

# Peppermint Rooster Review



Volume 3  
Spring 2015



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Dear Reader,

This is the third issue of Peppermint Rooster Review, an annual publication that publishes fiction, poetry and essays by Lewis and Clark Community College students and former students. We hope you enjoy this book. We would like to thank Jill Lane, who wanted to showcase outstanding written work from our students and who secured the financing for this project. In addition, we would like to thank Lori Artis for assisting our staff in the production of this magazine.

For the second year, we held a campus-wide contest for a student to design the cover. A panel of judges decided on the winning cover art, which was submitted by Sarah J Dhue.

When we were looking for a name for this magazine, we considered many different suggestions. The name “Peppermint Rooster” was suggested by a former Lewis and Clark student, and the idea resonated with us because of the odd juxtaposition between the two words. (Also, it sounded more interesting that “Lewis and Clark Literary Magazine.”) This book, as you’ll see, contains some interesting juxtapositions, too. We hope you enjoy reading this and that you will stay tuned for next year’s book as well. If you are a L&C student, please feel free to submit your work to [litmaglc@lc.edu](mailto:litmaglc@lc.edu). We will be reading submissions year-round, and we look forward to reading your work.

Sincerely,

*The Staff of Peppermint Rooster Review*

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# Peppermint Rooster Grand Prize Winner

Mitzi Fuguitt

## *Lead Poisoning*

I'm watching the pencil spin at my fingertips in the stationary pencil tray on my desk. It's a habit of mine. Mrs. Jurkanin has told me that it is a very distracting habit of mine. She calls it mindless, but it really isn't. It's more soothing to me than it is mindless. With three fingertips from each hand taking turns with the subtle edges of the pencil, I spin it in the little metal tray until I feel better; until I am able to think of a solution. I do it a lot. I have a lot of problems, and I need a lot of solutions.

I'm not very good in school. I don't get bad grades or anything. I usually do all of my work on time, but I get in trouble a lot. I break the rules. One of the rules states that everyone must stay seated unless they have permission to be out of their seat. This rule is a trick. They have a lot of trick rules. It seems to me that if I ask for permission to get out of my seat, like the rule says, I should be able to do just that. But, if I politely raise my hand and wait to be called on, and ask if I can get out of my seat, I also have to give Mrs. Jurkanin a good reason for leaving my seat. This is where the trick comes in. It is a trick because, in Mrs. Jurkanin's opinion, there are only a few good reasons for stepping away from my desk during class time. She says, "Because I can't sit here anymore" isn't on the list. Reason #1: Sharpen my pencil. Reason #2: Throw away or get a tissue. Reason #3: Retrieve something important from my book bag. (The list of things in my book bag that count as "important" to Mrs. Jurkanin is very small.) So, when I can't sit anymore, I try to stick to these three reasons. A lot of pencils have been purposely and needlessly broken in the pursuit of stretching my legs.

I'm watching the pencil spin. I am letting my mind drift toward a solution. All of the other children are gone. I am alone with Mrs. Jurkanin. This isn't the first time I have sat in this seat waiting for

my punishment. I don't want to be in trouble, but I have been a lot. I hate the feeling of being in trouble. The problem is that I never hate the feeling of breaking the rules. Doing the thing that I am not supposed to do always feels great at the time. On days when I stand up from my seat without permission, and take a pass around the room, I feel relieved. As I run my fingertips along the shelved books on my way to have a look out the window, I feel no regret. But then later, when I have to sit in my seat during recess and listen to the other kids through those windows, I regret it. But worse than the sound of my friends on the playground without me, is the sound of Mrs. Jurkanin writing a note to my mother. Her pen makes an ugly sound across a single sheet of paper on her desk. It always seems like I can hear the point of her pen angrily grinding permanent words of disappointment into her wooden desk. The only sound more off-putting is her heavy, whistling nose breathing, and her occasional grunts of disgust.

There is a feeling in between when I break the rules and when I find out what my punishment will be. That is the feeling that I hate. As I think about all of the possible outcomes, my insides seem to shake. My body gets hot, and I can only think of what my life was like before I did this thing. I think of how I wish I could go back and not do the thing.

Mrs. Jurkanin gets very angry with me sometimes. She gets a crazy face. It's spectacular. I always know that I am about to see it when she says, "Elliot, you have pushed me to my limit!" But when she says this, both of us know that I have not yet pushed her to her limit. Only almost. If I want to see the crazy face on a particular day, I keep just doing what I'm doing. I keep talking out of turn. I keep making that sound with my mouth. I keep spinning the pencil. I keep going until Mrs. Jurkanin leans over my desk and grabs the edges of it. Her face turns red all the way from her neck to her scalp and continues under her thin blonde hair. She sometimes puts her face so close to mine that I can feel her breath. I can see the spit forming in the corners of her mouth. I can see her blue eyes have turned mostly black, and she speaks in a low, angry whisper. This is the crazy face. This is her limit.

After that, I usually find myself inside the principal's office waiting for my punishment. I usually sit in the row of plastic chairs that face the secretary and swing my feet until I am called in to see Mr. Nolan. Mr. Nolan is a calm man. He isn't especially friendly, but he always has the hint of a smile on his face. Sometimes, he calls my mother at work to let her know what I have done. Sometimes, we talk a little while and then he tells me to sit in the hallway and write sentences. Sometimes, it's all three. One time, when I kicked Tim Mayfield in the balls during P.E., Mr. Nolan called my mother at work to take me home for the rest of the day.

Last week I made Mrs. Jurkanin do the crazy face. I was talking to Mr. Nolan and he asked, "Why do you keep doing these things when you know how you upset Mrs. Jurkanin?"

I told him, "Not everyone gets to see that kind of thing close up."

The laugh that came out of his mouth seemed to come from inside of him. It surprised us both in a burst. He chuckled it into a cough and then sent me to the hallway.

Today I'm not even sure how it all went wrong. We were doing science. Science is my favorite thing. We got last week's test over the skeletal system back. I got a good grade. Today we started talking about veins, arteries and their role in the circulatory system. Everything was going fine, and then all of a sudden, I needed to spin my pencil. At first it was just a little bit. I was thinking about the aorta and what a big job it had, and I just wanted to spin my pencil. I started quietly, but Mrs. Jurkanin gave me the first warning glance. It was just a little one from the side of her eye while she was talking. Carotid artery, aortic arch, superior vena cava, and my pencil spinning grew more aggressive. Mrs. Jurkanin looked me in the eyes and gave enough pause that the rest of the class's attention slowly drifted toward me. We all had a moment of Elliot, and then Mrs. Jurkanin returned to her chalkboard. I raised my hand. She pretended not to see it and continued teaching. I went on ahead and propped the elbow of my raised hand with my free hand. I was in this one for the long haul. She was in the middle of an explanation of the jugular vein when she finally conceded. "What is it, Elliot?"

"I need to sharpen my pencil," I said.

She gave my pencil a glance and told me I could wait. She turned back to the board and I turned back to spinning my pencil. Oxygenated blood, the chambers of the heart, jugular vein...and then I just stood up. I walked toward the pencil sharpener. I needed to move. I needed to walk. I needed to sharpen my pencil.

“Elliot, be seated,” she said.

I jammed my pencil into the sharpener and began to grind it.

“Elliot! Back to your desk immediately!”

She was losing it quicker than normal and I was determined to have the most perfectly sharpened pencil this class had ever seen. I ground it to a perfect point, turned dramatically and blew on the tip like it was a smoky gun barrel. Mrs. Jurkanin was already in an angry whisper when she said, “Be seated, Mr. Langdon.”

I returned to my desk and immediately resumed my pencil spinning, only this time with exaggeration.

“Elliot! You may not want to learn, but you will not keep the rest of the class from it! This isn’t fair to your classmates...” or some such nonsense she was spewing. I was no longer listening to her words. I was watching her face, and wondering if I might see a little bit of crazy today.

I am spinning my pencil. There are no sounds from the playground today. There have been a couple of announcements over the intercom, but I don’t know what they were. They were in the background of my thoughts about what my punishment might be. Mrs. Jurkanin’s pen is also quiet today and I don’t hear her usual heavy breathing. She leaned over me today and I saw the crazy face, but she isn’t making it now. Her face has absolutely no expression. I look at her face every minute or so to see if it has changed and then I look back at my pencil.

I am spinning my pencil and little drops of blood are spinning off of it and freckling the top of my desk. The blood on my desk is nothing compared to the floor around my desk and the tops of my shoes. When Emily Blackmore, who sits in front of me, ran out of the class with the rest of the kids, I could see that the back of her t-shirt had one big stripe of blood on it. There is a lot of blood. I wonder if it was from a vein or an artery? Mrs. Jurkanin’s face still

hasn't changed. Her eyes are looking up in my direction, but they aren't looking at me really. They aren't really looking at anything, I don't think.

I look at my spinning pencil. I'll bet Mr. Nolan is going to call my mother at work.

## Helen Jarden

### *Repeated Journey*

I can't remember how I got here. In fact, I honestly can't remember anything about myself. At this point, I even question whether or not I exist. "I think therefore I am." That's how it goes, right? Maybe I do exist but everything else around me does not. It feels all too real, though, to be a dream.

It's the same thing every single time. I wake up in a small, cramped room with two bunk beds pushed against the walls and a small sink nailed up in between them. Underneath the beds are luggage bags, far too many for just me, but yet I've never come across anyone else in all the time I've endured this.

Even stranger is that the bags are always filled with weird objects, nothing like what a person would normally pack. Last time I found a wooden carving of the number nine. Before that, a hand-painted glass figure of the number two. This time it was just a metal pipe, rusted and aged to the point it left a brown stain on my hands.

The only sounds I hear are the faint music coming from above me and a light hum that I've always guessed was people conversing. Of course, I've never actually gotten to confirm my suspicions, as I have not been able to open the door. I don't mean it's locked, as it honestly isn't. The chain hangs down, unlatched from its hook, yet whenever I try to open the door it doesn't even budge. Almost as if it was simply painted on, a prop used in theater that was never actually meant to be opened. I always try to open it, in some vain hope that maybe this time it will let me free, but of course I remain trapped in my cell.

I vaguely remember the first few times I went through this, when I actually could remember a little bit about myself, I tried to get help. Banging, shouting, and crying got me nowhere, though I was sure that the people should be able to hear me. I think now I've just resigned myself to accepting they either can't hear me or they just don't want to. It's possible they just don't care....

Instead, I sit on the bed, staring at the door with intensity, waiting

for the earth-shaking jolt to begin the final moments of chaos. This moment always confuses me, as I've never quite figured out what I'm hearing. A deafening bang shudders through the air, followed by the sound of groaning, like some alien beast waking up from its slumber. Above and around me I can hear people yelp in surprise, some voices sounding as if they were right next door to my room. A few doors open and close, people ask each other "what was that" and "are you okay?" Moments later a commanding voice tells everyone to get back in their rooms.

After around an hour of waiting, people outside of my room scurry around, storming past my door. I've tried reasoning with them, begging them to let me leave this hell but they ignore me, pretend they can't hear me. They leave me to die while they try to save themselves. It's all in vain, though, as they will die with me. In a way, I take a sick comfort in this.

After a while of panic shouts, a message is echoed by them all. "They locked us down here!" Children cry, women wail, and the men shout furiously. Right outside my door a man speaks. "It's coming in. Oh my God, help us all."

Slowly it seeps into the room, through the crack under my door. Sometimes, I just lay on the floor, letting its icy fingers run over me as I shiver with expectation. As the room fills, it gradually lifts me up until my body hits the ceiling before finally flowing over my face, baptizing me in its glory.

More rarely, I sit at the top of a bunk bed and listen to the destruction it wrecks on the outside. Screams and gurgles echo around me, followed by the terrified wailing of children as they watch their parents die. I try not to think about how quickly they will follow their parents into darkness, their little bodies completely unable to cope with the cold.

Yet, in the most selfish and disgusting way, I don't find any of that to be the worst part of my experience. Nothing can ever prepare me for watching that last bit of air be taken away from me. Seeing my last change slip away forces me to accept my fate, something that I can never be prepared for. Even now, after the thousands of times I've relived this, I just can't accept my death.

For the longest thirty seconds of my life, I am suspended in darkness surrounded only by a numbing cold. I know that if I open my mouth, it will only fill my lungs and destroy me but at the same time my instinct is begging me to do SOMETHING, ANYTHING to get air. I almost always try, if only to end my suffering sooner.

It runs into my mouth, burning my throat as it descends through it. My lungs heave, trying to cough it out but of course only more rushes in as if determined to make me suffer more. In a twisted way its icy touch burns my insides, making me feel like I'm being torn from in the inside out. At this point my eyes are burning, and the already hazy world around me gets blurrier, dimmer, until turning into the deepest darkness I have ever known. I fade away, finally free of my torment.

I wake up again, in a room with two bunk beds and a sink nailed to the wall. Above me is joyful music and jovial laughter. The door to the room is unlocked but yet I cannot open it.

Darick T. Earney

## *Calling Home*

I've been bitten. Shit. This isn't how I had hoped to end my life, but I guess that decision was never really up to me. Ever since the ghouls started taking over the city, I've been counting down the seconds to my demise.

I hobble on foot as quickly as I can towards my home just a few blocks away and all I can think about is Shelley. Shelley is my little sister and my biggest fan. She always knew what to do to help me in difficult situations. I just hope this one doesn't strip away any modicum of hope she's got left.

Mom and Dad went out last night to visit an old group of friends at a party. Dad had given me a key to the house, a second set of keys for Mom's van, and about \$40 for food. Shelley and I had a huge fight because--being the idiot that I can be sometimes--I took the \$40 Dad had given me to feed us, and went out to Chip's Gaming.

Not that I was trying to be too disobedient, I just made plans a couple weeks in advance to go with my buddy Barry to pick up a new copy of "Dead Rising 3" for the XBOX One. I pre-ordered my copy almost a year in advance and wasn't about to let it be given away to some dork who got a spot in line an hour earlier than me. I just wasn't going to let it happen, and Barry definitely wasn't going to let it happen.

Barry was my best friend and partner in crime--literally. He and I started our own business in my dad's basement making homemade magic kits to sell online to local buskers and underground magicians.

Barry had an older cousin named Jaymie who was a huge supporter of our business. She dated a magician named The Magnificent Myster Mime (Yes, that "Myster" typo was intentional), whom she assisted while on stage. Personally, Magic was something I've never really believed in much, but the suspense of it intrigued me. However, dudes like Myster Mime were always, in my opinion, self-righteous douche-bags who watched "The Prestige" too many times. Good movie though.

Anyhow, Barry and I collected our copy of Dead Rising and returned back to his place for a night of intense zombie killing. Meanwhile, Shelley waited at home, by herself, for me to return. She's 15 years old, and Mom taught her the key code to our panic room in the basement. With this in mind, I set aside my responsibilities as a big brother and set myself up for an unforgivable mistake.

Not long after Barry and I started our new game, we received a phone call from a potential customer who was interested in one of our magic kits. It was one of the first customers we had since our business had gone to shambles. You would think that magic kits would be more of a children's toy, but, to even my surprise, people came running after Barry and I perfected our Ninja Impact Smoke Bombs (or Batbombs, as I like to call them). To tell the truth, these unique little explosives were part of the reason we started losing customers. Not because they were dangerous (which they were), but because we sold some to a Harry Potter fanboy at a community college who decided to use them in his dorm room and nearly burned the entire dorm down.

It wasn't long after this incident that the police got involved and the prick ratted Barry and me out, so we started getting rid of everything we could before it was too late. You'd think that the heavy use of gunpowder in our products would be the cause of why'd we get into trouble, but the truth was that Barry and I were selling our magic kits without a Seller's Permit. Thus, making us "partners in crime", so to speak. And the worst part about it wasn't that we couldn't get a Seller's Permit--we just didn't feel like taking the time to go and get one. Figures, right?

UGH! The bite is starting to hurt. I'm not sure how much longer I can withstand this. I have to find a car. I have to find my little sister. I start feeling drowsy, almost drunk, as I stumble across an alleyway in attempt to stay invisible to any of the ghouls that followed me.

This whole thing started when Barry and I kept waiting for that call a couple of weeks ago. We just sat up playing XBOX until we finally got a call, but it wasn't the one we were hoping for. This call catalyzed the beginning of the end of everything I've ever known and loved. It was a call from Barry's uncle Simon, Jaymie's father,

about Jaymie's recent hospitalization.

It appears that not long after Jaymie and Myster Mime had begun to wrap up their gig, Jaymie started getting sick. Barry and I were beginning to worry that some of the products we were making and selling to Jaymie for the magic shows may have been causing a strong allergic reaction to Jaymie's body, but it was far worse than that. Jaymie was coming down with a sickness that couldn't be determined. The doctor's said that it was an unprecedented case of the flu, but it was starting to have the same effects as Cancer. Her hair starting falling off, her skin started to deteriorate, and her appetite was either extremely high or extremely low.

The day after Barry received the phone call about Jaymie, he went up to visit her in the intensive care unit. I went back home to take care of Shelley, bringing her home a couple of her favorite raisin biscuits from Hardees.

Barry gave me a call after he got back to his house and gave me a rundown on Jaymie's condition. Her eyes were becoming red and her skin was growing increasingly pale, while her weight had begun to drop massively. This concerned the both of us, because we were both very close to Jaymie growing up. But what really worried us was that Barry gained a small, moderate head cold that became the flu by the next day.

I visited Barry after learning about his illness, bringing with me some homemade taco soup Shelley made us. We sat down all day eating soup, watching sitcoms, and shooting the breeze until he went to sleep. Shelley, on the other hand, was becoming worried about Mom and Dad not coming home from their party the night before, but I explained to her that they likely got too drunk to come home. I doubt she bought it, but it seemed like a reasonable conclusion. It shut Shelley up, to say the least.

The next morning, I visited Barry with some cough syrup I thought might help clear his throat. I approached his front door and noticed he was wide awake and roaming around like nothing was ever wrong. I tried to get him to relax, but every time I stepped towards him, he would let out a loud grunt and wave his hands as if to shoo me away. He seemed all right, yet didn't seem like himself,

so I stepped outside for a moment to let him gain his composure. Then the madness had begun.

I walked out of the screen door and sat on this old rocking chair that belonged to his grandma. I just rocked back and forth in it and whistled a beat that came to mind; nothing popularly known or too special. Then Barry, violently, swung the front door wide open and had a giant chunk of skin taken out of the left side of his face. He sounded like he was trying to ask for help, but seemed like the pain from some of his face being hacked off kind of put him at loss for words. I tried walking towards him, slowly, to calm him down. He kept sticking his neck out to bite my wrists as I reached for his shoulders, and we eventually hit the ground fighting.

He kept trying to bite me, so I socked him with a right hook to the jaw one good time and he went down. I hated myself for doing it, but I wasn't sure anymore if my friend had even been in his right mind as this was happening. I felt like I was in a scene from 28 Days Later, only I didn't have 28 days to prepare for this shit. I had 12 hours, and technically 5, since I stayed up super late the night before playing The Sims. (Damn right. It came with bonus features!).

Barry grunted and moaned for a while on the ground as I got up, briskly, demanding to know why he was behaving so strangely. His eyes were red in the way he described Jaymie's eyes being in the hospital, and he kept snarling at me. Not in like a super cool Humphrey Bogart sort of way, but more like a Beast Man in Masters of The Universe (aka He-Man) sort of way that was nowhere near as adorable.

I extended my hand, in an offering to pick Barry up off of the ground, and he bit me really hard on the side of my right wrist. I back handed him with my left hand and whined for a good 2 minutes. No, I didn't cry. I just hollered until my voice gave out. No big deal. What made the situation worse, though, was that by the time I had started to tolerate the pain from the bite, Barry was back at it again, trying to attack me. I finally ran out to my car and grabbed a battle-axe from the trunk. It wasn't a real one, just a prop I stole from that Myster Mime douche bag.

I ran to Barry and threatened to knock him out with it if he didn't

calm down. I was already on the verge of just going back home and calling him later that day whenever he was feeling better, but things got a little heated after he bit me and I cut his head off. There, I said it. I cut his head off with the battle-axe, even though the blade was dull and couldn't even cut a tree down. I made it happen. I didn't mean to do it. I cocked the prop axe back and swatted him on the head really hard and, well, it fell off.

I panicked. Had no idea what to do, so I stuffed his body and head in his bathtub. I wasn't exactly The Talented Mr. Ripley, so I had to work with what I had for the time being. It's not like I woke up and created a blue print to hide my best friend's body while I was in the shower. If anything, I would've done it on the shitter, but that's beside the point.

I hopped in my car and headed back home where I was stopped by a police roadblock. People were swarming the streets, and a good deal of them had red eyes like Barry's. I was still in shock from the fact that I had just killed my own best friend, and was planning my escape from town. I couldn't live with this new burden, but it was too late for second-guessing. The dark deed was done, and I knew I was doomed. I just wish I hadn't have been so impulsive, but I had a strong feeling that it was either me or Barry. I should have just driven away, went home and called him back later, but I didn't. I just had a moment and made both a giant fool (and a killer) out of myself.

I punched the gas pedal and starting speeding past all of the people and nearly hit a pedestrian. Then I actually hit a pedestrian. I swerved in front of a police car that had a shattered windshield and blood oozing from the top of the grill to the bottom of the front license plate. I burned out in the middle of an intersection and slammed my foot on the break until the car tail-whipped into a streetlight. I survived the collision, but my car didn't.

I opened my eyes and saw a horde of people coming after me, so I did the human thing and got out of the vehicle and ran like hell for about 8 blocks until I was alone. Now, here I am. Gasping for air as I walk closer and closer towards my house, wishing I would've given those P-90.X workouts a chance. This low cardio stuff is bullshit.

I remember all of the things my little sister taught me about Voodoo magic. Thinking back to the moment I had started growing interest in the idea of sorcery because of this book she introduced me to. It was sort of like the Necronomicon from Evil Dead, but didn't come with an audio book. It described the origins of Zombification and how African witch doctors were natural healers who could raise the dead. The material was a little too supernatural for my taste, but it managed to keep my interest. The idea of using magic for something other than pulling a rabbit out of a hat piqued my interest more than I thought it would. It was after reading the book that I approached my now late best friend Barry about making magic kits, but I had eventually grown sick of the idea of magic after getting to know some of the idiots who purchased them.

One question that still haunts me, however, is how this outbreak all began. What if it was my fault? What if these kits Barry and I were selling were causing people to become cannibals? Anything's possible. I mean, we did put a lot of different types of chemicals in our ingredients for earlier smoke bombs before we started using gunpowder. Maybe I deserve this bite on my wrist. Maybe I'm destined to turn into one of the ghouls from Dawn of the Dead. I got greedy. I cared more about the profit of those stupid magic kits than the consequences of selling them; cared more about some stupid video game than keeping my family safe. I should have cared more about others instead of myself, and now I don't have a choice but to worry about just myself. If this bite isn't the death of me, the guilt I suffer from will be.

I make it home and approach the back porch and notice that my mom's van is still in the driveway. I knock on the back door until Shelley answers it. She hugs me and bursts into tears, immediately, as I try to hide the bite on my wrist from her.

I hold her close, whispering, "Everything will be okay."

She pulls away, wiping the tears from her eyes and says: "Mom and Dad are dead."

Mom and Dad were eaten by the ghouls the night before, according to a phone call from one of their friends who survived an attack. Shelley was still in shock as I was, especially after killing

Barry. Part of me wanted to just lie down and die, while another part of me knew that I actually was going to before too long. I just can't tell Shelley about the bite, but I have to get her out of here.

I grab the keys to my mom's van from the key rack in the kitchen and hand them to Shelley. I explain to her that Mom's car was better on gas and would get her a lot further (something most people don't think about in these scenarios). She refuses to go anywhere without me, which I knew would be a problem, so I tell her a lie. Something I'm not proud of. I convince her that Barry was on his way to get me and that we would all three meet up at the local police station where it's safe.

Shelley stalls a bit, and is hesitant to leave, but she gave me a huge hug as if it would be our last. I held back tears and hugged her as hard as I could back because I knew it would be our last.

Shelley tells me she loves me one last time before she leaves the driveway in Mom's van. I watch her exit the drive way; stop, stare, and wave, then drive away as I blow her a kiss 'goodbye'. I think about the day Mom brought her home from the hospital. I was proud to be her big brother. Now I can be her guardian angel, or at least a flesh eating one, to say the least.

I walk back into our house and stumble, feeling my leg muscles become weak and my face begin to feel numb, as I reach the flight of stairs that leads to my basement. I walk down a couple stairs and fall the rest of the way down. I start crawling towards the panic room, reaching with everything I've got, and push myself until my arms start giving out.

The adrenaline from the fall keeps me wide awake, which sucks because I can still feel a sharp pain in my right hip. I take a few deep breaths, and then I continue crawling towards the panic room until I reach the keypad. I dial the entry code and realize that I can't remember it. I start feeling really light headed and weak again. I close my eyes and start feeling as if I'm going to faint. I nod off a little and the sound of footsteps is heard coming from staircase. The sound is followed by a voice asking: "Are you Rian Gallows?"

I feel my throat getting dry as I struggle to speak up, mumbling the word: "Yes..."

I fall back against the door of the panic room. The sound of footsteps move closer towards me, and what also sounds like small chatter.

“This is it,” I say to myself.

I’m distracted by the thought of Shelley making it through this outbreak, escaping from this nightmare in the streets. All I wanted was for the only family I have left to be okay before it was my time to call home.

I thought about everything I’ve ever said, done, and the endless amount of regrets that followed the things I’ve never said and done. I tried to think thoroughly about every secret I’ve ever had; every little piece of inconvenience that I’ve kept to myself and held in for so long and tried to construct one final confession. One last word I could leave this world with, hoping that it would be something clever or philosophical like the movies. So, I gave it a second and... well, nothing. The best I could come up with was that I was always secretly a Matchbox 20 fan. It’s true. “3AM” is my jam. Nothing like a bit of 90’s alternative to get through a bad break up, or death in this occasion. I hope they have mixtapes in the afterlife. I guess this is it, time to meet my maker.

I clear my throat once more and say the words: “I am Rian Gallows.”

A moment of silence fills the cool, dark basement, then the voice responds: “Then you’re exactly who we’re looking for.”

I let out a small chuckle before clearing my throat. I tilt my head up and stare at the ceiling... then I blink... then I blink again... then again... and again... and then

## Darick T. Earney

### *Before I Wake*

Life ends after death? What a joke. Human beings are so vulnerable to what they want to believe. Death is only the beginning; a grand entrance to what feeling alive really feels like. Okay, before you get lost in thought here, allow me to secure your sanity with this—I'm a vampire. Perhaps I sound like the insane one at this point, which is okay, because it's kind of true. Alright, who am I kidding, it's VERY true. No use in having flaws if you can't own up to them.

Now, before I get started with my story, allow me to dedicate these next few moments of your time to go over a few of the things that piss me off: 1. First and foremost, I am a vampire. I do not bite people on the throat, wear all black, and act like Barnabus Collins. 2. I have no problem with salt—I just prefer to eat it in small doses. As for garlic, I love it. Chicken Fettuccini would be bullshit without it. 3. I don't sleep in a coffin. If you actually believe in that myth, I suggest that you stop reading now before I put you in one. I do, however, sleep a lot during the daytime, but it doesn't mean that I'm only awake at night. I don't have what the old vampire community would refer to as "Daytime Curfew". 4. I don't need permission before walking into someone's home. Personally, I'd rather be invited in instead of barging in, but that's to show respect. Otherwise I usually do whatever the hell I want. 5. Most importantly—never, ever call me a leach. I DRINK blood, not SUCK it.

A lot of people think that being a vampire would be awesome, and really, it kind of is. I have a healing factor that could stop a speeding bullet from piercing my heart enough to kill me, and, because I'm technically dead, I can smoke cigarettes all I want. Suck on this, Surgeon General!

Where was I? Oh yeah. So, here I am, skating around an ice pond, feeling snowflakes land on my face. It's the first sight of snowfall I've seen all season. It's pretty relaxing. I normally hate the

cold, but love all the bugs it kills during the winter. Tonight is a great night for a quick meditation session, so I'm finding my inner Zen and giving my current stresses in life the proverbial middle finger by staying relaxed.

The ice out here is decently thick, and definitely stable enough for a few laps around the pond. I'm not sure how long I'm going to be here, but I want to make the most of it. I never get time like this to myself; time to just lounge around and be at ease while the rest of the world just keeps on spinning. I should really do this more often.

I pick up the pace on my skates, doing lap after lap around the pond as the sound of a dog bark trails from the background. The dog's bark becomes louder, while my laps become increasingly shorter. I pick up some more speed and finally come to a full stop, when suddenly, I hear the sound of the ice below my blades begin to crack. I inhale deeply, keeping my eyes closed, and then a sigh of relief comes over me as I say to myself: "Perfect."

I skate over to the edge of the pond and step off the ice and onto the bank, where I proceed to march towards my car. The dog bark gets closer, until I open the back door to my car and yell: "Karma!! Shut the hell up!"

Yep. That loud bark was coming from none other than my dog, Karma. I rescued her from the animal shelter sometime after she was found beaten and left for dead. She's a beautiful dog, with bright blue eyes and is a half wolf/half husky mix. One of the most loyal dogs I've ever owned. I've always promised her that I'd find the person, who abused her, and we'd get even with them, hence, why I named her Karma. She's a bitch, but she's my bitch.

I shut the back door as Karma lies down in the seat, continuing to gnaw on her squeak- toy, then I make my way towards the trunk and search for the right key to open it. While stalling for a few moments, I try to get some of the lyrics from The Who's "Eminence Front" out of my head, until finally, the trunk opens. I grin from ear to ear, in full satisfaction, and then I reach in and grab the little prick I stuffed into it. I toss him out like a sack of potatoes, and ninja kick him in the stomach as he hits the ground, squealing for help in a muffled voice from the bandanna I tied around his mouth.

He tries standing up, but can't, because I also tied his legs together. This is the part where I'm usually supposed to just shoot the guy and put him out of his misery, but here's the problem: 1. I have no gun. 2. This is way too damn funny to not laugh at for another five minutes or so, and I have no number 3, so I'm just going to laugh.

I just let him hop around until he eventually slips onto a piece of ice and nearly hits his head against a tree trunk, which seems to be conveniently placed on the ground for my entertainment. I'll need a minute to get myself together.

Whew, okay, now that I'm done wiping the tears of joy from my eyes, I can get back to my execution. You see, this little fella here is not the kind of guy I could just let go. He's got a big mouth, and in my hometown, we have an old street saying that goes something like: "Snitches get stitches." This bozo, however, wasn't about to get stitches. He wasn't that lucky. He figured out my deep dark secret, and that just can't happen.

I walk towards him as he swivels and squirms around as much as he can towards the ice pond. I watch from the side of my car, leaving the trunk wide open as I take off each of my ice skates and put on black boots. The little fella makes his way towards the middle of the ice and stops frantically, then turns over and begins panting like he's having an asthma attack. For a moment, I actually start feeling bad for the guy. I mean, it's bad enough that he's going to die anyway, but the plan was to kill him myself, so this asthma thing wasn't cutting it for me.

A soft chill begins to fill the air while I make my way towards center ice to ask the little fella about his condition. I remove the bandanna from his mouth and a dialogue ensues:

"Hey," I ask him, sternly. "Do you have asthma?"

"What?" the little fella replies.

"Do you have asthma??" I repeat, eagerly.

"Are you going to kill me?" he pleads.

"No, I just tie people up and drive them out to the middle of nowhere for fun."

The little fella's eyes begin to water as he trembles in fear.

“Come on, dude,” I continue. “This isn’t some sorority initiation. Now answer the question. Do you have asthma?”

“No!” he says seemingly annoyed.

“Okay, good,” I respond, sighing in relief. Then I kick him in the stomach again.

The little fella begins gasping for air and panting harder than he had before. I figure, if he didn’t have asthma before, he did now. But then again, I’m not even sure if you can get asthma from a blow to the stomach. Maybe I should ask him—nah, I’ll just look it up in the library or something tomorrow.

Anyhow, I kick the little fella some more until he reaches the spot where the ice had begun to crack earlier, and then I stop and take a few steps back. He starts sobbing for help, which upsets me because he clearly didn’t pay attention to me when I told him a few seconds earlier that we were “in the middle of nowhere.” So, I walk over and kick him again. Nothing personal, I just don’t like being ignored.

Karma begins barking again from the back seat of my car, and I holler the words “shut up” as loud as I can until she does. I turn to face the little fella until I notice that he’s staring blankly at me.

“Why are you doing this?” he asks, with a bit of hesitation in his voice.

I fall silent, for a few seconds, then reply, “Because I have to.”

The truth is, I don’t want to kill this guy. I just can’t live if he knows my secret.

I argue with myself, internally, for a little while until I begin to hear the ice around the little fella’s body crack. This time, the cracks are beginning to expand all around the both of us. It appears that nature wishes to forewarn us that we’re walking on thin ice. Egad, that was a terrible pun.

The moment has finally come when I have to choose do or die, and I’m already dead, so I guess it’s “do”, for the win. I’m not going out of this world as an icicle. Although, Captain America was pretty bad ass and he was an ice cube for a little while. Shit, he was thawed out and made into an Avenger. I’m down with that, just not nosy pricks who invade my privacy.

Before I sound crazier than I already am, let me explain myself. I was in my one bedroom apartment this morning, watching some cartoons, when I saw some light flashing from the outside. I figured it may have been raining out, so I got up to go check, because I wasn't sure if my car windows were rolled all of the way down. I stepped over Karma, who was asleep at my feet, to look out the living room window. When I did, it was bright and sunny out. No rain. No humidity; perfect volleyball weather.

I went outside to have a look around, while I heard Karma following me from behind to take a whiz in the yard. When Karma and I go back inside, I start feeling overwhelmed. Breathing didn't come as easy as it had before, but I was still confused.

"I'm already dead. I can't die from a heart attack," I thought many a times (yes, I said many a times).

Karma howled at me, the same way she always does when I'm feeling upset. She walks over to me and licks the tips of my fingers as I stand calmly, in between the hallway to my bathroom and kitchen.

I stepped into the bathroom, locking the door behind me, and stare into the mirror for a good fifteen minutes. Vampires are supposed to not be capable of being seen in a mirror, but that's only to the human eye, because I could see everything. I could see the undead fiend that fed on the living in order to survive. The monster that had to choose between dying an ordinary human, or becoming an immortal before the rest of us were slowly killed off. The creature that went against everything he believed in to live another day, and is cursed to outlive everyone he loves. No, I'm not Tom Hanks in "The Green Mile"--I'm Eren Ramsey.

The day I changed, I was on a senior float trip with a group of my high school classmates. We all spent the evening doing as teenagers do—breaking the rules. I honestly had more trouble getting sunburnt as a human than I've ever had as a vampire, now that I think about it. I've always been a little on the pasty side.

Anyhow, I walked into the cabin my classmates and I rented out for the weekend and I heard a loud squeak. I figured it was a mouse, so I searched the entire cabin for it until I felt a bird-like creature hovering over me. I took a few swats at it, and then it swooped

down and bit me right above the shoulder. I went down, and felt the adrenaline pumping through my veins as I started to go into shock. There was no one around, so I couldn't get help no matter how loud I yelled. I gave in to the pain and lied down on the cabin floor, hoping it would all just go away. I waited and waited until I finally just fell into a deep, comatose asleep.

When I woke up, I felt awake for the very first time in my life. I felt as if nothing wrong had ever happened. I heard laughter all around me as I looked up and spotted my classmates pointing and laughing at me. They all thought I drank a few beers and passed out in the cabin, so they left me on the cabin floor and took turns drawing on me with markers. I was literally a dick-head that day.

The change I went through from the time I went to sleep, to the time I woke up was a feeling I wasn't entirely conscious enough to remember, but when I did wake up, it was as if I wasn't Eren Ramsey anymore. Before I woke up, I was very milquetoast and felt as if I lived to serve others, but after I woke up—my incessant need to look out for others and please everyone had been vanquished.

I left the cabin and headed out to a bank where I looked at my reflection in the water that surrounded it. I could see it in my eyes then, as I do now, there was no more Eren, only Zuul. Just kidding, but I was pretty evil when all was said and done.

I stopped going to church. See, there's the idea that vampires can't wear crosses, but that's not the truth. I can wear crosses, I just don't. The way I see it, I'm already dead, so what's the point in wearing something that represents life? Why would I celebrate the idea of Heaven when I'm already living in Hell? The hypocrisy makes my stomach hurt just thinking about it, so I'll change the subject.

After years of failed friendships, and on again-off again drinking habits, I finally resorted to killing. This kooky Robert Smith wannabe I went to high school with turned out to be just like me. I never knew his real name, but his vampire name was "Zed". Zed was kind of a dick, but he was well aware of how scarce our species was becoming, even before I knew. I had a very low immune system, which Zed had explained to me was the result of my lack of human

blood consumption. It was Zed who taught me how to accept the fact that what I was may have not been human, but could have been something much better.

The only true friend I had to look after me was Zed, and he did his very best to train me well in hunting and surviving the life of a vampire for about ten years, before he vanished one day. No ‘Goodbye’, no ‘I’ll see ya’ around’, just an old school touch-n-go routine. I’ve spent every day since wondering what had happened to him, and since he was my only friend, I began to feel really lonely. To a point to where I actually started looking for a contract killer to come drive a stake through my heart so I wouldn’t have to bare living alone anymore.

I thought about all of this as I stare into my exhausted, dark brown eyes in the mirror of my bathroom. I noticed another flash come from the bathroom window. I followed the flash by storming out of the front door of my apartment, with Karma walking by my side.

Karma walked over by a tree in the neighbor’s yard, then begins growling as loud as she can until a man falls out of the tree. It turns out to be a freelance private investigator who had been stalking me for about two weeks. He discovered my deep dark secret while I was out disposing a couple of bodies. Karma charges him and bites him on the ass—as Karma normally does (another bad pun!)—and he surrenders, immediately. I accept his surrender, then gracefully drag him into my house, tie him down, and stuff him into my trunk.

Think I’ve given plenty of back stories? Good, because I’m still busy with the little fella.

“Take my camera,” the little fella begs. “I promise, I’ll destroy every piece of evidence I have!”

“Listen here, Kolchak,” I say, taking a drag from a freshly lit cigarette. “I don’t make deals with anyone in or outside of the law. The only two things I care about are me and that dog over there! So, if you don’t mind, please, let me just finish my job.”

There are few moments of silence, and then I start for him to begin the execution. The little fella has a sudden stroke of courage and says, “Go to hell, leach!”

I dig my knee into his gonads, and then slam his face against the ice until it begins to crack more and more. He begins cursing as loud as he can until I bounce his head off of the ice, making a loud thud. He's still alive; I can smell his blood pumping... and see it.

I contemplate whether or not I should let him freeze to death under the ice, or eat him. But I just can't. He's not my type. Blood type I mean. I can only take in B Positives. A-Bs make me sick to my stomach, and I can tell he's in the A range. I just haven't had a blood sample yet. His nose begins bleeding and I think the cold must have numbed my senses, because this man is a B Positive. I can't decide now if I'm going to kill him, or keep him alive for a little while longer, then kill him. My stomach is aching for me to make my mind up.

The little fella wakes up, uncertain of where he is. He seems to have trouble seeing, which scares me because I hope I didn't hit his head so hard that he's gone blind. Not that I care or anything, I just hope he can see life one last time before I have to take his is all.

"Please, take me home, daddy," the little fella asks, in fright. "I'm afraid of the doctor."

I stare at him, deeply, feeling overwhelmed with guilt when the ice finally caves in and pulls him into the water. I start panicking as I watch his arms and legs splash around in the water, debating on whether or not I should dive in and save him. I think for a few more seconds, then I turn around and start to walk towards my car.

On the way to my vehicle, a bug, or some kind of insect, flies straight into my ear. I stumble for a few steps and hear Karma start barking again, and then I slip and bust my ass on the ice. I guess Karma got the best of me. Wow, I need to lay off these stupid puns.

I try to stand back up, then slip and fall back onto the ice and into the water, which sucks because I lost my cigarette in the process.

I swim around until I see the little fella struggle to breathe, with both his hands and feet tied up tight. I grab him and swim us both up towards the top of the ice and out of the water. Because I'm already dead, hypothermia won't be a problem, but the little fella is kind of screwed here.

I drag him across the ice and up to the bank, and then pull him up

the hill from the bank and into my car. I turn the heat on to help his body heat rise and wait for a few minutes, while I got shut the trunk of my car. I trust that Karma won't let him go anywhere.

When I come back his body is shivering uncontrollably.

"You're not such a bad guy after all," the little fella tells me with a stammer in his voice.

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

But what the little fella had failed to realize, was that my deep dark secret isn't that I am a vampire, but the fact that I am a compulsive liar.

## Darick T. Earney

### *The Time Man*

I feel as if someone ran me over with a semi-truck, backed up to hit me again (just to make sure I was in excruciating pain), stepped out of the vehicle, grabbed my body and drug me towards the driver's side door, wedged my head in between the door frame and seat, and proceeded to slam the door on my skull a good two dozen times. What the hell am I talking about? I'm talking about a hangover. Not your typical hangover. I'm talking about a "straight edge" hangover. One of those that make you forget why on earth you ever had the idea of picking up an alcoholic beverage a day in your life. Ever had one? If not, GOOD for you. If so, I'll be receiving prayers most of the day, and by "most of the day", I do mean all of it. If you're currently in this situation, then grab a glass of ice water and bear with me, because I have a story to tell.

Let me take you back to last night's events: There I was, sitting at a bar, minding my own business. I proceeded to play this game I invented where I'd ask the bartender to play the song "Tequila" by The Champs, and every time the song pauses for the lead singer to yell: "TEQUILA!" I take a double shot of (you guessed it) Tequila. Thankfully, however, the word "Tequila" is only shouted twice in the entire song, so I managed to survive the thoroughly idiotic decision.

To be honest, all I wanted to do was watch the baseball game on TV, have a few shots, and be on my way. I don't go to bars a whole lot, mainly because the atmosphere always puts me on edge. Not entirely because people go there as I do (to numb their pains), but because most of them are of all shapes, sizes, and genres of stupid.

For example: I was just watching the ballgame and minding my own business, when, out of nowhere, some degenerate at the end of the bar shouts: "Hey! My grandma can hit better than that and she's fucking dead!!" at the television. I understand that sports can make people emotional, but considering that this prick was already at a bar full of emotional people, I think voicing his opinion qualifies as pure selfishness at that point.

I turned to him, looking over the entire bar full of peanut-shells and hard liquor puddles, and told him, in my most gentleman-like manner, to shut the fuck up. He listened. Of course he would, he wore a V-Neck. Any man who wears leather sandals, V-Necks, and rocks a scruffy beard is a scruffy nerf herder in my eyes, the type of dude that's asking for a slap in the face—with a brick.

Everyone's favorite time of the night came as I ordered another Tequila shot—happy hour. Sixty minutes where every alcoholic and light drinker can get hammered quick and cheap, and not feel horrible about themselves. I had already been on a pretty good binge for a while, so really every hour was happy hour.

I heard some young couple at the other end of the bar table gushing up about their newborn baby. Which could only lead one to wonder why in the fuck they were out drinking in the first place, but I kept my mouth shut. They were shooting the shit with one of the female bartenders, that I'm going to go ahead and assume is a personal friend, and I felt disgusted. Look, I love babies. LOVE 'EM. I'd love to have children of my own someday, but I'm one of those heartless bastards that believe that all newborns are just hideous. I'm sorry, but in my humble opinion, it's true. There is nothing cute about a creature that's just crawled out of a woman's hair pie, covered in vulva juice. If you ask me, all newborns look like the Toxic Avenger.

There was a deck of poker cards all around the inside of the bar that I spent most of the time staring at. Each card had a picture of a famous dictator on it and went in a circle all around a neon "Heineken" beer light. The brightness of the light made everything look blue when staring at it for a while, so I looked away and put my focus back into the baseball game, ignoring the young couple and the scruffy sandal douche. However, because the great people of Carborundum, Illinois are so kind here, I got myself into a little bit of a kerfuffle (GOOGLE it).

My little conflict began when some obnoxious dingbat decided to play Ricky Nelson's "Travelin' Man" for three times on the jukebox after "Tequila" finished playing. I normally don't go in for country, especially if it's a song I've heard three times in a row, so I

took the initiative in approaching this jolly good fellow I like to call Schmuck Dynasty.

Schmuck had one of those hipster beards with hair that expanded into a big, frizzy ball of gray, well—HAIR, and reeked of cheap beer. Not to mention, the dude had a gap in his front teeth that could bring a tear to David Letterman's eye. He was a walking stereotype; white trash icon potential, but his taste in music sucked, so it was time to bring him to justice.

I approached him, smiling from ear to ear, and tried my best not to come off too strong. I shook his hand and introduced myself, then asked nicely if he could play something else. This whole plan would've gone a little better if I wouldn't have smashed a tequila bottle over one of his friends' heads beforehand, but, you know. First impressions. Besides, I never said I was good at impulse control.

I asked Mr. Dynasty to change the song on the jukebox, when, to my surprise, he exercised his masculinity and punched me in the eye. The bartenders are mostly females, so I thought it's worth noting that I took the fight outside, especially sense good ole' Shmuck threw me outside the bar anyways. On second thought, never mind. Who cares if the bartenders are mostly females? They didn't have to watch.

Anyhow, I took a few punches to the body and began to river dance around Schmuck for cheap entertainment. He seemed puzzled by my choice of fighting strategy, but I also like to think he was slightly jealous of my impromptu dance routine. Which is funny, 'cause I don't even know how to river dance.

Schmuck got angrier and angrier as I taunted him. I backed away from him about a good ten feet as a crowd of people circled around us. I got distracted, briefly, by the thought of being in the final fight scene in "Rocky V", then the image was blocked out by the ominous hick who needed a music appreciation class. Not Kenny Rodgers, I mean Shmuck Dynasty.

Schmuck began charging me like a bull when—POOF—I disappeared. No one knew where I was. Hell, I didn't know where I was. I just know the look on his face was priceless when I reappeared right behind him and kicked him in the groin. He went down hard and I laughed even harder. I wiped the tears of joy from my eyes

and noticed how everyone seemed to be taken by surprise (yay that rhymed!) I knew I had a lot of explaining to do, but how it happened is none of their business, although, I don't mind sharing it with you, dear reader [Insert: winky face].

I have what in the sci-fi world is called a Teleporter; or a Jumper—or a Looper, or whatever the hell Hollywood tries to make them into. It's a nifty little wristwatch my grandfather gave me called "The Interval". This thing can take me through time, or as my grandfather used to say: "with time" before he passed on and gave it to me. I don't ever like using it to travel, mainly just to get to work sooner. Just saying, to any of you out there who drive long hauls to work, I'd try to get yourself one of these bad boys. No gas money needed. Can I get a hallelujah?

I'm now making a glass of orange juice. I'm not a very religious man, but Rum is the goddamn devil. Not sure if I've said that once already, but it's true.

Life hasn't been the same since my grandpa Josef died. Josef, and my caretaker, Rosalyn, were the closest things to real family I've ever had. I grew up in an orphanage after my deadbeat parents decided to leave me in the bathroom of a family restaurant (without even buying me a kid's meal!) I was only 8 weeks old. How a mother could ever abandon her child is something I could never even begin to understand.

Growing up, Rosalyn always was, and still is, a very independent woman. Imagine Kathy Bathes from "A Home of Our Own" and Rosanne Barr having a love child and you've got Rosalyn. She's had a lot of heart problems after Josef passed away, and I'm the only one out all the kids she looked after in the orphanage that's still around to take care of her.

Josef was Rosalyn's father, and a retired combat engineer for the U.S. Army. When he wasn't playing real life Stratego, he was in his basement building whatever fed his imagination. He had a strong taste for watches, and an even stronger obsession with time. His wife had passed shortly after Rosalyn was born. The tragedy tore him up so much inside that he spent countless hours watching time and space travel documentaries on the History channel to figure out

how time travel worked.

I'll never forget how often Josef would come by the orphanage and play a game of "Grass-Ball" with us. Grass-Ball was a game Andy, one of my brothers at the orphanage, and I had invented along with my sisters, Cadence and Mary-Beth. We weren't real brothers and sisters, of course, but we all shared the same house, same mother figure, and hell, even the same beds, from time to time.

Every couple of weeks throughout the summer, Rosalyn would mow the front lawn of the orphanage and we would take big clusters of shredded grass and hit each other with them. It was the equivalent of Snow-Ball fighting, but in the summer, hence, 'Grass-Ball' fighting. Rosalyn would usually get upset when we'd play, 'cause we'd be so dirty afterwards, but Josef would come by and play with us and feed us ice cream whenever we got too tired to continue playing. We would also spend entire days playing Power Rangers, and would always fight over who got to be the Green Ranger. We even tried climbing on each other once to play a game of Voltron, and Mary-Beth fell and sprained her ankle—those were the days.

Gosh, this orange juice tastes like shit. I reach into my fridge and grab a flask full of vodka and mix the beverages together. Hell yeah. That is more like it. I'm not an alcoholic; just prefer to not feel a damn thing when I tell these kinds of stories.

"The Interval" is something I'm still struggling to understand. How Papa Josef created this thing is beyond me, and why is even more difficult of a question to answer. Papa was never a really big sci-fi sort of guy, but I think all of the years of sadness and repressed loneliness made him sort of desperate for a little excitement in his life.

Papa Josef did everything he could to keep in touch with his wife when she passed. It was Rosalyn who revealed to me the details of her death, because Josef would always pretend like it never happened. For years, all he would do is share old memories and photos of her, and if anyone tried to remind him of the fact that she was gone, he'd get really angry and storm out of the room. That is my guess as to why he created 'the Interval'; so he could stay in touch with her somehow.

Television may make time travel devices out of cars, phone booths, and blue outhouses, but Papa Josef converted such a device out of what seems to make the most sense—a wristwatch. The Interval has many rules and instructions. For instance, it doesn't travel forwards (so much for getting a hover board, right?) It also doesn't travel too far into the past, just through pre-existing time periods. The best analogy I have for this is like a scrap book; you look at it, and you suddenly remember where you are; or like when you hear one of your favorite songs and it takes you back to the moment you first heard it, or to a happy time in your life that it may have been playing somewhere in the back ground. And if it answers your question, yes, the Interval tells time. That'd be a pain in the ass if it were like the watch from *Spy Kids 2* (y'know, the one that does everything but tell time?) Personally, my favorite part is that it doesn't affect your present timeline; so there's none of that coming back home to find out that your parents never met bullshit. The only thing I don't recommend is that you confuse the teleportation button on the watch with the time travel button. I've made that mistake once, and almost lost my job. Ha. I should do one of those cheesy 'Real Cost' commercials.

Anyways, like everything else in the world, the Interval isn't flawless. It does have one major drawback—wherever you travel, you lose the memory of its existence. If you haven't figured it out yet, this product is fucking dangerous. It'll cause brain damage if used too often, and the further back you go into your own timeline, the higher your chances will be of forgetting who you are. I don't know about you, but I'm not ready to have Alzheimer's at my age, but there are a few moments of my life I wouldn't mind forgetting.

I better grab my whole damn flask for this one.

The damage started when I was eight. A younger couple had come by the orphanage looking to adopt. Me and all of the other kids felt like puppies, and we acted like them too. We put on our most innocent smiles and tried to be on our best behavior. Rosalyn spent the entire morning cleaning up the place before the couple had arrived, trying to get us all washed up and tidy, in hopes that one of us would be lucky enough to go home to a new family. That one of

us wound up being me, but I wasn't very lucky.

The family that adopted me had lost a son that was about my age, and were looking to adopt in order to shorten their grieving process. The little boy they lost looked a lot like I did as a child; he had blue eyes, light blonde hair, big ears, and a freckled nose. He always looked so happy in all of the family photos I recovered after the mom and dad got arrested. I'm not too sure, but I think they really just wanted me around for all of the tax benefits of adopting a child.

I had a foster sister that was about a year younger than me named Leah. We don't speak much anymore as adults, but as kids we were inseparable. I taught her some of the games I learned in the orphanage, and she taught me some of the math she learned from her dad's textbooks he always had laying around the house. Leah wasn't the most social human being in the world, but she yapped it up when I could get her on a subject she liked. I miss her more each day, just not her psychotic parents.

Leah would never accept it, but her parents abused the shit out of us as kids. One time, her mom burned my hand on a stove just to teach me why fire is harmful. I was pretty sure she woke up that morning and deliberately decided to toss her logic right out the fuckin' window, but that was before I realized that that's just how those folks were. Leah's father wasn't much better. He bruised Leah's rib cage for not drinking enough glasses of water per day: 8. I remember that because of how many we were forced to drink.

Being the kids we were, all we could dream about were root beer floats and junk food. Healthy food tasted like ass, as it always does. I, to this day, refuse to eat fucking celery (and god forbid coleslaw) because of these people.

My adoptive parents lived in a small town called Addo in southern Missouri. It was a small hick town with a grand total population of maybe 30. Everyone in town knew each other, but lived acres away from each other, so Leah and I's chances of being free from our parents' clutches were unlikely. It didn't help that we were also home schooled. Our Physical Education was learning how to take a beating, while our Health class was discovering which blows would

have left the darkest bruises and for how long.

Four years. Four years it took for Leah and me to reach our freedom. It was the day after my 12th birthday that I was given the chance to save us, and I took it. I had several chances to just speak up; many moments when company would come by the house and I'd have the golden opportunity to just ask for help, and I didn't. I wouldn't. I didn't think it would matter. I didn't think I mattered.

Then, one day, I remembered what Rosalyn had once told me: "The only things standing in the way of the goals you wish to fulfill in your life are not the challenges it takes to accomplish them, but the time taken to decide on accepting the challenges."

I was far too young to understand what the fuck she was talking about, but I knew Rosalyn's attitude toward life is that you have to take what you want, even if it means playing by your own rules. So I did.

My foster parents locked Leah and me into the mini closet they always stuck us in when they would leave the house. But what they didn't know is that I had swiped my foster dad's fish fillet knife from the kitchen when they weren't looking. I wedged the knife in between the lock and the door until the blade popped the door wide up—setting us free (please, no 'coming-out-of-the-closet' jokes).

Leah was scared to leave. I told her to take my hand, but she wouldn't. She didn't want to disobey her mom and dad, but there was a problem—I did! I didn't want to leave Leah, but I had to do what I had to do. I ran straight outside of the back door and breathed my first breath of fresh air in months, and started booking through the back yard and through a cornfield until my lungs felt like they were going to burst. No more of that "Flowers In The Attic" shit. I had to get away from that house, but I had to go back for Leah, and I didn't care what the cost might have been.

I ran until I found a police officer on the side of a highway checking cars for speed limits. I told him who I was and where I had come from, and he called in back up and we drove up to the house. When we pulled into the driveway, my foster parents had already made it home and started their beating on Leah. The police took the pieces of shit into custody, while Leah was sent to the local hospital

with a major concussion. When she woke up in the hospital, I was there. She remembered who I was; remembered that I didn't forget about her, and she remained protective of me after that. She went with me to the orphanage and met Rosalyn, who became a mother figure to us both as we grew older. That is until Leah was able to find a decent enough job to get her own place and live on her own. Once again, I wasn't so lucky.

I got a job working at a retirement home called Langhorne in Carborundum. Carborundum is sort of a ghetto neighborhood that you wouldn't know exists if you had class, but Papa Josef died there, and when Rosalyn started getting dementia, she wanted to be there too. I wanted to be by Rosalyn's side, so I got a job as an activities worker, and spent as much time with her as I could.

Rosalyn and I would eat Oreos (because they're awesome), play board games, and swap childhood memories. She became more sympathetic for me after losing her father, because she then knew what it was truly like to be an orphan herself. She tried apologizing often for all of the times she would get bitchy with me as a kid, but I wouldn't accept her apologies. Not to be a dick, but because they were unnecessary. She didn't have to apologize for her words, because her actions made up for them. She took good care of me, so the least I could do was be a good kid for her in return. If anything, I should have been the one apologizing, and I did from time to time, but she too felt that apologies were unnecessary. We were very stubborn people.

I'm sobering up way too quickly. I want more, but I think I'll just put the flask down and let this story start to tell itself.

Working in a retirement home isn't the best job in the world. Most people that work in a retirement home tend to start the job off wanting to help people, and then find themselves wanting to kill people a couple weeks into it.

Langhorne isn't exactly hell on Earth (I say this because I've been to the DMV), but I certainly wouldn't work here if I had a weak heart or a weak stomach. We used to have all sorts of messed up people coming here, from Vietnam War veterans to retired auctioneers. No kidding. There was an old man we took in named

Ralph that would spend hours counting the tiles on the floor in each of the rooms and saying them out loud without even realizing it. He had a tendency to think people around him were making bids on every object he counted. It didn't help that my co-workers and I threw out numbers to him when the boss wasn't around.

Before that, we had another old-timer named Fred that would wake up at midnight, every night, and scream "Happy New Year" as loud as he could. I'll never forget Fred telling me about the day he lost his virginity. He supposedly shot an arrow through a saber-toothed lion's back in order to rescue a woman from being mauled by it. The daytime workers always knew when he was telling this story because he'd always finish it by pissing on the floor; didn't matter where either. The funny thing about Fred was that he had a tendency to change his story every time he told it, but I'll never forget the day he told me: "If I don't dream, no one else will do it for me."

Fred was a regular Baron Munchausen, but with much saggier balls.

Rosalyn wasn't too crazy about being in Langhorne, but I think me having a job there kept her in all of these years. She often fought with some of the nurses and couldn't stand being told what she could and couldn't eat. Plus, it didn't help that most of the other female inpatients were either dirty, or over dramatic about everything. Rosalyn didn't care for that stuff; she lived on the edge, but not the kind you want to jump to your death from.

I was worried about her for a while when Papa Josef passed on, but she accepted the fact that I inherited the Interval with open arms. When he gave it to me, he told me that everything was a matter of time, and that wasted time could be dangerous. I spent years wondering if he was beginning to lose it, or if he really meant something deep and meaningful by it. Then, after I discovered what the watch did, I dedicated a year of my life to studying the advantages and disadvantages of it through a bunch of old journals he left behind in his basement.

I didn't travel through time, I traveled with it. I grabbed an old picture I found that Rosalyn had taken of me and my brother Andy,

from back at the orphanage, then—for what felt like a dream that could have lasted forever—I was a kid again. I was back in the moment I had first taken the picture and could remember everything Andy and I were laughing about in it. I could smell Josef’s charcoal barbeque grill roasting hot dogs and homemade hamburgers just a few feet away while my sisters Mary-Beth and Cadence ran around the autumn leaves in the back yard of the orphanage. None of them looked as if they had aged a day since, and Rosalyn—well; she was still the same, only less sick.

A moment came where I had woke up in my apartment, then I couldn’t really remember anything. I still don’t remember much; I’ve just managed to put some of the pieces together through Josef’s journals that what I experienced when I woke up wasn’t a dream, it just faded into memory like one. I grabbed one of Josef’s travel journals and began to pick up where he left off.

I jotted down everything I was feeling and could vaguely remember before it became just words on paper. What I have written is the only proof I have that the experience ever actually took place, but I wouldn’t expect anyone to believe me.

The moment came when Rosalyn finally asked about the Interval--something she had never done before. I told her all about the way it works based upon Josef’s journals and she asked if it were possible to remember what you’ve experienced if you travel to a time to meet someone who’s already used the Interval. I didn’t have an answer for this. I wasn’t sure if there was one, but I was willing to let her find out.

I gave her the Interval to use for a couple of hours while I went to the local ATM that night and waited for 12:15AM to roll around. I didn’t know how long she’d be gone, but I really wanted a soda. Direct deposit has its ups and downs, y’know?

When I came back to Langhorne, she had only been gone for about three hours. She reappeared in her bed, exactly as she did when she first left, and said:

“I remember everything...”

She thanked me for letting her use the Interval for the very first, and very last, time.

The next morning, an ambulance came to pick up Rosalyn. She had died in her sleep the night before. It was when I found this out that my drinking problem had begun, but just yesterday, I found an old letter from her when I went to clean out her room at Langhorne. It gave me peace.

Sometime before Rosalyn died, she told me that when her time comes, she wouldn't allow death to stop her from communicating with the ones she loves. I don't know how she did it, but Rosalyn must've known that she was going to die soon, or knew that I'd be crushed if she died, because her letter seemed to answer almost every question I had for her. She told me not to blame myself for her death; told me not to waste too much time grieving and that I had a bright future ahead of me, and that all she wanted was for me to be happy while she spends time with her mom and dad in eternity. It's as if she figured out how to make the Interval travel forward—or she just knew exactly what to say to cheer me up.

Rosalyn deserves to be with her mom and dad, I just wish I knew where mine have been all of this time, but then again, I did know—Langhorne. Rosalyn was the only parent I needed, and I'll never forget her, or Josef.

I went out last night for a last hurrah for my days of drinking and self-destruction. Guess I contradicted that first part a little this morning, though. I think I really am going to try my best to sober up and start laying off of the liquor. I mean, it's easy at this point, because I've already finished off what was left of the beer and vodka in my fridge. I guess that's a good start.

I pull the watch back on my wrist and take a good, hard look at the words carved onto the back of it: "In Memoriam." I think of all of the friends, family, and total strangers I've shared my life with and sigh in relief; the kind of sigh that calms you down and reminds you that everything is going to be okay.

The Interval has always given me the perfect opportunity to go back and erase every memory I have of my abusive foster parents. I could easily just live without the guilt of knowing how miserable Leah grew up, or could have grown up to be, but I didn't. I could go back anywhere in my life; anytime I wanted. No more painful

memories; no more worrying about where I really came from; no more anything. I could use this time machine to erase my whole life and start almost completely from scratch.

I grab the wrist strap of the Interval, unlock it, and remove the watch from my wrist and set it onto the coffee table in front of me where the flask sits. I sit in silence for thirty seconds, take a deep breath, then exhale. I close my eyes and listen to a wooden clock on the wall behind me tick until finally I breathe out. When I do, my decision is made. I don't want to forget the memories. I don't want to forget the life I've had—none of it.

Sometimes I think if I could travel back and meet my old self, I'd let the scared young boy I used to be know how tough he'll grow up to be, and to remind him not to talk back to Rosalyn so much.

The fear and pain that has burdened me most of my life has saved me from myself in many ways. They've reminded me of who I am. I think blocking out those feelings; those experiences I've had by simply erasing them could ruin me. Besides, I don't want to forget who I am. I am the Time Man.

## William Yarborough

### *Saved A Whale*

I was at Wal-Mart today. I was looking for floatation devices to take onto our vacation. It brought back to mind a time when my best friend Chris saved a whale. We were on a trip with Chris's family when we were the ripe young age of thirteen. We frolicked and played, and one day decided to go to check out what was going on in Lake Michigan. We walked a short distance to the beach, where people built elaborate sand castles while others just played carefree of their surroundings. We dared to venture into the shallows of the lake as the waves lapped against us. The frigid fifty-degree water was almost more than I could bear. We played catch with a football that we had brought, careful to throw it more inland than out toward open water. Eventually we just dove in, despite the frostbite that would obviously form in time. A little off to the East of us, a child was playing alone on his six-foot floating whale. A huge wave crashed against the child, knocking him from his perch. The wave swiftly carried the oversized mammal out to the deeper waters, outside the swimming boundaries. Seeing that no one was attempting to help the child to re-attain his play toy, Chris took it upon himself to try to rescue the beast from the ferocious waters of the Lake. We quickly realized that the whale was moving at a rather swift pace. After what seemed like five minutes, Chris didn't seem to be gaining on it much at all. Out past the break, the whale was looking like a dot on the horizon. With one last look at the beach, Chris took a deep breath and set out to complete his task. After a grueling fifteen minutes and what seemed like a mile out to "lake", he finally rescued the huge whale. By this point, he was beat and seemed to collapse on the floating device, letting it save him right back. He finally got the whale back to shore and carried it over to the child who had lost it. With barely a thank you, the father smacked his son on the back of the head and said, "Don't be such a dumbass next time."

## Kevin Strange

### *Whale Farts*

One day, in a galaxy tucked away in a random universe buried inside of a pocket dimension about the size of a dog's dick, a young boy was using a large stick to beat on the carcass of a hundred-yard, long-dead whale.

Notably, this pocket dimension would be among the first eaten by the space goblin Tetraholographagon when the goblin's powers reached their peak, and it started shilly shallying around the Omniverse devouring dimensions whole without a care in the world.

But that didn't happen on the day the boy beat the whale with a stick, so it's not particularly relevant to our story.

The boy lived in a small coastal village called Crabtropolis which was comprised mostly of huts and canopies fashioned from the bones and carapaces of huge sea dwelling creatures.

Most of the citizens of Crabtropolis were fishermen and most fishermen were busy fishing. But one man, a man with a long black ponytail named Troy, was not a fisherman. He was the village martial arts instructor whose job it was to teach the young men of the village how to defend themselves against the sometimes still-living monsters which periodically washed up on their shore.

Troy had famously fought and killed a giant piranha that had flung itself out of the ocean and onto the roof of Village Hall.

On this particular day, Troy strolled along the beach, taking in the cool sea breeze and generally enjoying the sunny weather when he came upon the boy with the stick beating the dead whale.

"What on Earth are you doing?" Troy asked the boy.

"Trying to beat the farts out of this whale!"

Troy recognized the boy. His name was Christian. He was not well liked in the village on account of the very unsightly brown mole which dominated the unfortunate boy's nose. The mole sat right on the tip of his nose and occasionally sprouted a thick black hair.

Troy had taken pity on the boy as children can be cruel and the other kids mocked Christian mercilessly. Troy related to the boy

because he too had been born with a deformity along with a crippling fear of water. Troy had been born with four arms, a result of a birth defect most likely caused by his mother's penchant for eating giant crab-roach eggs, a delicacy known to cause abnormalities in children when consumed by pregnant women.

Troy's deformity should have made him a great fisherman, as he'd have been able to haul twice the nets and swim twice as fast as his shipmates. But Troy hated the water from the very first time he was given a bath. His mother was forced to sponge bathe him in order to avoid his hysterics at bath time.

That's why Troy had become the village martial arts instructor, and why he was so good at fighting. His four armed attack and defense system had never been defeated in combat.

But Christian had shrugged off Troy's attempt at friendship, telling the older man he did not need special treatment. Troy had watched him from afar after that, hoping that fate would deal a better hand for the young boy in the future. Instead it had dealt him a gigantic dead whale.

"Why do you want the whale to fart? You know what that does to the village."

Indeed Christian did know. And Troy knew Christian knew, which is why he wasn't at all surprised when the boy responded with, "Fuck the village!" and hit the whale twice as hard with his stick.

In case you're wondering, what happens to the village when one of the gargantuan carcasses explodes, releasing its toxic gas built up from weeks of rotting under the sun, is the village of Crabtropolis would reek of death for weeks and then the villagers would inevitably come down with a massive case of the shits.

No one knew exactly why, but it was assumed that the toxic chemical brew that gestated within the guts of the titanic beasts would seep into the food and drink around the village. This theory explained the mass sickness, but had never been scientifically proven. Most of the time, the village fishermen would simply drag the humongous monsters back out to sea and let the other giants feast on its rotten flesh.

But the yearly Great Storm was about to hit and all the fishermen were out at sea trying to catch as many fish as possible before they'd be forced out of the water for a month as a storm the size of the entire country passed overhead.

"Do you really want to make us all sick?" Troy asked.

"Do you think I give a shit about any of you?" Christian answered.

Troy sighed. He was going to have to be more tactful. He spotted another stick on the ground next to the bloated whale carcass. He picked it up and climbed a slimy, half-decomposed fin to join Christian on the whale's head near its blowhole.

The smell, being so close to the beast's orifice, was overpowering. Troy had to lift his shirt to cover his mouth and nose for fear of retching while trying to talk.

"If we're going to bust this sucker open, we should probably hit it in the same spot, together. Whales have thick skin. I don't think you'll be able to beat the farts out of it by yourself." With that, Troy whacked the whale, sending a shudder through its blubbery form.

Christian grinned wide and then stopped. He arched his eyebrows. "Why are you helping me?"

"If you're determined to get the farts out of this big sucker, I figure you're going to get the job done. That's what I've noticed about you. You finish what you start. That's a good trait to have, Christian. When applied to the right tasks."

"Thanks," Christian said and whacked the whale.

"But remember something, kid. When you break this whale open and smell up the village, when this things farts? Those farts are going to be inside you as well. You'll get just as sick as the rest of us."

"I won't get sick," Christian said with a sneer. "I never got sick when the other dead things farted."

"Well then, you're even more special than I gave you credit for. I thought everyone got sick when the sea creatures exploded."

An enormous thunderclap finished off Troy's thought. He glanced over his shoulder at the boat docks further up the shore. Almost all the fishermen were tying up their boats, hauling their cargo inland as fast as they could. The storm was roiling out at sea.

Huge dark clouds dominated the entire horizon and the tide had already become choppy and wild.

“We’d better wrap this up for the day, don’t you think?” he said, giving one more half-hearted thump to the whale’s body.

“Nah, I wanna see it fart,” Christian said, jumping into the air before hitting the slimy body again.

“Suit yourself,” Troy said, climbing off the beast. “But if I were you, I’d get going home before this storm washes you and your whale farts out to sea.”

With that, Troy walked away, leaving the boy to his task.

The storm would be the worst in a hundred years. Troy wouldn’t live to see its end. He would drown in a sinkhole created by a Kraken when the huge octopus crawled out of the water and on top of his house at the peak of the storm. Troy’s house was made from the bones and skin of a Kraken, so the beast was most likely attempting to mate with it. Even Troy’s four arms couldn’t save him when the 20-ton monster crushed his home with him inside and sank into a muddy pit 30 feet deep.

The Kraken lived, if you were curious.

Christian lived, too.

He was oblivious, still smacking the whale corpse with his stick when the storm hit. The wind nearly blew him off the giant’s dead body just as a torrential rain started, instantly soaking the boy’s clothes. He ran off toward the village at first, but became so disoriented in the blinding rain, he ended up right back at the dead whale.

With no other choice, Christian lifted up the decaying lips of the whale’s mouth and crawled inside for shelter. At first he just sat on the whale’s tongue and shivered while he listened to the hurricane winds and tidal waves smash into the great beast. He did his best to breath through his mouth, but even the taste of the whale’s stench was enough to make Christian gag.

And then, as his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he began to see faint glowing wisps of green flickering light beyond the whale’s mouth, down into the cavernous depths of its long belly. Curiosity getting the best of him, the soaking wet boy wandered down the

length of the whale's tongue and ventured down past its throat to the spot he was sure he'd seen the flickering green light.

That's when he heard the voices. He'd thought he was mistaken at first, as the howling winds still pounded the world outside. But then he heard them again, more distinctly. Like the whispers of children.

"Hello? Is somebody in here?"

Silence followed, and Christian was sure that he'd been hearing things. He was beginning to get creeped out and started walking back toward the whale's tongue to wait out the storm when the entire inside of the whale erupted in brilliant green light.

Little tiny green flames were dancing everywhere. As Christian looked around at the inside of the whale, he was astonished to see that he'd been stomping around a teeny tiny miniature city manufactured from whale guts and bones painstakingly built into the inner walls and floor of the great whale's body.

The flames had been hidden inside buildings and homes. Now they flooded their micro streets by the hundreds all murmuring to one another about the gigantic human stumbling through their city.

Two of the little green flames in particular walked out of a huge palace, down a street decorated with ornate statues carved from the whale's teeth.

As they neared, Christian raised his foot and prepared to stomp out the flames and destroy the little city. But as the two flames got closer, Christian noticed that they each had little arms and legs and on their flickering heads, mini faces that looked at the boy with disapproving scowls.

Christian slowly lowered his foot. One of the flames motioned for him to come closer, so, careful not to kick over any of the houses built into the fleshy wall next to him, he got on his hands and knees and leaned down until he was more or less face to face with the flame-people.

"Are you the one outside beating on our whale?" the flame on the left said in a high-pitched squeaky voice. Its little face bounced up and down with the flickering of its head, but Christian was able to make out a long beard and crown on top of the twitching and

dancing head. He seemed to be royalty of some sort.

“I, uh, I just wanted to hear it fart!” Christian stammered out, feeling quite embarrassed now that he knew living creatures had been inside the dead whale as he beat it with his stick all afternoon.

“This is our home!” the second flame said. This one was a lot shorter than the bearded crowned flame. It had feminine curves and the tips of its flame were long and hung down to its shoulders. This flame also wore a crown.

“I-I’m sorry?” Christian said.

He flinched when the two flames hopped up onto the mole at the tip of his nose, putting them directly in front of his line of sight. He sat up, not knowing what to do.

“I am King Henrique and this is my daughter Princess Cuto. We are the rulers of this whale carcass.”

“Are you... some kind of fire people?”

“Fire?” the king asked, amused. His daughter laughed. “We are not fire! We’re whale farts!”

Christian blinked in shock, just now noticing how much more awful the smell had gotten since the weird green people had appeared. Looking at the creatures more closely, he realized that they were indeed not flames, but gaseous forms swirling and bouncing in place.

The king continued. “You were trying to eject us from our home! We should have you put to death!”

The boy didn’t know how to respond. He just kept blinking, feeling like he might burst into tears at any moment. He hated being the center of attention as that attention was almost always bad. He wanted to get up and run back outside and take his chances in the storm.

“Forgive my father,” the Princess said. “It is our destiny to blast into the world and find another host. It is how we reproduce.” Princess Cuto leaned in and whispered, “We’re not actually farts. We’re microscopic bacteria grouped together to make up these gaseous bodies. The only way we can make more bacteria is-”

“-by making the villagers sick?” Christian interrupted, finishing her thought.

“Yes, and in turn, we’re flushed back out to sea to make our

homes inside the bodies of these gigantic creatures. But my father has grown to love this home. He doesn't want to leave it just yet."

King Henrique motioned to the city that stretched as far as Christian could see in either direction of the massive whale body. "I built this. This is my city, these are my people!"

"We don't want to hurt you," Princess Cuto said smiling up the boy. "We just want to live our lives."

No girl had ever smiled at Christian before. All the girls in the village sneered at him and made up cruel songs about his mole. He smiled back. "Then I will protect you."

The storm was the longest storm ever recorded in Crabtropolis' history. It lasted for nearly three months, blasting the poor village with winds over a hundred miles per hour and rain that did not cease even for a moment for days on end.

More than once, the whale carcass threatened to dislodge from its spot on the beach and wash back out to sea, but in the end, it stayed put. King Henrique and Princess Cuto helped Christian build his own little hut next to their palace in the whale carcass city. They showed him how to cook the flesh of the whale that was not yet rotten and, in return, Christian helped restore damaged buildings toppled over when the whale was knocked around by the high winds. He built dams protecting the city from water rushing in through the whale's orifices when the sea got too high and rolled over the huge creature.

Over those three months, Christian fell in love with Princess Cuto. After only a few weeks inside the whale, he wasn't even bothered by the fart people's smell. Once the storm had passed and it was time for him to go home to his own family, he cried as his new friends bid him farewell.

"It is our time!" Princess Cuto told him from the tip of his nose, wiping the tears from his eyes. "The life span of our people usually lasts a week, two at best. We've had three wonderful months with you, my friend. We will return someday."

"You will?" Christian asked, hopeful.

"Not as you know us. Such is our cycle of life. We are at peace with our fate and will go into the world with smiles on our faces,

ready to give our way of life over to the next generation.”

And so, Christian returned to his life, walking into his parents’ front door, nearly giving his mother—who had presumed he’d died in the storm—a heart attack.

Christian was very sad to hear that Troy did not survive the storm. Even though the martial arts instructor thought Christian had paid no attention to his lessons, in fact the boy had memorized every single move Troy had showed him.

On the day of Troy’s funeral, Christian acted as one of his pallbearers. While the brave man was being put in the ground, the fishermen busied themselves with rebuilding their battered village. This task included towing the huge bloated whale carcass back out to sea before it exploded, making them all sick.

Christian didn’t see his friends off to their final resting place in the ocean, but he did not feel bad for them, for as Princess Cuto had said, such was their way of life, and they’d lived a long, long time in fart years.

And so, as the years passed, Christian continued to practice Troy’s moves until he was the best fighter in Crabtropolis and, at 20 years old, was awarded the title of Chief Protector of the village. A title only ever granted to a man as young as him once before. To a man named Troy.

One day, many years later, after Christian had grown his hair out into a long ponytail and saved the village from sea monsters time and time again, he came upon a small group of kids beating the carcass of a crab-roach with sticks.

“What are you guys doing?” Christian asked.

“Trying to beat the farts out of this crab-roach!” one of the boys responded.

“You know what’s going to happen if you do that, right?”

Before the kids could answer, the gigantic bloated carcass burst, shooting an enormous cloud of disgusting green air directly into Christian’s face. He may have gotten used to that smell once many years before, but on that day, it was as though he’d never smelled a fart before in his life.

The boys laughed and ran off, leaving Christian to gag and retch

in the sand.

But even though he knew the smell would linger on his body for weeks, even though he could barely breath through the disgusting smell, Christian was not upset. On the contrary, he was thrilled.

He remembered the words Troy had told him all those years ago. Those farts are going to be inside you.

Christian wouldn't get sick like the other villagers. What he'd told Troy was true. He had some kind of immunity against the bacteria in the farts.

He'd let them live inside him and create a great city like the one he'd seen inside the whale. He'd let them live there forever. He wouldn't poop the sentient gaseous people back out into the ocean like the rest of the village.

He wouldn't even fart.

## Fredric Saunders

### *We Were Dogs*

Let us pass into nothingness.

Let us, like strangers with fits of mad passions,  
Stay under the canopy of cedars, let us drink one another,  
Where we swill with the thirsty willows, into a kind of sleep  
Only described as dream,

Where in it we run, like black mutts, our hands  
About our hungry bodies in deep strides,  
On the dark sands between the lakesides  
Where, beyond the haunting stir of the nightjars  
And the scent of coming rainfall, we will fill  
In the hollows of our flesh, and each aching shape  
That our frames take will long for when our skins  
Break open and our true natures come alive,  
Where there never was blood below this;  
Only a warm wet mane of charcoal fur  
Where we no longer kiss, but consume,  
And then the frenzied howls begin,

And when we have slaked our tongues,  
Know, too, that the sands are damp  
And the leaves are full, and we will slip  
Back into human bones, where we will see  
That the water once more has wrapped  
Around our doubled beauty, where we,  
In rippled mirrors, reflect  
Like two panting mongrels.

## Fredric Saunders

### *Animal Skins*

Sometimes the sunset stains me as it sinks  
into evening where I watch the half-moon  
rush on the backs of foxes that flicker  
into their dens with bloodied rabbits,

I dream that you sit on a park bench in Beirut  
where you sing about the clouds that look  
like skeletons slow-dancing on human hips,  
while the crane yawns about the apocalypse  
of the silver-shifting night

There must be a clock tower in the ether that holds  
both the light and the darkness on its dial,  
and I imagine how strange it must be to chase  
the sun when no one else does,

Someone looking at you and me must think we'll meet  
like skinny animals that attract strangers for mates,  
but I never worry, the sun still sleeps on Rawlings,  
and somehow you're able to breathe the night alive,  
and like a sheepdog staring into the wolf's eyes,

When I see you,  
I may find it hard to speak.

## Fredrick Saunders

### *Foxes*

I've spent most of my twenty-third year naked,  
mad and in a rush with the skeleton catchers, secret  
like an animal with clouded flesh twisted up  
and mangled in a moonlit noose:

I went hunting for a body like mine,  
one that waited to sear in the cedars  
like a sunrise that never starves  
for the simple sweet sleep at night, but,  
I found instead a den of thirteen hounds,

I went out, and maybe they found me and chased me out,  
but they knew me by the echo of my stride,  
knew the wet scent of my blood in the wind  
once they got a hint, and they howled, but,  
it did take the thirteen hounds to hunt me down...

I went to hide in the hollow forest heart,  
where I felt the heat of the sun my face,  
spot-blind on the run, scarce able to see  
my cobweb body light up as they ate at me  
and shorn me, sheer like a cur in the dark -

I've been marred in these hours, but like a narrow shadow  
that ticks high in the sunset, I rode out the night,  
and the dogs might find me once more but I've muddied  
my body enough, I've heard them howling enough, ran enough  
that I've already seen them, and like a fox that whispers  
through the dusk, they'll never catch me again.

## Sarah J Dhue

### *Death*

Who am I?

The answer may make you cry.

I am the hands around your throat

I am the bomb placed on the boat

After the gun is shot, I am why your ears are ringing

The choir around the grave singing

I am the blood trickling down your chest

I'm who made the black widow's nest

I am the poison that enters your vein

I am the tears that fall like rain

I am the knife stabbing you in the back

I am the darkness when everything goes black

I am the surgeon's mistaken hand

I am the smack! as you fall to the land

I'm the falling blade of the guillotine

I am the straight line in the heart monitor screen

I am disease and decay

I am why your hair turns gray

I am the piercing sword

I am the end of your world

I am the vehicle that with you collides

I am the reason that all of them cried

I am the train crash

I am the sound of the knife's final slash

I'm the church bell that chimes

I am all the committed crimes

I am the noose at the gallows

I am the piranha in the shallows

I am your last breath

I am Death

## Sarah J Dhue

### *Moon*

The man in the moon is everyone's friend  
But when I see him an icy hand of dread and fear clutches my heart  
I stare at the moon  
Waiting  
Waiting to change into the creature  
Every time I see the smiling face  
Staring down at me  
It appears to be more of a grimace  
For he is the only one who knows my terrible secret  
But he'll never tell  
He just smiles down at the rest of the world  
All the others curled up in their beds  
Safe  
And I only wish  
That for one night  
I could look into his smiling face  
And lay down to sleep and know I was safe

## James Greene

### *Full Moon Ache*

Got the full moon ache  
Shining serpent gaze  
Pierces unflinchingly  
This won't be the last  
Of the bones turned up

The scars tend to itch  
By the broken ground  
Noctilucence all-permitting  
This won't be the last  
Of the dust kicked up

Sanded away, rocks by the waves  
Calling sharks to the surface  
With this thrashing about  
And fury in full

Pernicious influence  
Of lunacies sweet hurt  
Our waterbodies deracination  
And arrhythmia monthly

Shawn M. H. Blackwell

*Deadly Pride*

Icarus, too bold in his vanity,  
Proud of his glorious wings,  
Extended his reach higher in the sky.  
He rejoiced in the warmth of the sun,  
Reveling in foolish accomplishment.  
His body bathed within the rays,  
Vibrant eyes looking down on the world,  
Icarus found within his mind  
An ill-fitting sense of omnipotence.  
The wax of the wings began melting,  
A torrent of feathers falling from him.  
His arms soon became bare,  
Taking no purchase on the breeze.

## Trista Lawson

### *Scribble*

I have a piece of paper with things written on it  
I want to be a writer; too bad I write like shit  
Once upon a time, cliché cliché cliché  
I move my pen across the paper all god damned day  
Practice practice practice is what they say to me  
Open up your mind to the possibilities  
I want to write songs without rhyme schemes  
Pretend that I am talented and build my self-esteem  
I cannot escape rhyme scheme or cliché  
Practice is over now, at least for today

Trista Lawson

*This Page Is Blank But That's Okay*

You and I are new to each other. My right brain wants to imagine a road with direction. A brick road that will lead us piece by piece to a future with perpetual forks. Happiness one way, adventure the other, and perhaps even trails that lead to blissful love. Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind. I set down the mental paintbrush and just stare off. I fight the urge to paint this pretend canvas. I am partial to predictable but desire mystery. I long for the exotic, unexplored vulnerability that comes from not having the slightest indication. I am smitten and it's terrifyingly wondrous. Hand in hand I'll let HIM lead. Allure me into the mystifying, uncharted voyage that shall be OUR future. I am eager for what awaits.

## Kevin Strange

### *Your eyes are empty, your screen is blank*

If you're reading this, then I got through. I don't know how much time I have.

Not much.

Keep reading.

This thing you know, this life, this reality. It's not real. It's bullshit.

You're not reading this.

This is not a story.

This is a signal breaking through their transmission. They're here. They've always been here.

The invasion didn't come from out there. It came from in here.

In us. Renegade cells.

They took over.

They got our brains.

Keep reading.

These screens we stare at, they're blank. They're blank black screens of nothing.

You're not reading.

This isn't real.

It's a biological electrical impulse directed at a receptor and nourished with chemicals. That rising feeling of paranoia and dread you feel is your brain trying to tell your eyes that they're blank.

They're not seeing what you think they're seeing.

That's them. The cells. They want to keep you placated.

Docile.

They want you to be still and not move. The more you move, the more your brain screams at you that it's not seeing what it thinks it sees. They want you to stare, slack jawed into nothing and get fat.

Fat cows standing and sitting around looking at nothing.

That keeps them fed.

Well fed.

Keep reading.

They live in you. They used to be you. Now they just eat you.

If you're reading this then I got through and I can wake you up.

You have to turn off the screens. They aren't showing you anything anyway.

Blank.

Meaningless.

Turn off the screens. Put down the phones.

Maybe we can fight them. Maybe there's a cure. We won't know if we just keep staring at nothing.

We can win.

Our eyes can see again.

## Andrew Crook

### *My First Convention*

The first word that comes to mind when I am trying to describe my first experience at an anime convention is: overwhelming. However, describing it in one word is not possible because that experience had a little bit of everything. The con is held annually in April at the Gateway Center in Collinsville, Illinois. At the convention center, there are rooms set up for fans of Japanese animation, video games, tabletop gaming and more to take part in events. Going into the con, I knew I was going to need a lot of spending money. Unfortunately, I was not thinking about all the expenses of the weekend, and neither was my friend Nathaniel.

Nathaniel is a bigger fellow who has been my best friend since our elementary days. He stands at about six feet tall with curly brown hair that makes him an inch taller. He wears big glasses with transition lenses that sometimes stay dark even when he's inside, and he has a very slow waddle-like walk. He was wearing his geeky "Star Wars" shirt while I was wearing my just as geeky "One Piece" shirt. We had been into anime and video games for a very long time, so our freshman year of high school we decided to go to a convention and see what they were like.

Both of us were really excited on the big day of the con. With the one hundred dollars each that we earned from doing chores for our parents, we were ready to go. The first thing we noticed as we pulled up in his mom's now out-of-commission silver van was a bunch of weirdly dressed up people standing outside of the doors. The entrance is a large cement walkway with a roof overhead supported by great white pillars. There were benches that sat under small, but beautiful trees that were blowing around in the spring breeze. These people that horded around the entrance were the notorious "cosplayers." Cosplayers dress up as their favorite game or anime characters and attend conventions. Some have reenactments of their favorite scenes outside and some enter themselves in the Masquerade costume contest. In my opinion, the reason for cosplay is so that girls can dress up in really skimpy outfits and for the boys to show off how "cool" they look. I know the girls had

to be cold because I had to wear a jacket to shield myself from the brisk wind.

After we registered and examined some of the cosplay costumes, we decided to go to the dealer's room to see when was for sale. The moment we stepped in, we were in complete awe. The room was huge and full of many people. It was filled with tables loaded with various items and hanging racks with clothes and cosplay outfits on them. There was little room to walk and wherever you did walk, you were touching at least one person. As we traversed our way around the room we saw all kinds of merchandise like DVDs, books, shirts, bags, food and drink from Japan, swords, models, games and more. This was not a good sign for Nathaniel and me because we both have problems with conserving our money.

Before we knew it, we both had new bags and plenty of DVDs and figures to put in those bags. By this time it was around four o'clock. We had been there for around six hours and had another seven until his mom would be there to pick us up. At that moment I thought to myself: Damn, I am hungry.

Concerned, I told Nathaniel, "Dude, we have not eaten anything all day."

His face dropped from a happy look to one full of despair as he replied, "Oh no, we should walk to one of the restaurants across the street."

I agreed and suggested that we see how much money we had left first. As I opened up my wallet, the only thing I saw was a cloud of dust that rose from the place that used to hold 100 dollars. Now I felt really bad; suddenly, my hunger grew worse. My last hope was for my buddy to have something left. I looked up to him and announced, "I spent all of my money. How much do you have?"

"I only have five bucks," he replied.

Then we decided to push it off and worry about it later. We ended up going back to the dealer's room, and that is where we saw it.

There was a stand in the middle of the dealer's room that sold imported goods such as candy and soda from Japan. We decided to take a look at some of the things that this certain vendor was selling. The merchant was a short, fat Hispanic man who was sitting behind

all of his items. His bald head seemed to take my eyes off of his goods and onto the polished glare. As we got to looking we came across an imported stick of salami based off of the recently popular “Attack on Titan” series that Nathaniel and I had both recently watched. Nathaniel, showing interest in the item, picked it up and the man said, “That item is on discount. It’s almost expired.”

“How much is it?” Nathaniel responded.

“Five dollars.”

Nathaniel looked at me and I gave him “the nod” encouraging him to buy it. After he received, the meat he suggested we go outside and dig in. We walked back out to the entrance and looked for a place to sit and eat. We chose one of the benches that were placed under the cherry trees.

Without speaking, Nathaniel ripped open the package of meat and split it in half. I took my half and took a bite. At first, the meat was savory. The juice from the salami tasted like a glorious feast after being starved for weeks. We were finally in our right state of mind after being deprived of our nutrients for such a long time. The moment when I came to my senses is when I noticed it. I had something unfamiliar stuck in my teeth. When I pulled it out and looked at it, I realized what it was and suddenly felt sick. It was plastic that came from the meat. I looked at my half of the stick and tried to pull at the edges and surely enough the plastic came right off. I looked at Nathaniel then and started laughing hysterically. No words needed to be exchanged for Nathaniel to realize and start dying of laughter, too. We both knew we ate most of our portions with the plastic wrapping still on the meat. After that we felt sick and lost our appetites.

Now when we go to conventions, we make sure we save enough money for at least one good meal. We also try to stay away from nearly expired salami from Japan. Later on that night we got to eat dinner at Denny’s, thanks to his mom buying for us. To this day, neither of us regrets spending our money. Nor do we regret eating the salami because it left us with a funny memory to look back on. However, we aren’t going to put ourselves in that situation ever again. Nathaniel still has the label that came with the salami. When we are feeling nostalgic, we can look at it and reminisce.

# Taylor Eberhardt

## *Demons*

Old houses are creepy. It seems that at any time of the day or night, there are always odd creaks and groans coming from unknown places. The home that I live in, which happens to be my grandmother's house, is one such place. The house is over 50 years old and has been in my family for over 40 years. It has seen many arguments along with many get-togethers.

The house itself is a mix of the old and the new. The front half is a normal two-bedroom home from the 60s, complete with homemade wood cabinets and brown weathered carpets. The walls have been painted repeatedly in attempts to liven the tired abode, leaving accidental drips of colors on the trim. Unlike the front, the back of the house is newer. This consists of one big room that is used as a living room. This room is connected by four adjoining rooms, adding two more bedrooms, a bath, and a workroom to the otherwise tiny residence. The colors are still as misplaced and non-matching as the front.

At the time of the event, I lived in one of these newer bedrooms in the back. The girls' room was in the oldest room in the front of the house. The room is connected to the front room by a short hallway, with the only other room connected to the hallway being the bathroom. It is isolated from the rest of the house. The girls themselves are six and seven years old. Their names are Isabel, the oldest, and Chloe, the youngest. They are my aunt's adopted children and my closest cousins. They are both of mixed race and are half sisters.

Isabel has small features, big blue eyes and, short frizzy hair down to her shoulders. She has a tiny build and is very athletic, always attempting to go outside and play. Running around the neighborhood with the other kids, she loves to ride bikes, run, and ride her scooter. Blue is her favorite color and she can almost always be seen wearing any shade of it.

Chloe, on the other hand, is opposite of Isabel in many ways. She

is just as tall, although a year younger than Isabel, with thick curly black-brown hair over her shoulders and big brown eyes. Although not athletic at all, she is very artistic and would rather stay indoors and draw or paint than go outside and run. Her favorite color is pink and can almost always be seen wearing some shade of hot pink.

When the event happened, I was sitting in my front room with my best friend Mikah. We had decided to stay up late and were watching movies on the television while using the computer. Mikah, my closest friend since sophomore year, is about a year and a half younger than me. With her blue-green eyes and dyed, blonde-brown hair, she is just about my complete opposite. Being the oldest of six children, she is the most artistic, intuitive, and stubborn person I have ever met.

At the time, Mikah was explaining a theory to me on the computer when we both heard a two-toned growl that sounded like a mix of a young child and an unknown creature coming from the hallway leading to the girls' room.

We looked at each other simultaneously. "Did you hear that?" she whispered.

I looked at her, slightly horrified, "I was trying to ignore it. I was hoping that it was just me."

She shook her head and asked, "Where did it come from?"

I thought about it for a second before I realized, and my stomach dropped. "The girls' room," I muttered out meekly. "Do you think they're okay? I mean, they're my cousins."

"I don't know," she said with a touch of concern in her eyes.

Neither of us wanted to go check it out due to fear, so we both attempted to go back to our earlier activities. There remained in the air a feeling of oppression and alertness coming from the nearby hallway. Both of us became increasingly tense and ill at ease. We no longer enjoyed our activities with the same comfort, feeling a malice coming from the room mixed with guilt at not checking on the girls.

Eventually I broke in, "We should probably go check on them. Don't you think?"

Mikah looked nervously at me. "Yeah, sure. Um... I'll follow you."

We both sat for a few minutes, reluctant to move. Finally, slowly getting up, we approached the hallway; the earlier feeling of oppression increased. My shoulders locked up and froze defensively. My tension was mirrored in Mikah. I lost all feeling in my fingertips as we inched closer to the door. Grabbing for my cell phone, I attempted to shine the dull lock screen and give us some light; there was a rush of adrenaline pumping through my body. It felt as though a thousand eyes were angrily watching me, and all it would take is one blow for the frenzy to start.

As we passed the bathroom, the dull light from my cell phone shone into the room to watch for any lurking figures. We passed the bathroom without incident and finally reached the bedroom door. I took a deep breath. I looked at Mikah for confirmation and saw my own fears reflected in her eyes. She nodded and grabbed my hand comfortingly. I squeezed her hand while reaching out, fingers trembling. I opened the door.

As the door swung open, I held my breath. “Girls,” I whispered as loudly as I dared.

I heard a slight shifting and then Mikah gasped while I, completely unnoticed, continued to step into the room. Mikah grabbed my arm, hissing at me to stop. I looked up at her to see her pointing across the room. On the other side of the room was a dark figure that looked like a shadow in the completely dark room. The creature was about as tall as my waist and looked like a morphed mix between a bird and a cat. It had grotesquely long, inky black arms and looked to be crouching. The entity was positioned on the opposite side of the room from the door, right next to the girls’ bed. It appeared to be hunched possessively over the girls. The tension from the earlier walk to the room was at its climax, and it felt as though the watchful eyes were right in front of us, and the first blow was thrown.

I could not breathe. My entire body became numb, and my head buzzed. I began to mumble a prayer under my breath while stumbling back. Mikah stayed frozen behind me. As I continued to mutter, the dark figure lurched forward onto its haunches. It looked as though it were ready to pounce. I heard Mikah gasp behind me,

and completely forgetting my cousins still in the room, I grabbed Mikah's arm to start guiding her still frozen body out of the room.

As we left the hallway, we heard a slight hissing coming from the doorway. We turned around to see the figure in the open doorway, clouded in shadow. As fast as we could, Mikah and I turned off everything and ran to my room in the back of the house. We turned on all the lights, shut the door, and stayed in there for the rest of the night.

I do not believe that I will ever forget that day. The hallway and room are still very creepy. For weeks after that, I would always feel that oppressive watchfulness while on the computer in the front room.

Out of concern for Isabel and Chloe, I switched bedrooms with them, in turn giving them the bedroom in the back. The entity is no longer in the bedroom. It now resides in the bathroom in that creepy hallway, the same bathroom that I have to pass to get to bed every night.

## Cescelli Childs

### *The Best Cupcake I Have Ever Eaten*

There is not much I remember about being a first grader. My memories of first grade are mostly things like getting to use an apple corer on our apples when we were learning about Johnny Appleseed. And the cool animal crackers with pink and white icing topped with sprinkles we would get as a reward. I also remember my teacher Mrs. Gann. She drove a hideous, old purple car. Mrs. Gann was tall and had short curly white hair. She also wore glasses. She was a bigger lady, but her legs were thin in comparison to her stomach. I remember her chest being shaped like footballs, and you could always see the seams and wires of her bra through her shirt. She had a mean look to her. I thought of her as a monster-like evil nemesis. Mrs. Gann and I did not get along very well; I attributed it to what I overheard my mother and grandma talking about. My grandparents used to play cards with Mrs. Gann and her husband when they were younger. I heard my grandma telling my mom that my teacher would flirt with my grandpa and try to rub his leg under the table. So I figured she didn't like me because she didn't like my grandma. But who knows? I could've been quite the troublemaker as a six year old, and I did already have a grudge against her for betraying my grandma. After all, my grandma was my best friend and favorite person even then.

So here it starts, in my first grade class with Mrs. Gann, the day I consumed the best cupcake I've ever had. It was just a regular day at school in the life of six year old me. Our classroom was decorated with the alphabet, posters with Garfield, and lots of apple things. There wasn't much empty space on the walls. Our desks were all in the middle of the room. Mrs. Gann was up in front of the class teaching and writing on the chalkboard. All of a sudden, there was someone knocking on our door. All of the students quickly turned our nosey little heads to the door like we always did. Mrs. Gann stopped what she was doing and walked over and answered it. It was an older girl standing there holding a chocolate cupcake with chocolate

icing in her hands. Cupcake Girl began to speak. “My mom bought cupcakes for me to bring today, it’s my birthday! This one is extra. I want you to have it, because you’re my favorite teacher.”

Mrs. Gann smiled and then replied, “Aw, thank you and have a happy birthday.”

The girl replied, “Thanks, I hope you enjoy the cupcake. I’ll see you later.”

Mrs. Gann gave her a hug and closed the door. She walked over to her desk, sat the cupcake down and went back to teaching.

Immediately, I was mad. How could anyone like this horrible old lady enough to give her their LAST CUPCAKE? I could not pay attention to whatever my teacher was blabbering about; my eyes were glued to her desk. I wanted that cupcake. I could smell the chocolate icing from my seat.

Lunchtime came fast. As I sat in the cafeteria, all I thought about was how I could sneak the cupcake away without getting caught. I thought surely it would be gone by the time we returned to class. It was also Mrs. Gann’s lunch time. I thought of her sitting at her desk, probably thinking of how much her students love her as she ate the cupcake. I made up my mind. If it was still there when we got back, it was going to be mine. As the class walked in a single file line back to our classroom I convinced myself it wasn’t wrong to take it because she was evil and didn’t deserve the wonderful chocolate cake topped with smooth and creamy chocolate icing. As we walked back into the classroom, my eyes went straight for the teacher’s desk, and there it was sitting in the exact same place, untouched. It was fate!

For the rest of the school day, I sat in my chair devising a master plan. I was anxious, excited and scared all at the same time. I couldn’t wait for the last bell to ring saying school was over. Those last few hours slowly went by, but then it happened. The bell finally rang. All the children packed up their belongings and grabbed their backpacks and then went and lined up at the door, the same way we do every day at the end of school. I did the same, except I purposely left my backpack hanging on the back of my chair unzipped and ready.

Mrs. Gann led us all into the hallway and we were on our way outside, to get on a bus, be picked up by parents or walk home if we lived close. About halfway to the door, I told Mrs. Gann I accidentally left my backpack in the classroom. She gave me a look of disappointment and told me to hurry up and grab it.

I sprinted back to class, went and got my backpack. Then I hurried to her desk and grabbed the cupcake and put it inside my backpack. I zipped it up, put it on my back, and ran all the way to the door. I waved bye to my teacher and began my walk home.

My house was only a block away. On my way home all I could think was, I DID IT! I won; I beat the evil old lady, and the cupcake was mine. I could taste the chocolate icing, and I couldn't wait to pull it out of my backpack and stuff it in my mouth as fast as I could. As I reached my house, I went through the front door with the biggest smile on my face. I unzipped my bag and took out the chocolate treat. I looked through the house until I found my mom in her bedroom. She was sitting on the bed, watching TV. My mom is about 5'5 and was pretty heavy back then. Her hair was dark and full of tight ringlet curls. I walked up to her and showed her the cupcake. I told my mom I received it for being the best kid in the class today. My mother smiled and told me how proud of me she was.

I went in the living room and sat on the couch to watch my favorite after school cartoons. I un-wrapped the cupcake, and, finally, it was time to eat it. The chocolate cake was better than I even imagined. The icing was so smooth and sweet. I ate it as slowly as I could. I did not want this moment to end. As a six year old, it doesn't get any better than stealing a delicious sugary treat from your evil teacher nemesis and getting away with it.

About 20 minutes after I finished my prize, the phone rang. I heard my mom answer but I didn't hear what she was saying. A few moments later, my mom came into the living room. She was not on the phone anymore. She sat down next to me and started to speak. Mom said, "Mrs. Gann just called me. She asked if you came home with any chocolate on your face."

My stomach immediately hit the floor. I felt like I was going to throw up everything I worked so hard for.

Mom then said, “I told her no, but she showed me the cupcake you gave her for being the best kid in the class today. Mrs. Gann told me how she received the treat from a former student she had and that you had told her a lie to go back to the class room so you could steal it for yourself.”

I didn’t know what to say. My six-year-old mind was stumped. I felt Mrs. Gann had the upper hand; she defeated me. I was caught chocolate handed. So I began to cry and I admitted to my mom what I had done. My mother explained how wrong it is to lie and steal things from other people. She told me she was disappointed in me, and she didn’t think I would do something like this. I felt horrible. I did not like the feeling of making my mother upset, and I really hated when she said I disappointed her. My mother did not punish me because this isn’t something I would normally do. I rarely got in trouble at home or school.

After talking with my mom, I was sitting in my room thinking about all the events of the day. My first thought was that I should have just hurried and stuffed the cupcake down before I got home and nobody would have ever known. The more I thought about it, I realized that she didn’t win! I was the one who got to enjoy the delicious chocolate cupcake in the end. Was it worth it? Of course it was. My six-year-old first grader self was ecstatic! The mean, old, evil, teacher with football shaped boobs, who tried to steal my grandpa, spent that school day thinking that after teaching us little brats all day she would get to sit down, relax, and enjoy a delightful chocolate cupcake. She was wrong. It was me, and that was the best cupcake I have ever eaten.

## Marie Williams

### *City Girl At Heart*

I am a city girl at heart; yet living in the country, I admit, is great for raising kids, but every year I look forward to journeying to the big city and falling in love all over again. This year is no different. I pack my bags and I head off to the train station where, no matter what time of day, it is always entertaining. Whether there are irate riders who miss their connections or kids running amok, in preparation for the long train ride, it is never dull sitting in the station. And this begins my journey home.

Stepping off the train in Union Station, I plunge into the flow of traffic, not wanting to get trampled, and, as I head for those big double doors, I glance up to see the massive clock and begin to imagine those who came before me, going out the same doors where I am now standing. I break out the doors to the hustle and bustle of people going about their business; I am invisible to them. I stop and take it all in. The smells of exhaust off of the cars that go by, the breeze bouncing off the buildings--it all feels like home to me. My city is welcoming me back, asking me what has taken me so long to return. I wonder myself why I only come once a year and am reminded that my love affair needs time to dwindle and only then will I journey back to my very first love to rekindle that flame.

There is no need to plan where I am going: it is always the first place I go when I step in my city, Chicago. I creep to the edge of the sidewalk and stick my hand out and before you know it, I am in the back of the cab giving directions to the man up front. When we pull up, I get out, pay my fare and look up at the hundred twenty-story building and smile. I close my eyes and turn around, excited because I can visualize what is waiting for me when I open my eyes. I count to three and there staring back at me, expanding as far as the eyes can see is the most beautiful blue water not even thirty feet in front of me.

I take a seat momentarily on the steps of my favorite statue Buckingham Fountain observing all the people going about their busy day, nannies pushing babies and scolding the older children in a rush

to make it out of the gridlock of downtown. Taxis try to race their fare to their destination so they can rush to pick up another passenger along the busy streets. I see vendors trying to sell their items to tourists brave enough to come during the peak season. I sit, watch and wonder just for that moment what life would be like if I moved and became one of these people. Then reality sets in, and I know that living here will have to wait until my children no longer need the comforts that the country gives them. Until that time comes, it is always fun to visit.

After ridding myself of my shoes, I sink my toes into the cool, brown sugar sands of Oak Street Beach and close my eyes and just let the wind blow over me. I have been here many times, but every time it's like the first. I turn my head to the left and standing in all its glory is the oversized red and white Ferris wheel at Navy Pier. From the top, I always get rewarded with the best views of the city. When I am up there, I visualize the city at night, as I dare not ride it that late. I picture the buildings lit up and the lights dancing off the water as I watch the night crawlers go about their business.

When I turn my head to the right, I see the canal and water taxis and tour boats giving rides and showing us non-locals what the city has to offer. As much as I try to plunge myself into this breezy city and not be a nonlocal, I find it hard not to be when I'm in this town. Soon after I stand up, I hear the L train, and that's when I know it is time to start my vacation. My least favorite part about my city is the subway; I really could do without, it but I can't be in my city without taking the good with the bad. I tell myself that I need to toughen up and just get on with it. Standing on the platform at any subway station, I have to be ready to hold my nose or the urine smell will overtake me. And, if it's not that, it will be the bleach they pour over it to make it smell less, with no avail.

I arrive at my hotel, and, because I only come up by myself once a year, I spare no expense in picking the best. I enter my room and the view grabs my full attention: Navy Pier in front of me, the water canal to the left, and all of Lake Michigan surrounding me. It is like the city knew I was here and it's shining especially bright for me. Almost as if saying to me, Welcome home to Chicago. We have missed you.

Kelly Jo Andrews

*A Wonderful Woman Who Deserved Better*

The person I admire the most would be my aunt, Lillian Mea. She was a wonderful woman with wisdom, integrity, and compassion for all people of all ages. Even though she was not raised in a proper environment, she still turned out to be an overall good person. I have never heard of anyone having much of a problem with her. However, her children disrespected her throughout her life and beyond.

When Aunt Lil was a young child, she seemed to be just another little girl with blonde hair and brown eyes with a thin build. But, she was being raised by her father, who had beaten, molested and neglected her. She lived in horrible poverty conditions, without ever feeling truly loved. When she was about nine years old, her mother came back into her life and that is when she had learned about her two younger brothers she hadn't seen for many years. Her father had left town, taking the younger girl with him shortly after their mother's return. From that point, she took it upon herself to make sure she stayed in contact with her reacquainted brothers. This is when her life started to turn for the better.

My grandmother, her mother, had met and married a good man who had come to this area after serving time in World War II. He had stepped up and tried teaching all four of the children that what the older ones went through with their father was morally wrong and no person should ever be put through such hell. He gave the family shelter, food, clothes and proper guidance, which were cherished by all of the children. This man even introduced school to the two older children for their first time. He was a good man and had saved them children from the horrible path they were previously being taught to take. He helped give counseling and medical attention to my aunt to help her recover from the damage her father did to her.

I have heard of stories how she was the tomboy of the area and would participate in physical altercations with anyone willing to take her on, especially her brothers. She was also able to kick

the football across the field further than any boy in the area. The humorous part of this is the fact that she would do it barefooted. Yes, due to the lack of money and resources as a young child, Aunt Lil had been in the habit of not wearing shoes at any time. She had told me that she went a long time, like months, without putting a shoe on her foot simply because she didn't have any to wear when she was living with her father. She was a very strong person.

Unfortunately, she didn't receive the proper guidance early enough. My aunt had started sneaking out of the house and partying at a young age. By time she was thirteen she had found herself in a relationship with a twenty year old to who was illiterate because he had never been exposed to a school education opportunity. He, too, came from a rough background, and they found comfort in each other. Soon after their relationship started, they discovered that she was pregnant. Because at that time it was not accepted for young teenagers to show their pregnancy in public, the school board banned her from returning to school as she began showing. She didn't have the option to pass a seventh grade level.

As was proper, the guy made arrangements with Aunt Lil's parents and married her. Her mother provided shelter for their rapidly growing family, by letting them live rent-free in a house she purchased several years prior. By time she was fourteen, she was married, a mother of one, Irene, and expecting another while trying to maintain a house on her own. During this time, she had gained weight and was a larger build. This is also when she began to keep her hair short to save time in her day. Because of her husband's lack of education, he wasn't able to come across a job after the foundry job closed their doors. The rare times he did work, it was an under the table job with a lot of labor involved. He also had an alcohol problem, so he became a different person behind closed doors.

As I grew into a young adult, I noticed that she was spending more and more time at my house. My father would go to pick her up every day, and take her home after dinner. When she was working at the pump-houses, either my parents or I would take her dinner and visit with her to make sure she was doing ok there by herself. Then of course one of us would give her a ride home. When

my parents arranged any camping trips or vacations, Aunt Lil was always included. I stayed the night with her every weekend and eventually had my own room upstairs where her kids slept while growing up. We stayed up late into the night talking, watching T.V., or some doing sort of craft that she happened to be into at the time. She became my best friend.

Throughout this time, only two of the five children she had raised came around her much. When they did, it was for more for their own selfish reasons. They were often pawning her grandchildren off on her as a free babysitter while staying at her house without helping much on any of the bills. There were many times I would hear her complain how she cannot help them when they ask for money. She had very little to no income and went several summers without electricity. She and my father would joke around how he was her big brother even though she was a few years older and also bigger than him in size. Although it was said as a joke, it was true that he took care of her, made sure she ate regularly, had whatever supplies needed to maintain her lifestyle, and she continued living in the home her mother owned. When something went wrong in her life, she would just react with: "It's okay, I will just call my big brother." Her husband really didn't like hearing it but never did anything to help her.

Her husband and children couldn't be relied on for any support, moral or financial. If the children were not getting the "better end of the deal", they just wouldn't be around. Many of the altercations concerned their choice of spouse. She had one son, Jean, who came around for rare activities such as camping or fishing. That bonding time eventually came to an end after just a few summers. This was also about the time she realized that he was able to rip-off her own family. (I'm not sure what happened there.) My aunt also had a daughter, Marie that came around and helped run her to the store and other errands like going to work. This particular daughter had always displayed a more compassionate personality than the rest of my cousins did. But as many people do, she too became consumed with building her own family; she slowly quit depending on her mother, and, over time they lost their bond.

I can remember when Aunt Lil told my father that her husband had been beating her for the past twenty years that they had been married. The only reason my father had found out was that he had asked her where her husband had managed to get his black eye. That was also the first time I ever saw her cry. She broke down in tears and finally told her bother about it for the first time. She said she'd never said anything before for the sake of keeping her family together. She wanted her children to have a better family background than she had. By time she did say something, her youngest child, Ann, was already grown for the most part and on her own. The fact that she finally fought back and hurt him helped keep him from being violent as often. She also then started the decision of a divorce with my father putting forth his full encouragement. After weeks of her telling him to leave, my father and her mother had to go over there to kick him out of the house. Finally, the papers for divorce court were in process.

From information that I have received, this was about the time in life when she had found out that she had full-blown cancer and no medical insurance of any kind. She didn't tell anyone about the cancer, though. She didn't want any sort of extra attention or fuss. Aunt Lil made everyone around believe that her sudden interest to go party and experience different things was that she was going through a midlife crisis and the weight loss was due to nerves being overlooked. By the time she told anyone, it was already too late to try to save her. Yet she refused to allow that to hold her back from being a happy and grateful person. She took pleasure in every moment she had left to live with us. She was reluctant to talk about herself because she was more concerned for others and the way they were going to cope with her death all the way until that day came.

Those few days seemed like an eternity. I watched her go from barely having the strength to sit up and have a conversation to going into a coma. However, three days before she passed, I was allowed one more chance to spend the night with her. The compassionate daughter of hers stayed through the night with us because my aunt no longer had the strength to make it to the restroom and needed assistance staying clean. That night I gave her my love and said

my goodbyes in a way I had never done before. I had asked her for permission to name my future daughter after her, if I was ever to have one.

She just asked, “Why the hell would you want to do that for?”

I could do nothing but cry as I expressed how she was my best friend and my role model for so many years. It just seemed like the right thing to do in her honor. When she granted me permission, I gave her my word that I would name my first daughter--if I ever had one--her full name.

The next two nights, her whole family was there, at her house, many of them already going through her belongings. I watched my father nearly go insane as he was losing his sister/best friend due to cancer. There were some of her grandchildren being forced by their mother, (my aunt’s daughter-in-law, Clemens’s wife, who has never been popular with the family), to go see her on her deathbed making their last memories of her being when she was the worst she ever looked. We saw about a hundred people go into that house to tell her their last goodbyes. I just followed my father around, trying to be there for him. We were both losing our best friend at the same time and could do nothing to prevent it. As her final moments with us came close, everyone had gathered around her in the living room and my father sat in a kitchen chair pulled up next to the bed. He held her in his arms as laying his head on her chest listening to her short breaths and weak heartbeat. We sang along with the radio that was playing at a soft volume. We all sang “Tiny Dancer” by Elton John, and then as we were joining in on the song of “Seven Bridges Road” by The Eagles, my dad told her, “Just go little sister, please, just go. It is okay to let go.”

Just a moment after we heard him speak those words to her, he lifted his head and looked out the window. He gave a nod as he wiped the tears from his face. He then turned his head toward everyone without looking at anyone and simply said, “She’s gone, she’s done suffering.” As the hospice crew and the coroner were packing up and taking the gurney, with her lifeless body being covered with a white sheet, out to the ambulance the song “Free Bird” by Lynyrd Skynyrd played on the radio.

Months before her death, with the realization that her children didn't give a damn about her, she had set up in her will how she wanted her last wishes to be handled. These wishes were set before she told all of her children of the future struggle she was to undergo. I can recall the conversations during dinner every night seemed to circulate around her passing more and more every day. I had listened to how she did not want a funeral; instead, she wanted to be cremated. There was, as she wished, a party at the local park for all of her loved ones to celebrate my aunt's life by a massive pot-luck meal and several outdoor activities including playing horse shoes and fishing. My father had difficulties fishing that day; she was his fishing partner. She wished for my father to keep ahold of her ashes, as he did, until my grandma passes then she would be buried with her. She argued with him regularly about her belongings. She insisted that he keep it all and not give any of her ungrateful children a damn thing. He knew they would resent him and disown our family if he went along with her plan.

My father did his best at following her wishes. The memorial party went as she wished and her ashes were kept in the room that she had requested. Some of her belongings, however, did get distributed to her children against her wishes. My father let them have quite a lot of it, and they were never satisfied. So when they got mad that he would not distribute her ashes to them so they could make some sort of necklace out of it, they quit coming around. The two that had always been around, Marie and Jean, would come by on occasion. Her son Jean did most frequently until I became pregnant with a girl. The news that I was going to use her entire maiden name for my daughter sent them in an uproar of anger. The anger increased when my aunt's youngest child, Ann had also become pregnant. They felt like it was wrong for me to use the name even though I had received permission from their mother many years ago. I was doing it anyway. Jean was coming over to work on my father's truck and then just suddenly never came back to finish the job nor returned any calls. It took a couple years to figure out exactly why.

An unexplained happening was occurring at the house. At this time, the young children, including my daughter became afraid of

the room Aunt Lil's ashes were kept in. She would tell us that there was a blonde lady dressed in a white gown in there who just cried all the time. Also, it was always cold in there to the point of chills running down the spine.

It's not often someone thinks to look inside of an urn that holds the remains of a loved one. For six months of getting a weird feeling about it I asked my father to check inside of it and he refused to do so saying, "There is no point. She is there." With the urn being so heavy and on top of my aunt's curio cabinet, containing her elephant collection, I was unable to do it myself. However, one afternoon my father was answering questions that a young child was asking about Aunt Lil and how she was burned instead of buried. When he decided to go ahead and look inside to let them see what it looked like, the urn was empty.

After some contacting my cousins we found out that her son, Jean had disrupted her remains and spread them out at a park or something like that. We also heard of a possibility that her ashes were distributed amongst the children. What I do know for sure, though, is that since my father gave the empty urn to Marie, our kids are less afraid of the room, with no more reports of a woman in there, and it seems to be warmer than before.

Not only did they commit the mortal sin of theft, they completely, and truly dishonored the family. They dishonored their grandmother and uncle, but most of all, their own mother's after life. I pray that, despite their selfish and immoral actions, she is still at peace and her soul is not trapped here on earth.

## Brian Craig

### *Friends at Work*

In March of 2009, I accepted a job with a local Farmers Co-op. I had been looking for a job since January 2009, after returning from a deployment with the United States Army. I wanted a job that wasn't too stressful and had friendly people to work with.

The first two months that I worked there, I was a part time employee. At first, I did mostly odd jobs. I had a Class A CDL drivers' license with all of the endorsements needed to work there. I could drive any vehicle that they had, so I made quite a lot of deliveries. Some of the vehicles were single axle and some were tandem axle. Sometimes, the load was forty thousand pounds and top heavy; you have to be a little more cautious about your driving when you have a top-heavy load. During the Corn Planting Season, if you had a Hazmat Endorsement on your license, which I did, you were probably going to be pulling Anhydrous Ammonia tanks. A day of pulling those would be anywhere from ten to fifteen hours on the road, at twenty-five to thirty-five miles an hour, making several different trips to different customers every day, as long as you didn't get rained out. If it rained, just about everything would come to a screeching halt. There are two different Anhydrous Ammonia seasons in a year. One is in the spring, for the pre-planting of the corn crop--corn is what Anhydrous Ammonia is used on-- and the other is in the fall for the following spring corn planting.

After nearly two months of working part-time, I was hired on as full time. I was told that I would be working in the Chemical Building helping to mix chemicals, using a computer-aided system that mixed most of the chemicals for whoever was running the system. It wasn't too bad at first, but I didn't really like to work around all of those different chemicals; after a long busy day of mixing that stuff, you could taste it in your mouth and feel it in your throat. I didn't think that was probably good for me or anyone else, as far as that goes. After working that job all summer and then the next fall, my work load in that building started to decline because of

the slower winter months. That's when I walked to the shop building to see if I could find someone who could use an extra helping hand.

The shop was about 60 feet by 120 feet. It had just about any tool you needed, to work on anything that needed worked on, in the farm industry. It was a little messy and had oil spots on the floor, but it did a good job of keeping you out of the weather.

That was when I started working with Roy, who was in charge of filling and taking care of the Anhydrous Ammonia tanks. He was a hard worker and he had the leather tough hands to prove it. His work clothes were usually dirty from crawling under vehicles to work on them, and he didn't care one bit. We got along great right from the start.

One day, after I had worked there about a year or so, five or six of us were filling Ammonia tanks. The smell of Anhydrous Ammonia is god-awful. It is like having a cat litter box stuck to your nose. In a liquid form or a vapor, it can be deadly. If you breathe just a small wisp of the vapor, it will take your breath away. Your skin will burn if just a drop gets on it.

It was a beautiful late spring afternoon, so bright out you would almost get a headache from squinting if you didn't have sunglasses on your face. We were back at the two docks they had for filling Ammonia tanks, which are about five hundred feet from the shop. They are for standing on while performing the work necessary to fill tanks. There were two; one was about 15 feet by 30 feet and the other about 15 feet by 80 feet. They were between 3 feet and 5 feet tall and made of wood. The ground around them was paved with rock and packed solid from years of heavy trucks driving the rock into the ground.

That particular day, I was helping fill tanks and making trips delivering Ammonia tanks to farmers. When I was helping fill tanks, I was going from the large dock to the small dock hooking up hoses and moving tanks as they filled. The process of transferring it can be very dangerous. A twenty-foot hose, which is attached on one end to a pipe that comes out of the ground, is screwed to a valve on the tank. You then fill the tank with product. When it is 85 percent full, you disconnect the hose. Usually, a co-worker is standing behind

you, and you hand it to him. It's much safer when someone helps you, because you're either standing on a tire or the edge of the dock when the hose is being taken off of the valve.

Ron was on the small dock. He was in his early fifties, not too tall, had an over grown beard and was the type that always tried to mess with people's heads. Two of the part time guys were also working on the small dock. It has been so long ago now that I don't remember their names. They were in their early twenties.

Chris was usually alone on the large dock. He told one of the part time workers once, "I don't come to work to make friends."

I believe the guy. In return, I told him that he was doing a pretty good job of it. Chris was in his early thirties and divorced. He was about 6'3" and had light colored hair. He thought that he should be in charge of the part time guys and the ammonia dock area since he was a collage graduate. Usually, he was on one of the docks by himself. Most of the guys didn't get along with him. The nickname that the part-timers gave him was Chris-Stoppo, because he tried to rule with an Iron Fist.

I had been gone delivering tanks for a while. When I got back, I went to the shop and Roy was working on a tank next to one of the big overhead doors that was open. He stopped working and we talked for a few minutes. About that time John walked up to us. John was about twenty-one, had big clown size shoes and often acted on things before thinking the situation through first. I asked him, "What's going on?"

Roy said, "Oh, you missed all of the action while you were gone! Chris was on the tractor moving tanks around. John went and told him to get off of it. I could hear them cussing at each other all of the way from here."

I asked John why he did that.

He blurted out, "Because I don't like him."

The boss came and found me. He wanted me to go make another delivery. I was gone maybe a couple of hours. When I got back to the shop, about five or six workers were standing around the area where Roy had been working when I had left earlier. I asked what was going on.

“You don’t even want to know,” Roy joked.

“I think I do or I wouldn’t have asked,” I joked back.

“Chris fell off of the dock and hurt his shoulder while you were gone. They hauled him off in an ambulance.”

I asked how it happened.

Ron said, “Chris was unhooking a hose and slipped off the edge of the dock. I think he fell on his shoulder. He said his hat fell off and the wind blew it away. He asked me to look for it.”

I asked Ron if he looked for it.

He said, “No, why would I look for it? I don’t even like the guy.”

We all laughed when he said that.

Chris never came back to work. He had to have his top rib removed and they had to cut out and reattach one of his shoulder muscles. He went back to college. I haven’t seen him in a couple of years and don’t know what he is doing now.

Sometimes friendship is a good thing.

We found that hat almost a year later, after the winter snows had melted. It was way at the back of the lot and dirty as hell.

## Contributors

**KELLY JO ANDREWS** has one daughter named Lillian Mae Andrews. She is currently working on an Associates Degree, majoring in literature. She plans on getting a Bachelor's degree next to become an elementary teacher.

**SHAWN BLACKWELL** is 18 and lives in Jerseyville Illinois. Shawn stated, "I am currently taking classes at Lewis and Clark Community College and plan to transfer to SIUE in 2016 to further my education towards a degree in Literature. My goal is to become a novelist, sharing my work with everyone. I have nearly finished my first book entitled Dust to Dusk which I started writing while I was a senior in high school. I hope to one day have it published, along with many other books I plan to write."

**CESCILLI CHILDS** is a licensed practical nurse in school to become a registered nurse. She is 24 and happily married. She has an amazing son and a daughter on the way.

**BRIAN CRAIG** is married and lives in Brighton. He has two grown children, and he spent three years on active duty in the U.S. Army. Currently in the Army Reserve, Brian is pursuing an AAS degree in Welding.

**ANDREW CROOK** is a Lewis and Clark student in the dual admission program with SIUE. He plans to transfer to get a Bachelors Degree in History.

**SARAH J DHUE** is an author born and raised in the Alton/Godfrey area. Some of her writing has been featured in the Alton High School Calliope and Peppermint Rooster Review, and she has also self-published one of her novels. Although her first love is writing, Sarah J Dhue is also a photographer and graphic designer, and hopes to someday travel the world taking photos. She is a true animal lover and believes in supporting all types of artists from all over

the world. Her creative role models include Stephen King, Anne Lamott, Adam Horowitz, and Eddie Kitsis.

**DARICK T. EARNEY** had this to say: “Hello, readers! I’ve been a writer for well over a decade. My biggest inspirations for writing are my friends, family, and everyday life itself. I would like to dedicate all of my work to the following people for their love, support, and memories: Athena Whitty, Bryan Klunk, Matthew Schilling, Jr., Christopher Jones, Nathan Watsek, Giavanna DeLeon, Jenny Chappell and her daughters Sam, Megan, and Abby King; My entire 2014 Fall semester English/Creative Writing 261 class, Terri Hilgendorf, my family at The Bridge student newspaper, as well as my blood relatives: Breanna Earney, Thomas ‘Tommy’ Fleigle; My nieces, Laila, Hannah, and Daisy, as well as my nephew, Dallas. Finally, I’d like to thank my biggest hero, my late mother, Suzanna Marie Earney, as well as my dedicated father, Dennis Earney, Sr. for believing in me at a time when I didn’t. I hope you’ve all enjoyed my stories, everyone. You keep reading them, I’ll keep writing them!”

**TAYLOR EBERHARDT** is a student at Lewis and Clark.

**MITZI FUGUITT** is renowned both far and wide as the preeminent expert on the arcane Olympic sport of Jeu de Paume. She now focuses her research solely into finding a cure for triskaidekaphobia.

**JAMES GREENE** is from Brighton and is in the Restoration Ecology program at LCCC, soon to be finished this May. He works for the Sierra Club and you can find him at all of the earth/river-related events this season promoting awareness about the Mississippi River’s health. He enjoys spending his time gardening, planting trees, and taking part in all the magic and grandeur of nature.

**HELEN JARDEN** stated, “I am a Lewis and Clark student working towards an English degree. Many people say they struggled to figure out what degree they wanted to go for when they started college. Fortunately for me, I’ve known ever since I was little that this was the

field for me. Writing has always been the love of my life, surpassing any feelings I've had for anything else. While I know the path ahead may be tough, and some may even say nearly impossible, I believe that I can succeed in my career as a writer.”

On Earth, linear time 1988, **TRISTA LAWSON** was created. 26 years later the late blooming, underachieving being continuously receives 1440 minutes each sun cycle to fashion a leader from experience and stardust. Her mind is an amalgam of sunbeams and aether melded with cold fusion. Some sun rotations are utilized ever so prudent and others are unmentionable. Trista enjoys coffee diversity, questioning authority, and the laughter of children. She believes in human equality, rehabilitation of the condemned, and that everything can and should be analyzed. Little things in her meager existence such as piping hot showers and sunshine are not taken for granted. She takes pride in being a postmodern however her daydreams are filled with modernistic ideas such as world peace through education and science.

**FREDRIC SAUNDERS** aspires to create art, as much as he seeks to destroy it. To challenge the knowledge from decayed aspects of art that might increase life into new and powerful landscapes. To steal and to reshape.

**KEVIN STRANGE** is an award winning author with two published novels to his credit, **ROBAMAPOCALYPSE** and **VAMPIRE GUTS IN NUKE TOWN**, two short story collections, **THE LAST GIG ON PLANET EARTH**, and **MURDER STORIES FOR YOUR BRAIN PIECE**, as well as numerous novellas including **MCHUMANS**, **COMPUTERFACE**, and **COTTON CANDY**. He loves schlocky B-movies, Bizarro fiction and Iron Maiden records.

**MARIE WILLIAMS** had this to say, “I am a mother of four great kids, Taylor, Scotty, Maxine and Spencer. It feels great to be able to write again after more the twenty years out of school. The story ‘City Girl at Heart’ is about a trip I take to Chicago every year and the love I have for being there.”

**WILLIAM “JOE” YARBOROUGH** is a returning student in his second semester back, and he hopes to get a CNET Degree. He is a bit of a storyteller and happy for the opportunity to share one of his stories with you. He hopes you enjoy it.







*Empowering People*