected during the first course selection. And I encounter failures at the end of the first term, and in the following year. I nearly freak out, even though I have already predicted the result. For unspeakable reasons, I grin alone. How dare I anticipate a miracle? Who do I think I am!? Does fate surrender and do I win the "victory" when I receive the offers? How ingenuous was I!

Thus far, I have to admit that I haven't fully learned the lesson that fate has given to me. Having decided to transfer, I am faced with a difficult choice of another program. "We are not so wealthy that you could rely on us for lifetime," my brain is haunted by my parents' words. In the disguise of social science, economics catches my eye. Well, I can at least find a job within the financial sphere, probably a lucrative position, with a B.A. degree in Economics in the future, can't I? And I fail a core course in economics in the following term. It is the first time that I find life meaningless in a nadir. I face a dilemma. Continue the program? Unpredictable amount of extra study time and toil await me, as it has clearly turned out that I have no aptitude and assiduity for that discipline. Withdraw from university? I have no idea how to find a job without an undergraduate degree in today's gloomy economic slump. I am in the fatal siege laid by fate, who laughs grimly at me with a nasty grin. Moreover, he never listens to your imploring or defying. There is no compromise, no peace, no armistice, no victory, and no surrender. That reminds me of a cat playing with his prey just for fun.

Finally, the only choice is a solution of compromise: transfer to a general program in Economics. It requires fewer courses and efforts to graduate so that I could hopefully finish my suffering earlier. I will never cling to any hope of a bright prospect. In this world, success is an exceptional case, hope means a grimmer despair. Are hope and confidence necessary? Absolutely, because hallucinogens and stimulants are forbidden drugs. This tragedy, which is still unfolding, reminds me Dukkha, namely suffering, the first principle of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. Life is conceived in desires but the world is changing relentlessly; as long as we live, we suffer from our unfulfilled desires. It is not necessary to come to terms with a possible disappointing destiny, but it is necessary to shrink the desires to the minimum to prevent a tantalized heart being smothered by a deeper disappointment—merciless fate always leaves the "better parts" of his show yet to come. Fate is like our shadow, and we are a ponderous walking dead with a Siamese twin dragging behind, always until demise.

The Mountainous Journey En Route to a Dream Career

JORDAN YEE

AFTER SPENDING four years carefully knitting together the pieces to a master plan for the future, myself and four close friends finally realized what we have actually been doing all along: succumbing to societal pressures and pursuing a path perceived to be ideal only by the peers and leaders that surrounded us. In reality, the plans we were encouraged to tirelessly pursue in order to ensure job placement were confining dream catchers, built not to catch bad dreams, but rather our best and biggest ones. Of course, I knew landing a career in the sports industry would require heroic efforts and unconventional thinking, but with critics obstructing each recommended route through the mountainous journey, I didn't know how I could possibly navigate myself up to the peaks. Although our mutual dream to work in the sports industry had been put on hold throughout the duration of business school, we knew it could be revived on our much anticipated road-trip to Boston, where we would attend the Holy Grail of sports conferences: the 2014 MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference (SSAC). As I looked forward to embarking on a new and uncertain journey, the seven-hour trek down the I-90 by car through whiteout conditions to Boston would prove to be the first sign

of many sacrifices that I would need to make in order to break into the sports industry one day.

As we began day one short of sleep and fuelled by an excessive amount of coffee, I felt like it was my first day of high-school as we checked into the SSAC. Although focused on personal learning and networking opportunities, it was difficult to avoid becoming fixated on every attendee's name tag—Harvard Professor, ESPN Executive, General Manager, Owner, Coach, Venture Capitalist—as there was a variety of industry professionals that nonchalantly flooded the convention centre and commanded attention like a celebrity would while walking down Hollywood Boulevard. Being surrounded by success stories was overwhelming and made it difficult for me to separate reality from hopeful visions, but focused on the ultimate goal I sat down for the first presentation and decided to let the learning begin. “Starting a Sports Business” was the first noteworthy panel of the day, featuring several business founders, including Kevin Plank, Founder and CEO of multibillion dollar company Under Armour. Similar to several presentations we would see later in the day, the key learning outcomes were not all that surprising: work hard, hustle, learn how to sell, do unconventional things, etc. The plethora of presenters and topics quickly triggered sensory overload and it became apparent the words being preached were not the only source of information that warranted attention at the SSAC. Lost and confused, I changed direction and lessened my focus on the words being said and instead searched for the common traits that proved to be vital to each individual's survival through their own journey.

With a full day of experience, all of us started day two feeling more confident, prepared, and open-minded; however, our improved readiness wouldn't significantly alter the day's outcome. The thought-provoking debate between world-renowned authors Malcolm Gladwell and David Epstein delivered an insightful message on persisting and challenging commonly accepted ideas, but it was still just another one of many engaging presentations at the SSAC. So, as the sun set and I reflected on my thoughts for a second time, I acknowledged that the

SSAC could only provide some of the advice needed to conquer the arduous journey to my dream career.

As the conference came to an end, we regrouped and looked forward to the last leg of our journey in Boston. It was game night at the TD garden: Celtics vs. Pacers. An agenda featuring great friends, dinner, drinks, and a heavy-weight NBA matchup couldn't have looked better for a final night in Boston. Especially after a weekend filled with learning about the intricacies of the sports industry, I knew that attending the game as a fan would not only be a great celebration but also a perfect way to see first-hand the reality and appeal of working in the industry. Exhibit A was the 37 year-old conference attendee/speaker and Celtics Head Coach Brad Stevens who was living his dream—not considering the inevitable loss to a better team—right in front of us during game night. Initially, we were beyond satisfied with simply witnessing a close game packed with highlights in a historic atmosphere with beers in hand; however, it was not until we got up from our nosebleed seats and headed for the exit when the ultimate highlight would be showcased. Only a few steps displaced, we noticed a familiar face from the SSAC and started whispering to each other like high-schoolers, arguing over who it was and which one of us gets to talk to him first. It was the Assistant General Manager of the Boston Celtics, Mike Zarren. We were familiar with his heroic story; from unpaid intern to general manager of an NBA franchise, he already conquered the seemingly impossible journey through the mountains of critics. What was more surprising and awe-inspiring was his grateful disposition and burning love for basketball. Instead of acknowledging his own feats in conquering the mountain, Mike acted as if he wanted everyone who could see him to know it's not about being at the top of the mountain, but rather the lessons learned on the perilous journey. It was about the process of building character. Although entitled to unlimited perks related to the Celtics, Mike sat in the nosebleeds. While I thought I learned more than possibly retainable over two days at the SSAC, observing Mike in his environment was a pivotal moment. Forgoing great or even decent seats and their glamour, it was apparent all he needed was a few beers and *any* seat in the house in order to

enjoy what he was doing. He was living his dream and candidly conveyed what is most important about the journey to a dream job and the life after conquering it.

After seeing Mike, we left the Garden with restored and newly ignited faith in ourselves. Each of our perspectives on the journey to a dream career in the sports industry had not only changed, but developed monumentally. The SSAC was undoubtedly inspiring and informative, but it often inspired for the wrong reasons. It made us fantasize about the perks and glory of succeeding in an industry commonly perceived as glamorous when in reality, the most imperative factor that will always remain true is one's meaningful connection and commitment to their passion. Alas, the weekend was over, but our journeys' through the mountains had just begun.

Fate or Acceptance?

HAYLEY YURGAN

SOME PEOPLE describe fate as wonderful because it means great things are meant to happen. But the word fate goes both ways. So does it really mean that some bad things are meant to happen? I was brought up Catholic and was taught that God has a plan for everyone. I have always struggled with the ideas of fate and determinism. I doubted its existence, but if it did exist, how could it be wonderful if it produces poor outcomes?

He has experienced an ischemic thrombotic stroke in the left side of his brain. The right side of his body was affected by this, and is paralyzed. He's lucky to be alive.

The medical jargon continues as we just stare at the doctor in confusion. The stroke is sudden; just yesterday we had been celebrating his retirement. The party is over now, no more celebrating, no more planning for a well-deserved, work-free future. Now all I see is the right side of his face drooping as if it was made of clay and someone had modelled it by pulling downward on his features, extracting his happiness as they went.

An ischemic stroke is caused by the interruption of blood flow to the brain from a blood clot.

The explanations are meaningless to me. Is the doctor explaining the fine details of a stroke going to change anything for my grandfather, whom I called Dedo? No. I suppose I skipped the classic denial phase of grief and went right toward anger. The anger I feel and the hopelessness that seeps into me from his blank stare leaves me with so much to say but nothing to articulate. Luckily my father is still in denial, thinking everything will be fine soon. His denial of the gravity of the situation allows for the doctor to explain the extensive rehab my Dedo will need:

He needs to be placed in a rehabilitation facility in order to recover. Recovery will not be ideal in the home.

So we all agree. He will attend a rehabilitation clinic to help him get back to his true self, not the unresponsive man that he momentarily is because of some miniscule clump of blood. Something so small has changed everything! That's when I realize how selfish I really am. He's the one going through it. He doesn't need my anger, he needs my support, and that's what I will give him because I know he can overcome this. Maybe this is acceptance, but how's it possible to experience so many of these supposedly drawn out stages of grief within an hour? The "normal" progression can take years and follows a steady order: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then acceptance.

It is a slow and winding road to recovery. The first therapy target is speech. After a few weeks he is speaking. My father and I visit every day after I am done school. My Baka spends the beginning of her retirement sitting next to her husband's hospital bed and wheeling him around. After what seems like an eternity, he starts to move his arm. His frustration becomes most evident when a sling contraption makes an appearance. It holds his arm in place and has a little slot for a fork, so he can feed himself because he has not recovered the fine motor skills of his fingers. This should be an exciting time, he is moving forward, but to him it is just an inconvenience. He pushes through

everything, not wanting to seem like he is ungrateful for the help; nonetheless, realistically, relearning everything you accomplished over fifty years ago is not anyone's idea of a good time.

Finally, he takes his first step. It's like what I would imagine experiencing your child's first steps as, exhilarating and pride-producing. You can see the delight in his no longer drooping grin that no one has seen in over a year. It is hard to fathom that he was there for my first steps and now I am experiencing the same for him, like some sort of sadistic déjà vu. In any case, he is coming home, and he is happy, even joking like his old self. He pulls me aside: "Guess what, I am going to look younger than ever, at least my right knee will! I'm getting Botox!" Only he could find humour in therapy. Some might think all this was meant to happen because everything happens for a reason. His friend even says, "He was meant to make it through this as a test of determination." I suppose that is meant to be comforting, but it isn't.

Things are looking up, so I take the opportunity to go visit McGill as an option for my undergraduate degree. I explore Montreal for the first day and I love it. I can see myself here for the next phase of my education. My Dedo is well, so I can focus on my plans and personal future! That is when I get the call from my father:

*Dedo has a stage four brain tumour. He only has a few hours.
We're at the hospital now.*

This time I do not skip the denial phase. My heart immediately sinks into my stomach like a massive boulder. He is doing well. This is a joke. I am on my way to the airport though.

Dedo passed. You don't need to rush home now.

I still rush. It could not be true. Doctors must have looked at his brain a thousand times since that's where a stroke occurs. How could they miss a powerful, enormous, mammoth of a tumour? The anger stage quickly sets in; my head is about to explode from the

incompetence of such highly educated people. I make it back and indeed, he is gone.

Fate: destined to happen, turn out, or act in a particular way ("Fate").

I do not believe in fate. People decide their own fate. He decided he was going to persevere and overcome that tiny blood clot's destruction. His death was not fate. Some might call it that as part of their acceptance, but it is not part of mine. However, perhaps it somewhat contributed to my fate, if you want to call it that. I ultimately, did not attend McGill. However, I am very happy as a Queen's student. That is in part because of him. I admit I made the decision against McGill to avoid the connotation of his death. If I'm forced to attribute it to fate, my Dedo decided mine. I suppose that means I'm back in the acceptance stage of grief.

Work Cited

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Camp

The Epitome Of Bliss

ADEENA ZELDIN

I WAS born into a household where camp was more than just a way to spend my summers; it was a way of life, and a household rule—you went to camp, no questions asked. My father constantly expressed that camp was the most enjoyable experience he had as a youth, and I was reminded of this every year until I was eight years old; it was at this age that my parents shipped me off to the raved about sleepover camp: Camp Ramah. Camp is more than just a place for children to keep busy in the summertime through a variety of sports and activities; it is a place that one cannot help but miss; a place that is unfathomable to anyone else but those who have gone there; it is a place where memories are made; it is a home away from home. My goal is to convince you that this is the place to attend in your summer months. I am twenty years old—practically an adult, and still attend camp; that should be convincing enough. As an alumnus, I am grateful for having attended Ramah for such an extended period of time; the experience of living with friends, having inspirational staff members, and existing in a carefree environment for two whole months of each year was enough to alter my sense of self and contribute to who I have become today. Nonetheless, I am not here to talk about myself, but to rather use my

experiences to convince you why camp is the greatest place and why you should attend it this upcoming summer.

Initially, attending Ramah was not a choice but rather a requirement. The thought of living away from my parents for two whole months seemed impossible, yet, the impossible turned out to be attainable—attainable for a total of nine summers, approximately eighteen months overall. You would think that nine summers at the same camp, with the same people, and with the same staff, would become rather tedious; this impression, in fact, is the complete opposite. Returning each year means that you are committing to taking on greater responsibility, participate in an abundance of activities, and act as role models for the younger children. Do not be alarmed about the amount of time you are away! Two months will fly by without you even realizing, and by the end, you will grow nostalgic of camp itself as opposed to your parents and your cozy bedroom.

It all started when I found my name on a cabin sign and awkwardly approached my counsellors whose names I learned were Brenda and Pammy; they were the only two people I knew so I guess at the time I called them my friends, however, moments later, three girls were standing by my side. I assumed the girls were my cabin mates so I went and introduced myself. I learned their names were Shira, Maya, and Eden—they were my first *actual* friends. Little did I know that after nine long years, I would still consider them to be my best friends. Making friends is a major part of the camp experience. Whether it is homesickness, boy trouble, or just wanting to hang out on the field, I always had someone to turn to.

Ramah has this green field in the middle of camp called the “migrash”; just imagine the greenness of a golf course laid atop two one hundred-yard football fields. Yes, it is that big! I can recall a time that my friends and I just laid on the migrash all day long; the feeling was rousing yet tranquil. I felt as though I was daydreaming; staring up at that cloudless bright blue sky while feeling as if I was lying on a memory foam mattress. That moment was one for the books. The serenity of the migrash and the ability to experience it with friends is an experience I highly recommend you carry out.

After nine years and eighteen amazing counsellors, I can still remember each and every staff member's full name. Ramah takes pride in hiring their staff. They want to ensure that you receive the best quality camping experience possible. The appointed staff can be compared to the nature of a family; the counsellors are your mom and dad—the ones who you look after you and your well being, the unit head is your grandmother/grandfather—the one who looks after *everyone's* well being, and other campers are your brothers and sisters—the ones you talk, play, and sometimes argue with. Yes, I say argue with. But why you may ask? Well, living in a cabin at camp is like living at home with brothers and sisters, and I mean lots of brothers are sisters: try fourteen. Crazy right? It's not as bad as it sounds and on the contrary, it is quite fun. Although you would literally be spending 24/7 with them, the fact that there are just so many of you, allows you to jump from one person to the other when irritating feelings start to arise. Also, your parents are not present watching you like a hawk every five seconds; you are free to be who you want to be and do what you want to do—without, naturally, breaking any rules. I am sure you are thinking, “wow! A summer with no parents, sounds awesome!” Well, yes, it does have its perks, but what I have learned as an alumnus is that whether you like it or not, your counsellors *are* your parents—even though they do not possess the title. I believe that the staff members underrate how much they actually teach you while at camp. I am convinced that because of them, I learned about responsibility, built interpersonal skills, and learned to be selfless. There are no better role models I could have asked for.

Ring. Tweet. Ping. Buzz. Do these sounds remind you of anything? We live in a world where technology is constantly developing. Almost everywhere you turn there is someone on a cell phone, an iPod, a tablet, and a computer; imagine a world where all this is non-existent, a world with no distractions, a world where people have face-to-face conversations. Well, there is no need to imagine such a world, because that world exists; it exists at Ramah. I guarantee you that by the end of the summer, you will forget how to mock the ping and tweet noises. It was not until after I completed my summers as a camper that I realized

how beneficial the carefree and tech-free environment was. Being a tech-free environment enhances the idea that the atmosphere is untouched by devices and machinery because it is these mediums that interrupt the blissful lifestyles. Camp is a whole different realm; a place where instead of texting your mom and dad about your day—you handwrite and personalize a letter to be mailed home; a place where there is an emphasis on nature and camping instead of an industrialized city filled with shopping malls and restaurant chains.

I want you, Ramah wants you, and deep inside—I know *you* want too. In ten years I want YOU to be writing about your camp experience and convince the kids that will be reading your piece, why they should come to Ramah with all that it has to offer.

Untitled

EMILY ZIJLSTRA

MANY SERVERS, like me, will tell you that everyone should work for a year in the restaurant industry to understand the true definition of customer service. If you do not learn about yourself, at a minimum you will learn a lot about your fellow man. For the past three summers, I have made a living serving tables in a fine dining restaurant. Sure, the money is great, but as most would agree, the hospitality industry is hard and tiring work. For some, waiting tables can be effortless. For others, the multi-tasking, the requisite thick skin, the bad jokes, the long hours on your feet, the never-ending cleaning, the serving of certain dishes to the point that they seem utterly unappetizing, the impatient chefs, the ever-failing coffee maker, and the attempt to hide everything in your life with an even tone, the composed clean uniform, and the believable smile is simply a challenge on some days. After working in a fine dining restaurant, my fellow server employees and I have come to the conclusion that the list above is effortless, and serving can be rewarding and lucrative if your customers are low maintenance individuals. However, you begin to eye the restaurant's exit sign if you spot that certain type of patron. Anxiety builds, as you know it will leave you with stereotypes, bad habits and a most certain terrible night of serving. Sometimes the proverbial exit is all you can think about.

A day in the life of a server usually consists of a series of events all compiled into one nightmare shift, and I intend to share some of these experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed as a restaurant patron.

The Gluten Free Evangelist

This individual would love to shout from the rooftops that they are in fact gluten-free. While doing this they indulge in the breadbasket that has been placed on the table.

The Joined At The Hip Couple

This is the couple that can't take their hands off each other and proceed to make cooing noises while feeding each other throughout their dining experience.

Mr and Mrs McMiserable

Mr and Mrs McMiserable are fundamentally unhappy, and you are to blame for everything. One wonders why they venture into public, given their propensity for glaring, scoffing and claiming every ailment under the sun. Their negative personal outlook seems to be your fault, the world's fault, and ultimately everyone's fault but theirs.

If you don't classify yourself as any one of these stereotypes above, you have probably, more than you care to admit, fallen victim to being:

The Substituter

This individual doesn't make minor changes to their dish; they attempt to create their own, believing they are one of the next contestants on Top Chef.

The Bill Divider

“Well, I had the trout, which \$19.95, and Sam had the veal, which was 21.95, so I should pay less than he did.”

The Substituter and The Bill Divider tend to fall under the same category. Perhaps, the common element between the two is they make things difficult and provide extra work. Nothing is more excruciating at the end of a long shift than watching people trying to calculate individual checks instead of dividing by the total of the bill by the number of people dining in the party. This may have to be at the top of the list because not only is it time consuming for everyone, but you are taking away from other diners’ experience as your server stands in the back trying to match the countless individual bills.

As much as I would love to share with you my entire list of annoying dining traits, I will save you the trouble of hearing any more as I am sure you have been able to relate to at least one. I know this because, I, too, fall victim to at least one. My examples of these individuals may provide small humour to you, but makes me wonder why they are so easily recognizable to me.

From the Bill Divider to The Substituter, I have been one of these clichés I so often jump to criticize. Perhaps it is a learned behaviour because I see it so often. Or, perhaps from working in a fine dining restaurant I feel that if you are paying a substantial amount of money for a meal, you deserve to have a dining experience worthy of your money. We often place stereotypes and judgment upon others to compensate for things we lack or inspire to be. I have realized many different things about the different individuals you meet in the dining room. They have come together for the common reason to potentially celebrate, get to know one another for the first time, manage a difficult conversation or simply just to enjoy a meal they didn’t have to prepare. I have learned that the dining room is a place where you can learn a great deal from your patrons if you are open and have time to listen. Behind every Substituter, there is someone possibly struggling with illness, and behind every Bill Divider, there is a fastidious home

budgeter. It is truly a relay effort and every team member supports the customer's experience, and can contribute to the financial success of the establishment and your personal financial success.

As we frequently jump to criticize our customers, we often forget that they shape our career. A dining arena is a place of significant teamwork, assertiveness and courtesy training. It is an environment that is a perfect starting ground for learning the ability to cope under strenuous conditions in the areas of time and demand, and without The Gluten Free Evangelist's or The Mr and Mrs McMiserable's, where would we be?