

Realities

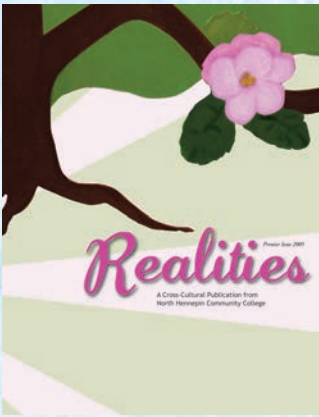
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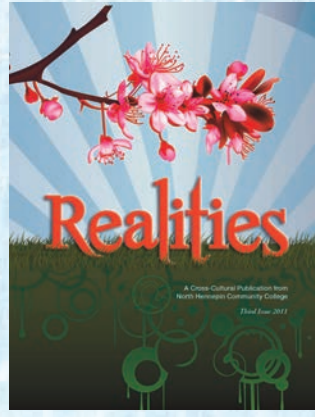




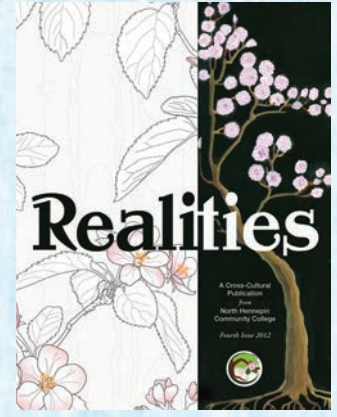
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Realities

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of Student Writings for Sharing of Cross-Cultural Experiences*

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Founders and Editors

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Realities is dedicated to all people who have had the courage to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching their lives by seeing how other lives are lived.

Note from the editors:

To preserve the authenticity and character of the writings, they have been minimally edited.

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Introduction

There is a saying, “Intellect is the door to freedom and alert attention is the mother of intellect.” This mission of an educational institution like North Hennepin Community College is to impart to students the knowledge necessary to lead them through the door of intellect to freedom. But, as the saying continues, that process is not the whole story. The rest of the story, and arguably the more important part must be told not by the institution but by the student giving alert attention to that knowledge in a way that turbo-charges the intellect, giving that knowledge imaginative power. This takes work, fusing rigorous study of knowledge to experiences, one’s own and that of others, helping each of us to become not only recipients of knowledge but transformers of it who pass on reinvigorated knowledge to future generations.

Like a pebble tossed into a pond ripples, the authors in this issue of *Realities* are tossing in their knowledge and experiences for your perusal, giving you the opportunity to compare your experiences with theirs, helping you the reader become more inclusive, if not more expansive, in creating your narrative of the world more intricately considered as you journey through the complexities of life toward wisdom, the point at which you come to regard the world.

Further on the notes of inclusiveness and expansiveness, the editors of *Realities* are pleased to include several stories from students enrolled in Blackfeet Community College, Browning, Montana. These stories come to us through Leanne Zainer, an English professor who is on temporary leave from North Hennepin Community College to teach at the Blackfeet Community College, where, as she herself notes later in this issue, she is expanding her journey by incorporating the differences found on a road not often taken.

May these stories from near and afar encourage you to range farther in your journey and contribute to this journal’s mission of publishing stories of enlightened experiences.

Sincerely,
Mark L. Larson and Don Wendel



Line of Death

By Martin Zorn

This is a story about the night that would affect my life forever. But before we begin, let's back up a few years. I joined the Navy at seventeen years of age, fresh out of high school. I went to boot camp in California to learn all the Navy ways to live and survive. After boot camp I went to Aviation Ordnance "A" school. This is where I learned all the skills I would need for the next four years. I was shown how to load various explosives on the A-6E bomber. Once I was graduated from school, I was sent to my squadron VA-85; this is where I would learn about the harpoon missile and nuclear weapons. So basically I was trained to kill, which brings me to the night at hand.

My squadron was attached to the USS Saratoga for deployment. When out on the ship you work twelve hours on and twelve hours off. This particular night was March 23, 1986; it was basically a normal night. I woke up about two hours before

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corvettes heading to our location.
This conflict just got real for the first time.

my shift on the flight deck. Like most every day, I would get out of my coffin bed and grab a shower. There's nothing like a shower mixed with jet fuel; sometimes you feel dirtier getting out of the shower than when you started. After I dressed for work, I went to get some chow and, of course, we had no fresh milk again. After eating some powder made French fries and some powder milk, I headed to work.

I started on my way to the ordnance shop to see what was on the docket tonight, and as always banged my shins on the water tight door lips. After getting into the shop, the captain came on the radio and said to stay on our toes because we were heading into conflict with Libya. We all sat in the shop thinking about what was about to take place. I started getting out the test equipment for the night. You always check the weapon systems plan before loading weapons on them. Some friends of mine and I grabbed a coffee, and we started talking about Muammar Gaddafi and

his Line of Death. In 1973, Gaddafi claimed the whole Gulf of Sidra belonged to the Libyans. However, this was not the case, and he was about to find out. My buddies and I went back to shop to find out we had to prep our best two birds for a Harpoon missile and Rockeye bombs. So we headed up to do our wire checks on the aircraft and just then general quarters sounded: "Danger was possible at any time." The captain spoke on the radio again, and under orders from President Ronald Reagan we were to blow up two missile corvettes heading to our location.

This conflict just got real for the first time. We started the harpoon checks on aircraft 501; this was usually our best bird for a harpoon. As we worked on the test, the system didn't work. I started tracing the wire system to see if anything basic jumped out at me; I couldn't see anything. We did some basic conductivity tests and they were checking fine. What was wrong? Just then it clicked – the armament control panel had to be bad. I ran down to another bird to steal one out for aircraft 501. When out on the water, we often had to borrow parts from another plane.

The chief then called me. He said that bird needed to be checked and loaded in an hour. I had to tell him it would be close; I didn't have the wire system up yet. We started working on the plane, and then general quarters went off again; missiles had just been shot at us but fell short. A panic started to set into some of the crew. I saw men a lot older than me crying, thinking they were about to die. All I could think about was getting my bird ready for when it was needed. We put the new armament control panel in and it worked. So we put one Harpoon on one side and Rockeye cluster bombs on the other side. Orders came down: the two Libyan missile boats wouldn't turn around, so my bird would launch at 0500. The plane was launched and had orders to sink the little missile boats. I was due to end my shift, but I stayed in the shop for news about what was happening. At about 0700, my squadron shot the first harpoon

missile in history in a conflict, and it worked perfectly. The Libyan corvette was sunk, and thirty-five sailors not much different from me were dead. Gaddafi withdrew the line of death after that, and we flew normal flight operations from then on.

Over the years, I have listened to all the debates about who should be allowed to fight and where. I have come up with this conclusion: be careful what you wish for – someday you might have to actually take a life. I have been indirectly responsible for the deaths of thirty-five sailors. A year doesn't go by that I wonder how many families I have affected. So in my four years of service I do know this: most people couldn't look down the barrel of a gun and pull the trigger, let alone load weapons of destruction.

No biography submitted.



My Experience as a Liberian Refugee in Sierra Leone

By Habakkuk T. Polahn

What I vividly remember about the camp was that, despite the unfavorable living conditions that existed in the camp, the conditions did not pull people apart; instead, people were so willing to assist each other at all times, be it financial or moral assistance. On many occasions, refugees in the camp collected money to help out other dwellers who could not afford their medical bill. The camp leadership also had a team of elders that were responsible to settle disputes amongst refugees in the camp.

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After we spent two years in the camp, we learned that the crisis in Liberia had ended. We left the Waterloo Camp for Liberia.

What I realize about living as a refugee is that your life is at risk. You could die at any time because you are not provided the amount of care you need to live, for instance, shelter, health, education. More needs to be done in order to care for refugees around the world.

Habakkuk T. Polahn and his parents originated from Liberia, Lofa County. He lived in the capital city of Liberia, Monrovia, and has travelled to two West African countries, namely, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. Presently he resides in the United States of America. He speaks Kissi, the language of one of the 16 tribes of Liberia, and English, which is the general language spoken in Liberia. He has spent two semesters at North Hennepin Community College and is pursuing a career in Business Computer Systems and Management. He loves listening to music, making friends, and playing soccer.

Remembering When War Hit My Community

By Nyumah Garley

It was a Sunday morning. We were inside the house eating, and we heard someone saying, “Everybody come outside!” We came outside and saw a lot of men with masks on their faces, carrying guns. They told everyone to sit on the ground and started asking us whether we were keeping any soldiers in the house. We told them no and they started shooting all around us. They went from house to house and brought everybody outside. One of them said, “We are going to kill you people if you do not tell us the truth!”

I remember when they took a man and said he was a soldier. One of them asked him to walk three feet away from him and then shot him in his head. He said, “This is just an example! Everyone here is going to die!” People started running for their lives and they started shooting and killing. After the armed men left, there were dead bodies lying all over the place. People were looking for their children, family members, and loved ones and could not find them. As a result, many people fled the community in fear of being killed.

I remember people leaving the community and going to other African countries to live as refugees. Some came back to look for their loved ones, but they were never found. The community never became the same after it was hit by those armed men. It was all different people including some of those armed men that came back to live in our community. I remember telling my friends that war is not good. I hope you remember, too.

No biography submitted.

The Death of My Backbone Twin

By Kaliah D. Duckworth

My brother, my backbone twin, Amiere A. Duckworth Sr., came into this world September 5, 1987. Born to our parents Billy J. Duckworth Sr. and VerLisa Brown, in Joliet, Illinois, we shared 14 brothers and a sister, and we had a relationship that was inseparable. We loved to do everything together, and whenever we got together we shared a memorable moment. We were always together and people always assumed that we were twins because we looked so much alike only he was lighter than me. The day I was so not looking for came so quickly and unexpectedly. I got out of SmarJesse class about 2:55 p.m. on April 16, 2012, and I went straight to the Campus Center. I sat at one of the computers, so I didn't have to take my laptop out my book bag. I began to do my homework, as usual, and then I received a phone call about 3:05 p.m. from one of my relatives in Joliet, IL.

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Jerisha says, "Key you may want to sit down!" I thought to myself, damn my twin back in jail, what the fuck?! I replied back with, "I am J, what the matter is?" she began to weep and say, "It's Amiere, he's been in a bad car accident and it's not looking good. All kinds of thoughts began to surface in my mind and I wondered if this was a bad dream or someone was trying to get me to come back to Joliet. I was just there a week before and it really had me in shock. All I could think of was I need to call our mom and dad.

As I began to breathe heavily I said to Jerisha, "Are you serious?" I need answers; is my brother okay? I could feel the tears starting to trickle down my cheeks. My sight began to fade, all I could see was clouds. Pictures and memories of him and I was all that came to mind. She called me back within minutes and cried; at that moment I knew the results. She said he didn't make it. I cried, screamed, yelled, and cried some more. All I could say was, "Why God? Why did you allow this to happen?" A few of my friends saw my hysterical moment and came up to ask me was everything okay.

I replied with, “NO! My brother just passed away, literally.” At this point I couldn’t feel my fingers; my body began to feel numb.

How am I going to tell mom and dad? What am I going to say? Man I don’t want to do this, but I have to. After I called each one of them, I still couldn’t believe those words were coming out of my mouth. I couldn’t move forward; all I wanted to know was why and how.

That night I couldn’t sleep well. I woke up in the middle of the night crying uncontrollably; all I could taste was sweat and tears. All that day and the next few days I couldn’t eat, think, function normally, or even gather my thoughts. I kept telling myself I have to see my brother; I have to see my brother to make sure he is okay.

I made it. I can now breathe a little easier because I made it to Joliet, Illinois. “I see him.” I’m so excited to see my backbone twin. I began to cry again; it’s really true. My little brother Amiere is really not breathing anymore. I began to feel his body, rub his hair, and kiss his lips and face. I continuously told him I love and miss him so much.

I was forced to eat. My family kept reminding me how important it was to eat and not get myself sick. I had to gain some kind of control back so that I could eat and not harm myself in the process. Amiere wasn’t the only person in the car. There was another male and two female passengers. The boy suffered major injuries and one of the girls suffered minor injuries, but Amiere was the only one who passed away.

Since April 16, 2012 my life hasn’t been the same. This event that has occurred in my life has drastically changed me. My perspective on everything has changed. Amiere was more than a brother to me. He was my best friend and supporter. He was a great father to his four precious children (the last child hasn’t been born yet). Every day I go through the notion of missing him and wishing to see him again. I can’t get that image out of my head of him lying on the table looking peaceful.

I am still in shock to this day. It has been almost five months, and the memory is still as fresh as if it happened yesterday. I wish there was something to do to help clear the memory. I can’t leave him; I

My suffering is trying to get the best of me, and I’m trying my hardest to prove the devil wrong.

can’t let him down, so I have to continue to succeed like he knows I am capable of doing. My suffering is trying to get the best of me, and I’m trying my hardest to prove the devil wrong.

My family and I are still suffering great pain from this. Amiere was only 24 and still had so much life to live. He left so many memories behind. All my life it’s always been Amiere and I against the world. Now that Amiere is home with the Lord, I feel like I have nothing or no one else. He was always there for me no matter what. He supported everything I did and never talked down to me.

Every day I want to hear his voice. On April 16, 2012 he called me about 6:45 and asked me what I was doing. I told him, “I’m still lying in bed about to get up and get ready for school.” He replied with, “Moc, get up and have a great day at school and be safe; I love you and I will call you later when I think you are out of class.” I replied with, “I will, and I love you always and forever and may you keep your head up and have a productive day.” That was the last time I heard his voice.

No biography submitted.

Abolitionist: In Process

By Sarah Valentine



Imagine a young girl who has been exploited, beaten, used, sold, and had her childhood stolen from her. She is serving 40 “customers” a day, and addicted to heroin she’s forced to take so she won’t fight to escape from her pimp. Jasmine has been stripped of dignity, innocence, family, friends, opportunities, and even the privilege of a name, now replaced with a number so she can be “ordered” off a menu. This is her day to day life since being abducted by a brothel owner. She’s six years old.

My stomach is lurching, a storm of emotions taking over my senses. My hands are shaking, palms sweating, heart racing. Six years old? It’s like I can’t force myself to believe this is true. I glance around the auditorium to see if this is really happening. Are the other women at this Women of Faith conference hearing about the same tragedy and just lounging comfortably in their seats? Or are they as appalled as I am? I see some visible emotions around the room: anger, surprise, and some compassionate tears. Feeling a bit validated and frustrated at the same time that an angry mob isn’t forming immediately to go out and demand justice, I try to focus again on the speaker. Natalie Grant, a Christian artist, is telling the story of a little girl who lost sight of her parents at a train station and was kidnapped by a brothel owner. She is done sharing the gruesome details of this girls’ experience and is now giving general information about this thing she calls Human Trafficking.

It’s hard to pay attention with so many questions in my head screaming to be answered. I hear some of the statistics she talks about: 27 million slaves in the world today, illegal in every country, authorities don’t care, half of those enslaved are children... I tune in and out of the session now, trying to untangle the web of chaos my feelings have spun. How could I have never heard of modern-day slavery before? How is this happening in America without any protest? How can I just continue on with my normal life like this doesn’t matter? Sorting through these reactions one by one, I try to put them aside to deal with later, in the privacy of my journal.

Even though this room is full of conference attendees learning bone-chilling information, my body is on fire. Fury, passion, mercy, the strongest desire I’ve ever had to see justice crush evil in the world collide together and come burning

red hot to the surface. Crying silently, I ask God why He would ever burden my heart with this if I can't do anything about it. I'm 16 years old, and failing out of high school because I'm too depressed to make it to classes every day – obviously I'm having some motivation issues. I'm just one person anyway. What can I really do to aid millions of people, let alone just one or a few? I don't know what it takes, but I'm sure I can't do it. So why break my heart for these victims if I'm not cut out to help them?

Then a fiercely gentle voice answers back. *That's the beautiful thing! You're not the one that can help them, but I can. Don't be discouraged. You will save these girls. You will find your place to fight human trafficking. You are going to change lives, but only with my guidance. Let's conquer this together.*

Skip ahead a few years. Now I'm 20 years old and living the life of a missionary. How I ended up leading a team of students to the Amazon Jungle is another story, but for now I'm surrounded by my team and the prostitutes we visit every Friday night when the

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Plaza is busiest. Tonight the Plaza is completely void of the usual commotion you'd see on a normal evening. This is especially rare on a weekend when everybody clusters around the fountains and sidewalks of the squares of the city to buy jewelry, fruits, drugs, clothes, and anything else you might think you need when the hippie street vendors coax you into spending your American dollars. The city of Iquitos is normally a third world Las Vegas with bright lights, loud music, carefree tourists, lively masses of locals joining the rush of excitement in the atmosphere, and access to instant gratification of your choosing anywhere you look.

But tonight this is not the case. Rain has been plummeting down on the city as it only can in the rainforest with a brutal force for the past hour, forming streams of flowing water on the empty streets. Normally, I would be annoyed at the downpour as I usually am with the way the rain makes Iquitos a dirtier place. Puddles make it harder to maneuver the un-fixed holes in the roads. The dirt and

trash on the ground now has no boundaries as it's swept away by water, sometimes getting stuck in your sandals. The smell of wet stray dog is everywhere, and I catch a whiff of urine the rain is washing off the walls of buildings that have been so disgustingly decorated by drunk men who can be found stumbling around regardless of the weather.

However, this evening, the rain is not a nuisance but a blessing of sorts. Sure, my clothes are completely soaked and I can hardly hear what's being said over the roar of raindrops pounding the pavement, but the current downpour is the reason part of my dream for years is coming true. Since nobody wants to risk the storm, the prostitutes are in their usual corner of the plaza where everybody knows they can be found, but this evening nobody is looking for them. My enthusiasm is contagious because thanks to the rain, my teammates and I get these women all to ourselves. Every Friday night we come to the same corner to spend time with the women who are selling their bodies to survive. We normally get to know them only so much before they're distracted by possible customers or taken away to provide their "services." But this Friday night, we're huddled underneath an awning of a restaurant in the plaza to protect ourselves as much as we can from the relentless rain, and we've been talking to nine of the women for four hours. Usually this would never happen, but they have nowhere to go with nobody demanding their time, so we continue in conversation. Our desire as a team is to make them feel like they're worth friendship and not just sex, to let them know that we value them as people even if their surrounding society doesn't. My desire in the depths of my heart is not just to do this once a week, but to do this with my life. I don't just want to have their full attention one night because of a rainstorm. I want to show them love and acceptance – and that they're worth more than a few minutes of somebody's time, and I want to be able to do this every day.

It's getting late, and we're not used to being out until 2:00 a.m. like we are right now, but none of us wants to go anywhere since this is the first meaningful conversation we seem to have ever had with these women, especially with the few that don't open up at all due to their lack of trust in most other people. But this time, they're all sincerely engaged, asking questions about God, our lives in America, and what it's like to have a "real" job.

One of the women, Maribel, pulls me aside. I'm nervous, wondering what kind of difficult question she couldn't ask in front of the rest of the group. My brain is tired now after hours of translating from English to Spanish and back again since I'm the only one that can fluently communicate between my team and the women. What if

she asks something really theological and I can't find the words this late at night to answer in a way that stays true to what I believe but in a way that she can relate to? What if I never get to speak to her again and she leaves with the wrong impression of me, my team, or God?

The pressure I'm feeling quickly turns to sadness when she asks, "Sarah, how do I get out of this? Where can I go? Where is a safe place for me and my children? I don't want to do this anymore. I know the men that sell drugs on the street have a place to go. Some church takes them in and makes their life better so they don't have to work the same street as us anymore. They find real life. Where can I go? I want to get out of this life." The despair in her eyes is a sharp stab to my gut that I can't avoid. My heart aches for her, knowing that there is no place for what she's looking for, at least not in Iquitos. I tell her I don't know, but I could ask around and hopefully I will see her next week.

On my way home, I question God's motives again. I ask him why He would have put this burden on my heart years ago, when still now I'm getting small tastes of what it's like to work with these kinds of women, but I can't actually help them, just talk with them. Why would He let me go through the frustration of not being able to help when this woman is begging to get out of her situation; when He knows that this is what causes me the deepest form of grief? Why did she bring this to me of all people? It's like she knew that my dream is to create exactly what she asked for: a safe home for women to get off the street and out of prostitution and sex trafficking. How could God break my heart like this, knowing that I would have to tell her there is no place in Iquitos for her to seek help?

Just like He has through all these years of striving to get where I want to be in life, that fiercely gentle voice responds again. *The reason you're here right now is to see the intensity of the need. My heart for these women here in the Amazon is even more broken than your heart for them. You needed to experience this so you could understand how desperately they need the ministry that you will start. Here. In Iquitos. You needed the motivation to keep you going through the next steps of getting your ministry started. Now that you fully understand their situation, you won't give up until you can be back here to provide the care that they require. This next season of your life is going to be difficult, but you'll get through it because you know the faces of the women you will take in. They don't have a place in Iquitos to turn to for help. Not yet. It's time now to start the next step of your journey, with Me, to save these women.*

Now I'm back home, in my second semester of school. Living paycheck to paycheck and studying for tests is not exactly what I had in mind to prepare me for the ministry I want to start. But I know that I am supposed to be where I am now, and it might take me a few years to get back to those women I know are looking for a way out. These women need professional help, not just someone with a compassionate heart to try and solve their problems. My dream to open a safe home for prostitutes and trafficked victims may have started forming years ago at a women's conference I attended when I was 16, and it may sometimes seem far off still. But my end goals have been promised to me, and even specific faces shown to me, though I questioned why it was so difficult to bear at the time. I know now how much it's worth it to keep fighting to achieve my dreams. It might take some years of training to arrive, but someday I will be back in Iquitos to change the lives of women like Maribel.

Though Minneapolis is her home, Sarah Valentine loves traveling and experiencing other cultures. She went to Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion Elementary School, so she has a special place in her heart for Latin America. Because of this and other passions of hers, she began working with a missionary organization called Youth With A Mission (YWAM), which has locations in over 160 nations and does ministry or service projects. One of her most life changing experiences was living and digging wells in the Amazon of Peru for six months. 2012-2013 was her first year at North Hennepin Community College, and she hopes to take the knowledge and skills learned here to apply to a future ministry in Iquitos, Peru, to rehabilitate, counsel, and educate women and children who are coming out of prostitution and sex slavery. Her hope is to get them off the streets or out of the brothels and to teach them a new trade so they can financially sustain themselves in the future and feel empowered to live life free of selling their bodies. She is willing to chat (through email) with anyone about this experience or about human trafficking in general. Her email address is sarah_valentine1@yahoo.com.

One Chance, One Opportunity

By Shelly Kaunzner

It was that time again; time for me to see what requirements I had yet to fulfill for my Liberal Arts degree, and register for classes. Let's see... two areas I am missing are Global Perspective and Ethical/Civic Responsibility. There is an Interdisciplinary class available that covers both: The History, Philosophy, and Practice of Traditional Aikido. I've heard of the art, I have practiced a martial art before, I loved the Steven Segal movies (well, some of them), and it sounded like a good fit for me to jumpstart my activity level as well. What the hell, I'll sign up. I had NO CLUE of exactly what I was in for and just how profound of an effect it would have on my life.

What began as a semester of discipline, Japanese cultural immersion, philosophy, and of course physical practice, transformed the person I was from a forty-something, stressed, and depressed individual with a lot of drive but going nowhere, to someone of value. Each humbling lesson felt as though it was designed for me. Each training session had a lesson attached to it, a story to be told, one that would provide food for thought to each of us as we left the dojo. Some days I walked away feeling

Each humbling lesson felt as though it was designed for me.

as though I learned so very much, while others, I realized how much more I had to learn. The bumps and bruises both to my body and ego continued throughout the semester, but I endured because something within me felt drawn to find out more; to continue what I started by doing more than just taking a three credit class and walking away.

During one of our classes, we learned about the traditional Japanese tea ceremony and the significance of everything within it; from the way a tea room is set up, how the tea is prepared and served, to the type of tea traditionally used and clothing worn. One thing that resonated with me about the ceremony was that everyone who came to a tea house had to kneel down to enter, regardless of rank or position in life; all were equal. Given my traditional Western upbringing and the cultural norms that

come from that, it was a refreshing experience to hear. Sensei, the teacher, introduced us to a Japanese term from the tea ceremony: *ichi-go ichi-e* (one chance, one opportunity). Which basically means that every encounter with someone should be treated as if it were a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence (as if today were the last time you might meet). It really set the tone for the ceremony in that it created what felt to me as a sacred space, if only for that short time.

With the semester over, I followed my heart and began to train at the Minnesota Aiki Shuren Dojo. Since that time I have had some incredible experiences, met amazing people, and traveled to Japan to tour and train as well. In my travels I met some of the most skilled and wonderfully humble people, Senseis and scholars, in my life. My experiences with my Aikido family have so enriched and changed my life that I am a stronger, healthier, happier, and more grounded person than I have been in a very long time. The experiences continue to change my life. During my visit to Japan, I stayed with Senami Sensei and family. They are wonderful people! Upon my return to the United States, I sent a letter to my new family in Japan – one was received in return. Within this letter was a separate sheet of paper written by Senami Sensei which read, “P.S. I add a paper in this letter. It’s my most favorite words in Japanese: *ichi-go ichi-e*. I appreciate that I was able to meet you in my lifetime. Take care, my family!” Had I not begun my new life’s journey through the practice of traditional Aikido, I would have missed out on my “one chance, one opportunity”.... that continues to save my life.



Shelly Kaunzner wrote this essay after her study abroad in Japan as a student of NHCC and is currently working on her degree in Gender Studies at Metro State University where she plans to be an advocate for victims of domestic violence. Her ongoing life experiences that stem from the practice of Aikido continue to be a part of how she lives her life with the desire to be of service to others.

Prevailing over Fear of Failing

By Ben Fleischfresser

Besides a better paying career, have you ever thought about the benefits that college can provide? I hadn't either – until I enrolled in college. After orientation, they explained the multiple career paths we can choose from: doctor, lawyer, contractor, or even a music producer. That piqued my interest as to what other benefits going to college could provide. Could I learn more about myself? Will it help me get over some of my fears, such as public speaking? These are all questions I had thought about before my first day of class.

As I started my first day, I was nervous, not knowing what the class environment would be like: would it be boring and slow, would it have angry teachers, or would it be more relaxed like high school was? I came to my first class, which was Business Computer Systems. The teacher introduced herself and gave three of her own personal interests. She then asked the class to do the same. I am not the type to speak in front of thirty or more people willingly. I'm shy. But it had to be done. When it was my turn, I could feel my hands starting to sweat and my mouth getting dry, the words I had practiced in my head slowly disappearing until I had forgotten them all. It was my turn. I stood up and it took me a minute to speak. I finally came to: I introduced myself with my first name, last name, my major, and the three personal interests I was asked to provide. The class had some questions on one of my interests, which was music. They asked what type of music I listen to, who was my favorite artist, and how long I had been listening to him. I was surprised that I could answer those questions with ease. I then began thinking to myself why it was easier to answer those questions than it was to introduce myself.

After class I had to go straight to my second class, which was Introduction to Microsoft Office 2007. At the beginning of that class it was the same scenario; we had to list five interests, why we chose that class, what we were majoring in, and what career we wanted with that major. Again, I could feel my hands starting to sweat, my heart rate increase. I started to forget my words again. I thought to myself, "they're just simple questions. Get it over and done with. There's no need to be afraid." Finally, it was my turn. I stood up, cleared my

throat, and began to speak with confidence. "I did it," I thought to myself, "I did it with no hesitation."

I arrived at my third class at 6:30 pm. It was English 0950. I felt confident and looked forward to the class introductions. I wanted to let the class know about me. But this class was different. The teacher did not ask for introductions; he just wanted our names. The class went around introducing themselves with their first and last names. When it was done, the teacher gave us numbers and asked us to form groups according to our numbers. The class got into our groups. We had to write a story about a picture that lacked details. My group began to talk amongst each other, and I sat there silent, until one of my group members asked how I liked the story. I then gave my input and then remained silent. We were ending the class and my group still had no ending. They couldn't come up with one. I had an idea of one, but feared the criticism. I finally built confidence to speak to them. I told them my idea and they liked it.

When I got home, my girlfriend asked me about my day. I explained how I overcame my fear and spoke in front of the class. She was as excited as I was, knowing I hated to talk in front of people. That's when I learned that college can not only help you with earning more money, but help you overcome some of your fears as well. I never thought that I would be the public speaker type. So, first time students, be aware that you will not only learn what you are taught in college, but you will also learn more about yourself, discover things, and overcome fears. I'm glad I attended college!

Ben Fleischfresser, is 25, a real-estate agent, and foreclosure specialist at US Bank. He has a goatee that has five different hair colors. He loves music and writes music. He has three kids, a six-year old, a two-year old, and a little girl on the way. He is the biggest football fan ever! And he drives a Dodge Charger with a cracked rear bumper!

Making a Dream Come True

By Adilet Takyrbashev

My story began in 2008. At that time, I was fourteen years old and had finished my 8th year of school in Kyrgyzstan when my parents told me that I would have to move to United States to study there. I was happy and excited to move. I told all of my friends about it and most of them were envious. It was not like I was moving to nearby Russia or other neighboring countries; I was moving to the United States, the county that everyone wanted to see. So my parents bought me an airplane ticket, and I was ready to go. It took me almost 24 hours to get here. When I was flying over the Atlantic Ocean, I looked down through the window, and all I saw was water. That's when I told myself, my life will change forever.

When the plane landed, I had a feeling that I was somewhere else not on this planet.

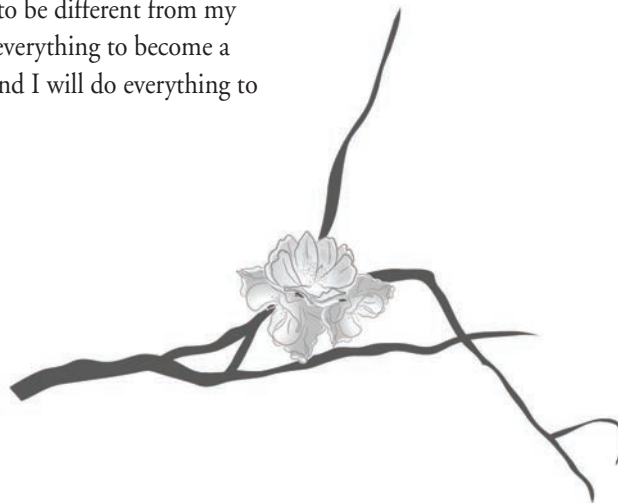
When the plane landed, I had a feeling that I was somewhere else, not on this planet. Everything was so different: the diversity of people, fancy cars, highways, McDonald's. I thought I was dreaming. I had to go to school in two weeks, but before I went to school, I had to take an exam in order for the school staff to see how well I could speak English. There were five levels. My score was the lowest. I had to take the first level of English.

My first impression of school was indescribable. In Kyrgyzstan, we didn't have lockers, computer labs, TV's, or projectors in the classroom. Everything was new for me. I liked school. Everyone was kind to me: no bullies, no crimes, no fighting, no drugs, no cigarettes, and no alcohol in school. That was weird for me because in Kyrgyzstan the schools are like mini versions of prisons. Students fight a lot, smoke in the restrooms, drink in the classrooms – it's something else. So, I told my friends about what an American school looks like, but they didn't believe me. They thought I was lying. Then I got involved in two sports: soccer and wrestling. I didn't think of my family and friends back in Kyrgyzstan; my thoughts were about America.

Two years later, I started thinking about my family and friends. I missed them. I wanted to go back to Kyrgyzstan and see them again, but I couldn't. Then, after my third year of being here, I just had to go back. I was tired of American life. I wanted to spend my time exactly how I did back in Kyrgyzstan. I wanted to be me again. Finally, I had a chance to go back to Kyrgyzstan for the summer. When I saw my friends and my neighborhood, I was shocked. I got so used to the American environment, I just forgot how I lived as I did before. It took me weeks to adapt to my old environment. My friends had grown and some of them were involved in criminal activities. Everything seemed to be so different. After a year of living in Kyrgyzstan, I missed the U.S. a little bit, but still I wanted to live in Kyrgyzstan.

Now, I am 19 years old, I go to college, I pay my bills, I have responsibilities to take care of. My life changed completely. Some of my friends who are 20-25 years old don't work. They take their parent's money, and that's how they live. By comparing their lives with mine, I realize that God gave me a chance to be different from my friends. That everything happens for a reason, and I have everything to become a successful person in life. I take this opportunity as a gift, and I will do everything to make my dreams come true.

No biography submitted.





The Difference between Good Neighbors and Aloof Neighbors

By Michelle Fick

Growing up, I had the best childhood because I lived in the countryside; the only traffic in sight was the traffic of birds, bees, and dragonflies. Not a Yosemite, but the location had the same tranquility Burroughs described – what was his description – and I loved the place with all of my heart. I did not know all of the sounds that the nature that lived there was telling me, but after finding a interactive songbird poster, I recognized the songs of the chickadee and the chipping sparrow. I had thought the sparrow’s call was a noise an insect was making. My mother did not share the affinity I had with our surroundings and seemed to want to keep nature from getting into the house.

Forced to stay outside, weather granted, my brothers and I roamed our neighborhood freely, not together, but mischievously all the same. If our mother knew just what kinds of adventures we each had found, she would have locked us in the house and forced us to watch television instead; at least she would have contained us in the yard where she could keep an eye on us. Actually, she did try to ground me to our yard, but I scared her when I climbed the trees. She had difficulty keeping my feet on the ground; lucky for me, she did not know how high I climbed in the woods on my friend’s property, for which I probably deserved a spanking for risking my life. My number one objective in life was to explore – everything – and have every possible bit of fun doing it.

In a wilderness mixed with homes strewed several acres apart, the kids in the neighborhood and I built tunnels in the forests (we called them “the woods”), forts, housing blueprints with the forest pine needles, and makeshift tree houses. Because of the hands-on experience, I adored the woods and spent tireless hours playing in the trees, which was the only jungle gym available to us because it was a poor neighborhood. Apart from mealtimes, about twenty other neighbor kids were kicked out of their homes too, year round, and we were creative.

We, with our minds put together, invented games, and depending whose yard we were allowed to play in, and what type of atmosphere the yard consisted of, we could develop an adventure better than any television show. Some of the yards were tall grass and hills, and we would make up cowboy and Indian adventures in them. We played *Land of the Lost* on property that had a mixture of trees and fields, more

hiding places in less dense woods. Our yard was half cut grass and tall grass, and was used for sports activities. You name it we played it, and had a blast doing it until one of my older brothers was caught with drugs, and my childhood changed drastically.

Our parents decided we should move to a suburb with a drug free reputation to protect us from any possible rebellious kids. At first we thought it would be a new adventure, but the new neighborhood was no adventure at all. After we had moved in, the youngest of my three older brothers and I decided to explore the place, and search for kids close to our ages. We knew the neighborhood was full of kids because our school buses were full of kids, but none were to be found playing outside. We rode our bikes up and down the streets,

I adored the woods and spent tireless hours playing in the trees, which was the only jungle gym available to us because it was a poor neighborhood.

and not a soul around, they may have been playing the first wave of video games and watching cable T.V. It was the most boring place on earth, in our eyes, and we wanted to move back, but our parents did not see the problem.

At our old place we knew everybody, knew parents and pet names, talked to all of them several times per week, and on one occasion held a neighborhood carnival, where everybody made an appearance. In the new neighborhood we couldn't make friends with the kids on the buses. My brother and I gave up and stayed in the house. There was no point going outside because there was nothing to do. We slowly became couch potatoes. We did eventually find a park, and a landfill with an abandoned house to play around, but that was it. The new neighborhood may have been more upscale than the old one, but we did not envy anyone living there, we wanted out.

Actually when I became a teenager I started to dabble with drugs – there was nothing else to do, which defeated my parents purpose in moving in the first place. I had become introverted, worrying what other people thought of me, and nobody except family members to talk to. Sometimes I think the move to the new neighborhood was so drastic that, given my young age, I found it difficult to learn how to adapt to an environment of closed doors. I had learned how to become aloof, and that was all.

While reading Sanders' book, I recognized the similarities in *The Geography of Somewhere* and my experiences with people who kept to themselves, living apart from their community. I think it is a behavior that people develop when separated from community for long periods of time that make them unwilling to communicate openly. I had become so bad at communicating that I could not ask for help at a store. Actually, I could not go to a store by myself. I realized as I got older that I had to practice communication with others every day. Trying something new is very difficult, but after ten times it becomes commonplace.

I have gone back to my childhood neighborhood and found the wilderness growing wilder, to my surprise. Our old yard is mostly wild now, the dirt roads are just as sandy, but some of my favorite trees had been cut down, which is a huge loss in my heart. But there is no trace of bulldozers, and the woods are still there. I would love to move back, but the one important thing that did change for the worse is that no one was outside. Sad to see my old community is gone.

A Graphic Design and Studio Arts major, Michelle Fick believes that everyday offers a learning experience. She usually turns to nature for inspiration. Color, form, space, line, and textures of all things wild, artist mediums, and three-dimensional wood canvas are her styles. Abstract forms and digital collage have also captured her interest in the artworks of human nature. Her devotion to the wilderness is unchanged. If she had one point to pass on to others, it is this: be kind to animals; you never know what kind of trauma (storms, predators, or people) they have survived.

The Luce Line Trail

By Anita Forrest

Every child at some point makes the magical discovery of that one special place where they escape the reality of parents, teachers, and, perhaps most importantly, nosy brothers and sisters. For some, this may have been a tree house or a backyard fort. For me and my friends, it was the Luce Line Trail. This was no ordinary trail. The abandoned remains of an old railroad, it lay just beyond the border of civilization as we knew it, nestled into a valley surrounded by woods and overgrown brush. Once our feet hit that path, we were transformed into the masters of our own universe, unsafely beyond the limits of our parents' watchful eyes. We did our best living on that trail. We grew up on that trail. That trail, which once carried trains across the great state of Minnesota, carried the children of our neighborhood into adulthood.

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children of our neighborhood into adulthood.

Getting to the trail required some navigation. Far at the end of the street, beyond the familiar houses of neighbors I knew, lay the beginning of a little dirt path. Tall trees and overgrown brush almost completely obscured the path from visibility, but we kids had no trouble finding it. It was very narrow, barely wide enough for a bicycle or one person on foot. If I went with a friend, we had to walk single file. It was important to never venture off the path to avoid scratches – or worse, poison ivy. A few steps into the brush and the descent began. The grade was steep and the terrain rugged. Most ventured this path on foot, but at a certain age, taking a bicycle down that path was a rite of passage for the incredibly brave – or perhaps the foolhardy. There was, after all, the very real danger of flipping over the handlebars and lying broken, helpless, and alone in the woods.

Once we were under the thick canopy of the foliage, daylight quickly faded and the air turned cooler and heavy. I imagine if colors had smells, this is what green would smell like. The familiar neighborhood sounds of lawnmowers and sprinklers faded

into an eerie, deafening silence, broken only by the rustling of the wind and an occasional “crack” of a branch underfoot. If the branch was large enough, it might even echo like gunfire. On particularly hot summer days, the electric song of a distant cicada might serenade the journey. Midway down that hill, my adrenaline would begin to surge as I imagined the danger lurking behind every tree. I knew I had come too far to turn back – my heartbeat would race as I quickened my pace. Nearing the bottom of the hill brought the gradual return of daylight and a wash of relief as the sun once again kissed my skin. I had finally made it, like stepping through the wardrobe into Narnia or through the looking glass into Wonderland. Of course, the trail itself was not as mystical or spectacular as Narnia or Wonderland. It was just plain old dirt and gravel, nothing much to look at. But it held every kind of excitement, mystery, and danger the childhood imagination could conjure up. A sense of adventure was the only thing needed to experience everything this trail had to offer.

A short walk away from the afternoon sun brought me to my favorite part of the trail, Gleason Lake. Approaching the lake, I could see the old trestle bridge, and my heart would again begin to pound. Large worn timbers stretched down into the lake, supporting the rugged ties that lay across the top. There were no railings – nothing to steady one’s balance. Large gaps between the ties taunted those daring to cross with the threat of a plunge into the murky waters below filled with snapping turtles. Once the first few steps had been taken, the only choice was to continue forward. Turning around was far too risky. Maneuvering those ties required the gravity-defying skill and agility of a tightrope walker!

Those who were particularly courageous would venture to the center of the bridge with a fishing pole in one hand and a tackle box in the other. They would carefully choose the perfect tie, then sit on the edge with their legs dangling over and fish all day. The fish must bite better if the line is cast from the bridge because no one ever fished from the shore. Now, the bounty of Gleason Lake mostly consisted of bullheads, a small catfish with spines in its fin that give a nasty sting. But, if one had courage enough to master the bridge, surely the sting of a bullhead was of no concern. Of course, one also had to consider the threat of the power lines that ran alongside that bridge, adorned like a Christmas tree, with bobbers and tackle dangling from snarls of fishing line. Surely these testified of those who had narrowly escaped an electrifying demise. The survivors would mourn the loss of their favorite lures, but that was a small price to pay. Some gave the ultimate sacrifice – their entire tackle box plummeting into a watery grave. That lake consumed tackle

boxes like we kids devoured peanut butter and jelly sandwiches! Just beyond the lake, the trail changed. It looked the same, but was virtually desolate. No matter how brave, no one was foolish enough to venture beyond the bridge, knowing what lay on the other side – The Work House, where only the most hardened criminals were locked away. By day, we ignored that part of the trail, knowing as long as we didn’t venture past the bridge, we were invincible under the power of the daylight sun. Twilight was a different story. As the oranges and reds of the sunset gave way to hues of gray and purple and the air grew cool and damp, tales of prison breaks and murderers lurking behind every bush hung overhead like a dark cloud as we

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songbirds brought serenity
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all scurried to get off the trail. Unless the moon was full overhead, that trail was darker than pitch at night, and no one risked finding themselves in that predicament – if escaped felons didn’t do us in, our own imaginations surely would. Fear for our lives got us home faster than any threat of punishment for staying out past dark ever could.

As I grew older, adventure and mystery gave way to the search for solitude, an escape from the usual teenage angst to be alone with my thoughts. Sometimes I would venture off the trail through the woods to find a quiet place away from the trestle bridge. Soaking in the warmth of the sun along the shores of Gleason Lake, the gentle waves and calls of songbirds brought serenity I could find no place else. It was here I felt closest to my Creator, and as I gently whispered prayers and poured out my heart, He carried my troubles away on the breeze.

Sometimes I would ride my bike into the afternoon sun. That trail stretched for miles – all the way to South Dakota – and I would push myself to see how far I could ride before having to turn back. With gravel snapping under the tires of my ten-speed, I pedaled furiously until my muscles burned, on the brink of exhaustion. Then, at just the right moment, my pedaling would stop. As I coasted, I sat straight up and threw my arms to the sky in victory. An overwhelming sense of freedom washed over me as the wind rushed against my face, and I knew if I could live in that moment forever, I would be invincible.

The last memories I have of my days on the Luce Line Trail were quite possibly the most meaningful. I had met someone very special, and that trail became our special place together, walking hand in hand as if we were the only two people in the world. Late one afternoon, as we approached the trestle bridge, we were surprised to find no one else there. We carefully descended down the steep incline to the waterfront below, he turned to take my hand in his to steady my footing along the way. Once at the shore, we sat under the bridge side by side in silence, somehow knowing the experience we were sharing could not be captured by mere words. Turning my head slightly, our gaze met and I felt his arm slide gently across my shoulders to pull me closer. In that moment, our lips met for the first time, and time stood still. I wanted it to stand till forever – and in my heart, it still does.

Eventually visits to my special place became fewer and further between, and the Luce Line Trail gradually became a part of my past. I would think of the trail from time to time and enjoyed reminiscing with childhood friends, but I never returned. That is, until one day many years later. As I made the familiar trek to the end of the street, approaching what used to be the woods and the little dirt path, my heart sank to see luxury homes with perfectly manicured lawns now standing in their place. A new asphalt path led to stairs carved into the hillside, and I could already see the trail up ahead. I was surprised to see so many passersby – joggers, families bicycling with babies in tow, and even people on horseback. What once was the trestle bridge now was a two-level fishing bridge, complete with stairs and large sturdy railings. Even the trail beyond the bridge, once desolate and fraught with danger, was bustling with energy and activity.

That day, I learned firsthand that “you can’t go home again.” My heart was mournful to realize the place that had once held such significance in my life no longer existed. As I turned to begin my journey back, the subtle fragrance of the air captivated me and, just for a moment, I paused. As I closed my eyes, there it was, unfolding before me – the Luce Line trail I remembered, in all its splendor. I saw it so vividly, not with my eyes, but with my heart. I stood there motionless as I basked in the memories of what used to be. For that brief moment, I was a child again, free-spirited and filled with wonder.

I never returned to the Luce Line Trail again after that day. There was no reason to. That final visit had penned my closing chapter. The Luce Line Trail was no longer special. It had become just an ordinary trail. What was truly special was what this place had meant to me and all of the memories that were made there. I am much older now, but I still smile when I think back to the times I had on that trail. They hold a very special place in my heart, and that special place will be with me forever.

Anita Forrest is 46 years old, married, with two teenage sons. She is in her first year at North Hennepin Community College, working toward a Business Administration degree. An assignment for her college writing class, this essay is the first essay she has written in almost 30 years.

The Memory of My Grandparents' House

By Mohammed Hussein

The front porch was the
quiet station for my
grandfather during the
sunset and sunrises.

My childhood life was full of memories and happiness. One of the most beautiful memories of all time was when I visited my grandparents' old house for summer break from school. My grandparents' old house was built in an isolated small sheep farm of Bale Eteyo, Ethiopia. It is about 12 miles away from Gassara city, in the northern part of a cold valley between the Sandbo river valley facing down to the hilltop mountain. The walls of the house were made with mud and the roof with long grass; furthermore, the front porch was the quiet station for my grandfather during the sunset and sunrises. From far, the wave of the savannah grass added more beauty to the mountain. On the southern part of the house, it is covered with bushes, surrounded by woods, and some magnificent colorful trees that are home for many wild animals, like red fox, walia ibex, and different species of monkey populations. From the distance, the smell of sunflowers, wild roses, and other blossoming flowers existed; honeybees buzzed for nectar. In the afternoon, the Sandbo river bank was the meeting station of most wild animals that like to taste the salty water and socialize with one another, even though it is too risky for some animals to be attacked by other predators. About a mile and a half narrow valley at the coast of Sandbo River, the march of the flamingos on the open water looks like military personnel. Summer season was the best time to visit my grandparent's house with my younger brother and my other cousins. We liked to watch the full moon at night on the hilltop behind the old house. We enjoyed counting the shooting stars and claim that they belonged to us, sometimes arguing with each other. During the day, we sometimes were all quiet for a moment, watching the open blue sky to see if the clouds made animal shapes or mountains. From the distance we could hear the loud screams of monkeys and chirps of the yellow green grasshoppers. My grandparents' old house is a long way gone; however, the legacy and beauty of this magical place will always stay with me like yesterday. I always miss my grandparents and the breezy cold air of the summer season.

No biography submitted.

Envy for Crows

By Austin Fisher

Downtown Minneapolis isn't what most people would think of when the word "nature" is brought up, but I have found that I have seen more visible wildlife in Minneapolis than in my suburban neighborhood.

This week I was driving down an avenue laden with traffic, cursing to myself at my bad luck, when I noticed a huge murder of crows socializing in the trees above me. In fact, the trees were so heavily laden with the dark birds that I could barely see the branches. Each crow cawed in a way that seemed to resemble a pair of old ladies cackling at the younger generation. Cawing at me in a manner that gave me a feeling of stupidity, they seemed to be laughing at my frustration with traffic.

As the exhaust fumes filled my nostrils, I became jealous of the birds. I realized that they could fly away at any time they wished. Crows have no prior obligations to their fellow crows, besides that of their mates. The black buggers had a right to laugh at me, the foolish human, who, in his race to make something of himself, had made

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then why don't we have the
same freedom as the crows do?

many prior engagements to his fellow men. I looked around me at this point and saw the frustration of the many people who were stuck in traffic and thought, "If we are really at the top of the food chain, then why don't we have the same freedom as the crows do?"

I realized that humans have paid a price for the knowledge that we have gained. In our effort to become more and more advanced, we have lost our primal instincts. Much like Annie Dillard in *Living Like Weasels*, I wished that I could see through the eyes of the crows and think with pure instinct again. My desire was to look down on the human race and laugh at the frustrations that they had created for themselves.

With a loud honk from behind me, however, I realized that I had to keep driving. Nobody is allowed to go back to instinct. Not in a world that is full of the accomplishments of man. With a sigh, I put my foot to the gas and watched the puff of smoke coming up from the exhaust pipe of the car in front of me. "Maybe that's why we don't think about our mark on nature", I thought, "we're just envious of it."

Austen Fisher has grown up in a house full of animals (human and non-human) and loves to be outside. His family also loves animals and has been known to capture and study everything from snakes to bees. As a kid he spent numerous hours playing imaginary games in the woods and has tried to bring this childhood sense of wonder back in his writing. Austen is a soon-to-be student at the University of Minnesota's BFA Guthrie Training Program and still enjoys playing imaginary games, although grown-ups call this "theater". Austen uses his perceptions of animals and their personalities in his acting and writing and he strives to create a detailed picture for his audience.



Identities: Holland vs. America

By Eva Sistermans

People do not realize
the personality of
their country until they
cannot find it anymore.

During a speech, the Dutch princess Máxima, born in Argentina and married to the Dutch Crown prince, said that she “had not been able to find the true Dutch identity in the seven years that she had been living in The Netherlands.” This quote got me thinking. Now that I am living in the United States, I can compare what it means to be Dutch to what it means to be American. And I think something like a Dutch identity does exist, because I have discovered that identity since I have been here. When American people see me, they think that I am just a regular American girl. But when I start talking, things change. I turn into something different. They hear my accent and immediately ask me where I am from. And hearing that I am a foreigner changes their image of me. I am not regular anymore, but different. Something else. Apparently, being Dutch does make me different. However, if I am different, what makes me different? What does it mean to be Dutch? Of course, it does not mean that I am a completely different person, because we are all human beings. But I discovered that there are some characteristics that one can find more in Dutch people than in Americans.

Before I write about all these things, I am going to write a bit more about The Netherlands. And from now on I am going to talk about Holland, because when someone acts typically Dutch, we call him “a real Hollander.” When Americans think about a Hollander, they think about Amsterdam, windmills, canals, tulips, and, unfortunately, pot. There has to be something true about it, otherwise we would not have that image, but Holland is more than that. Holland means more than pot and prostitutes, the two things most tourists come for. Holland is the country where we can visit our friends or family spontaneously for a cup of coffee or tea. We do not just say, “Oh, you should really come visit me,” and never visit each other; we actually visit each other when we are in the neighborhood. Holland is the country where we do not have Santa Claus, but Sinterklaas, who comes from Spain by steamboat each year with his black helpers and no one thinks of that as discrimination. He only gives presents to nice children, by the way, because he takes the naughty ones with him back to Spain in a jute bag. It is the country where most people eat potatoes, vegetables, and meat for dinner, or all of this mashed together in a stamppot. It is the country where everyone rides their bikes instead of driving a car, just because everything is so close you can bike there. It is the country where we eat raw herring with onions while standing at the corner of the street at the fish vendor,

and no home is without licorice in all different kinds of sorts and sizes. Holland is, well... the country where we do a lot more crazy stuff than I mentioned here.

Considering all the things I just listed, and a lot more things I did not list, we can definitely speak about a Dutch culture. But does a Dutch identity also exist? I do think so. The first thing I noticed when I came here is that Dutch people are more sober than Americans. Dutch people think first before they do something, and then act. We call that, “watching the cat climb out of the tree,” which means that we first watch how everything works before we do something ourselves. Americans, on the other hand, tend more to throw themselves into the unknown. For example, if I would ask an American if he wants to go bungee jumping (okay, maybe not bungee jumping but something less extreme) with me he would probably say, “yes” and be enthusiastic about it. A Hollander would think about the pros and cons first, maybe ask some other people what they would do, and then make a decision.

Besides being sober, I also think that Dutch people are more likely to make compromises. We live with a lot of different people from different cultures on a small piece of land so we have to work together in order to make that work. One can find that “give-and-take” mentality everywhere. When people have a problem, they will talk with each other until they find a solution that works for all of them. One can also find that mentality in politics. We have a lot of small political parties. Right now, there are eleven of them in the parliament. And they have to work together in order to get a majority of seats. In the United States, there are a lot of different people from different cultures living together as well, but they are living together in an enormous country. More space means less chance on disagreements, so maybe people are just not that used to making compromises. And in politics, Republicans and Democrats are constantly fighting each other, not willing to make any compromises at all.

Another typically Dutch thing is that Dutch people are more tight-lipped than Americans are. Americans talk about everything with everyone, they talk about the amount of money they make with a complete stranger on the bus, they discuss their love life with the mailman, and they use the problems they have with family and friends as the perfect topic during a lunch with colleagues. Dutch people talk about the weather, a new kitchen, or their pets – safe topics. The more intimate topics are saved for family and friends. But when you reach politics or social problems, these habits turn the other way around. A real Hollander has an opinion about everything, even if he has no knowledge at all about the topic, and shares this opinion with everyone. And they do not avoid a discussion when someone else does not agree with them. Americans, on the other

hand, do not share their views on these topics with everyone, because they are afraid to insult someone or hurt their feelings.

The last thing that I have marked as typically Dutch is the Dutch immediacy. Dutch people can be direct. When a Hollander does not like something, he will tell you. Most of the time Hollanders do not mean to hurt someone’s feelings, but Dutch people do not always think about the impact their words can have. I think they are just trying to be honest, but it can seem impolite to someone else. I did not even think about it this way until I came here and noticed how polite and nice Americans are to each other. When they notice something that they do not like about a person, they will try to find something they do like about that same person and compliment them on that. They always find something to compliment someone on – a haircut, their baby, a pair of boots, or even their bike helmet. Dutch people only give compliments to people they know.

Considering all the characteristics of “the real Hollander” I just gave, I hope that I have made it clear that I do believe that something like a Dutch identity exists. The Dutch identity is sober, it is an identity of giving and taking, it is about not scattering your problems all over the place, except when these problems are about politics, and it is about being direct and reserved at the same time. But above all, the Dutch identity is something that I miss and value when it is not there anymore. I would have never thought about the Dutch identity in the way I just did had I not moved to the United States. People do not realize the personality of their country until they cannot find it anymore, until they end up in a different environment that has its own habits and customs. And like I said before, the fact that I am used to the Dutch personality does not make me completely different, because we are all human beings. Neither does it make one image better than another. But that does not mean that the identity of a country does not exist, and that its citizens cannot value the character of their country.

Eva Sijstermans’ parents are both Dutch and she was born in The Netherlands, also known as Holland. Eva grew up in her hometown Nijmegen, but when she was fourteen years old, she moved to Leiden. She lived there until she was eighteen. After graduating from high school, she decided to come to the United States for one year to get to know another culture and to improve her English. She is attending North Hennepin Community College and trying to receive the Academic English Language Proficiency Certificate (AELPC) in English for Speakers of Other Languages. Eva is fluent in Dutch and English and has had French and Latin for six years and German and Old Greek for two years.

My Gentlemen

By Vicki Richardson

There is an old saying, “you can’t tell a book by its cover,” and I’m here to tell you how this old saying is absolute truth to me. Do you think there is a perfect place for a six year old child, with an insatiable imagination, to grow up in? Well, in my opinion there is a place; and, it is located in Highland Park, Saint Paul, where green rolling hills and deep ravines simply call to you. If you happen to own a shining silver bike like I did, you can travel for miles while the black asphalt accommodates your swerving in and around the oncoming traffic.

To me, they were such gentlemen.
They made me feel safe and special.

One early, sunny, Saturday morning, I left the house and, jumping on my bike, headed off for a new adventure. As I felt the wind blowing through my new butch haircut, I felt strangely empowered as though something great was about to happen to me. Suddenly, I heard laughter and singing coming from the ravine just below me. I jumped off my bike, looked over the edge of the ravine and yelled, “hey, who’s making all that noise?” My heart was pounding and my curiosity was exploding. “Come on down here and ask that question,” replied a deep voice. I was half way down the hill when I screamed, “coming!”

Looking up I saw five shaggy-haired, bearded grandpa’s staring at me. I walked over to them sticking out my right hand for an introductory shake and said, “Morning, my name is Vicki.” They laughed out loud and shared their names with me. “Have some breakfast with us?” they asked; “ok, I said,” and they handed me a huge silver plate with bacon, potatoes, and eggs that covered the entire plate. We all started talking about classical music, which I loved, and Chevy cars, which I knew nothing about, and families, which I knew all about. Stories of grandchildren, wives, brothers, and military wars...and loneliness started just pouring out of these guys as I listened intently. One of the grandpas looked up into the sky while he was talking, and I think I saw a tear fall down his cheek. I walked over to him and put my arm around him as far as it could go. I wanted him to feel good like I did when my grandma

would put her arm around me. I think it worked because he smiled down at me. These were five great guys that I was fortunate enough to have breakfast with that day. To me, they were such gentlemen. They made me feel safe and special.

Quite suddenly, I knew it was time to go. I stood up and said, "I really have to go now, and clean my room; it is Saturday you know." They stood up, too, and hugged me, and thanked me for dining with them. I think they must have loved their families very much because they loved me already and they had just met me. To this day, I remember each one of them, tenderly, and with a smile on my face. My Saturday morning dining experience changed me forever, and I promised myself from that day forward that I would never "judge a book by its cover."

No biography submitted.



Listening to Nature's Whisper

By Lensa Tucho

It was such an attractive place to sit because it invited you to a view you had not already experienced. There, you don't see a comfy sofa to sit on; however, you do not feel any discomfort by sitting there. A natural green grass is where you lay as you lift up your spirit with the presence of a serene, silent, and beautiful environment that gives you an awesome feeling. This silent place speaks to you with a soft voice you can hear clearly, opens your eyes to the splendor of nature that puts its memory in your mind and knocks on your heart's door to present you with a pleasant flower. Once nature wins your heart, you start conversing with it. Even if it has no loud voice and you physically don't speak out to it, it understands you and you understand it. You reveal your thoughts and whisper your dreams to its ears, and it gives you hope and encouragement to fulfill your dream.



For me, this is where I contact nature and nothing can compare to this extraordinary place; it always wins my soul.

For me, this is where I contact nature and nothing can compare to this extraordinary place; it always wins my soul. This place is located in front of my home, in the same compound in my high school called Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS.) I consider this place as a core point of my memory and as a base and foundation of my life because it reminds me of my high school life that involved valuing of one's education, commitment to one's friendships, and love and respect to one's own family. Sometimes I sat at that place with my friends and family members, and we chatted with each other about education, about different programs in our high school, and about life in general. But most of the time I sat there alone and enjoyed life. Beside her beauty there is special thing I want to reveal about this place. I used to sit there at evening time during the sunset. While a cool air drifted, shaking juniper and eucalyptus trees over me, I smelled the fresh air and stared at a rounded, orange color sun shining with her dim light above hills and tall trees. As she added extra magnificence on where I was, I observed special beauty in her body. The beauty of

unoccupied land I did not know before, and I started to dream to have that beauty. As I appreciated the beauty of the land, I continued to hope to have its invisible, imagined, and extraordinary things in a future life. I dreamt of beautiful places that I was in, a land of freedom I have never seen before. I dreamt of living on United States ground. I showed this placed my heart's desire and my future life goals I want to accomplish, and I saw hope and accomplishment in this place, giving me a feeling of seeing my dream come true one day. The place encourages me, saying, "your dream will come true." As I pay attention to its whisper, I promised to come again at that same place and again say, "I will see my dream come true and, as soon as I am shaped for my purpose, I will be back and help my society and my country, I promise." This place has kept its promise and I saw it again in a new land, a new land I was dreaming of for a long time. I saw it on the soil of the United States. My first day in America was an amazing day; I felt born again. I don't recognize whether she followed me or I followed her, but we saw each other from the distance, and I thanked the place I knew so well. Now, every time I remember our original place I associate my dream with my beloved place. So I motivate myself to work hard to fulfill what I have promised myself, so that I will come again to that fountain.

Lensa Tucho, was born in a small town called Dembi Dollo, Oromia. She has been in the United States since February 27, 2012. Spring 2013 was her second semester at North Hennepin Community College, where she is majoring in pre-nursing. She lives in Columbia Heights, likes playing basketball, reading, and writing fiction. She is Christian and serves Lord Jesus and his people in a worship team of Ebenezer Oromo church. What she values in life is people. Though she misses her old friends, she appreciates her life in America.

Accepting the Cold

By Welton Mah

As I walked toward the other students at the bus stop, I noticed their cold breath from a distance, while they seemed to be uselessly exhaling carbon-dioxide to plants that were dead. The cold somehow penetrated the thickness of my jacket and my stomach tightened as the cold chills spiraled through the rest of my body. Now in the midst of these individuals, I became aware that everyone around me seemed to be quite at ease. I refused to question anyone about the hot topic, but “aren’t you guys cold” moved swiftly from my brain into words that I alone could hear. Maybe the voodoo I always heard about growing up back in my native Liberia must be working against me, given that the wind chills that gave me a mountain of cold buns didn’t put a shiver on my colleagues.

Nevertheless, over the years I grew accustomed to the snowflakes that would cover the entire coat before I got home. Sometimes my siblings and I would treasure the beauty of the snow that fell; we appreciated the wetter snow so we could make a snowman. Though snow sledding was preferred to gliding on the ice, the only other option that was available for me was playing ice hockey. My physical education class would leave the campus during school and head out to a nearby lake that appeared smoothed, easy to slide on. After dividing into teams, my competitive nature would propel my team to success as I played the goalie in several ice hockey games, a sport I did not know existed until the age of 12 or so.

Realizing that the weather did not impact the livelihood of the natives of Minnesota, I have accepted such an uncharacteristic climate change – winter – and do not allow it to interrupt my daily activities.

Welton Mah was born in Monrovia, Liberia. He is pursuing a degree in Computer Science. Math is his favorite subject and vanilla is his favorite ice cream. He loves to listen to Gospel music. His favorite book is Of Mice and Men. He loves to play soccer and basketball and hang out with his cousins.

NoMi: The Life on the North Side

By Chloe Rosten

North Minneapolis is known for gangs, guns, violence, and drugs. Some think NoMi, short for North Minneapolis, is a “ghetto” or scary. For 21 years, I’ve lived through the hardships and phases of North Minneapolis. Growing up in NoMi as a white female made it difficult to fit in. Cracker and Oreo are just some of the names I’ve been called growing up as a minority in a black neighborhood. For my entire life, I grew up with an unbreakable bond to my family, learning to stick up for myself and knowing right versus wrong. Through struggles of life and my father’s alcoholism, I became who I am today.

There stood the white house with the green trim on the corner sitting on top of a brown grassy hill with a large green tree covering the large picture window to the living room looking east. As I walked across the hard solid ground, approaching a Springer Spaniel/Black Lab, grass starts to fade on the hill as you see the line of dirt

Cracker and Oreo were just some of the names I’ve been called growing up as a minority in a black neighborhood.

that is like a barrier between the dog and the grass walking up towards the white door with the squeaky black railing. Covered by massive growing trees, there stood a white two-car garage about 200 feet from the house, filling itself with the aroma of brandy, drugs and illegal car work. Opening the black, rusty looking door, I saw a garage filled with broken car parts, hundreds of baseball caps that Dad was collecting, oil forming a sun shape on the ground of the dirty floor, random things that would never be thrown away, and – not to be surprised – a gray colored, four-door Sedan sitting in the garage with the hood up and an impaired brown-haired man with slurred words working on it. Walking ashamed as usual back to the house, I passed the redneck fire pit, the trembling tool shed ready to fall, brown grass wanting to be watered, and the Springer Spaniel/Black Lab protecting the premises.

On the way to school, I would sit in the car. I took deep breaths of the cold chilly air to prepare for another day of sitting in a mainly black classroom, being the Oreo

in the middle, being the wannabe trying to fit in, ignoring the insults of being called Cracker daily. I sat there on the cushioned seat of mom's Taurus, just fighting the urge and remembering the need to stick up for myself – to be myself.

Sitting in her hot pink and lime green room, I stared at the walls, ignoring the smell of burning food, the yelling match between my parents and the sirens in the background. I walked down the 15 stairs that separated me from the yelling, just to smell the aroma of brandy on his breath, never wondering what they were yelling about

Walking ashamed as usual
back to the house, I passed the
redneck fire pit, the trembling
tool shed ready to fall.

anymore. I stood out in the darkness – the white house across the street with people sitting, partying, drinking, and drug dealing their lives away. Kids were running around screaming, playing, throwing fits, and wanting to open presents. As I turned to go back into the loud screaming house, I hit the floor as I heard, “bang, bang, bang.” I heard the screaming of despair, smelled the gunshot residue and revenge in the air.

No sixteen year old should have to get a restraining order.

As I sit watching the small television multi-tasking and doing school-work, a ring fills the empty house. I pick up the white cordless phone, I immediately hear yelling coming from a black woman wanting her money as if she were there. This has never been a surprise, but before hanging up on this rude woman, I tell her not to swear at me, yet, when she does it again, my finger presses the button that mutes her voice and the sound of people in the background. A few minutes later, a POUND, POUND, POUND bangs on the door of my house. I answer it with my Springer Spaniel/Black Lab at my side. She starts to speak nicely to me until I tell her that my dad is not here. Then, she starts bitching to me about her “mother fucking car” and how she wants it back. Being a sixteen year old, white female facing a black woman who brought four or five of her thug wannabes to intimidate my dad isn't an easy thing. As I call 9-1-1, one of her thug wannabes dares to put his face up to the screen door just to find my Springer Spaniel/ Black Lab barking nonstop. She yells that she is “a Christian lady” and if she knows anything, “God wants the truth!” As I stand there, I yell back that my Dad isn't here, calling her a crazy

ass bitch as she threatens to kick my ass, her thug wannabes telling me to watch my language, and I say, “Why? What are you gonna do about it?!” As the screaming continues, I ask how she knows my dad. After telling me that her friend recommended him to her, I let her know that her friend must not like her then! The black-and-white finally show up as she continues bitching at me for things my dad does. She harasses me until I had to get a restraining order to keep her away from me.

Life as a North Side Resident was never easy but you learn to accept and embrace your life. Family, friends, and life's struggles are what make you who you are. Growing up in North Minneapolis with an overprotective mom and siblings made me realize that I need to be who I am, stand up for myself, and know family is always there. Standing up for what you believe in is just one of many things the unbreakable bond of family has taught me. Living life through restraining orders, being a minority in a prominently black neighborhood, and learning to be myself has made me who I am. A struggle in life and learning to live with it is what makes everyone an individual.

No biography submitted.

Of Beasts, Crystals, and Birches

By Anna Banker

Most people go further south for spring break, but this year, we went further north – three and a half hours further, in fact. We drank some coffee, gathered the dogs, and headed up highway 35 until we reached Lake Superior. Neither I nor my boyfriend (or either of the dogs, for that matter) had been to Lake Superior in the winter time. Our first stop was right outside of Duluth, a small pull-over scenic outlook off of highway 61. We were compelled to stop because if we drove any farther, the giant floating slabs of ice would cease to exist, but the harbor was still frozen. Carefully climbing down the slope to the shore, one understood instantly the degree of treachery each step would entail. The ground was not ground at all, but a sheet of diamonds along the shores of a giant, thawing beast. The beast, with its

The ground was not ground at all,
but a sheet of diamonds along
the shores of a giant, thawing beast.

long, slumbering breaths, pushes itself against the shore, shedding behind a small amount of its icy coat with each breath. With each cast of ice along the shore comes the sound of slush meeting ice and rock with a crash followed by a scraping noise as the slush is drawn back into the body.

Our next stop brought us to Gooseberry State Park. We suited up in snow gear and hiked to the falls. The massive steps of high, middle, and lower falls were coated with columns of ice as wide as myself, but covered by a layer of ice instead of multiple layers of warm accommodations, as in my case. We were not to be fooled by its solid, pure white appearance as the same layer of ice that was supposed to be our ground opened up here and there to reveal, through a window, flowing dark water underneath. As we were the only patrons of this magnificent park on a Wednesday afternoon in the middle of March, I decided to set the dogs free without worry of disruption. One dog, a puppy, has twice the body length of a dog of comparable size and half the height of leg. She bolted straight across the ice, searching for interesting sniffs.

The other, a lean, wolf-like and old dog, continued cautiously forward. Much like the dog in Jack London's, *To Build a Fire* the older dog was compelled by instinct and wisdom to navigate his way carefully along the ice, while the younger dog was merely dragged by naivety and curiosity to seek out thrills. Had the short, stout and young dog been set upon an Alaskan tundra, she would not have survived. I took the two dogs and tied their leashes together, as I assumed that the younger one would then be obligated to rely on the instinct of the bigger, stronger and wiser dog. Perhaps she learned something.

From the falls, we took a trail that followed the river, above its banks on a hillside, to the lake. The hike was icy, hilly and tiring. Along this trail, there was a birch tree that I am familiar with, having hiked past it many a time. This birch was wide and branching – a perfect climbing tree. Terry Tempest Williams in *The Erotic Landscape* describes experiences with nature by contrasting interactions with the landscape as being either pornographic or erotic. The difference between these is watching versus experiencing. She states, “but the world we frequently surrender to defies our participation and seduces

My body was engaged to keep
from falling, but my spirit was
also engaged through this
connection to the natural world.

us into believing that our only place in nature is a spectator, onlooker. A society of individuals who only observe a landscape from behind the lens of a camera or the window of an automobile without entering in is perhaps no different from the person who obtains sexual gratification from looking at sexual actions or organs of others.”

With this passage in my memory, I decided to experience this tree. I used my hands for grabbing, my eyes for seeking, my legs for pushing, my ears for anticipating cracks or crashes, my arms for hauling, my feet for stepping. Once at a satisfactory height, I nestled into the trunk and dangled my limbs from the branch I was straddling. As Williams describes, being in a tree in such a way is like “really be[ing] held.” From the top of this birch tree, I could see the entire valley in which the frozen river was winding. Two opposing sides of it had met and crashed, like tectonic plates under our world's surface, resulting in a spine of ice mountains, running through the center of the river. I could also see trails from animals crossing over the snow. One particular trail perplexed me as it was crossing the river when suddenly, the trail turned at a ninety degree angle, towards the center of the river where it then looped and turned until coming out on the other bank. I could see the frozen mammoth falls in the distance. Like Sylvia in *A White Heron*, who also sat at the top of a tree and saw the ocean, I saw something similar, Lake Superior, and thought, “truly it was a vast and awesome world!” My body was engaged, compensating for sways and twitches and to keep from falling, but my spirit was also engaged through this connection to the natural world. Terry Tempest Williams states, “we can choose to photograph a tree or we can sit in its arms where we are participating in wild nature, even our own.”

Anna Banker has attended North Hennepin Community College for three years and is now transferring to Minneapolis Community and Technical College to pursue a degree in nursing. She lived in Beijing, China, for nine years as an expatriot, but now enjoys all that Minneapolis has to offer including biking, drinking coffee, and walking her dogs. Her goals for this year are to go camping every possible weekend, go canoeing at Voyageurs National Park, and learn how to hate the long Minnesotan winters less.



Pilgrimage for Peace

By Aaron Schwab

I find a good space
to make myself
my own king of this
miniature mountain.

You can stroll through a mall and find countless ways to relax. Stores full of scented candles burning with a gentle lilac or soothing warm apple pie smell offering aroma therapy, bath salts and lotions ready to pamper the body; full body massage chairs with settings from tingle to minor assault; soothing teas to calm the nerves; or in some cases, full table and foot rubs for the truly worn out shopper. These items for finding a way to relax may put away the tension for a few moments, but finding peace is another task all in itself. Peace is a journey, and for me a journey that takes a few tanks of gas and a bit of exhaustion in itself to accomplish.

My pilgrimage for peace usually begins in the same way. Family, friends, or a female want to get away for the weekend, and in the state of Minnesota that means only one place to go – Duluth. This means an early rise, packing up a car, and hitting the road. The long trip up 35 is far from relaxing. The mix of excitement and exhaustion makes the passenger(s) go from chatty to sleeping in intervals, leaving me, the typical driver to focusing on the road. The first part of the drive is usually on the dull side. The less populated suburbs start to dwindle one by one, and eventually the scenery starts to dull. The Tanger Outlet Mall gives one last look of suburban life before turning into rural Minnesota. Then the tall pines appear. The scenery changes and the billboards go from displaying one fast food stop for each one horse town, to Grand Casino Hinckley advertisements. The first stop is on its way. Hinckley is a nice break. It is just over the half-way point from the cities to Duluth, and the Hardee's there is always a welcome quick lunch break. A sourdough burger and bathroom break later, the road starts beckoning again.

This is where things start to pick up. The original drowsiness fades from a hardy lunch, and whichever passenger was dozing, is now alert, and the party can continue. The tall pines grow thicker, and the road starts to have hills and drops. The Northern Minnesota geography creates a roller coaster of road work, and as the car nears the top of the hill, you see the breathtaking drop. The city appears out of nowhere. All of a sudden there are factories, sky scrapers, homes stretching up the massive hill, and the lake. Lake Superior, the closest feel you can get to the ocean in hundreds of miles. I find Lake Superior slightly more soothing than the ocean. The freshwaters being home to less hostile creatures, being absent of jelly fish and shark free. The

view is astonishing, and the shopping districts bustling, nightlife thriving, and tourist stops aplenty. If this were a quest for simple fun, the journey would stop here.

This is where I push. My travel mates will usually ask “how far north do you want to go?” This is where I give my destination that I’ve had in mind this whole time, Grand Marais. This usually sparks a big debate, but one that I usually win. A small mental celebration later, the car ride picks up, and things go from a rush-rush morning into one of my favorite drives in the world, US Highway 61. The highway offering the labeled scenic route is exactly that. The feelings of getting away from it all are now setting in full-fledged as the state completes its change from suburb to city on the lake to driving the rocky wooden coast. The statue of Paul Bunyan in Two Harbors, the delightful hikes and paths of Gooseberry Falls, and small shoreline towns all have a soothing effect on my mind. At this point I don’t know if it is the feeling of being away, or the ability to steal glances of the coast that are making me feel more relaxed, but it doesn’t matter. The hours have passed, and the constitution of whoever is with me has not changed my excitement for my destination.

Then the arrival – a few more curves around the green coast and the small town appears. The outskirts lined with budget hotels and antique stores, while driving into the small downtown has a welcoming feel. The familiar landmarks, of Sven and Ole’s Pizza (a probable dinner stop), Blue Heron Inn, log cabin sporting goods store (the name escapes me, but I can picture the building perfectly – a log cabin exterior of several foot thick brown wood for two floors, all shaved to triangles at the points where they extend past each layer), and a 1950’s style drug store. Those will all be stops, but what I’ve been waiting for is just a few hundred feet out of downtown.

I usually park in front of the log cabin sporting goods store; it is right on the lake and by a pleasant town square. The square has a few benches with tourists overlooking the lake, the seagulls pestering for any kind of food their greedy beaks can take from them, but I walk right up to the rocky beach. The beaches around Lake Superior all feature a wide array of pink, purple, and reddish stones. The closer you are to the lake, usually the smaller the stones get. Each step on the rocks your feet sink into the stones an inch or two, not enough to trip you up, but enough to make the walk a little more taxing. I follow the beach around the fancier hotels and past the coast guard post and have made it. The light house trail is in front of me.

The trail somehow seems restricted to me. It is right by the coast guard post, and has various signs dictating policy that I have never

bothered to read, but right on the coast you can find a few well cut paths in between some natural shrubbery that only gets a few feet over head. The greenery is filled with a few pastel pink and white flowers that have put forth the effort to spring up between the cracks in the rocks and frigid cold winds. The path is filled with natural stone steps forged by freezes and thaws that set their place in time, and when you make your way through the jagged path, you finally get there, the most peaceful place on earth to me, the giant stone ridges standing up against Lake Superior. The stone ridges are like tiny mountains that can be topped by the waves on a windy day. You’ll see tide pools filled with still water and green algae. The path to the light house is an intimidating cat walk of a thin concrete path, with a short, but somehow dizzying drop of around ten feet into the deep frozen waters. I venture away from that and the other people. It is easy to find some space alone back on the rocks. I’ve driven for so

The moment of peace never lasts too long, usually after an hour or so I get restless.

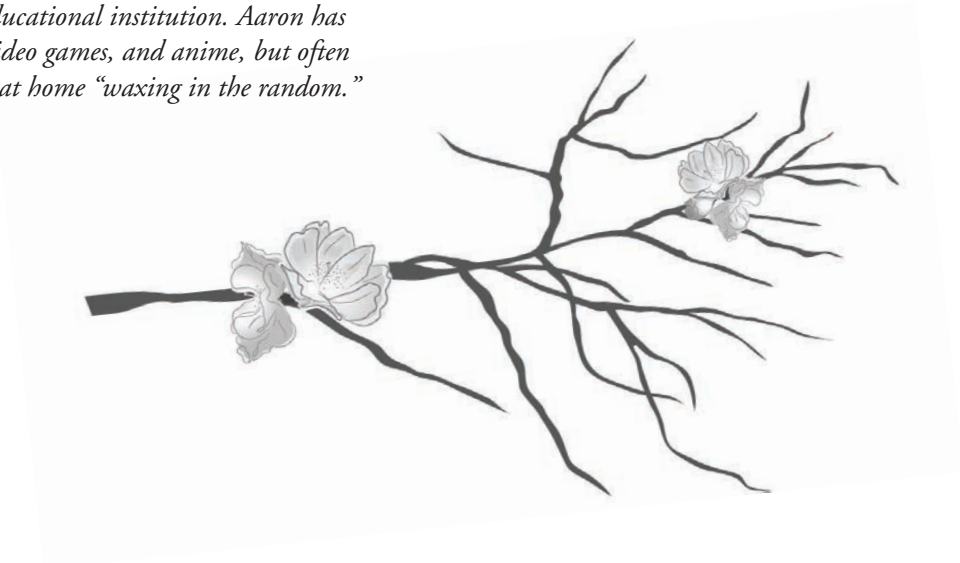
long and have come so far to experience this. I find a good space to make myself my own king of this miniature mountain. I watch the endless waves of the freshwater ocean come in from miles away. I feel nothing but the cool stone against my bottom and the chilling winds from far away come across the lake. Unlike the ocean, there is no salty smell in the air, just clean and crispness. The rhythm of the waves and calling of the seagulls put my mind and body at peace. This was worth it. Every dollar spent of gas, every second of driving, and every distraction along the way. It might be a combination of the build-up leading to its final destination that may make the pay off more rewarding, but this is simply a treat.

The moment of peace never lasts too long, usually after an hour or so I get restless. I can’t help feeling a bit recharged, though. The lasting peace in my system caused by this place has long ago made it where I would like my final resting place to be. In my will I have stated that I would like my ashes to be scattered along the shores of Grand Marais, so my spirit may experience the lasting peace there. I am still alive, so I must do one last thing. Along the shores you may every now and then encounter a rock sculpture. According to local legend the sculptures are supposed to grant a wish to the sculptor upon completion. Not being a sculptor or architect, I usually follow the snowman style of assembly, putting a few larger rocks on the

bottom and smaller ones on top. I make my wish for whatever earthly desire I can think of and the journey ends. I have found my peace for now.

My sense of peace and the road to it, may explain why I am a generally stressed person. There are so few times I get to visit my most peaceful spot since it is so far from home. Perhaps that's why I can occasionally be found at the mall, trying to buy myself a relaxing distraction that can attempt being a replacement for true peace, but everyone who does the same thing keeping all those stores in business know the end result. A few minutes is no substitute for the real thing, there are no short cuts on a journey to peace. Sometimes you have to find some companions and just go. Peace is where you find it, and I'll find mine up north.

Aaron Schwab has been an almost lifelong resident of Maple Grove, minus a few years hanging out in St. Cloud. He is new to North Hennepin Community College, and it is the first time in a decade he has attended any educational institution. Aaron has many interests like cooking, video games, and anime, but often says that he finds himself best at home "waxing in the random."



Introduction

Ok! This Fifth issue of *Realities* magazine includes selections drawn from an additional pool of writers: students at Blackfeet Community College in Northwestern Montana. Just as we encourage students to encounter different realities, faculty committed to academic ideals of experiential learning and multicultural awareness expose themselves to new places and people. Long a NHCC writing instructor, I am currently teaching at Blackfeet Community College, and I appreciate anew the challenges students undertake when placed in unfamiliar situations – and the enormous rewards that ensue. Recently smarting from a mistake I made during a ceremony, I was immediately granted the vision of an amethyst sky framing the tribal buffalo herd as I drove along the Backbone of the World (the Rocky Mountains).

Most gratifying is working with and learning from Blackfeet students. You'll find in the pieces included here a fine sense of detail, of awareness of the physical world and of physical engagement with that world. Blackfeet remain on ancestral ground; the land reflected on by these writers is the land their forebears walked, rode, and hunted. While activities described are sometimes culturally specific, many are ones Minnesotans appreciate too: tubing down a river on a summer afternoon, cheering on family members in competition.

The founders and editors of *Realities* will be journeying to Blackfeet country in October to meet the authors featured here and to encourage additional writers as we build relationships between our colleges. We encourage all our readers to venture as well: put yourself out there, take a risk, make a friend wildly different from you. And then tell us all about it by submitting to *Realities*.

Happy trails!
Leanne Zainer
<http://bfcc.edu/>

Soul Vacation

By Ashley Tray

Cyan skies, still air, and a temperature reaching the triple digits – it is a perfect day to be tubing the river. The telephone rings, “Ash-Tray! Get your life together!” It’s Molly – the ying to my yang, best friends since the summer before the first grade. Having strained my ankle, the last thing I wanted to be doing was hiking down a rocky hill and pushing my not so little body away from the boulders submerged in the water. With understated hesitance, but avoiding her persuasive speech, the one I know she has prepared for the possibility I say no, I gather my swimming gear – bikini, sandals, oversized shades – and am out the door before logic catches me.

As a rule of thumb, we meet at the local convenience store to purchase beer for our day trip. Molly and alcohol go hand in hand, so this is no different than any other time she plans an event. I debate with myself what kind of beer I want, and Molly stands back shaking her head. Having already chosen her drink of choice, Peach

In our line of vision is Rock City,
where we will ascend into
a little piece of paradise.

Twisted Tea, she quickly becomes annoyed with my indecisiveness. I go to my old faithful – Bud-Light Lime. Once the necessities are purchased, we get rolling down the highway.

After belting *Summer of '69* four times, I get the first glimpse of our desired location, the very spot where the Cut Bank Creek and Two-Medicine River conjoin to form the Marians River. With one large sigh my weary soul is rejuvenated. I cross over the threshold, also known as Sullivan’s Bridge, and park my car in a lush plot of weeds, where our trip will end here in a few hours. Having trailed close behind, I gleefully hobble to Molly’s car, and combined force extends into a sea of wheat fields. Having navigated this path many times, the car practically drives itself. Before we know it, in our line of vision is Rock City, where we will ascend into a little piece of paradise.

Scorching hot rocks host a headquarters for rattlesnakes, so the adrenaline rush begins. As we stagger down a mountain of rubble and through a mass of thorns, perspiration begins burning our eyes just as we tiptoe into the icy water. A congestive effort takes place as we attempt to tie our tubes together, allowing for the smallest rubber donut to be in the center acting as host to our miniature igloo cooler. Observing the once clear blue sky, we insert ourselves into our floating devices and set sail into our small town heaven.

Almost immediately, we are surrounded by copper ridges 30 feet high, housing hundreds of undisturbed birds' nests. We do our best to navigate into our preferred sections of aqua, paddling our way into the rapids until we reach a slow moving swimming hole. There we gently roll out of our tubes and bobble in the water, cooling ourselves from the heat. The clouds have darkened even further, and the rain drops start to dribble. Back in our tubes, it is an exhilarating feeling being in the water while it rains: toes, finger-tips, and hair wave, feeling in the refreshing liquid. The amazement ends abruptly with an angry boom and flash of light, startling enough to tip us out

We entered into a new land.
A beautiful, hidden treasure:
nature carved steps and spiraling
rock formations 15 feet tall.

of our tubes. We frantically swim to the shore. Laughter bellows; this is a typical experience for us two. Some would call us the "bad luck twins," but to us it is just another adventure to tell. Re-enacting our beginning, we plop into our tubes, open a chilled beer, and wait out the storm. Enjoying our stationary stance, until the cooler's insides become vacant, we come to the conclusion the storm isn't going to pass anytime soon; we surrender to Gaea.

Slow moving at best, I was thankful for the alcohol which took the edge of pain off my ankle as we begin to climb. Molly has no problem laughing at my injury and asks if I'm going to need a handicap sticker for my car when this is over. I laugh, and tell her she's going to need a new floating partner.

Sensitivity had never been a priority, sarcasm being our primary language. Huffing and puffing, we make light of our less than perfect circumstance until we recall the rumors we had heard about the lone cougar roaming the area. Hustling as though the wild beast were nipping at our heels, fear quickly subsides $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to the top;

we entered into a new land. A beautiful, hidden treasure: nature carved steps and spiraling rock formations 15 feet tall. My eyes pirating an image straight out of a fantasy book, I hardly notice the clouds have parted and blue skies returned to greet us.

Knee length grass tickles our feet; we keep putting one foot in front of the other for what feels like forever until we see the vehicle in our near future. Trudging our final steps, we approach the black Grand Prix that hours ago was our departing monument. Legs and ankle relieved, the car doors open to greet us; like a fire-breathing dragon heat bellows out. Hands blindly grab for sundresses and towels; draped in our summer apparel we cautiously take seats on the hot leather. The car effortlessly fires up, and without a thought we roll into reverse. Much to our surprise, after approximately 10 wheel rotations, we come to a halt. Forward provides us with little to no leeway. Confusion written all over both of our faces, we exit the vehicle, simultaneously examining the exterior. Mud saturates the wheel wells. Ever the problem solvers, we dig handful after handful, until the car is mobile once again.

As the trip winds down, we spare conversation for a few moments, physically exhausted from the obstacles Mother Earth has provided us with throughout the day. The sun begins to droop and waves of pink and purple become the main characters in the sky. Flashbacks of having been in this same place multiple times, I can't help but believe that this is a secret between me and my best friend – my soul sister.

Ashley Jo LaTray was raised on the outskirts of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by her maternal grandparents. She is a pre-nursing student at Blackfeet Community College with an emphasis in geriatrics and aspires to incorporate alternative medicine into nursing in hopes of reducing unnecessary side effects from popular medications. She is an avid reader and enjoys spending her free time outdoors with her friends and family.



A Piece of my Childhood

By Mariah Wilcox

Have you ever had a place that made you feel safer than anywhere else, a place where you spent hours of the day dreaming about what you could do with your life, a place where you will always call home in your heart? I have. It was a big wooden barn with a green roof, two huge doors on each end with diamond shaped windows in them. It was my safe haven.

I spent endless days in that barn, brushing down my horses, taking a nap on the floor of the tack room, hiding from a rain shower, or escaping the brisk heat of the day. Many of my childhood memories consist of that big ol' barn. Nothing more than a stinky, dusty place to some; to me, it was my sanctuary.

If you stood just right, that little gleam of sunlight would catch the side of your face, warming you up just enough to get the morning chores done.

The floor was just dirt. If you didn't wet it down part way through the day, it was hard to breathe in there. You could taste the dry dust on your tongue. I'd wet it down just for the smell of the wet dirt; it made me feel right at home. There were two barn stalls inside. This is where my good barrel horse spent his nights. The stall doors were made with cedar half way up and bars across the top. When the cedar got damp, it would fill the barn with its sweet aroma. In the early morning when the air could still send a chill down your spine, I'd walk to the barn to feed the horses, opening up those big sliding doors, letting the sunlight in. If you stood just right, that little gleam of sunlight would catch the side of your face, warming you up just enough to get the morning chores done.

After the chores were all done, I'd curl up for a cozy little nap in the horse blankets on the tack room floor. My loyal cow dog by my side beneath a saddle rack, hoping my mom wouldn't catch us. The tack room was brighter than the rest of the barn. It had a huge window so the sunlight would illuminate the whole room. It smelt of

sweet horse sweat. You could almost taste the sweet molasses grain when you walked in. In the back of the tack room was the fridge where we kept all the vet supplies for the horses. I hated that smell; it always reminded me that something bad could happen.

When spring would first hit at the beginning of March, the horses would start to shed their long winter hair. Each day for about a week we'd bring two horses in at a time and brush them down. The barn floor didn't even look like a floor then. It would look as if we had just sheared a sheep. Piles of horse hair floating around in the warm breeze. We'd be spitting hair out of our mouths, wiping it off our clothes and face. It would get everywhere; at times it would even make you sneeze. The horses loved it, brushing felt so good to them.

At the end of the day when the horses were all rode and the chores all done, it was our turn to play. In the corner of the barn my dad built a barn swing that would keep us occupied for hours. A torturous

At the end of the day when the horses were all rode and the chores all done, it was our turn to play.

swing – no matter how hard you tried to swing back and forth it would go side to side, causing us to hit the wall. We didn't care; we all would let out a roar of laughter, bringing happy tears to our eyes. Sometimes we'd twist each other up in it till it wouldn't twist anymore; then we'd let go, sending each other spiraling out of control. You'd go on the ride of your life, and it would be over in three minutes tops.

On weekends the barn was the party place. On summer nights, we'd all get together and build a fire outside of those big doors and barbeque with steaks, hotdogs, hamburgers, and mom's famous potato salad. Adults would be reaching for a beer, and we'd be reaching for an ice cold Dr. Pepper. My dad would grab his guitar and sing some good George Strait tunes that everyone loved. Sometimes we would sit and listen to stories the adults all shared with each other.

A lot has change in my life since that big ol' barn, but it will forever hold a special place in my heart; that's a piece of my childhood that will never be forgotten. I couldn't think of a better way to spend a night when you're a young child; those nights are what we lived for – hanging out with the people we love most, enjoying childhood the best way possible. Just living for that moment, nothing else mattered.

Mariah Wilcox is a 21 year old college student attending Blackfeet Community College, a proud auntie, a loving sister, and rodeo cowgirl. Rodeo is a huge part of her life; it's been something she has always done with her family. "Rodeo to us is like our getaway from reality." When times are tough and life just seems to be flying by, rodeo is the one thing she has to keep her pushing forward – not only to become a better competitor but also to better her future. Rodeo and the crazy fast paced cowboy lifestyle will always be a part of her life. And attending college is another way of securing that future.



The Making of Wellman Ranch

By Tylee Wellman

Most people around here know my family because of the family ranch. Most people think that it was started by a man of the name Robert (Bob) Wellman. Most people think that because of him, my family is where they are now. Most people are wrong. We wouldn't have what we do if it wasn't for my great grandmother, Ramona Wellman, who is a strong Blackfeet woman; she was the one who had the idea to start a ranch. She was the one who went to the bank and got the loan. She was one who worked and stuck it out for the long run.

She had nowhere to go with her
six kids and no money. But this old lady
had some tricks up her sleeve.

My grandma is a sweet little old lady now; just by looking at her, you wouldn't be able to see all the struggles and obstacles she went through to get to where she is at now. At a young age, she fell in love with a "white man;" he was sweet and gentle, not a mean bone in his body. She married him, but after they were married, something changed. She doesn't really talk about it, her life with him, other than the good memories. My great grandfather, Bob Wellman, would beat her up on a daily basis and cheat on her on a regular basis.

She had nowhere to go with her six kids and no money. But this old lady had some tricks up her sleeve. She once told me a story of how my grandpa would take off to the bar and leave her home with the kids. She said she would catch a ride up to the bar and take the sparkplugs out of the car. She said, "Old Bob Wellman could go to the bar and drink, but he wasn't going to cheat on me in my own car." The next day she would catch a ride again, plug in the sparkplugs and drive home. "Then he smarted up and would carry the sparkplugs with him in the bar, so then I had to start airing down all the tires." My "gram" could always find the humor in anything and she sure was a crazy woman...she still is a crazy woman.

Family is close in my family – very close – and in Blackfeet tradition the oldest grandkid is usually raised by their grandparents. Well, that was my grandma and her older brother. So she knew more of her family than most of the siblings. When her uncles saw that she was in trouble and needed help, they told her to go to the bank and get a loan so she could buy some cows. As collateral, she could use their herd of horses and start making money to provide for her family because her no-good drunk husband wouldn't. My grandmother did what she was told and started the cow business. After seeing what my grandma had done, Bob saw what could be and kind of took over. It was going good for a while: her children were almost grown and her sons were old enough to go out on their own and do work.

They had made a living and were doing well, but being who he was, my grandfather was still cheating. He soon after left, and I'm not too sure, but took some stuff with him. He was a conniving man who liked to put things that weren't true in children's heads. A big fight came about in my family. It's not very well talked about and no one will say anything. But I have an idea of what happened. My great grandfather tricked my grandpa Terry and told him lies about his family that made him turn against his siblings. They then emptied the bank accounts that were worked for so long. My family was broke. With nothing to their name but a few cows and tractors,

everyone had to pitch in and help save the family ranch. The eldest sons, my uncle Rob (who I look up to and have the utmost respect for) stepped up and helped overcome this dilemma. Without these two, who knows where my family would be. Now my family has one of the biggest Indian-owned farm and ranch in Montana.

I am so very thankful for the strongest woman there is and also for the most determined man in the world. Who knows where I would be without the love and support of these two special people.

Now all of their hard work has paid off: from the long, cold, trying nights of calving; to the long, boring days of farming and everything in between. As I'm typing this paper they both are in Cancun, Mexico, bathing in the sun and sitting by the ocean enjoying themselves. They deserve it for what they have done.

Tylee Wellman is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe. She has lived on the Blackfeet reservation all of her life. Graduating from Browning High School in 2012, she is currently attending the Blackfeet Community College. In the spring of 2014, she will be graduating with an Associate of Arts in Psychology.



Old Rusty

By Dusti Boyce

Gazing out my kitchen window, I see multiple broken-down vehicles parked at the bottom of the hill, each sitting there idly in the drifting snow banks and slowly rusting their bodies away. Years ago, before they were laid to rest, they all purred like kittens and had their fair share of exciting memories and delightful destinations. You probably wouldn't recognize it today, considering the piles of old tires and ancient car parts, but an incredible treasure lies hidden amongst the depths of that old junk yard.

Behind several of those old broken-down vehicles, parked in the accumulating snow, sits a 1966 International pickup truck belonging to my father. Unfortunately, along with the truck, my father has also been laid to rest, making it even more special to me. Although the truck remains beaten up and isn't very appealing to the eye, it has sentimental value and is my family's own personal treasure.

The truck is shaped like a full-figured woman; both sides of the pickup have bulging fenders above the rear tires that resemble a woman's hips.

It's unquestionable how the old pickup received its name (Rusty) – due to its aging appearance. The truck's cab is painted a ghostly grey, while the box is a pale green with almond brown rust rising up like mold near the bottom of each side. The truck is shaped like a full-figured woman; both sides of the pickup have bulging fenders above the rear tires that resemble a woman's hips and every edge is rounded similarly to the human body. Like a lot of the broken truck's damages – only one headlight remains, there is a crack in the windshield shaped like a skewed "W", and the bumper is fairly bent – you would think someone had beaten the truck to death if you didn't know the story behind each one of its scars.

Inside the rusted old pickup truck, you can find holes where the radio, jockey box,

and heater once remained, making the interior a hollow skeleton. Above the dash, connected to the ceiling, visors are bandaged together with silver duct tape, similar to your typical "Rez Car."

Several decorations accompany the pickup, such as a small drum hanging from the rear-view mirror, an eight ball on the stick shift, and a sticker that says, "fear this" attached to the windshield. On the ceiling reads my mother's and father's names, "Marlene and Dave" in engraved lettering. I can't help but smile each time I see those markings, visualizing the genuine love my mother and father once shared all so long ago. They are like the signature markings that credit the sentimental beauty of the pickup.

When people think of treasure, they imagine gold coins, sparkling rubies, or a princess's long lost crown. However, things in our lives can be so special to us they become our own personal treasures, items given to us by loved ones and those belonging to the deceased we cherish and miss. It is obvious that my father's 1966 International has seen many things throughout its lifetime, not only by all of its battle wounds, but by the odometer that reads 739,772 miles. With all of its imperfections, the truck means the world to me. It strongly connects me to my father as I visualize and question the memories created behind that large narrow steering wheel. The truck may look like pile of junk parked below my house, but it is a sentimental treasure hidden amongst others less important.

Dusti Boyce graduated from Browning High School in Browning, Montana. She previously majored in Allied Health at Blackfeet Community College and is transferring to the University of Montana, where she will begin her studies in nursing. Since the age of seven, Dusti has been fond of writing poems and stories. Because of her writing skills, she was selected as a tutor at Blackfeet Community College and received the William O. Goggins Journalism award as well. In the future, she plans on helping her Native community by working as a nurse practitioner at the local Indian Health Service and to continue writing in her spare time.

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