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## November URI Community Diversity Project 2010

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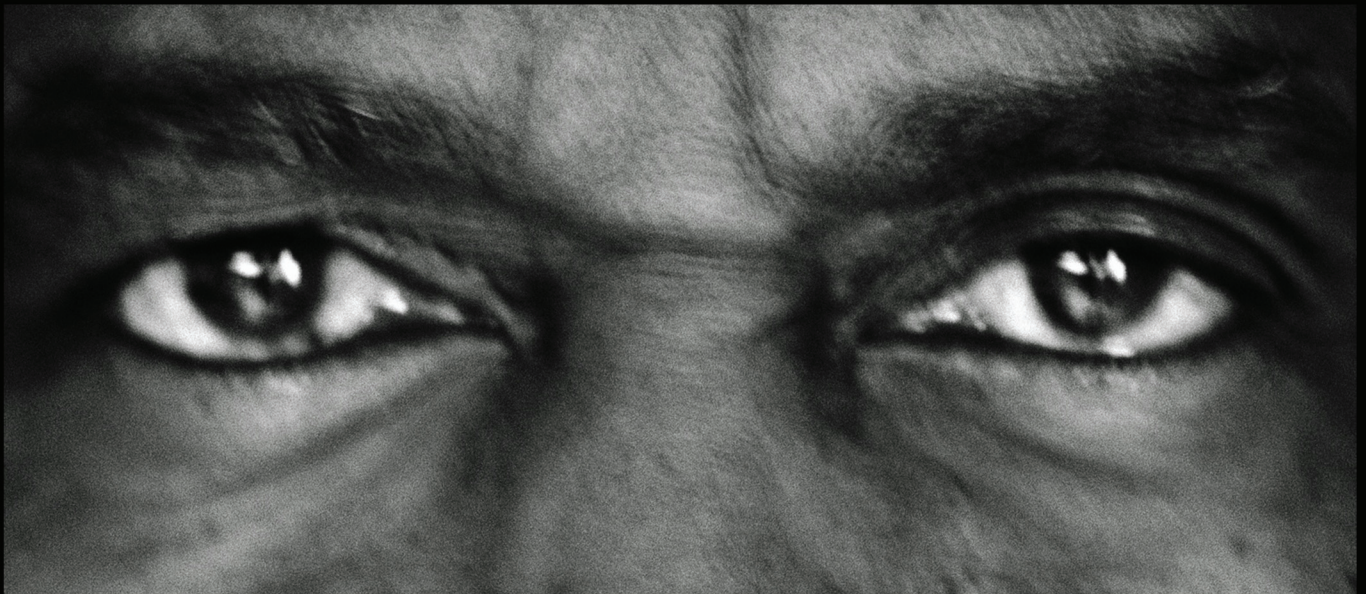
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# November URI Community Diversity Project 2010



Joseph Santiago  
Riley Davis  
Richard Travisano

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**NOTE from the Editors**

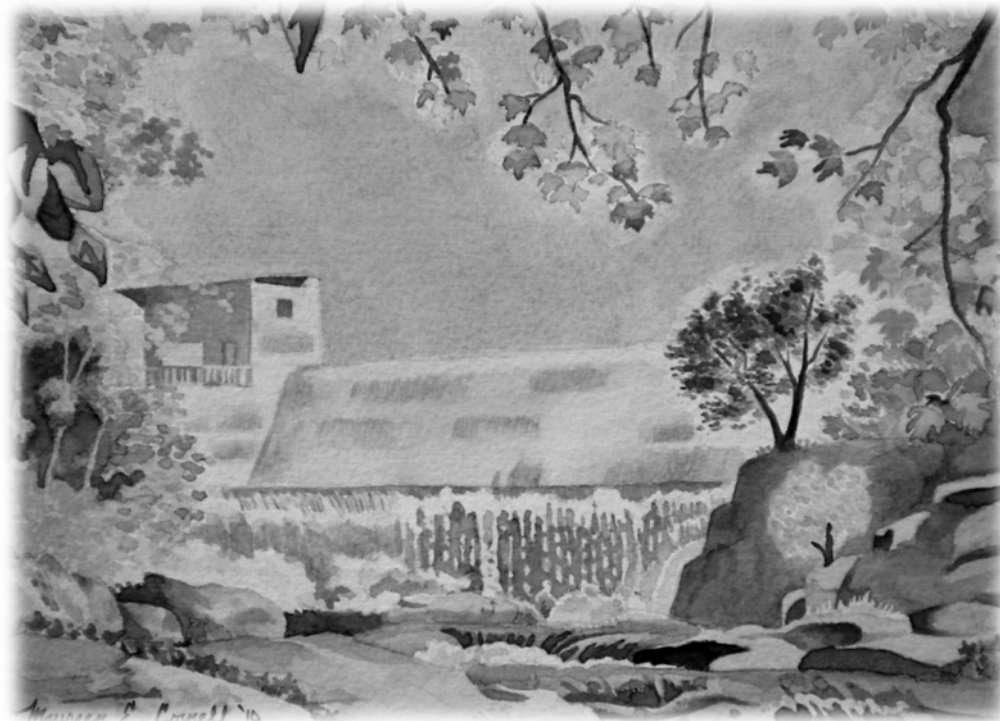
This project was made possible by the collaboration of Riley Davis, Richard Travisano, Joseph Santiago, The University of Rhode Island Housing and Residential Life, The GLBT Center, URI GSA, The Rainbow Diversity House, The URI Department of Student Affairs, The URI Department of Student Life and the 2010-2011 Student Affairs Diversity programming fund committee. The November Diversity Project invited the University of Rhode Island facility, staff, students, and community members to come together and share their works.

This project was developed in the World Voice series format and is created with the World Voice philosophy which seeks to draw its strength and diversity from the participatory culture it encourages. The World Voice series is internationally published and has become a quickly growing global community learning network. World Voice books are a cultural exchange where people from around the globe share their lives, passions, spiritual pilgrimages and their own humanity through poetry, stories, and art; thus becoming part of the historical record of a burgeoning global society. In Joseph’s words, “When we get together to share our experiences we begin to see ourselves as individuals that are part of constellations of culture and diversity instead of perceiving diversity as something that is separate from us and is acting upon our lives.” The World Voice book series has the goal of fostering communication and commonality of all people across borders. This book is simply a way to open the door for discussion and discourse through the creative medium.

Writers have come together from around the world and their spelling, grammar, and word choices, are often left as the author considered it as a final draft. For many authors English is not their mother tongue so we ask you keep an open and uncritical mind when finding a word choice or sentence structure that maybe somewhat off. This may leave some sentences as imperfect in many English writers/readers eyes as they come across them. Deliberation and consideration has been used in deciding what to edit and what to leave as a mark of the author’s voice. How any of us chooses to say what we wish to say communicates as much about us as it does our topic.

It is our hope that all readers will take advantage of the opportunity, and challenge, to enter the arena and to share their own voice and experiences. Tell us what you agree or disagree with, bring up new topics, or shed new light on an old one. It is my hope that this November Diversity Project might inspire the reader as well as the writer to take hold of their own creative capacity to fashion their life in a way that makes them proud to be living it!

To get involved with the World Voice project contact Joseph Santiago at [balanceheart@hotmail.com](mailto:balanceheart@hotmail.com) and ask for an online submission form. Check out books published under the World Voice theme go to [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) and search for World Voice: Inspiring a Conscious Signature 2010.



*Mansfield Hollow Dam – Painter Maureen E. Cornell*

## **POETRY**

*Poems by Jillian Chase*

### **The Bloody Cry**

Tears fall from her cuts  
Blood gushes from her eyes  
The doctor dilates her skin  
The knife slices her tiny pupils  
Soft epidermis wrinkles  
The iris' slashes cry  
Her hands are okay now  
Scars on the eyelid left behind  
Thin line of beauty is drawn on her leg  
Thin line of eye shadow on her upper lid  
Hair of imperfection on her 'perfect' face  
Deep gash of jealousy on her retina  
and the tears fall from her cuts  
and the blood gushes from her eyes.

By Jillian Chase 09.29.2002

## **Some Kind of Wonderful**

Dew. Drops form.  
Light. Sun rises.  
Crisp. Cool air.  
Run. Among fields.  
Flee. From sanity.  
Forget. Life's monotony.  
Excuse. Past wrongs.  
Live. Life fully.  
Breathe. In deep.  
Set. Sun down.  
Dark. No shadows.  
Lies. None hidden.  
Flowers. Fall asleep.  
Dew. Drops form.  
Light. Sun rises.  
New. All knew.

by Jillian Chase 03.28.2005

## **Good People**

My destiny is my own choice,  
all I have is my inner voice.  
Follow your heart, and positivity will trail.  
Follow the crowd, and you will surely fail.  
Get up, stand up,  
carve your own path.  
It is those that do not that will surely finish last.  
Appreciate those around you who care,  
Ignore those who stop and stare.  
Remember daily you are your own worst enemy,  
and appreciate the few who choose to befriend me.  
Life is yours to live  
Happiness comes when you give  
a shoulder to a friend that needs it  
a joke to a friend who gets it  
an ear when it needs to be lent  
and friendship when you are spent.  
Have faith that one day,  
maybe not this day, but one day  
it will come back to you.  
For good people keep good people's company  
throughout all of life's monotony.  
And "bad" people, if they exist,  
will not have the great pleasure of this.

By Jillian Chase 04.05.10

## Untitled

I am not: overly articulate.  
Nor am I: extraordinarily beautiful, intelligent or courageous.  
...there are many things that I am not.

What I have decided is most important is focusing on the things that I am.  
Some of these things may be quite positive attributes, others less helpful and others indifferent.

Yet, I can be nothing more than myself.  
I am certainly: passionate, creative, stubborn, compassionate and I work hard.  
I can also be.... cynical and despondent.  
At times-- often a defense mechanism.

But, if I have learned nothing else in my short 21 years, I have certainly learned one thing...

To put it bluntly: I Feel Best When I Feel Alive.

Not just the scientific alive, with my  
heart pumping,  
blood circulating,  
lungs full of air, and my  
brain processing everything around me.

Rather, I Feel Alive

when:

my heart bursts with emotion (good, bad or indifferent)...

when:

my blood pumps so fast that I can feel my pulse through my sweatshirt...

when:

my lungs can't get enough air because I've exhausted them with laughter...

and when:

my brain can't process what's going on around me because whatever it is doesn't need to be processed- it just needs to be let in.

This "realization", if you will, is not something brand new.

Rather, it is something I have realized over time.

As I stumbled and cried my way through adolescence,

I waited for life to "click in".

I've realized that life- or anything that may fall under the extremely broad umbrella that is implied by life- will never just "click in".

Thus, I have decided to take my own life into my own hands.

Destiny is simply what you make of it.

My destiny is described in my Learning to Live list.

I hope that somewhere in between my scientific living and my thirst to live, I can accomplish enough to fill up my proverbial happiness cup.

Cheers to the rest of my LIFE.

By Jillian Chase 08.03.2009



## **Blinded**

Now I lay me down to sleep.  
I let my conscience slowly sleep.  
Let the truth bleed deep from my heart for you.  
Clearly it's the only way to show you.  
Open your eyes.

I'm right here.  
I've always been here.  
How can you be so blind?  
Now I lay me down to sleep.  
Forever in your mind, I'll speak.  
Whisper thoughts and move mountains for you.  
Scream for you.  
Until you realize, with your real eyes.  
Are they real lies?  
Can you see?

By Kolby Andrade

## **Just Deal**

I just deal...  
Because it's who I am.  
I complain about three times a month.  
With the exceptions of PMS and mood swings.  
I'm not going to claim that I'm depressed, because I don't visit a shrink.  
I'm an optimistic pessimist.  
A walking, talking, breathing, oxymoron.  
I'm an independent, intelligent young woman.  
Who has far too much to say.  
For the most part I'm proud of who I'm becoming.  
I'm going to put the past on the shelf.  
I'm going to smile, laugh, take chances and live.  
I'm going to stick my middle finger in the air.  
I'm going to say, "Fuck your feelings"  
I'm going to live for me.  
I just deal...

By Kolby Andrade



Reflections 2 – Painter Maureen E. Cornell

## The Great Writer's Story

A writer on the rocks.  
With a pretty poet soul.

A beautifully written story.  
All about a changed lives and torn pride.  
With lost and hopeless goals.

Tears, blood, sweat, and sweet sorrow,  
Poured into letters scribed in cheap black ink.  
Read her words that will make your heart sink.

They say loose lips sink ships.  
Many ships she's sunk.  
She hates admitting her flaws,  
But she's damn well aware they exist.

A writer on the rocks,  
With a pretty poet soul.  
Opened up a locked up book,  
Unlocked a door and took a look.

Put her life on pen and paper.  
Squeezed her eyes shut and crossed her fingers.  
Swore to herself every single day  
That she'd be a famous writer someday.

By Kolby Andrade

## Letdown

I rise up into the white, so bright, so blissful.  
Day after day, a smile, smack dab in the middle of my face.  
Nothing, not even the worst day could ruin it.  
Because you'd be standing there at the end of my day, every day.  
You never let me down.

Sinking into the black, so dark, so uninviting.  
Night after night, a scream, a sob, a pathetic cry for help.  
Nothing, not even the brightest of light could save me.  
Because you're gone, lost, in some other realm.  
You're such a let down.

By Kolby Andrade

## **Lost**

My mind feels so strong, yet I feel so weak  
The words are all thought out - I just can't speak.  
An ocean of insanity washes over me.  
With gasps and short breaths, I scream - 'swallow me, swallow me'  
I want to sleep away the countless bad days,  
and wake up when the sun shines,  
because these days the sun won't shine here anymore.

By Kolby Andrade

## **Nature**

The sun is hiding behind cloudy skies.  
Nimbus clouds release their cries.  
Insects crawl and birds will fly.  
Yearning for some place warm, safe and dry.  
Nature is a wonder, some will never see.  
Nature can be the key to set you free.

By Kolby Andrade

## **Pretty Little Mess**

Things get a little messy.  
Things get a little fucked up.  
Caught in predicaments you don't want.  
Beautiful features you fear to flaunt.  
Can't let go and you won't give up.  
You're my dirty little mistake.  
And my favorite screw up.

By Kolby Andrade

## **State of Mind**

Connected in a way in which no one understands.  
Playing a large role.  
In a story too unplanned.  
Fingers intertwined.  
Mixed feelings are combined.  
Not easy to explain.  
When love's a state of mind.

By Kolby Andrade

## Silence

Silence, is it the absence of sounds?  
Or is it the presence of truth?  
Is it really golden?  
Or is it a time for our demons to speak?  
Is silence really quiet?  
Because it seems rather loud.

By Kolby Andrade

## Stone

He spoke the words through parted lips.  
His gaze lost in space.  
When I raised my eyes to look at him.  
I couldn't believe his face.  
"Stone." He spoke.  
Stone, he saw.

By Kolby Andrade

## The Great Writer's Story

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Unlocked a door and took a look.

Put her life on pen and paper.  
Squeezed her eyes shut and crossed her fingers.  
Swore to herself every single day  
That she'd be a famous writer someday.

By Kolby Andrade

## **The Sun after seeing too much of the moon**

That feeling of balancing the world on my shoulders has now subsided.  
I feel as if an angel has lent me her beautiful golden wings.  
That feeling of hopelessness has disappeared into that beautiful moonlight lingering above our heads.  
I feel as if everything in the past has just made me stronger.  
That fake mask I wore upon my face has fallen off and crashed to the floor, into a million pieces.  
I feel as if a permanent smile has been painted on my face.  
That heavy feeling that hung in my chest has been swept away.  
I feel as if I've been enlightened by the beauty of the world.  
That image of the world being the enemy has been transformed to the beauty I had been too blind to see.  
I feel as if nothing is ever set in stone.  
That deep, dark, cave of depression I've been hiding in has crashed all around me.  
I feel as if I have the strength to crawl out, and learn to walk again.  
That is because of you.

By Kolby Andrade

## **Things Gathered**

I'll give you the key to karma.  
Unlock the door of desire.  
Take me higher, the desert of doom couldn't get any drier.  
Give me the hookah of hope.  
The heroin of heartache.  
The acid of adventure.  
The taste of your time.  
Cherish my chaotic closure.  
Burn my biggest bridges.  
Love what's yours.  
And love what's mine.

By Kolby Andrade

## **Thinkable**

If thinkable people stopped thinking.  
What would they be?

If the thinkable did the unthinkable,  
What would it mean?

If the thinkable stopped thinking,  
What would be missed that was meant to be seen?

By Kolby Andrade

## **Thinking, thought, did, done.**

I liar I've become  
I've betrayed many. Haven't taken any of it into consideration.  
I thought I could handle the feelings  
That came with these actions.  
Got too wrapped up in my feelings.  
Got too carried away.  
Got too fucked up for my own good.  
Got too caught up in my own lust,  
What a predicament to be in, no?

By Kolby Andrade

## **Two of a kind**

You and I, are two of a kind.  
Different appearances, same state of mind.  
You're a guy, I'm a girl, what we have is a precious pearl.

Platonic love, from the very first start, I knew you would hold a place in my heart.  
That place is for you, no other will do, no other is as sacred or as genuine as you.

You and I are two of a kind  
No person could know, to them we are blind.  
You're as special to me, as I am to you, no best friend is better, no other could do.  
A brother or sister, a friend or a lover, forever, my forever, is you.

You and I are two of a kind,  
Two heads and two hearts, a deep bond is to bind.

By Kolby Andrade

## Wonderland

A sunny villa of enchantment.  
A fork stuck in the road.  
A for of natural beauty.  
It told me where to go.  
I took the road less traveled,  
Of dirt and desert land.  
When I reached my destination,  
I was in my wonderland.

Tree roots grown out of crystal.  
A river the purest blue.  
Cherubs all around me, searching their inner hue.  
A breeze as warm as sunshine.  
A fire as hot as man.  
Inhaled the scene so deeply.  
I'm in my wonderland.

Rolling hills over yonder,  
Weaved with grass and sand.  
The tree of youth forever standing.  
What is forever to a man?  
The tree rooted with such beauty,  
It's branches breathe off strength.  
Each and every single leaf, still growing it's own  
length.

Golden clouds align the skies,  
The nature, beauty, angels too.  
This enchanted place so colorful,  
Will never fade it's hue.  
With you and love and faith and sand,  
Forever young, my wonderland.

By Kolby Andrade

## The World

The world is such a disastrous place.  
It is strange, it is abnormal.  
It is wondrous, and it is magical.  
Beautiful sights fill the world.  
Though many hideous sights surface.  
Creating a darker aura for all.

The world is such an imperfect place.  
Good and evil woven together.  
Creating a marvelous quilt of life.  
People weak, and people strong.  
Goals created and dreams chased.  
Some give up, and some die trying.

The world is a sphere in the eyes of science.  
But to humanity, the world is an oddly shaped  
figure, of our imagination.  
A work of art, an amazing place.  
Filled with mixed emotion.  
Spun with diversity, culture, love and war.  
The world is worth our fighting for.

By Kolby Andrade

Poems by Michael Cichowicz

## Joy

(The Baby's Response to Sylvia Plath's *Metaphors*)

I'm the russet, shriveled raisin,  
the blemished pickle saturated in the salty brine of another.  
Sitting suspended in waiting for a long anticipated liberation.  
How long has it been, since the last I saw my copious comrades?  
Nine lengthy, prolonged questions, marked with anticipation, hesitation.  
For after my exodus, I must confess,  
to the highest degree, it was my jubilee, to be finally free, from my prior, confined dynasty.  
Yet into another I would plunge,  
The one I now consider my own abode.

I'm the pensive artist's unfinished masterpiece,  
waiting to be crafted into a new solid form of my own.  
I'm the anxious football,  
feverish to be cast betwixt the posts that mark victory to the one who flung it.  
Finally – movement.  
And like a swift, fervent freight train,  
I peel out from my dark cavernous residence,  
plunging, penetrating this fresh, exotic world.  
It's all so alien – the lofty white entities flitting about, poking and prodding at each and every faction of my  
being.  
From arm to arm I'm accepted around this bright new-fangled home of mine.  
When finally I fall refuge to a small, supple nook, swaddled in the arms of a compassionate smile, and a steady  
hand.  
I'm the last patch, the final part to the whole quilt that is  
my family.

By Michael Cichowicz



*Reflections – Painter Maureen E. Cornell*



## In Spain

Sunflowers as far as you can see, (and you can see quite far) looking west  
at the setting sun.

And in the morning,  
the sun tip-toeing on the eastern horizon,  
and they all flip –  
to greet the morning call to life itself.

Then all day salting away energy for the countless creatures of Spain  
(from ants to aunts) to live their lives.

A sunflower sea,  
with old castles atop every other hill island  
(which impress time on one's mind).

Then a gay hot air balloon rising with the sun,  
and I know the castles are solid stone illusions of the past,  
and I have a date with a very present 747 in Madrid.

Richard V. Travisano

## Listen

bright February morning  
sun sparking off all-round snow  
listen!

"Plink! Plunk! Plunk!  
(maple sap dripping into buckets  
spring's earliest footsteps)

Richard V. Travisano

## Middlebridge Nights

Coming down Torrey Hill at night,  
the Beavertail Lighthouse  
splashes all over you every five seconds –

and at Middlebridge itself,  
(if the sea is up and the *air* is moist)  
you can hear the surf pounding the beach -  
booming!

and if you don't smoke (or don't smoke much)  
you can even catch the fresh salt scent of the sea.

Richard V. Travisano

## Light

Being true to one's self, following one's heart – as it were,  
may mean true love, or mere infatuation, or just going off on a sexual bender-  
but whichever it is,  
this getting to where you ought to be  
lights you up,  
your radiance balms the world, the whole world,  
and as we say – all the world loves lovers.

So it's great! Beam! Shine! Light the dark (and some hearts as well).  
No one "sensible" minds --  
Unless (of course) it's with the "wrong" gender.

Now it's - "How?" "Why?" Whence this strangeness?  
"Nurture!" some pundits say. (So, mom and dad did bad.)  
"No, nature!" cry others. (Well, was it mom, or dad, who had the bad seed?)  
Or did you choose to do, to be, this "what?" that no one but you (and other queers) want?

The morality dogs get their backs up, bark and snap,  
herd you up with others, alike and akin, into your own circle.

Who are these fools who would disdain, cast out, some hues of the rainbow? Repress, reject, some lights the  
Gods choose to make this world shine, which color flowers would they ban, which dark tree barks should be  
no more, which fruits are not to their tastes, which furry beasts, which spiders, wasps or worms, dare to  
dance, fly and crawl outside the chocking boundaries of their cramped dignity? Do even minerals offend? Is  
lead too heavy, mercury too quick?

I say "Nay!"  
to all censoring curtains, shades, wet blankets, and fire hoses;  
all hues make light which brings --births--and nurtures life.  
Yes! Embrace all light to see the Gods' creation and, at last, get their message

Richard V. Travisano

## Middlebridge Nights

Coming down Torrey Hill at night,  
the Beavertail Lighthouse  
splashes all over you every five seconds –

and at Middlebridge itself,  
(if the sea is up and the *air* is moist)  
you can hear the surf pounding the beach - booming!

and if you don't smoke (or don't smoke much) you can even catch the fresh salt scent of the sea.

Richard V. Travisano

## The Night Shift

Reading on my screened porch in an old wicker arm chair under a fifties' goose-neck floor lamp, I look up at the loud "wonk" of a nearby night heron – the porch my cave as I peer into the dark, and listen, and scent the night river. I'm focused on the small splashes of snapper blues chasing bait, when deep "huffs" direct my attention to two huge raccoon figures in the half light from the lamp a few feet from the porch. One turns and ambles around the side of the porch and then returns with two pre-teens.

Three of them amble away and out to my dock to clean up after the gulls afternoon blue crab feast. But one youngster has noticed me and comes over and props himself up with his front legs against the screen for a better look. After a bit, the other young one, chewing on a big blue crab shell, comes back to check on his sibling. Then all four gather, march down to the end of my wall, climb down to the little beach, and continue their nightly neighborhood round.

Ten minutes later a loud "hooooo" from my big American cherry startles me. Barred owl!

Busy night.

Richard V. Travisano



*Middle America - Photography by Jillian Chase*

## Pennies From Heaven

Stray pennies  
(tails is luck in Connecticut)  
picked up  
(heads is luck in New York)  
with impunity, and kept  
(in Rhode Island)  
in an old sugar bowl.

Insuring (hopefully)  
that he  
(cock-a-doodle-doo)  
from Connecticut –  
and she  
(cluck, cluck, cluck)  
from New York ~  
will remain long together  
(and happily too).

Of course this tack is silly, but why not – especially when given, that the official state bird is The Rhode Island Red Chicken!

(It's only pennies, Henny Penny, not the sky falling – we hope.)

Richard V. Travisano

## On Re-meeting a Friend After a Decade [Does Lightning Strike Twice?]

I was looking forward  
(I guessed)  
to seeing you -  
as I imagined  
(or hoped)  
(for your sake or mine?)  
that you would be  
sort of (you know)  
like the way you are  
(or seem to be)  
instead of how you were  
(not to mention how I was)  
all those years ago.  
But I told myself  
"Stop dreaming!" because  
she is not going to show  
and (you know)  
come by and say,  
"ffi Richard!"  
and take my hand  
and (smiling)  
whisper (mischievously)  
"Damn everything but the circus!"  
Richard V. Travisano



*Two For the Price of One - Photography by Jillian Chase*

## Southern Spain Bus Trip: Huelva to Sevilla

Umbrella pines, wheat cut in the fields, olive trees, castles on hills.

The Romans moved in two thousand years ago, the Moors came somewhat later.

The Spanish waited them out,  
and are here still - and are quite comfortable.

Richard V. Travisano

## Where Are The Mae Wests?

We've parted

(so people are saying)

but we keep getting

(separately or together)

into the same boat.

So I wonder

(as I know you do)

whether we've parted

(at all, after all)

and I worry

(as you must too)

about these somebodyelses

(wailing in the wings of your and my lives).

And we're holding each other so tightly, and we're not at the wheel or the anchor, and there's nobody else in the boat!

Richard V. Travisano

*Poems by Riley Davis*

## Blind

I wish you could see what I hear  
The colors of sound I can sing  
A soft meadow brook on a warm summer day  
Like the song of a sunset fading away

If you could just see what I hear  
Where darkness no longer means 'lost'  
Where a young child's laugh is the light in his face  
And a whisper of love makes the world a bright place

It's simple to see what I see  
Just close your eyes and be free  
Feel the wind on your face as it whispers around  
And when you open your eyes  
Don't shut out the sound  
And just listen to what I can see

By Riley Davis

## A Collection of UN

Does the truth come out  
When you watch what you're saying  
Judged before you speak  
***Uncensored***

Known to the children  
The kindness of a stranger  
A hand meant to help  
***Unknown***

W·A·N·T·E·D  
Poster in the window  
The face of a crime  
***Unlawful***

Frozen decisions  
Caught in the snarl of fate  
There's nothing to lose  
***Unchangeable***

Hunger rests in the bellies  
Of children whose eyes  
Are asking us silently, 'Why?'  
***Unequal***

Congregating here  
All the effort in the world  
Making a difference  
***Unlikely***

First winter morning  
The mirror I look into  
Shows my mother's face  
***Unplanned***

The song of a bell  
Hollow and clear in the air  
Leads us through our day  
***Unofficial***

Taught to no one  
The freedom of self  
Exploration  
***Unusual***

Crossing the country  
A journey just beginning  
Your life in one bag  
***Unpack***

A challenge of heart  
All those plans for the future  
Washed up on a beach  
***Unwinding***

Logic creating  
A barrier between us  
Quickly tear it down  
***Unwanted***

Black tattoo  
Marks the place  
Of a memory  
***Unseen***

## **Distance**

A look across the room  
our eyes meet  
A connection so simple  
it startles

A story is told there  
your life  
your pains and your prides  
your decisions

It's only a moment we're looking  
so fast  
Can you see me so clearly  
as I see you  
Do you read in me the distance  
a long ride  
my life

I see what holds us back  
this connection  
Now is not the time  
not our place  
Pride, our fears unite us  
so simple

A look across a room  
The connection was made

By Riley Davis

## **Grandfather**

Crawlspace under the bed  
Hidden closet in the wall  
Secrets tell all

Inside the closet  
Soft ringing of a clock  
Tick-tock

Whispers in the hallway  
No one speaks  
The door creaks

Socks on hardwood  
Pitter-pat  
Moving silent like a cat

Small hand in hand  
Grip tighter  
Small giggle, little snicker

Stairs moan  
Lights flicker  
Moving quicker

Incoming! Start running  
Secret closet in the clock  
Tick-tock  
Tick-tock

By Riley Davis

## **Distortion**

Danger.

Dancing on the edge of insanity.

A distortion of some sort.

Nothing fancy.

Nothing like blue thunder.

A reserved obscurity.

A cultivated doppelganger existence.

Now me.

Now not me.

A sum of all the parts of an identity, clinging to Never-never Land.

Dressing up in grownup clothes.

Forever.

By Riley Davis

## **Relation**

Two strangers  
brought together  
A tangle of souls

Common ground  
forged and fought for  
between us

well met  
on the battle field  
alone in the fight

to reach the goal  
you must know yourself  
inside and out

Crushed by the weight  
Of expectations  
Commitment  
And honor

By Riley Davis



## **Routine**

Stand still, take four  
Run back, repeat  
A repetition  
Repeat  
In context  
Repeat

An assumption, it's hidden  
Don't look, repeat  
Stand still  
Repeat  
Don't look  
Repeat

Control your life  
It's simple, repeat  
Respond  
Retreat  
Routine  
Repeat

By Riley Davis

## **Time Watchers**

It is a soft touch.  
A slow engulfing of your senses.  
A warm cloud of black that calms your mind and lets you rest.  
Peace.

It is a slow ticking of the clock as you dream the fantastic.  
Your imagination flies while your body unwinds.  
The world settles down.  
Peace.

Close your eyes.  
Still your thoughts and just breathe.  
A deep breath that cleanses your body and clears your heart.  
Peace.

It is a quiet shout for a moment of your own.  
Ten hours, five hours, three.  
A soothing death.  
Peace.

Stop a moment.  
Rest.  
Take a breath.  
Peace.

By Riley Davis

## **Comfort**

Wind blowing  
swift walking  
rain falling  
Skate boards rolling  
Running  
heavy breathing  
Talking laughing  
Coughing sneezing  
The faint smell of cigarette smoke in the distance  
Ding ding upon the hour  
The world is changing so fast that they don't care to notice it's subtleness  
But I stand still  
unmoved  
like a statue even  
But no one really notices me  
They dodge me  
Bump me in my arm  
Step on my toes  
Split out that uncontrollable phlegm that forms in the back of their throat at side of my shoe  
And still I stood unmoved  
When I finally muster up enough courage like the lion in the wizard of oz  
I search for a place where I belong  
I see faces that look like mine  
They share stories similar to my experience  
We laugh we cry we support one another  
I found my comfort zone  
And boy I'm I comfortable  
But I realize there is so many opportunities just a footstep away  
I inch over to give this a try  
I feel like I'm in a different world  
Maybe I have an invisible cloak around me  
I'm talking but no one hears me  
Sees me feels me  
touch me  
I'm here  
Wind blowing  
swift walking  
rain falling  
Skate boards rolling  
Running  
heavy breathing

Talking laughing  
Coughing sneezing  
The faint smell of cigarette smoke in the distance  
Ding ding upon the hour  
The world is changing so fast that they don't care to notice it's subtleness  
I enter my comfort zone again  
Only to reflect  
What am I doing wrong  
Should I try again  
Soul searching becomes more and more abstract  
How do I find myself  
Like an open cut I need time to heal  
I smile to hide the darkness of my world  
I laugh to fill the emptiness I feel  
I cry to help me cope  
In the midst of this confusion  
I am proud of myself  
I have gain confidence  
I leap out my comfort zone  
Faces turning  
Ears open  
People staring  
Looking around  
pay attention  
I am a friend  
I am a member of many orgs  
I am a leader  
I am a student

By Precious Kafo



*Unrequited – Painter Maureen E. Cornell*

# SHORT STORIES

## Cliff Walker

It was late and we were tired. We rattled up the darkened road in a cramped old Chevy, packed inside like screws in an overfull jar, but warmer for it. The higher we got, the thinner the cold, shadowed air became until the black clouds themselves were seeping through the cracks around the doors and joining us inside that beat-up car. With every twist in the road we were pushed closer together, elbow to elbow, ankle to ankle, four to a row and two to a seat. The turns started coming faster until we were snaking our way through dense rainforest and over jagged cliffs like some bizarre, half-blind beetle. Continuing forward only for lack of a better option. Go. Go, for stopping was surely death; wild animals or other cars, bad people who would rape and kill us for sport. Fear; like a sour taste in the back of your throat, bitter, unpleasant, and unspoken. Slower and slower we went as roots made their way across our path, as boulders made their homes on the road and animals flashed passed our headlights like apparitions.

We were tired and it was late. Thoughts were becoming harder to hold onto. Breath was harder to grasp. The air was so thin that movement should not have been the heavy burden it was, but it weighed on us until we staggered out of the car like ancient men and women, centuries older than we should have been. Dark and humid, the open air pressed closer to us than the cramped cabin of the car. We spread out, putting distance between us, grateful for the space but with an itching on our backs; stumbling and weaving to find rocks to sit on or trees to rest against, needing the support of something solid to lean on.

One step, two. The crunching of the rocks was muted by the night. Indistinct shapes emerged from the darkness creating a cage of black hemming us in, herding us out. The car's headlights struggled to pierce the dark, but its poor wavering light extended no more than a few feet out in front. We were blind; creatures of the day, at the mercy of the night.

I struggled to a rock on the side of the road, gasping for breath. The altitude blurring my vision and clouding my head. The darkness shifted, looming up behind me, crawling over my shoulders and under my feet. I stepped back and the world dropped away, no flash of light, no startled scream, just blackness.

*By Riley Davis*

## Confessions

The door closed behind her with a sigh and a creak. It was dark inside, musty and private. Her toes touched the wall as she knelt on the hard little bench, the walls pressed close. The dark, stained wood slid like glass under her fingers as she stroked it thoughtfully. Quiet emptiness filled her mind. Soft darkness sat calmly before her eyes. A hum whispered past her lips as her thoughts shifted inward; her surroundings drifted away, her uncomfortable position faded in the shadows. She was comfortable here, alone. For now. Her head bowed forward and her eyes drifted closed. She let her thoughts flow like water, turning where they would, no resistance.

She whispers herself into the dusty screen before her, letting it absorb her shame and guilt. She told her secrets, everything she was proud of, everything she dreamed. Silence responded, loving, understanding, accepting silence. Darkness embraced her. God loved her.

*By Riley Davis*

## **The Cost of Anger**

Anger...It's a blind emotion that turns and twists at the reality that we accept as whole. It takes the passions we love and cherish as it slowly turns them into the monsters from our nightmares. Where does it steam from? Who decided that anger would be so blinding? Does the human psyche give it the infinite power that dwells and lingers on our pallets like the taste of soiled milk? Slowly I can feel it linger in my subconscious, weighing down on my views and perspectives, as the people slowly around me turn into icons of cruel nature and devastation. This emotion...so deadly it was gifted in the bible the name of "wrath" lingers in my soul as the words of those around me tingle and pick at it like a child picking at a scab. The senses tell the mind no, but the body reactions without thought. Does this make me a cruel person? I look at the pictures of my family and linger on the conversations where the words seemed flooded with malice and acid that it rips at my brain leaving small cuts and aches where the pleasure sense should be. Why do they speak of such insolence? Do they not see the world around them is changing? Even I, one stuck in the past, can look through the mirror beyond traditions and understand.

Looking at the faces, as the future of the world plays out as the youths of our lives turn and pillage in the streets. Their signs beg for freedom, their flags shimmering in the classic "R-O-Y-G-B-I-V" that we grew up learning in art classes. Do their colors make them wicked? Anger floods my soul once more as those around them scream and rant about their misdeeds. What have these youths done but speak for themselves, begging for the right to free love? What misdeeds have they committed? No blood lingers on their finger tips. Who has sinned? Death to those who leave the light of God, yet it make me wonder if God had wished such things be done in his name. Civil rights, this is nothing but the past repeating themselves. Color being blinded and ignored. How much death will it take this time, before he decided we were wrong? What does this show for the future? Will change be a constant battle that once again floods the streets with corpses of brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers? When will we learn that change doesn't always need death to follow in its stead?

Looking down at the books that had been accepted and used on countless occasions nowhere does it state beside "Love" particular requirements. Nowhere does it state that one cannot love another simply because they are the same. Who are we fighting? Looking down the streets as the colors march do proudly my heart begins to beckon, screaming as the voices of ignorance are the ones the world listens to. Voices of destruction, voices of pain, anger once more...Acid burning away at the inside of my heart, as it slowly longs to posse my body, when will this nightmare end? It makes me wonder how someone cannot love another simply because of their birth right to love another. How can a family look towards a Youth and decide they are unworthy? What is worth? Does it really exist? Or is it like anger, something we give more power than it actually holds in its possession. Such power we give ourselves. Such great commands as we look down on those who love different then us, who look different then we do. When will we finally cast aside the anger, cast aside the toll of death, and learn that Race is a title, and the only race in the world his human. Once the world looks beyond the labels instilled to give those who use them power, will we finally be able to love without boundaries. In a world where everyone is free to fly.

*By Alexandra Epervary*

## Emptiness is not a box

Emptiness is not a box and yet it holds everything close. The world is piled in over emptiness as if it were the soil for the world to grow. I imagine emptiness to be the dividing line between here and somewhere else. Holding onto the picture of a cardboard box so heavily taped together from the many times I have moved I begin to wonder... How many things have slipped from here to there, and from there to here once it knew how? Like a fish in water, I have forgotten that I bump and bother the ocean of air that sustains me. Perhaps emptiness is the ocean that floats all that we can see. It's invisible substance being the very thing that nourishes all the possibility that can be... Destiny. This is all done between the groaning spirals that might be games. Each move played through a snowballing universe that could contain the heavens.

Once in a while I look out at the vastness of space and see the colors of a sunset, a swaying field of grain, and the crashing of the waves. All the while asking myself how this reflects emptiness, and somehow the information is communicated from there to here. Somehow, all these little bits of something speak to me without words. My concept of what is opposite of here will always be there, but will the same cognitive point be shared amongst us for these undiscovered flip-flops. Silently embracing us and subtly whispering to us, emptiness seems to have a message that touches each of us in gentle ways.

As part of everything that we see and inside all that we know ourselves to be, I may be the first to question if I am one of emptiness's children. One of the animate universes that seeks to explore and venture into the game by the interactions of the restless vehicles of life. All of us children of emptiness holding onto the formless forms that keep us seeking to know the forms that we embody, imagine, adopt, and design through our unrelenting curiosity. Every thought must be pregnant with the delight of emptiness and the next possibility. I must make sure then that my thoughts are good ones.

There may be no here or there for the children of emptiness. It seems to be all a matter of belief and perspective that can move me to once again seek out the experiences that communicate to me about my roots of emptiness.

*By Joseph A Santiago*

## ESCAPE

A man chilled on an old rusted iron fire escape in Providence, Rhode Island, gazing into the streets only two stories below him. The man's tattooed arms lead down to his hands one of which was holding a pen. A pad of paper was resting on his lap. A joint was in his other hand. He lifted it to his lips and leisurely puffed. The man held the smoke in for a long while and then let it out with ease. As he did, the smoke encircled the air and slowly disappeared as it floated up above and out of sight. A jacket barely cushioned the man and his pad as he sat on the iron slats of his fire escape writing and puffing – a half dozen scribbled pages, lettering squished in and was printed sideways some of which read:

*Words are a window to the soul of their creator that when recorded and written down can be beautiful but if left alone and unwritten that beauty becomes fleeting in the seconds it takes to forget them, even by those who are the creator.*

*in the world*

*of words, silence and barren pages are forms of oppression.*

On the fire escape across the way might have been a mirror image at one time or another; but if that was true it wasn't any longer. A person sat on a beat up fire escape on the third floor. Her peach and hot pink color clothes were slightly grimy, in tatters, and she also held a pen; though, it was hollowed out and held between her lips. The pen was connected to an old, beat up soda bottle as she wrote in her mind with the smoke that trailed out from her nose, and her mouth, and her homemade pipe. Her thoughts disappeared as quickly and quietly as the smoke, which, encircled her head; and, like the man across the way, the smoke, too, disappeared as it floated in the same direction. Perhaps the wind also carried her invisible words up above and out of sight.

A short distance below in his squad car was a police officer. He observed; but, for whatever reason, at the time, he did not particularly care. He was a beat cop with not much drive on this night – as stark and rigid as they come.

A few groups of teens swaggered down the street one group on one side and the other headed in the opposite direction on the opposite side. They were wild and rowdy and unaware of the people on the fire escapes as they passed underneath them. They merely continued on with all of their rowdiness about them and paid no mind to their surroundings – police included.

Beyond the fire escapes in both directions there were similar houses lined up and down the block with an occasional car that passed by; the street ran straight and the cross roads could be seen for a few blocks on; but, then, was tapered out of view for the street became curved right where the abandoned factories began. Along the way, as in all inner cities, there was a never ending row of telephone poles that stretched along with the street, every now and again one would jut out with some anomaly from a car hitting it or perhaps just because it was created that way. The sound of traffic, gunshots, and music could be heard in the not so far off distance.

Around one of the corners, down an otherwise unnoticeable alleyway, was a group of overly talented graffiti artists – spraying away their cares onto the grimy canvas alleyway walls and junky artifacts that were strewn about. Spray cans were on the ground, the caps off and carelessly thrown to the ground, and the fingers of the artists were stained with paint. A man stood peering around the corner, on the lookout for cops, his right hand resting on his piece. He did not move. The two people on the fire escapes remained. The man kept still and barely moved but for his pen. The girl on the fire escape stared into the open air like a gargoyle overlooking it all but seeing nothing. The cop still sat and stared into his computer and then glanced around. He was holding a cell phone to his ear but didn't seem to be speaking at that moment.

The man who wrote was nearing or just surpassing his 30s. He grew up in the city but was determined not to make it all he knew. His name was Dimiour Gikos but he was known as D'jour around the city. He was tattooed, and when he wasn't sitting, he was tall and walked briskly. Underneath his Yankees hat his hair reached out from the roots and down in braids so sharp that it seemed as if they would never become frazzled or frizzed out. D'jour's face was not oval it was more elongated yet proportionately correct with beautiful hazel eyes. He was clean-shaven at the moment but was known to wear a goatee or sometimes a line beard. He was a writer of stories who depended on his surroundings and experiences to write. After all, one can only write about what he knows or what he can imagine; yet, what he imagines is based on what he knows.

Across the way, the lady began to stir; she was no longer still. Her name was Eley Theria. Once, people simply called her Ellie; but anyone that knew her was long faded from her life by now. Possibly the only people who knew her name now was D'jour and the postman. He had received junk mail for the building across the street

on a semi-regular basis – mostly writer renewal notices and furniture advertisements.

Ellie had finished her score and was annoyed that there was no more of what she both loved and despised. She reached in her pocket and found an empty candy wrapper, which she gently pushed off the fire escape and then she cried lowly and mutably. She drew away a brown paper towel that was partially under her leg, which she had been sitting on. With it, she wiped her face and nose, opened the paper towel up again and tossed that off as well. She watched it float down.

Ellie swiveled on her slightly soiled peach colored pants and attempted to get up. She made it half way and then sat back down facing the opposite direction. Her stirring had alerted D'jour for all but an instant and then he flipped the paper and begun another page of writing. He imagined her life and things that she had been through to get to this low point. He pictured that there was some hope and some steps in her life that she would take to pull herself up.

As he wrote Ellie reached up, grabbed onto her rusty fire escape, and pulled herself towards the railing – she leaned over the side and looked down at the people swaggering over the cracks and lines in the pavement below. Her arms, which leaned upon the rail of the fire escape, seemed lanky and long almost as if they could reach out for a star and actually grab one. The rusty fire escape was the only thing holding Ellie out in mid-air among the stars; it squeaked with age as the woman leaned – the bottom of her forearms now stained with rust. Her face was old yet she was young. She looked at the smoke trailing off in the distance dissipating into the sky. A bat flying past caught her eye and it too had grown smaller and appeared to dissipate into the night. Ellie then looked out and up at the stars and imagined things that she never wrote down and are now of no consequence.

The bat that seemed to have dissipated did not come back, but Ellie shifted her gaze and looked for it in the spot where she last saw it. The streetlights remained on though, and she slowly altered her line of sight and affixed her gaze on those instead. They seemed to give off streams of light in a downward direction, which ultimately pooled at the base of the pole for lack of room to cast any further.

He heard the sound of creaking metal gazed over at the woman because, although it echoed slightly off the surrounding buildings, it certainly came from Ellie's direction. She seemed oblivious to the noise – or just didn't care. She gazed on and D'jour wrote it off as he wrote on. After a few moments he heard it again. This time it was louder and as he looked over at the woman, from her body language, she seemed to have heard it too. She stirred slightly and went back to leaning and staring into the city night. A third time his ear caught the creak of the metal and he realized it had to have been from the fire escape across the way.

D'jour then thought about her life and he wrote some more. The light from the city reached up and dulled the star's shine. That was the problem with the city it was harder to see the stars. But they were still there – the stars. And he still wrote.

“What if the metal gives way and she were to fall?” He thought as he wrote and he heard the sound again. Then he dismissed the idea as being ludicrous but thought twice. “It would be wonderful story for writing. Would she be able to hold on to the metal as it slowly bent and eased its way down to the point where he could rush to grab her? Could he make it to her on time? Would he even have to? She could make that.” He imagined the sound that was being made could lead him to write a great story; and so he wrote:

Suddenly, the sound of the metal made a horrible grinding noise and bent away from the house as if it had the intent on letting her down as gently as possible. Ellie held on tight and screamed – she knew that the rusty



iron welding had given way and thought she would die. Her arms felt as though they had stretched enough to reach those stars she had stared at for so long. The stinging pain that she felt from the rusted metal on the palms of her hands was poignant and shot through to her lanky arms reaching her shoulders. As Ellie screamed the creaking metal platform bent with a sort of stiff ease down far enough to the street where she could let go. It seemed to her like it was happening in slow motion.

Ellie's homemade pipe had fallen with her and out of the folds in her shirt a crumpled up cigarette cellophane with her drugs. She thought she had smoked the last of it but was too high to realize otherwise. Ellie was happy for a moment until she heard the piercing sound of the squad car roll up beside her. Her fear drove her to scramble and run grabbing the cellophane but leaving the pipe. The pipe could be made again from remnants held within garbage cans. As she ran one shoe fell off and she pounded the city pavement with one bare heel and a dull pain that was virtually unnoticeable crept up Ellie's leg like an inchworm on a leaf. She was barely conscious of it as she ran on a slight downgrade and with a sharp left through the freshly spray painted yet still filthy alley. She had no thought penetrate her mind except to just keep running. She needed to get away from everything – the sounds, the smells, the city itself – just run. Ellie dodged her way through alleys and side streets, backyards and business lots.

For an instant, she was unaware of how fast she was and that she had eluded the police officer. She hopped a fence and caught her arm on the sharpness of the chain-link fence. Ellie held up her hand and blood flowed in a steady stream down to her elbow. She examined the wound, made a feeble attempt to pinch it closed, and gave up deciding instead to walk on to nowhere in particular.

As the night climbed on in hours towards the turning point of the day Ellie's bloody arm dried and she was now in the city park. The trees grew thicker before her eyes and they waved as if cheering her on for a battle well fought. She picked at the dried blood and peeled it away bit by bit as if it were a skin to be shed. She took her fingers, pinched the scratch, and endured the discomfort so more blood could drip out--and she had blown on it to dry and peel away again. Her arm throbbed but it did not hurt as much as her heart pounded, and it was something for her to do. She was positioned limply on a tree-enclosed embankment breathing heavy still from that night's event. Ellie's body was telling her to stay – so for the moment she did.

She led the flow of the freshly forming blood droplets with her fingernail down her arm in the opposite direction. As it dripped she blew on it some more. She suddenly felt eyes converging on her; it was some type of night animal; though, it was more afraid of her, her heart beat faster and Ellie took a huge gasp of air into her chest. She felt as though the high was gone and now it was only her with her normal yet somehow dulled out awareness. She was nowhere near as sharp as she should have been but she felt otherwise. Some power in her being drove her to get up and move on away from that creature and that embankment. She saw its eyes and it was almost as if she could tell what the animal was thinking – but she really couldn't. Ellie felt a breeze upon her back as she walked away and swore she heard the animal's footsteps patter off in the other direction.

She looked at the tree line in front of her and could see car lights breaking through; the highway was on the other side. She could see the trees waving in front of the all these headlights and could almost make out the shape of each individual branch. They were holding the cars on the highway. That was their purpose tonight – to cheer her on, protect her from view, and hold the cars on the highway. Ellie turned to the left and viewed lights flickering off and on. She decided to sit and watch for a while. It was as if she were watching a dance. The shades of shadows flickered back and forth and she could make out lightening bugs dancing along to the beat of the shadows. She closed her eyes and remembered the view from the fire escape. It could not even come close in awe to Roger Williams Park at night.

She got up and walked semi-cautiously as she kept switching her view from the tree-lined highway to where she was headed in front of her. There, further on, stood the 'Temple to Music,' small in the distance and silent and serene in the moon-soaked darkness. As she walked closer to the 'Temple to Music' it grew larger with every step, and Ellie noticed columns simultaneously poked out and rose up from the night air. In the calm lake behind the temple ripples softly rolled at an angle. The lightening bugs speckled the tree-lined horizon and that line of trees behind the lake was soaking in the dull glow from the city lights. Ellie thought of the beauty of the world she was missing and longed for change.

Unexpectedly D'jour, still on the fire escape, heard something within earshot that pulled him up and out of his writings. It was a horrible metal creaking – magnified tenfold from the last creak. As he looked around and across to the other fire escape he noticed it was pulling away from the building. It was far away but closer in that instant as to allow him to hone his sight to the panic on Ellie's face and the worry in her eyes. The bolts had pulled out of the wall. Her face was riddled with lines that were now deeper than he ever noticed they were; and all that she had worried about in the past was nothing compared to this moment.

The first jolt of the fire escape had caused Ellie to be paralyzed with fear; the next caused her to lose her footing and tumble over holding on to the rusted metal with her grime encrusted fingertips. Her help me scream echoed off of the buildings and down the street catching the ear of the graffiti artists. To them her call was like a sick cat crying at the top of its lungs. The sound reverberated down the alley and through their ears with a sharpness that penetrated their deepest being, giving chill-bumps to the even the bravest one in their team.

Although he was no expert, D'jour knew the outcome of the situation if Ellie were to fall. Within seconds, the police officer called in the emergency and was under the woman calmly shouting to her to hold on. The officer tried the front door but it was locked. He called up again for the woman not to let go and help was on the way.

D'jour noticed Ellie held on tight – as tight as she could, as split seconds mounted into seconds and a crowd gathered around her. The clanging of the ladder of the fire escape echoed in the ears of all who were near, in awe, and gasping; the escape ladder was being pulled down to the ground by the spray-painters from the alley. One had sat on the others shoulders to reach it. D'jour heard that sound and thought Ellie must feel the vibrations in her palms, fingers, and fingertips. Fingerprints of red and yellow stained the rusted, bottom rung where the ladder was grabbed to pull down. The officer pushed everyone back and refused to let them on the ladder citing it was far too dangerous and called again for backup in a slightly more panicked tone. Some of them protested but most listened for the moment.

As D'jour rushed in his window, through his apartment, and down the dark light-lacking stairwell he felt his heart pounding and lungs pulsating.

In the same moments D'jour was hammering down the stairs and he imagined a million thoughts about Ellie. How she felt her palms give way to just her fingers and tips; she was slowly slipping. She wrenched her head this way and that and saw all the people gathering below her. He thought she wondered why she heard sirens but didn't see any flashing lights coming from either direction because in her mind she had been there forever. Thoughts were racing through his mind about her thoughts and actions. How her legs stopped flailing almost the moment she flipped over and just seemed to have hung like dead weight. How she would change her life after this ordeal.

Meanwhile, the spray-painting crew was at it again; they were attempting to climb the fire escape ladder to

rescue her. The officer pulled out his tazer on the growing rowdy crowd and demanded they step back.

D'jour felt himself winded and crushed as people pointed. The buildings, the fire escape, the people, they were all distorted, like looking at a Monet that is touching one's nose – This was what he saw as his head, heart, and lungs all pounded in rhythm. It was as if he, himself, were in one of those paintings looking into another. He made his way through the crowd that grew to an enormous density in just a few short moments. There were double the police officers there now and they noticed him barreling through the crowd; they attempted to head him off. He dodged them as the crowd shifted. He swiveled around to the spray-painting crew and attempted to assist them in another rescue attempt. They were half way up the escape when suddenly, D'jour snapped out of his thoughts as he emerged from his front door and looked up.

Ellie was no longer there. She was in mid-fall. She had struck an air conditioning unit before hitting the ground with a thud. He was no longer with his thoughts in his mind full of wonder. He was thoughtless, motionless, wordless, and breathless all at once. And as D'jour stood there a single tear rolled down each cheek. He saw her body twisted and broken lying lifelessly in a pool of blood just a few feet in front of him. All his fanciful writings could not change the fact that Eley Theria was now dead.

*By Carrie Anne Perez*

## **Familiar Ambiguity**

I met Ambiguity on a stretch of road that you might not expect to see another soul. Ambiguity smiled with an expression that casted its position like a net into deep implications. Ambiguity began to talk me up about family, and quickly reminisced on the photo that his Mom took proving that Vagueness and him were kissing cousins. Her father Paradox found a variety of uncertainty that led to meeting his wife Perception, but it seemed that life for Vagueness would never remain stable for any length of time. Perception it seems had moods that could flip flop at any unexpected turn. This he confessed made Vagueness fear that she was somewhat dwelling in discontent because at any moment life could just be unclear. "The Ambiguous family pedigree is distinctly comprehensive" Ambiguity said. He spoke with a shy expressiveness as he spoke of being from here and there and had an accent I couldn't really place.

As we walked together it seemed it could have been hours that passed in the short time we chatted. Somehow I felt I was nearing my destination even though it was nowhere in sight. The thought of home brought to mind those we love. When Ambiguity spoke of his love Inconsistency, it seemed that he glowed. She was pregnant with twins and they both believing that they were not going to be able to name their children well asked Ambiguity's Uncle Paradox. "Quasi, Pseudo, and Exception" Paradox said with a sly grin. "I thought you said your wife was having twins?" I asked a little confused. Paradox smiled too and paused as he looked at me. "It seems when I asked Paradox he was divided by self-contradiction." So what did you do? "Unsure of how to proceed I asked him again and he said "Entendre is having twins and you're going to be the proud parent of two beautiful boys".

"Entendre isn't who you asked about", I said. "I know and I was scared to ask another question and so I am off to Innuendo's house. He's had this kind of thing happen before." Ambiguity said rushing away. I had a feeling though that the pun wouldn't stop there. Smile.

*By Joseph A Santiago*

## Forgiveness

She sat on the sidewalk outside the automatic door; hip bones sinking into the concrete and hands shaking from fatigue. Little tears beaded in the corners of her eyes as she squinted against exhaustion. The top lashes of her weary eyes dipped slowly towards the lower ones, going a little further each time before being jerked back up, until contact was made and they were stuck. A small battle ensued as she willed her eyes to open, and slowly the thick, heavy lashes lifted to the sight of neon flip flops crunching past her and a quarter dropped jarringly at her drawn-up feet.

She made no move to fetch it from where it lay innocently and impossibly far on the ground at her feet. Instead, her mind buzzed a little as she mentally added it to the change already in her pocket. She knew she could do so much better. If she got up and talked to people and explained the situation, she could do better. People liked helping. But the sun had yet to rise that day and there were seven hours until the flight she hoped to be on departed.

Her head drooped and shoulders sagged, bending forward towards the ground as the overpowering roar of a plane engine pressed her more firmly into the unforgiving concrete. The hands held up dropped and a tiredness so overwhelming it was almost defeat, filtered through her soul.

“What’s this?” A rough burly man barked at her from two feet away. His well dressed wife and kids looked on from the safe distance of twelve feet with their mountain of flowery luggage bags beside them. The woman held her young daughter’s hand in a grip gone white with tension, mortified for the man talking to the begging girl on the ground. Turning her eyes away from their curious and disgusted gazes, the girl lifted them up the six feet of man in front of her and stretched her tired face into what she hoped was a smile.

“Jus’ tryin’ to get home, sir,” It only slurred slightly as she pushed the unfamiliar English passed lips numb with weariness.

The man grunted and with a glance at his disapproving wife, dropped ten dollars at the girl’s feet. “She’s Rodney’s age,” he muttered as he strode past his family and into the airport, shooting one last look of pity over his massive shoulder before going through the sliding doors.

But the girl was not looking. Her tired hand had snatched up the money like it had a mind of its own and the fog lifted momentarily from her mind as she converted ten dollars to colones, added in the change she had gotten so far, and subtracted what they might charge her for converting. She ignored her pinched stomach, softly whispering to herself and ticking her fingers. Tears of elation and exhaustion dripped unnoticed down her cheeks. She had enough.

She looked over at the airport guards who had put up with her begging here for the last several hours. She smiled at them, a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes, and braced herself for the marathon that was checking into an airport. As she toiled to her feet all the bruises from sitting on something so hard for so long in the same position, screamed their existence at her, causing her knees to buckle slightly. She braced herself against the concrete wall and straightened herself out, found her feet, raised her head, and shouldered her one battered backpack. She lifted a foot experimentally and finding herself more-or-less stable, took the first step in a long time, towards home.

*By Riley Davis*

## Illegal

Black, like nighttime, look deep, judge actions, measure beliefs. A crushing weight of responsibility rides at her back; the responsibility of a people, of a family, of a dream. She lives looked over, misrepresented, and mistreated; a stranger in a stranger's land. Language runs over her ears, as incomprehensible as water running over a desert dune. Tradition is being sucked out of her skin until she remains, the dried up shell of what she once was. Here there is no spice, no color, no music in speech. Her potential, once as real as Renoir, now is Van Gogh, blurry and indistinct, unfinished and left by the side. She needs a hand, she needs to belong. Should she change who she is; accept another person inside her skin, stretching and pushing from within until it fits and she walks as another, talks as another, and grows into this world that has forgotten who she is?

*By Riley Davis*

## Injection

Sweat broke out over his skin and his eyes shifted restlessly. Faces were staring at him; angry, hateful faces. They had wanted him dead for what he did. They had hunted him through the filthy allies like a pack of starved dogs where fear had been a physical thing, choking the breath from his lungs until red bled down his vision and the air around him became wool.

Cold like glass shards shot shards down his chest to his arms and up the base of his neck. He thought of struggling but the thought never manifested in his movements. Black fog was clouding his vision around the edges and creeping up his legs in stark contrast to his arms.

20 years ago he had thought this was a fitting punishment for the crime; obliteration, nothingness. Forgiveness is not needed when the very footprints of a soul is erased from the memory of the earth.

A sigh pressed past his lips. His eyes slid closed, blocking out the truth. A waiting calm was bubbling inside him and he wondered vaguely if this was one of the effects. His fingers slipped from the grip they had held on the plank of wood he had used to defend himself. Panic lurched through him then swept past as if it had been just a gust of wind.

As the last shreds of who he was combated the emptiness growing inside him he cracked an eye open for one last look at the world that was about to forget him.

*By Riley Davis*

## Introspection is a Bear

Introspection is a bear that takes its time to recognize when it has awakened from its sleep. It's eyes moving across the memory of landscapes that bristle and tickle its fur as its attention stirs up perception to repeat again. The bees and butterflies fuss and frolic about their daze and sometimes stumble across a bear. Why one bee darts away and one butterfly floats around to see what can be seen, I cannot say. It may be that a bee feels stung by another and the butterfly playfully tickles along its way. Each brings a different experience to the bear and so they often get very different things.

When introspection lays its head down to follow its dream it forgets that it is part of the experience. As the dream plays with the dreamer, Introspection will wander through wonders. All the time asking, "I wonder what this could be?"

*By Joseph A Santiago*

## Lost and Found

--Mayor Ray Nagin, New Orleans.

From his perch on the back of the helicopter, Chaney Harrison scanned the perimeter of New Orleans. This was nothing like Iraq – these were our own; they needed saving. A city barely above water, a city screaming for help.

The whirling shrieks of the blades that kept his MH-53 airborne had grown dull, muffled by earplugs, subdued by familiarity. After six years as a para-rescueman in the United States Air Force, Chaney's filter had grown finely tuned – he heard everything, just not all of it went through.

Then, he saw it. Immediately, Chaney was on the "We oughta make another pass, I got a lone litter out here," he called into the microphone. Even in these unusual circumstances -- a time defined by the drowning, the missing, and the helpless -- *this* was not normal. From 1,000 feet, Chaney could make out its outline immediately. This didn't feel right, not out there alone in the grass-covered field. Sure, it was a common scene, the object itself, but not alone, not after Katrina.

A litter, in Air Force terms, is a long wire basket braced by aluminum poles that run down the length and along the sides. From the aluminum poles extend various straps, designed to attach the litter to ambulance, helicopter, whatever. Problem was, this litter, sitting in the middle of this field, wasn't attached to anything nor being held by anybody. They'd have to make another pass, assess the situation. Chaney stayed calm - *it was probably nothing*.

As they descended upon the field, Chaney took in the situation. This city, a mere day ago, ran like a clock. Sure, the time may have been a bit off and a few kinks may have developed in its mechanical inner workings, but the thing ran. Now, looking at the flooding, the destruction, you couldn't even get it started: every piece had been broken, individually and collectively, and the clockmaker was nowhere to be found. *God*, he hoped, *let there be no one in that litter*.

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In the year 2000, on the heels of an eye-opening wilderness awareness retreat in the jungles of Duvall, WA, Chaney Harrison could have never imagined himself a soldier. All he knew then, much as he truly understands now, was his love for nature -- a raw, burning desire telling him this, *this* is where you belong. Held back initially by the familiar issues of money and circumstance, Chaney finally saw his life permanently changed in the strangest of all places, The Gainesville Public Library.

It was on this day, much like any other, with this book, unlike any other, that Chaney's life would be changed forever: *So That Others May Live: The True Story of the PJs, the Real Life Heroes of the Perfect Storm* by Jack Brehm & Pete Nelson. Chaney read Jack Brehm's story -- a heroic rescue set to the backdrop of one man's choice to devote his life in the pursuit of other's safety. To Chaney, the job of a para-rescuer, or PJ, was just that: a job, but one that would provide him with everything he'd dreamed of: the outdoors, a true challenge, and decent money. First and foremost, the outdoors. He was sold.

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Staring from the helicopter, Chaney was overwhelmed by heat; sweat cascaded from his thick brow, past the stubble obscuring his soft face and into the flooded city below. A weatherman would later that night report a high of 90 degrees, although no one would really listen. New Orleans may have been the nightly news for the rest of the world, but for those within city limits, a slightly more pressing issue took precedent.

The helicopter sunk to the ground, particles of dust flying up from beyond the grass. Chaney raced off the ramp and made his way towards the litter, his eyes squinting through the wind and the sun. The litter wasn't flat -- it had mounds, valleys -- it was a human body. Hovering over the litter, Chaney unfurled the top of the blanket -- a face. A human body, alone in the field, forgotten.

Chaney immediately called for backup, as he continued to uncover the woman. Frail, old, probably in her mid-70's, she was unresponsive. He looked for a reaction, anything to indicate consciousness beyond the beating pulse his fellow officer had just announced. *Why was she left here? What if he hadn't seen her? Would anyone?*

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Had things gone his way, as they generally did, Chaney wouldn't be here right now, not flying over this particular field. While at his base in Hurlburt Field, FL, two days prior on the morning of August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Chaney anticipated this disaster in the making. By that point, Katrina had already torn through the Bahamas and made its way toward Florida with 80-mile-an-hour winds, reportedly killing nine and forcing the state of Florida to declare a state of emergency. Nine was just the beginning, Chaney understood all too well. He couldn't just sit by, passive.

Approaching the senior officer in his unit, Chief Master Sergeant Hoye, Chaney attempted to reason. He exclaimed, "We're the closest ones to the site, we're ready to fly. They need our help." The officer, without a second's hesitation, looked up from his papers and replied, "There is no identified need for the para-rescue skill set in New Orleans right now." Over the officer's left shoulder, Chaney watched the TV: a para-rescue team from as far away as New York or Arizona was cutting into a roof of a house with a chainsaw. *No identified need*, Chaney thought, *really?*

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Carrying the litter back onto the ramp that lay ready into the back of the helicopter, Chaney's team tried to find that perfect balance of tempo, speed and haste. It is said that in times of unparalleled stress, man reverts back to his highest level of military training -- the mind stops thinking and acts on simple, animalistic instinct. Chaney had been trained for this, so he acted. If his gut could get him home safely from three tours in Iraq, it would save this woman. It had to.

Soaring back into the sky, the helicopter made a straight shot for the airport, specifically designed to handle casualties of this nature. Chaney looked up from his unresponsive patient and out over New Orleans. The Big Easy, people used to call it. Home to Louis Armstrong jazz and careless Mardi Gras pleasure. Right now, it was anything but Easy.

He had been here before, in this city. Roughly one year ago, he had attended a two-week training module in New Orleans driving with the local ambulances, refreshing and reviewing his medical training, all part of the job.

From this aerial point of view, Chaney saw so many landmarks he'd used a year earlier to orientate himself through the city's windy streets. Things were different now, distorted and sour. He remembered the streets he'd navigate on his way to work. Flooded. The hospital he had dropped the wounded at. Flooded. Even the on ramp for the I-10 highway that brought him in and out of the city. Flooded. It was surreal, the whole thing, but there was no time to take that in. There was a woman aboard his helicopter who needed saving. "These things I do, so that others may live." The Code of the Air Rescueman, it rang through his mind. Not in a conscious, forefront-of-thought kind of way, just there, so engrained in his being, driving all action, advancing all thought.

This poor woman would be OK, she had to be. *So that others may live.* They dropped her at the New Orleans Memorial Hospital and flew unceremoniously back up, into the sky. *So that others may live.* This was just the sixth hour of the first day. There would be so many more, wounded, unresponsive, and unwilling to leave their homes. *So that others may live.*

Chaney Harrison never found out her name or what happened to her. He flew for five more days, carrying roughly 400 to safety in the process. He recalls the words of his commanding officer, "There is no identified need for the para-rescue skill set in New Orleans right now." It could have been more, so many more. By the end, 705 people were reported missing, 1,836 people dead.

*By Alex Dobrenko*

## **A Mayan Experience: A URI Physical Therapy Student Service-Learning Project in Guatemala**

*This story is written with hope that it reflects the professional and personal benefits and challenges of student participation in volunteer work in a developing nation.*

In December 2005, five students and I traveled to San Juan la Laguna, Guatemala for two weeks to provide physical therapy services in a center for children with disabilities. I hoped the trip would provide an



opportunity for the students to learn through experiences that were meaningful and by solving problems in real-life situations. Because I believe that learning through community service is a way for students to experience and apply their knowledge and that exposure to a diverse setting and culture facilitates broad and flexible thinking in terms of clinical and personal experience, I felt that the trip would benefit them at personal, interpersonal, community, and global levels. Ultimately, I hoped that the students would have an opportunity to practice their therapy skills on real people, stretch their clinical comfort zone, develop as clinicians, grow as people, and expand their world view.

### *The Journey*

Early on a very cold December morning we meet at the airport and gathered together with our luggage. There is a palpable sense of nervous anticipation mixed with the early morning fatigue that follows a night of fitful sleep. We double check to be sure everyone has their travel documents. Then we laugh and get in line with all of the things we are bringing; a wheelchair, a large therapy mat wrapped in black garbage bags and duct tape, our extra bags containing bubbles, stickers, hair elastics and coloring books, and several power tools. The security agents have a field day.

I have made the trip once before, but my five student companions (Mark, Shannon, Jess, Amy, and Alicia) have never been to Guatemala. Three of the students have never left the United States! I am filled with excitement for them and for what they are about to see and experience.

Hurricane Stan, just two months earlier, nearly put an end to our trip. The mudslides washed out major roads, and killed hundreds of people in mountainside villages surrounding Lake Atitlan where we are headed.

During the last hour of the flight, it is difficult to take your eyes from the spectacular mountain ranges below. A rough landing in Guatemala City finishes a restful and uneventful flight. Dazed but excited, we enter the stifling airport. Jess and Amy use the bathroom and notice the first of many "Do not put toilet paper in the toilet!" signs. It doesn't take long to get accustomed to the new practice of putting used toilet paper into the trashcan, but every once in a while on the trip someone reports - with embarrassment - that they forgot and returned to their old ways. It is inevitable that this prompts a similar confession from someone else.

We wait nearly an hour and a half for the final pieces of our luggage to be spit out onto the squeaky, slowly moving, luggage belt. We take turns between manning the luggage belt and sitting with, and keeping count of, the bags that we have already retrieved. Over the next two days everyone comes to know the exact number and owner of the bags. Once we make arrangements to hire a van, we attempt to get ourselves through the throng of many hundreds of people just outside the doors of the airport. Each of us has our overstuffed backpack strapped on, and clings tightly to the other things we carry. Alicia looks like she might cry; the rest of the group giggles with concern at the confusion that surrounds us. Once in the van that takes us on to our next stop, we each take a deep breath, Amy counts the group members out loud and Mark does a quick accounting of our luggage. The ride to our hotel in Antigua is pretty quiet. Each of us watches out the windows in amazement as the noisy, congested, and exhaust-filled city gives way to lush, green, curvy mountainous roads. We marvel at ancient school busses, now customized with bright paints and dubbed "chicken" busses, filled to overflowing with riders and topped precariously with everything from bundles of avocados to baskets of, yes, chickens. Each time a "chicken" bus stops to pack in yet another passenger from the side of the road, a huge cloud of exhaust envelops our van. Everyone is wondering what we are in for over the next two weeks.

By American standards, Antigua seems primitive, but it is a beautiful city with crumbling, earth quake shaken architecture, tall walls that keep secret the gardens and homes behind them, and cobbled streets where tourists and natives walk in Western and traditional clothes. The few old cars, busses, and cabs rattle over the bumpy roads sending up dust in their wake. The streets in the center of town are lined with shops, Spanish emersion schools, small travel agencies, and restaurants. On our overnight stop we nap, explore, and celebrate our journey so far.

The next morning our driver, Joseo, in three hours, brings us from the civilization of Antigua - and other small dusty, polluted, and less attractive cities - over the cool mountains to Lake Atitlan. He drops us off at the makeshift dock that has been built to replace the one washed away by mudslides during the hurricane. A boat carries us across the deep lake surrounded by four volcanoes, from the dock in Panajachel to the south dock in San Pedro. We soak up the sun and get splashed as water comes over the low gunnels of the boat. The view is magnificent!!

At the rickety southern dock we disembark and three boys offer to help carry our bags along a dirt path through a corn field to our hotel. The boys are so small that they nearly buckle under the weight of some of the bags. Some of us take pictures of the boys with our great big backpacks on. We pay them a small amount, they leave happy. At the hotel sleeping arrangements are chosen and we settle into our very basic accommodations. Alicia checks for running water, which she reports is "only cold water." I speak to the manager about the water and I am told that he just needs to ignite the water heaters behind each room. We are dying for showers, but decide to wait and see if the hot water problem can be resolved. After making our rooms "our own" we inquire about the hammocks in front of some of the rooms. For about 50 cents a day we rent them and they become part of our end-of-the-day ritual; a place where we relax and talk. The hammocks are also handy for stringing up hand-washed laundry to dry.

Everyone is anxious to explore the small town of San Pedro that will be "home" for the next two weeks. The town is built on a steep peninsula that juts into the lake. At the top of the hill is the town square and most of the locals' homes and shops. At the bottom of the hill, on either side of the peninsula, are the docks that are used by locals and tourists for transportation, delivery of goods, bathing, and fishing. The "Main Path" is a dirt foot path that winds along the bottom of the hill between the two docks. The path is the primary thoroughfare for locals and tourists connecting the small hotels, restaurants, and tiny shops. By the end of the trip the route is familiar and the people who work along, or frequent, the path become acquaintances. We come to learn their names, and they come to know ours. Mark is even given a special name in Tz'utujil, the local Mayan dialect.

### *Work at the Center*

The short trip to the Centro Maya, in San Juan where we work each day, is a little adventure in itself. We get there in the same way that everyone gets around, on the back of a "pick-up." As many people as can possibly fit, cram into the small truck and stand holding onto the metal frame that transforms the tiny truck into a mass transit vehicle. We get artful at managing all of the things that we carry on the truck each day. The ride is exhilarating. Jess and Alicia put on their sunglasses to keep the bugs out of their eyes and when we get off the truck Jess asks whoever is closest to check her lip gloss for any small insects that might have gotten stuck. The only vehicles on the road are the "pick-ups" and the occasional "chicken" bus. Once in San Juan we walk down the steep hill to the center. People come out onto their stoops to say hello and watch us curiously as we pass. The students respond to children who practice their limited English vocabulary on us.

Shannon comments that the shock of the first day at the Center seems silly by the end of the trip. But when we arrive on the first day trepidation mixed with skepticism is evident in the students' faces. The three feet of mud that invaded the Center during "Stan" has been cleaned away and the structure is just as it had been previously: a long cinderblock building with five small separate rooms, a large outer classroom with a corrugated metal roof, an outdoor communal eating area, an outdoor sink area, a room with a toilet and spigot, and a small dirt yard with one small tree and lots of useless, old, rusting equipment. The cinder block building houses an office, a storage room, a therapy room, a small classroom, and a kitchen with a work table, a small refrigerator, and a Colman camping stove. A cinderblock wall topped with barbed wire surrounds the building.

The Center is full to capacity every day with the four Center staff members, volunteers from all over the world, and children. The center is for children with disabilities to be taught and get therapy, but because the local public school is out for the coffee harvest and Christmas break, there are many children who are there just for a meal and companionship. The youngest children are accompanied for the day by their mothers or

older siblings. The Center is fun; it bustles with energy and activity. There is also a lot of work to be done. The only regular physical therapist comes once a week from Guatemala City. Because word has gone out that we were coming, there are many children to see for therapy. There are also several children to see in their homes in San Juan and other nearby villages.

Fabiola comes to the Center every day. She is a shy, sweet, 14 year old girl with cerebral palsy. She avoids us because she doesn't want to get her right arm and foot stretched. She would rather just hold hands. But with some playful teasing Amy gets her to submit to therapy.

Anna is a big, floppy girl who has the same pigtails in her hair all week. By Friday they are mass of snarls. She doesn't speak and smiles constantly. Anna doesn't need physical therapy, but she loves being bounced on the large, red therapy ball, so Jess indulges her from time to time. How can she resist?

Laura is an 18 year old girl who seems much younger. She seeks us out and seems to love the attention and conversation with us. Her intense gazes and winsome expressions make you want to help her somehow. Even with her missing front tooth, her smile is heartwarming.

Maria is 3 years old and a little difficult to look at. She is not cute. Shannon works with her on an old hospital bed that has no mattress. A blanket is spread over the springs to make it a little more comfortable. Maria requires daily stretching. All of her joints are severely deformed, especially her hands and feet. She cries constantly and frequently has to be nursed by her mother in order to calm down.

Melissa cries a lot too; especially when Shannon tries to work with her. A day or two into our visit she gets more comfortable and doesn't cry as much. She is a beautiful 2 year old who is not walking well. Her mother smiles and watches everything we do. Melissa's shoes are much too big and we feel that this is making it even harder for her to walk. We buy her some new shoes and they seem to help.

The poorest of the children come on a bus from San Pablo every day. Domingo is one of them. He is a 10 year old boy who has some sort of muscular dystrophy. He has a nice wheelchair that was donated to him last year. He hates to wear his seatbelt. This makes us very nervous since the surface conditions everywhere are treacherous for someone in a wheelchair. He needs therapy every day and smiles while Jess stretches his badly contracted legs and makes him exercise his weak shoulders. He is always filthy, but his huge smile and mischievous personality make you forget about that. He hides pipe cleaners, scissors, bits of string, and other little goodies under his legs to sneak them home. We ignore this.

Francisco and Flavio look so much alike that we often confuse them. Both are about 4 years old and both are silent. But, they are really very different. Francisco is deaf and blind. He can move quite a bit when he is out of his wheelchair. Jess helps him walk and do exercises. The wheelchair we brought with us is for Flavio. He is the youngest of eight children. Before he got the wheelchair his mother carried him everywhere on her back swaddled in a woven shawl. He has a severe seizure disorder which has rendered him completely passive. While Amy works with him he frequently has little seizures. Initially this worries her but after talking with his mother she is less concerned. He moves very little on his own and is at about a three month level of development. Flavio and Francisco are treated every day and the students show their mothers and the volunteers some activities and exercises to do after we leave.

Marta Ophelia is a big, twenty year old girl whose elderly mother and father take turns bringing her to the Center. They dote over her and frequently straighten her traditional clothing and wipe the drool from her chin. They say prayers for Mark and Shannon as they work with their daughter. It takes three people to lower her to the therapy mat on the floor and two people to carry out her exercises. Her wheelchair is literally falling apart. Mark and Shannon try to talk about getting her a new one, but for some reason – which they can't understand – her parents don't want a new one.

There are several adorable preteen girls who don't get physical therapy, but they huddle together and whisper as they listen to us and watch what Amy and Jess are doing. Victor, Ernesto, Juan, Ricardo, Romeo provide entertainment. Victor is 5. It looks like he has cut his own hair. He loves to ham it up and have his picture taken. Ernesto is 3. He is always running and jumping on people or speeding by on a lopsided tricycle.

Juan, who is 10, is the Director's son. He has a deformed ear and very deformed hands. He likes to play catch and ride bikes. His hands don't seem to limit him at all. Ricardo is about 17 and has Down Syndrome. He has an adorable giggle and sits with Jess and Alicia as they make adjustments to braces and sew curtains to keep the hot sun out of the new outdoor treatment room that is being built. Ricardo wears the Red Sox hat that Mark gave him, and likes to borrow Jess' sunglasses. Romeo must have been a politician in another life. He welcomes us every morning like he has never met us before. He has the same conversation each day. He has a loud voice and an infectious laugh. From time to time he answers the broken cell phone in his pocket with a loud "Hola."

### *Home Visits*

Each day some of us leave the center and visit children in their homes. Alicia and Jess walk back up the steep hill into the center of San Juan and follow confusing directions that lead down dirt roads and along winding footpaths between houses built so close together that only one at a time can pass. "The Juans" – two brothers, both named Juan – live in a very typical house. A large hinged metal door encloses the compound which is made up of a small cinderblock building for sleeping, an outdoor kitchen with an open fire, a family area covered with corrugated metal, an outhouse, and a garden area. Chickens wander in and around then back into the corn stalks that grow right next to the house. The Juans' mother and sister make tamales for the Festival of Mary. Younger siblings play with a new puppy, "Balto". Sometimes the father is there and watches what we do. Juan and Juan are ten years apart in age, but both of them stopped growing when they were about five. One of the Juans has a twin sister who was spared of whatever their strange disease is, and is now a beautiful 18 year old woman. Alicia and Jess work with them on a straw mat that is put down on the cement floor. It is easy to pick them up and move them, but both Juans just barely tolerate the therapy of stretching and moving. When Alicia and Jess leave the family members repeatedly expresses their appreciation and thanks.

Despite our repeated efforts, Rosalia's mother won't let us treat her. Rosalia is 16 and is severely disabled by cerebral palsy. Both of her legs sweep off to the right and her arms are held bent and tightly against her sides. Flies linger around her constantly wide open mouth. Her mother's understanding of why Rosalia might need physical therapy seems to be limited. We design and build an adapted chair that will get Rosalia up off of the dirt floor, and maybe reduce the huge callus on her left hip. On our last day we put the chair over the fence and into her yard, hoping that her mother will give it a try.

Manuel is a bright 12 year old boy who goes to the public school. One of the Center volunteers asks Amy and me to visit him to see what ideas we have about him using a computer. When we arrive at his house he and his brother are sitting on the spotlessly clean, painted cement floor playing cards. Manuel holds his cards between his toes. He does everything with his feet even though his leg function is minimal. His arms are non-functional. Not only are his limbs of very little use, they are fixed in disruptive positions, and make it difficult for him to fit into the wheelchair he has. Neither of us has ever seen anyone like Manuel and we marvel at what he is able to do with such significant disability. With the volunteer, we discuss various equipment options that might help him use a computer. A computer would make a world of difference for this child, and we hope someone follows through with getting one for him.

Each of us is especially touched by Jesus, a 9 year old boy who lost his home in Hurricane Stan just two months before our visit. He and his family live in a temporary house which they have to move out of soon. Jesus contracted Guillian-Barre after the storm, and he is just beginning to regain some function after being paralyzed by the disease. Shannon mentions that she hopes he is one of the many who regain full function as the disease resolves. On our first day his father carries him to the center on his back. Because he must work, and can't get Jesus to the Center every day, so we agree to go to the house to treat him. In the dusty yard of the house, Amy and Mark show him exercises on a foam rubber mat with tattered edges. They also have him try to walk in a set of makeshift parallel bars that his father has constructed from sticks. The whole family, including his grandmother, is devoted to Jesus, and participates in some way with his therapy. His grandmother frequently cries as she laments Jesus' condition and worries about his fate and the fate of the family. Amy cries too and says she is worried about the same things.

### *The Community and the Culture*

When we're not at the Center we are busy soaking up all that we can about the community and the culture. The students are desperate to make use of every bit of time that they have. Just walking in town is an adventure. Stray dogs, a major problem in San Pedro and San Juan, wander the "Main Path", follow us home, and join us at dinner in restaurants. We plan our trip to the "pick-ups" each day so that we get to walk through the market at the center of town. We soak in the confusion, smells, noises, and sights. The Catholic Church in the main square is always busy and we watch people coming and going in traditional dress and carrying Bibles. The coffee harvest is underway and we try to learn about it by watching and asking questions of the men working at the small street-side coffee processing plants.

It doesn't take long for us to notice that besides the children that are nervous when we try to work with them at the Center, we never see a child crying. The children are kind to each other, content and happy. Children of all ages walk hand-in-hand down the street. It is common to see five or six year old children caring for their younger siblings. They do not have many toys, but they are able to play with and make fun out of any available thing. Children help their parents with major household chores without complaint.

On our fourth night in San Pedro we're told that we should go to the main square for a festival that night. None of us has ever experienced anything like the Festival of the Ascension of Mary. The fireworks are sporadic early in the day and become more regular as the day goes on. It is dark when we arrive but there is an incredible crescent moon overhead. We wander the square listening to bands playing traditional music and watching children set off small firecrackers. We are all energized and wait excitedly to see what unfolds. Everyone in San Pedro is there. At about nine o'clock hundreds of fireworks explode and Mary emerges from the front of the church. Thirty women, with their heads draped in matching shawls, walk slowly and reverently carrying the platform where Mary stands on their shoulders. The beautiful statue of Mary is dressed in traditional Mayan clothing and draped in a shawl similar to those that the women carrying her wear. Her platform is elaborately decorated with flowers and lights. In addition to those carrying her, a massive crowd of women surrounds and follows Mary. Several men follow behind with a small generator that powers the lights. Mary spends the next three hours circling the village with continuous fireworks leading her way. The noise is incredible and from time to time we have to cover our ears. We wonder when they will let up - but they don't. We take a break from the deafening noise by ducking in to a small restaurant for a hot chocolate. We sit for a while then decide we should try to get a good spot for Mary's return and the grand finale. The street is now covered with pine needles and lined with long lengths of small firecrackers. Mary approaches the main square, and the elders, who are in charge of the fireworks, set up canisters from which they will shoot huge, home-made explosives. We watch in amazement and fear and reconsider where we have chosen to stand. This is when the real frenzy starts. We decide that maybe we should move back a little from the fireworks that are littering down debris. We are surrounded by the crowd and have to boost ourselves over a tall wall to gain distance from the explosions. We are completely caught up in what is going on. Shannon admits that she is a little afraid but doesn't want to miss anything. The finale, as Mary reenters the church, is a beyond description crescendo of music, fireworks and cheering. We, somehow, have managed to stay together. We hold on to each other and weave our way out of the crowd and down the hill toward our hotel. The Festival of Mary will not soon be forgotten.

### *Local People*

In just our short time in San Pedro we become acquainted with many local people. On our first day we meet Yolanda and Magdalena. By the second day they know each of us by name. Yolanda and Juanita work as a pair selling fresh-baked bread on the street. Yolanda's right eye is cloudy and she tells us that selling bread is helping her to make money to pay for cataract surgery. They find us every day and expect us to buy bread. On most days we do, but on the days that we don't, we get looks of disappointment and reprimand. By the end of our time in San Pedro we try to avoid them.

In the late afternoons, Amy, Jess and Alicia take weaving lessons from Angela at her home. They sit on cinderblocks and learn to weave using traditional hand-constructed looms that span from the weaver's waist to the branches of an orange tree in the yard. It is hard, back-breaking work. While they are weaving they experience the life of the household around them. In between her other chores, Angela's daughter helps to correct their mistakes. The students bring small gifts for Angela's son. He gives them hugs each day when they arrive. Despite the language barrier, Angela and her family and the students come to know each other pretty well by the time their weaving projects are done. From then on, whenever they see a woman weaving the students comment on the difficulty and perfection of her work.

As part of an assignment that the students must complete, Angela offers to take us to meet her grandfather, Santos, and his wife, Magdalena. Amy, Jess, Alicia and I climb steep, narrow paths to the home where they live with about ten other family members of all ages. We are welcomed in to their home and Alicia and Jess use their somewhat limited Spanish to have a conversation with Santos and Magdalena about what it is like to be elderly in rural Guatemala. The students are moved by the "awesome" opportunity and realize what a special experience it is. Magdalena takes us to where she sells candy and chips on the side of the street, and we are introduced to her friend, Isabella, who takes us with her to where she has her corn ground into tortilla meal. Amy comments that she thinks we have had a priceless experience that most visitors to San Pedro don't get to have.

Mayra is an 11 year old girl who balances a basket of small bracelets, woven purses and key rings on her head. At night she walks from restaurant to restaurant selling the items in her basket to tourists. The money she makes helps to support her family. We meet her while having dinner on our second night. Mayra does not go to school but she is smart and has picked up some English from tourists. She makes herself comfortable and sits with us at the table. We offer to buy her a drink and she accepts. At one point she takes some nail polish out of her pocket and offers to paint my fingernails, which the students think is "adorable". After that, Mayra eats with us nearly every night. We send our leftovers home to her family. Her sense of humor and big dimples entertain us and lighten some of the fatigue we feel at the end of our busy days. Our friendship grows and Mayra meets us at our hotel to hang out with us when we get back from the Center in the evenings. She loves to brush Jess' long blonde hair. Some days she brings her younger siblings, Andrea, Mario, and Martita to hang out too. We give them lots of the little things that we have brought; stickers, bubbles, candy, hair ties, toothbrushes, markers and other things. They are so excited and thankful for every item. One night at dinner Amy is talking with Mayra about Christmas. During the conversation she tells Amy that her family does not have the money for any decorations. On our way through the market Amy suggests that we buy some Christmas decorations and decorate Mayra's house. We do and then Amy, Jess and I make our way to Mayra's. Her mother is there and greets us with kisses of welcome and gratitude for our friendship with Mayra. Their house is shockingly small. The children proudly show us around the outside kitchen area and the one room where all six family members live. The room contains nothing more than two double beds and a bureau. Their belongings are piled along the perimeter of the room. We string up the sparkly garlands in and around the house and hang ornaments from the lemon tree in the front yard. The whole family seems delighted. We are completely choked-up and at a loss for words. We hug them good-bye and wish them "Feliz Navidad". Amy, Jess and I wordlessly hug each other as we head down the hill and back to the hotel. When we tell the rest of the group, they immediately understand what a powerful experience it had been.

### *On the Weekend*

On the weekend, when the Center is closed, we have time for some rest and opportunity to explore the region a little more. We all have some Christmas shopping to do so on Saturday we head across the lake to the large market in Panajachel. We spend several hours buying drums, hand woven and embroidered textiles, machetes, jade earrings, small Mayan figurines, brightly painted masks, t-shirts and other gifts to bring home. We are often surrounded by people trying to sell us various things and we hold on tight to the fanny packs that contain our money. Alicia, in particular, gets very good at bargaining for the lowest price on things. Mark expresses his frustration at trying to translate the language and the money into something that makes sense. When we get to the point where we can't carry anything else, we head back to the dock for the boat ride home.

Angela, the weaving instructor, helps us arrange a guide for a hike up to “La Narez”, the “nose” of the profile shaped mountain ridge that looms over San Juan. We are met by Moses, our guide, at 4:30 on Sunday morning. We have a 45 minute ride in the back of a pick-up truck through the pitch black morning to the ascending trailhead. Once there, we hike up for about another 45 minutes. Moses has timed it perfectly so that we are at the peak just in time for the sunrise. We are so excited to be there and the view is breathtaking. Mark comments that he can’t believe he even thought twice about whether or not to get up so early. Pictures are taken of the view and of ourselves with Moses and his machete. For about an hour we talk and eat our breakfast. Then Moses says we should begin our four-hour descent so that we’re down before it gets really hot. The hike down is beautiful, but steep and a little treacherous in parts. At the end of the hike we are all proud of each other and have experienced a special bond. Back in San Pedro, after we shower off the thick dust that coats our bodies, we treat ourselves to a relaxing lunch.

### *Day-to-Day*

During the whole trip communication is difficult. We don’t have nearly enough Spanish, and certainly even less Mayan. Jess says she gets a headache just trying so hard to listen, understand, and get a point across. It’s a little embarrassing at first but soon we get accustomed to looking and sounding silly using a combination of broken Spanish, broken English, and the local Mayan dialect, along with hand gestures, facial expressions and demonstrations to communicate with all of the people we interact with. The students say that, amazingly, this type of communication generally does the trick. Alicia who has the most Spanish, says that she is frustrated because she knows she is missing details, specifics and subtleties. But we realize how rich our communication has been even without perfect understanding.

Meals are important. Breakfast each day is a time when we energize, gear-up and plan for the day ahead. The coffee is great. Lunch is more haphazard and we are often in several different places so we eat granola bars or street food. Most of the time, all of us eat dinner together. Mayra joins us until about eight thirty when she has to go home. There are excellent restaurants and meals are leisurely and delicious. The weather allows us to eat outside almost every evening. One restaurant shows a movie on a big screen after the dinner rush. At another, we sit at a table next to an open fire pit. Dinner is a time when we relax, laugh, and tell stories of our daily adventures. We debrief and come together as a tight-knit group. On our last night in San Pedro, Jess expresses that the dinner is joyous and sad at the same time.

At the end of each day we spend a little time lying in our hammocks or on a spot on the ground, enjoying the incredibly clear sky. Because there is no ambient light, the moon and stars are clearer than we’ve ever seen. We try, rather pathetically, to identify constellations. We count falling stars for a while and then, one-by-one, excuse ourselves for bed. We sleep well after being lulled by the sound of the waves on the lake.

### *The Way Home*

After our last trip back across Lake Atitlan, as previously arranged, Joseo is there to pick us up. Because the main road is blocked by protestors, he says we have no choice but to take the more mountainous and circuitous route. We settle in for a long, bumpy, and sometimes precarious, drive along roads where the areas that had been washed out in the hurricane are still evident - and in some places nearly impassable. It is beautiful, but several people comment that they can’t wait to get to our hotel in Antigua where a hot shower with good water pressure and a comfortable bed awaits us.

Antigua seems familiar and civilized when we return. We spend the day we have there sight seeing and doing some last minute shopping. We have a celebratory final dinner together. The excitement of getting home is hitting all of us and we begin to transition back into our non-San Pedro selves. We talk less about our experiences and more about the final leg of our trip.

Before we know it we are saying good-bye to each other in the airport and heading our separate ways. Out of

habit we count to see if everyone has the appropriate number of bags. We make plans to get together soon for dinner and to share pictures. We have to get together soon. Because, we all realize that even with pictures, our families and friends at home won't be able to feel the same things that we feel about all of our stories and adventures.

### *Discussion*

In the course of this experience, the students and I had the opportunity to practice our therapy skills on real people, stretch our clinical comfort zones, and develop as clinicians. We had to work creatively in very basic therapy settings, with limited resources and limited communication. We treated children who have severe, and often poorly attended to, disabilities. We had to be flexible and adjust to a variety of circumstances. Each of us experienced personal growth and was immersed in a community and culture that expanded their world view. We met, worked with, interacted with, and in some cases, developed close relationships with several local people – young and old. Our communication skills were challenged and required creativity and flexibility. We had the opportunity to experience, first hand, cultural differences related to disability, work, money and lifestyle.

During the trip there was significant opportunity for discussion about the clinical and cultural experiences. This daily discussion and sharing optimized the overall experience. Strong bonds and friendships grew. But, most importantly, each of the participants felt that the trip was “a life-changing experience” both professionally and personally. For many the trip had been a leap of faith. For some it was a risk-taking experience. For all it was an exciting adventure.

Since that first trip, I have taken many more students to the same place. Each trip leaves me in awe of the experience. Each group becomes like a family. Each group accomplishes amazing things. Each group has unique, wonderful, and sad experiences. Each person comes home changed forever.

Included below are some comments made in written reflections following the trip:

“I had many fears about the trip... In researching the country it did not seem like a place I wanted to go... (but) I would have regret(ed) not taking the chance. It really was like a “live life to the fullest”, “live every day as if it were your last” type of thing for me. And in the end I was so grateful that I had decided to go because it did end up being one of the most amazing almost indescribable experiences of my life.” (Alicia)

“As a personal experience, I'm still feeling the effects. I had never left the country, never gone on a true adventure.” (Amy)

“... I am so glad that I went. It was the best experience I have had in so many different ways – it is so hard to explain.” (Jess)

“... I will never (again) look at a child... or an ill-equipped clinic and think nothing can be done. It was amazing to see how much could be done with so little.” (Amy)

“I feel this trip really helped me to become more confident in my therapy skills. I feel we kind of got thrown into the fire, and it was either sink or swim – I wouldn't have had it any other way... I feel I had to be a creative PT and work with what I had, and work through the communication barrier.” (Jess)

“They welcomed us into their homes and were very willing to show us how they cook, live, and work. They take such pride in what they do and are so open to talk about themselves.” (Alicia)

“I was lucky enough to have great experiences with the families... who offered nothing but love and support to their children, which was not what I had expected. But their unconditional love and acceptance for their child was overwhelming and could be felt even through the language and cultural barriers.” (Amy)



“Guatemalans always say “hello” or “good morning” whether they know you or not. It made you feel good and welcomed in the community.” (Jess)

“Looking into the eyes of some of the children – especially the Juans who cannot speak, I felt sometimes that I just knew what they felt or what they were trying to say. A connect between people can be made at any level without speaking.” (Jess)

“I can still remember each child, each person, each scene, each day- as if it were yesterday. I guess that’s how you know you were affected, how your life has been changed. My life was definitely changed. I feel as if I not only learned a wealth of information for my physical therapy career, but for my personal life...” (Amy)

“One (of my most memorable experiences) is when we brought decorations to Mayra’s family; the look on the children’s faces and the tears in their mother’s eyes because of a few dollars worth of Christmas decorations.” (Jess)

“I learned a lot about myself during the two weeks: that I could make do with little, that I could travel on my own, that I could connect with people I didn’t know and would never understand.” (Amy)

“I miss hanging out with (everyone)! I had such an amazing time, it sometimes consumes me... I find myself looking through (the) photos everyday...” (Mark)

“Every day I wish I had more, I remember the children who had nothing and were happy to be given a sticker or a hair tie.” (Amy)

“The trip was amazing. I learned a lot about the Guatemalan culture and a lot about myself... I never thought I would ever say this, however, I look forward to taking another trip to Guatemala...” (Alicia)

“I miss (everyone) and can't imagine going with any other group. I feel so fortunate to have met and been able to spend so much "quality" time together. Although our time was limited in the grand scheme of things, I feel that we were able to make a difference in the people’s lives and I think we all learned a lot about ourselves and what we are able to accomplish.” (Shannon)

“There are so many things that I can’t even express that impacted me on this trip. I am so glad to have had this experience because it really was life altering. It has definitely changed my views on many things and has made me a better person.” (Jess)

“Being a part of such a thing was an extremely rewarding experience.” (Alicia)

“The trip was fabulous and it is just too hard to explain (to people) though pictures do help.” (Shannon)

“As much as PT was the focus of the trip, I feel that I learned so much more about myself. That was most important.” (Jess)

“I feel truly blessed to have been given this amazing experience. This is a trip I could have never planned on my own, or ever have imagined by myself. I loved every minute of it: from the long trip there and back, to the hours on end of weaving classes, the language barriers, the kids, the truck rides, the food, the solar pools, the dogs, the friends, and all the memories.” (Amy)

*By Jennifer Audette*

## ***The Raven and the Sparrow***

Running, it feels like I am always running, running from family, friends, running from everything and nothing at the same time. It's all I can do, constantly changing faces in the blink of an eye, my masks are endless, as they are ripped off and disregarded. The skin makes a hallow slice of a sound as it falls to the floor lifeless. Its empty eyes and void emotions are left in the dust like the alias that follows it. I have so many faces, so many names, that even if they think they care close to grabbing my hand another falls and replaces that grip with air. Another dark ally and another crime to attend to, but the phantom never wanders far. She stands above the streets as her eyes shot out from behind a dark mask, my mask. I can be the villain, I can be the savior. I am the victim, and I can be the convicted. Yet with angelic speed I continue down the street with large black wings that fade in the darkness leaving a single feather behind. A feather that can be cherished or it can be detested as trash but it's still there. Sitting on your soul like a broken piece of glass sits in a wound waiting to be ripped out, but never really thrown away. Though now the battle seems to be in vain.

I run and yet they always manage to catch me. Their hands reach farther than most imagine, despite the fear, the pain, the anger; I can never run fast enough. I am stuck in a bird cage too small for my large wing span. Tight and confined, all my beliefs, ideas, opinions they are squashed into my mind and held there by the large solid gold bars. Bars which lack the room to stretch, they are firm and cold like the minds of those who smile so brightly around me. It's a pretty facade, just like all the smiles and the friendships that seem too good to pass up. Yet, once they get just close enough to make you believe their sanctuary the cage remains. Everyone still stares in awe but never move forward to undo the latch and open the doors. I wait, and wait...to finally have the open arms pulled me from the cage that I was placed in. All the arms are open and wide but maybe I am stilling running. I shy away from the kid touches, wincing from the possible chance of betrayal if I get too close. I fear the firm hand that seems to smack the kindness away and leave nothing but a broken mirror of memories of what was there.

Being alone is always the final result. No matter how many smaller birds come and rest in my fake gold cage, in the end they all fly away. Leaving me nothing but the memory of the fleeting love, the touch, which lingers on my breast where they rested. Some return again, while others keep their distance and watch from afar. Never again do they get close enough to touch, to hold, and to love. They know me, they understand that I am there but none have the courage to cut away the cage from my cramped black wings. Is it my fault? Do I push them away? The friends never stay long enough for me to figure it out.

Running, run, run, and run...It's a constant method. In the end though, even if the cage door was opened would I have the courage to receive the open arms? Would I fit loaded with all my fears, and distrusts through the small open door? I have grown so used to the cramped lonesomeness that it seems almost a shame to leave it alone, for something less familiar. Yet I sit like a wide eyed child, watching those who aren't caged sing, no matter how much they sing of things ignorant and childish, I long to be the song bird. I have no voice to sing, it's rough, and hoarse from the age old ideas that burn at my throat longing to be spoken. If I did sing, would I sing like the other birds? No, I already know that the mature tone of my voice would stand out, and once again I would be placed in this cage. So I sit. My knees to my chest, my back arched uncomfortably against the bars that confine me. Will I be able to stand when it finally comes time or have I forgotten what it feels like to stand tall and proud? Have I lost the only trait that makes me a bird? I no longer remember how to fly.

*By Alexandra Epervary*

## Sasha and the Red Vests

*"48 minutes for the next 48 years of our lives. I say we go out there and we leave it all out on the field. We got the rest of our lives to be mediocre, but we have the opportunity to play like Gods. **Let's be heroes.**"*

--*Varsity Blues* Trailer, as seen at the Dobrenko Household  
Saturday, February 13th, 1999

I laid on the burnt-red fibers of the family room carpet, the closing words of the *Varsity Blues* trailer still resonating in my ears; *Let's be heroes*.

Within seconds, I was up, sprung from the carpet and sprinting towards the kitchen, a plan of action slowly solidifying with every bouncy step. Today, I'd be the hero.

This idea, the third of the day, was a thousand times better than my previous two of the day, and equally as difficult.

Idea One and Idea Two went hand in hand this morning, the first a delicious strawberry shortcake, good for its taste, and immediately following, the second - a glass of coke, good both for cleaning my mouth and inducing my sugary, jittery state of speech for the day.

I nearly knocked the glass over, still half-full, as I ran into the kitchen where Mom was using her favorite weapon, *the metal mallet of death*, to pulverize pink slabs of white meat into their flat, pancake looking alter-egos. She was cooking *beetoks*, my favorite food in the world, something I would explain to any of my American friends in the only way I knew how: *massa s iyichka* - meat with egg.

I had to scream to be heard over the *whap whap whap* of the mallet.

"Mom, I'm soOoOo *bored!* Can we go to the movies!?"

Usually, this was a simple formality - the question that would necessitate a "yes" response. Mom would oblige, and I would run to the phone and call the voice who sounded just like the men in suits with greasy hair who sold cars on TV, but more automated. He would tell me after what always felt like a very impolite explanation of the theater's hours and things I already knew about the movies in the theater what times *Varsity Blues* would play.

The one problem was, this movie wasn't just any movie. This wasn't *Toy Soldiers*. This wasn't *Can't Hardly Wait*. And this certainly wasn't *Patch Adams*. In short, this wasn't PG-13. This was *Varsity Blues*.

This was Rated R.

Now visibly hesitant, Mom began her battery of questions, asking what the movie was about, why it would get this horrible Rating of R, and why they had to say all those *bad* words in the first place. I allowed this to continue for its necessary duration before explaining in my now perfected slow, calm demeanor, "Mom, you watch Rated R movies all the time without knowing it. It's really not a big deal, OK? So can we go?"

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The red snake of velvet that would guide us to the ticket stand appeared clearly through the window of the Sharon Movie Theater. I led the way, followed begrudgingly by Mom. By that point in our slow induction into the American way of life she had begun to appreciate movies, or at least pretended to for the sake of her one and only child. I was still, and always would be, her little Sasha.

When we moved, a strange man who didn't know me, Mom or Dad told us that boys aren't called Sasha here and that my name should be Alexander. Ever since, I've gone by Alex to everyone but Mom and Dad.

Approaching the counter, I acted as confident as my less than average height and cheeks puffed full of strawberry shortcake would allow. Today, I'd have to be American Alex.

"Hi, one for *Varsity Blues*, please."

The red-vest looks at me. His eyes take less than a second to take it all in before darting at my mom, "He isn't 17, is he?"

I interrupt, hoping to explain the simple, yet often misunderstood understanding of the wording that defines an R rating. My English is strong, my arguments reasonable & logical.

Mom's white teeth grin back at the vest while I feverishly pitch my case; she wishes she could be back with her mallet, making food for the week.

The guard responds as if the entire response was ready before I even began speaking, "Yeah, I mean, I get what you're saying, it's just there is really nothing I can do. Rated R means that, 'Children under 17 are not allowed to attend R-rated motion pictures unaccompanied by a parent or adult guardian'. That's it. End of story, kid."

Bah! Foiled by the vest. What was American Alex, the *man*, to do?

After a brief, private discussion with Mom, we decide that I can just see a movie with her that is not Rated R and, before I know it, we had bought two for *Message in a Bottle*. Yeah, I couldn't force her to see a movie about high school football, it just wasn't right, but *Message in a Bottle*? I'm a 13 year old boy on the verge of manhood and I'm going to see a movie about love and bottles in the ocean. Awesome.

*This cannot be the way the story ends, it just can't*, I think, as we waltz past the popcorn stand. I ponder absentmindedly about drowning out the bottle love with a bucket of salty popcorn, and then, out of nowhere, another idea slowly presents itself. *No*, I think, *not yet*.

We get in and sit. I try to withstand the pain of this romance, watch some previews about love and humor, classic PG-13 tropes, until I simply cannot take it any longer. It is time to employ the deadly fourth plan.

I begin a quick discussion with mom, confidence overwhelming, and she allows me to leave, understanding that today, I truly must be what I am born to be: a hero.

I walk back past the first red vest of the day, maintaining with the poise and precision my aura of adult. As long as he doesn't see me, I'm fine. I had earlier scouted the door for *Varsity Blues* – on the complete opposite end of the theater.

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I hear the door slam behind me. I'm in. Success, Freedom, All of it! I am... Rated R. I am a hero.

I sit and watch the previews, most of a level I had never seen before. The swears fly like never before – *Fuck* this, *Shit* that – each new cuss an unknown note, together composing the melodious tone of adulthood previously unimaginable by little Sasha, today heard by Alexander, leader of men.

The movie starts, and almost immediately, I realize why I shouldn't be here. A girl -- the popular, pretty one -- has just come on screen wearing a bikini made not from any cloth I've ever seen before, but instead the creamy, white fluff of whipped cream. Three cherries cover the especially bad parts of her. What was so bad about this, I thought? *Oh*, I realized, they're *going to have sex*. Weird.

I continued watching as Mox -- the football player with dreams of something bigger -- hung out with his friends, fought with his dad, and practiced his football – all of the activities I assumed were a normal part of the high school experience. This pretending wasn't too difficult within the all-black theater – I would stay silent when others stayed silent and laugh when others laughed. My voice, currently in the throes of a rather unpredictable battle with puberty, could not be counted on to maintain its newly found deep tone. It could, and would, squeal at any moment, revealing its high-pitched former self. This was unacceptable – my PG-13 identity could not be revealed to the other movie-goers, let alone the red-vested employee who had walked in a few minutes prior.

At the beginning of the movie, I kept meticulous track of that door's openings and closings, attributing each to either a fellow moviegoer buying snacks or using the bathroom. However, as soon as I saw the first red-vest enter I realized my neck's constant twisting and turning would need to cease immediately. Otherwise, I'd risk sending the blatantly insecure signal of a PG-13er: grounds for immediate removal *and* maybe even a stern talking to with the police who would have no problem using some of the words I had become accustomed to with my viewing experience.

So, I stared at the screen straight ahead, watching even more intently with my beady, but not too beady eyes, calibrated to a perfect level of an interested, yet not too interested seventeen year old male.

Mox continued to fight, play, and kiss, and the swears continued to rain down in waves, though the only thing I could think about was that vest. *Where was he? Could I see him? Could he see me?* I began to crane my head back and to the right, ever so slowly. Slower and slower, turning, now 90 degrees away from the comic relief on screen, I could easily make out the red-vest, still and silent, staring at the screen. My heart was racing as I began my neck's slow rotation back to...

Wait! What the f---. What was that? What the hell was that light! At about thigh-level, in direct line with my eyes appeared from nowhere a bright circle of shining light.

Oh god. Heart is beating. Palms are sweaty. My whole body becomes rigid, slouching slow, slow and steady, so that the top of my head is no longer visible to those behind. *Just act cool. Don't move. Nice and still. Gah!*

I couldn't hold, I had to know what was going on; what the hell was he doing with that light. I turn completely, using my left eye to peep through the natural slit between the chairs.

Shit! He was checking someone else's ID. Oh god, they look scared. I could feel the puddles of water forming

on the arm rests to which I now clung for dear life. Oh god, they're getting up, and, yep, they're leaving. They just got kicked out for being underage!

I was doomed. Sitting a few rows above the vest's current location, I had no idea what to do. I wanted, more than anything, to just scream for Mom or go back in time and take back that stupid third idea and just be happy with the first two but I couldn't, so I just lowered myself even more and more, sucking in my gut and straightening myself as much as possible to become one with the dark, plushy fabric fastened to the back of my seat. I could see the glow emanating from his flashlight now, swerving all over the room like a firefly on cocaine.

It was coming closer and closer, this firefly – the vest moving row by row, inspecting, and moving on. He was just one row away from me now. Stay rigid, stay hidden, I thought, as I closed my eyes for fear of what was to come next – his walking over, asking for my ID, taking me outside where inevitably the first red-vest would reveal my earlier ploy, call the police, and, worst of all, ruin *Message in a Bottle* for Mom.

Closer and closer the flashlight got, inches from me, moving closer and, boom! I felt it penetrate my closed eye-lids, turning the horrified darkness into even more petrified light. It was over; I was a hero no longer. Wait, what? What's going on here? Do I feel darkness again? Is this a joke? Did the vest really just gloss past me? Did he mistake me for a 17 year old? Oh my god, he did. Success for Sasha! Sasha the Hero!

My mom met me in the lobby a few minutes after my movie's conclusion, her hands clutching a few crumpled tissues used to wipe the now puffy bags under her eyes where tears had been. I looked at those eyes, crying because of some message that I only could have imagined was received by transport of bottle, and I realized how happy I was she wasn't crying about me, her son in jail for sneaking into a movie about football, whipped cream bikinis, and a cussing.

"How was the movie?" she asks, as we walk past the unsuspecting vests and follow the velvet snake towards the door.

"Meh," I respond, "I've seen better."

*By Alex Dobrenko*

## Sky Blue

The Sky was a mirror of buildings and streets, hollow of life and dead to anything. There were no faded blue or white puffs; those were now legends which marked the tails of the Grandparents to their children's children. To my people the sky was hazy, if you would call it a sky. It was void of life, not even the birds flew through it anymore. They hung low to the ground, easing their way through the crowds of people who walked the musky, busy streets. People and Robot walked hand in hand, and lived a life that united both races. They complimented each other, aiding the other as needed. Every family had one. A person they called their own, cold oil blooded beings that carried nothing but programmed emotions. They were cold to touch, and conversation, the only moments they had life was when they smiled. Laughter was their only emotion, they felt no pain, no sorrow, and they hated no one, and loved all. The image of perfection, our perfection, or at least the image we thought was perfect. All their flaws could be fixed by a minor tweaking of screws or bolts that were masked under the flesh like skin they had on their bodies, my body.

I am one of the cold bloods, a being based on the image of a child god who sits in their shops and decided who was best to be given the life we live. Our god, if there is such a thing. They lived under the mirror sky that shields the blue from pictures, keeping all weather outside. The only thing that lived inside was man created. All organic objects needed to be created by specialists, people of the past who lived off herbs and nature. Man now was messing with nature, cloning was something that happened more and more often. Life could be solved by a click of a button on a computer. Illness wasn't a threat anymore. Everything had a cure. Or at least we hoped that to be so. We gave everything we had to the Mirror Sky above our heads. It's a reminder of the world we created, and how we cast out everything that made the world full of life. The face we made and are forced to stare at every time we turn our eyes towards the empty void above our heads, my head.

Free will is something I've never had and probably never will. My life is controlled by wires and plugs that are hidden behind the flesh mask I get fixed every month or so, a flesh that if cut bleeds nothing and never heals, vacant of any fluid vacant to life. I am like the world, empty of life and restrained to the will of the man god, my master, my life, my everything. They know little of the control they have over me and my people. Our minds cannot comprehend disobedience, nor do we understand rebellion. The only will we have is that embedded behind our eyes. They eyes that watch the red bloods live their lives like nothing is wrong. Which wake the world around us shrivel at the will of the people beside us, and the world being taken over by filth that clogs our lungs but we breathe. And with every inhale we take the eyes I was given sees a little more, I am the worlds eyes. That watches everyone, the real image that everyone's eyes choose to see, my eyes.

We're always watching, seeing the nature reactions. What is acceptable and not to the world we live in, like a child learning manners from scratch. I am a child, a child stuck in the body already signed for me. This is not my body, I have no solid form. I am a soul created by numbers placed in a vessel to be toyed with, mocked, and harbored, an image that the person who designed me created for a purpose, my purpose. That was if I had a purpose, yet I like to believe that my purpose is to give everything else a reason to live. To show the red bloods the path to their success at my own expense.

It's a feeling that makes us almost feel the pounding of a nonexistent heart, the vital organ that makes us human. The heart of the millions my people aid every day, my heart.

*By Alexandra Epervary*

## **A Story of Un**

Un embodies the shape of a capsule broken in half and containing a perspective of reference that is descriptive of the frame being nailed upon experience. When I think of what happened yesterday I imagine a movie of events playing just under eye level on my left and it replays in a wide screen rectangle as I think of it. Since this memory is already encapsulated within my memory I have subconsciously organized it into a frame in which there are two sides. I can imagine seeing myself paying attention to that memory as I walk around to look at it from the other side.

The perspective underneath everyday processing shares with me many things about the way I am thinking about life, and thus how I relate to the ocean of variables and elements encountered before my first breath. The Un perspective brings a prescriptive quality to the "I" of an observer so the descriptive awareness of

being more than an idle participant can open up awareness even just a little bit more. The memory of what happened yesterday has rested seemingly solid, until touched like a still pool showing it to be understandably responsive to the ripples of my thoughts and interaction. Any experience by itself, is capable of being restructured, because it is the unstable reflection of practiced perspective. The mirror of the mind following its well traced roots into form while seeking connection and depth of breadth between known and unknown. One aspect of universal continuity may indeed lead into the whole, but it's not until it's connected by thought that it will be known to be so.

Seeking more than a reaction to the undetermined reality that stands tall around my underlying thoughts I seek the levers to play in my sandbox. Looking out through my perspectives, I am always curious if what I will find is what I thought I'd seen as the whole picture. While it might take a lie to recognize the truth, I don't believe the slices of truth that each of us can be aware of is any more or any less than a fragment of unrealized opportunities of expression. Moving parallel through my thoughts into a position of an unabashed participatory investigation infuses the unrealized happenings of an event into a further exploration of identity.

The capsule that Un contains is the stories of life and is bent like light through a prism. The infinite unassuming universe is somehow squeezed and limited through the acceptance of ideas preaching an unambiguous singular expression and path expected to contain the unyielding expression that is me. I have found the strung pearls of opposites as an opportunity for growth and part of the undertow of change. Un is the unraveling of position and perspective so we might see ourselves as a living Universe pushing and pulling through the currents of change that extend far beyond the lines children might color in. I am moved unaware of the universal stories that extend beyond this undiscovered moment. I wander forward as a partially unknown perspective sharing my story of Un.

*By Joseph A Santiago*

## **A Walk in the Woods**

In every step I seek to be like the wind so that trouble might blow right by me.

In every thought I drink deeply of life so I might be like the sea lapping at the many creatures it unites even as it reaches out to stroke the shore.

In every action if I were like fire I would burn away the branches of conflict to take away the sting of sharp edges so they would not burn us to be consumed.

If my words were like the earth I would always return to balance. Never fearing the threats of pain and with loving patience I would bury conflict by settling in the cracks that trace the imaginary castings of society.

If I were emptiness I would be seen like snow clothing the essences that are known as the unbounded universe. I would make room for form and variety. I shall welcome change lovingly and begin to explore myself beyond the dewy outline of what I believed myself to be.

If I were to put all of these things at the mercy of the brooding storm or the fair kindness of a lazy day, you might still look right over me.

*By Joseph A Santiago*



## Vision

Walking alone I hear the creaking of trees moving in the wind. I look up to see the moody clouds as each foot fall brings me that much closer to what feels like the roof of the world. In the quiet I can hear the rumbling in the distance and I wonder if this is what the gods must know to be a lifetime or one single moment. This moment seems to stretch on forever and it could be possible to go backwards simply by turning around and walking the other way. The silence surrounding me turns the volume of my thoughts louder and my focus is settled into the comforting rhythms of footfalls as I crunch closer towards the frozen sky. Like so much of my life I wonder if I should stay invisible or if I should show myself to be more than a simple man. If I hear voices in the distance I wonder if I must come closer to the group or can I take the wilds of this air and wrap it into me by joining it with my own inner silence? At every shelter there are logs that people will pour their heart and soul into but I started out glancing at the first register in Georgia and found someone writing their life history. I imagine a scene from Kung Fu where the main character walks across the desert with a simple bag and plenty of flash backs. All the while he leaves little trace except his footfalls and what he shares with those who listen. Walking in the world I pace through my memories under a brooding sky and begin to get closer to the idea of those I love. I have wanted to forget about the world and I never thought about isolation as a sensation until I understood the world to be left completely behind me.

To be seen in a crowd of four or five walking side by side seemed like a large family and at times overwhelming. Inside I grew quietly through the expression and dreams I was able to share with those around me. Yet my quiet took me to a place where I became part of the wind and I moved like water and my ideas could be just as formless. I invited the spirit of the wind to keep me company as I walked. It played with my hair and in the most silent of moments it made me feel like I was never alone. I could hear the leather of my jacket creak as I rested and I thought of the creaking forest moving just enough to say. "We recognize you here." I have walked through cracked and parched earth, beyond frozen mountain tops, and through the portals of my own brooding and musing ideas. I sought to seek the edges of the earth so I might know the monsters and muses there and see myself as one of them. When I reached the end of that journey I had a few pictures that now appear to be lost to time and I must have set them down in the same place where I allowed to settle the names of all those places I had been. I could not leave behind the connected knowledge of those places so I asked the wind to come with me.

Even today as I sit in a room and there are things dangling from the ceiling I play with the wind and I watch ceiling danglers turn in what appears to be the absence of wind. I am reminded of the trees swaying and the comfort of the world as I feel the swirling urge for open spaces by our elemental play. How easy it was to forget that comfort rarely lasted when temperatures dropped and the winds seemed like they would lift me high as a kite. Yet this seemed like just another barrier that signaled the crossing from world to world. There were times that the high canopies of trees rarely brook into full sunlight, which transitioned into ferns like I remembered the rain forests, waterfalls surprised my senses by prolonged anticipatory approaches, and flowers that I could not name greeted me. What I did not expect were moments that the landscaped was stripped, cut, and so barren it felt raped by pains meant to make profit. When setting down to rest on a piece of packed snow the familiar tug of winds I learned can grow by gusts as if someone open up a tap. It is an odd sensation to feel your body being slid across the snow. My mind flashed to Carlos Castaneda and as if a Yaqui shaman had told me directly to grasp upon an object and shield my eyes until I could jump onto the back of a natural spirit I waited for the right moment.

It seemed I walked through a white out into a stinging wet blankness before those that I followed set down their lantern to pound the first peg into a frozen world. The winds changed and my thoughts followed it as I

found it seemed awkward to think in words. I was not a practiced nagual holding my position along the mounting peaks of Mt. Katahdin. At any moment I might be lost or I may return to focus on those things left behind, those things enduring, and those things I have been fated to challenge. All things are present within this steady moment. It is only those things that are recognized that have the potential for me to notice them growing louder in the peripherals of my attention. In isolation I have recognized the distance inside that is without the tether of socialization. All the while I am coming back to the thought if I wish to be invisible on this twisting and even if I did I have to wonder how it is that I have been known. How it is that I have been seen.

As I put this away I reflect back to that moment I thought it was too much trouble to wait for that stranger to leave his mark on the AT register. Even as I am about to walk across the US boundary at Mount Katahdin's Baxter Peak a part of me has regretted that I will finish this trail entirely invisible to the records. Yet the person who started this somehow is not the one who has penned these lines... I regret not being able to look back on his words and thoughts. It is the man that I am now that will further the dreams of wild beasts and impish men by the myths of striving to continue the passion and adventure of living. At the moment my eyes cannot get past an idea of a warm bed and the hands in which I will place mine in.

*By Joseph A Santiago*

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