

THE PEPPERMINT ROOSTER



KALEIGH
GRACE

Peppermint Rooster Review

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“The Peppermint Rooster”
by Kaleigh Grace

Dear Reader,

This is the ninth 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 eighth year, we held a campus-wide contest for a student to design the cover. A panel of judges decided on the winning cover art, submitted by Kaleigh Grace.

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. 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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Mitchell Bushnell-Chamness

Metamorphosis

We all crawl before we ever learn to walk. Every single one of us were once an infant and then a toddler who depended on someone that served as a parental role in our lives. As time moves forward, we then become young adults taking on more and more responsibility until finally we're on our own. We all adapt and learn from the result of change—such is the case of when I was honorably discharged from the United States Air Force. I joined the military at the ripened age of 18 and scared isn't quite an adequate adjective to use to describe how I felt the day my mom dropped me off at the recruiter's office in Beaumont, TX to go to basic training. Still so wet behind the ears, I had no knowledge of what my life would be like for the next 6 years. The time I spent serving my country were beneficial and taught me how to be a responsible man. To this day I'm lucky enough to still be reaping benefits as a military veteran, however the transition from active duty to civilian life was not something that I would describe as pretty. Personally, I believe that separating from the United States Air Force has been one of the toughest decisions I've ever had to make. I went through many ups and downs. Some of the effects that I experienced after leaving my job were a sense of freedom, followed by depression, and then a feeling of courage and bravery.

This thrashing new emotion of liberation that I felt was so new and enticing; no longer was I on the Air Force's time, but my own now. My very last day working as an active duty Security Forces Senior Airman was ironically on the 4th of July in 2016 and the enormous amount of freedom that I felt was breathtaking. Within 6 years of my time in the service I lived in England, a few short months in Qatar in the Middle East, and then finally Missouri where I finished my enlistment at Whiteman Air Force Base. There were so many things I could do now as a veteran that I couldn't while still serving—one of them that is most popular among men who separate from the military is growing facial hair. (I haven't had a baby shaved face in years). I had planned trips to Iowa and Texas to have some much-needed time with family and friends. I was so excited and jovial. This newfound freedom

was everything I ever thought it was and more and I felt on top of the world. Everything felt perfect and since it was the middle of summer, I was very eager to visit Corpus Christi, TX for the first time to see my old coworker and best friend, Radcliffe as well as dip my toes in some sand on a beach. At the time she had also recently separated from the military a couple of months before me and everything seemed to work out smoothly for her. Initially I had planned to only stay with Radcliffe in Corpus for a couple of days, but since I no longer had to answer to Uncle Sam, I extended my vacation for a week. My only impending obligation was to get back to Missouri in time to start my classes at State Fair Community College in Sedalia, but that wasn't until late August, so I was "chillin' like a villain." The beach atmosphere had me in a trance that I didn't want to escape from, but I knew that eventually I would have to go back to real life and responsibilities. Because of my recent discharge I was now out of a job and being a full-time student would be my only source of income thanks to the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Feeling depressed was the effect that followed afterwards thanks to this life-changing event. 9 August 2016 was the day that I was officially honorably discharged from the United States Air Force and opposed to my last day of work in Security Forces where I felt so much freedom, this day I felt a wave of sadness. At the time I was living with my roommate, Paz, who, just like Radcliffe, was someone that I met and befriended through work in the military. Our relationship as roommates was always cordial since we decided to rent an apartment together back in 2015 and she seemed overjoyed about my decision to stay in Missouri after getting discharged. We spent a lot of time telling each other jokes, catching up on the latest season of *American Horror Story*, and gossiping about some of our coworkers. We got along great, were as thick as thieves, and told each other just about everything, but the day that I was discharged I began to drawback from her and everyone else. On that specific day I mostly stayed in my room with the door closed, in bed, and I cried. *Now, you as the reader should know that men cry crocodile tears and women fart and there's nothing wrong with either.* I finally reached the end of my enlistment only to be met with a bittersweet emotion at the finish line with what felt like a deep sinking feeling. It felt like I had a part of who I was as a person being ripped from me. For the next

couple of weeks before school started, I stayed at home in what seemed like a zombie state. Everyone including my roommate was still in motion, going about their daily lives with some sort of purpose while I was in a cocoon trying to pick up the pieces of what I thought I knew. It was very odd staying so close to Whiteman after leaving my job. So many of my friends and old coworkers treated me like some sort of guidebook of what or what not to do after getting discharged from the military. “What are your plans now that you’re out?” and “Have you found a job yet?” were some of the many questions I was asked by everyone. Cancelling plans with people as well as ordering food through the drive thru and for delivery became my normal even after my semester of college started--I ate enough pizza and Chinese for a small village. I felt lost and after a few short months into my very first semester of college everything that seemed upright was now upside down. Paz slowly began to give me subtle hints and jabs that I was lazy for not working and only going to school. One of our coworkers, Cintron, who’s originally from New Jersey, had also made the decision to leave the Air Force, and when he did, he left Missouri for good to move to Florida to stay with family. Like my current situation, he also was not working and just trying to make sense of his new life which Paz would comment about.

“I just don’t understand how someone doesn’t work,” she would say with so much judgment in her voice.

As my school semester was getting ready to be over and the Christmas holidays were drawing nearer, I made the decision to leave Sedalia and move to Columbia, MO since my lease with my roommate would end in January. I had just started dating my now husband, Drew, as well who lived in Columbia. I was ready for a fresh start and wanted to feel brave.

Finally, the effects of feeling a newfound sense of courage slowly started to take over me. If I was once brave enough to sign a contract for the armed forces and then make what seemed to be an unpopular decision to leave the military then I could also be brave enough to get myself out of an emotional decline. After finishing an unsuccessful semester of classes I decided to take on a new approach. I felt as if I was slowly gaining a new sense of how to go through my day to day and, although I was still crawling, I was now crawling at a higher speed. Drew was an enormous amount of help with me gaining some confidence

back. He did little things from helping me fill out applications for potential jobs and gave me a metaphorical good kick in the head whenever I needed it. I'm very stubborn and having that personality trait did not help whenever I was trying to obtain a class E driver's license for a potential package delivery job with FedEx. Since moving out of my apartment with Paz and having to pay bills on my own along with gaining an "other half," I was in dire need of a higher income. At the time I was a cashier at a fast food restaurant, Lee's Famous Recipe Chicken, making \$8.50 an hour. Now, to get a class E driver's license, also known as a chauffeur's license, in the state of MO, you must be 18 and pass a written test. The first time—*yes, the first time*—I took the test I thought I was so prepared since I studied questions online but that was most definitely not the case. My first attempt ended in a bomb and instead of attempting it again I cowered with my tail between my legs. It took a couple of months before I gained enough courage to try and take it again, but now it was imperative that I pass since my savings were dwindling down. A couple of those kicks from Drew and inspirational conversations helped me to pass it. I don't quite remember what my actual grade was but if I remember correctly, I'm pretty sure I barely passed, but "apples to oranges." That day was so exciting! I felt like I had taken ten steps back, but this one step forward felt like it was in the right direction for once—if I ever learned how to roll with the punches it was definitely after leaving Security Forces and the Air Force.

Separating from the military was everything but easy. If there was ever a time that I wished that there were an actual guidebook that shows you step-by-step what to do, I needed it then. I'd love to say that I go through life gracefully like a peacock and things come easy for me but that would be a terrible lie. I'm insanely stubborn and learn things the hard way as I'm tumbling through life like a ferocious chicken with its head cut off, but honestly, who doesn't. We're all learning and progressing through this crazy world trying to figure things out and although most adults can walk, sometimes we must poetically crawl through some of the effects of life to achieve our goals. I've come a long way since 9 August 2016, and I think back to where I was then to where I am now and all I can do is enjoy the growth that I've experienced. I'm married now to a loving (sometimes annoying) husband, still

great friends with Radcliffe and Cintron, and although I don't talk to Paz anymore because of our fall out from me moving to Columbia, I honestly wish her the best. Hopefully the effects of my life changing experience will assist me in the future.

Erin Gamblin

The Big Jump

It was a cold, clear-skied Saturday at the end of March in Greenville, IL. I had just arrived at the airport after an hour drive down one long, straight highway that almost seemed to never end. When I stepped out of my car and on to the sidewalk, the air was thin, cold, and harsh against my face. The airport, as it appeared from the outside, was no bigger than a Super Walmart. I thought for a split second to myself, “are you sure you want to do this?”, wiped the snot that was dripping beneath the cold tip of my nose on to my sleeve, and advanced toward the front door. I was about to do what many people consider crazy, reckless, or just downright dumb. I was just less than two months away from graduating nursing school and was experiencing the harsh reality of a very recent break up, so I did what any other 20-year-old, thrill-seeking college student would (or would not) do. I booked a skydive!

Upon walking through the door, I was immediately greeted by a petite, brown-eyed woman with brown hair pulled back into a tight ponytail who neither made contact nor spoke much.

“Can I help you?” The woman stood up and practically whispered.

I cleared my throat and choked up the words, “I’m here to jump.” It sounded more like a question. You could hear the uncertainty in my voice, but why? I knew I wanted to go through with this! After all, I had encouraged myself to do this, called the facility, booked the jump, and paid three hundred dollars. It had even been rescheduled twice over the previous weekend due to inclement weather. Standing here now, in the middle of the tiny, outdated airport with plain white walls in a room that smelled of dusty cupboards, reality began to set in, and it was setting in quick. The reality was that anything could go wrong. I was in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar faces, none of whom knew my family and loved ones, and I was alone. Just me and the shy, brown-haired woman. I had no clue what I was about to partake in, but was there really any turning back now?

The woman picked up her phone and punched in a few buttons, taking her time as if she had nothing better to do.

Beep, Boop, Boop, Beep.

There was a moment of quiet chatter before she pinned the phone down to her desk.

“Bob will pick you up at the door and drive you around back.” The woman nodded toward the door, gave me a half-smile and sat back down at her desk.

Bob was a kind, quiet man who was also petite. He had a slender build but still came off as a hard worker. He moved fast, swinging his arms at his waist as he walked, and seemed oddly determined for someone driving a golf cart around an airport campus, but he greeted me kindly and we shortly arrived at the back of the facility. He took me into a small room where I was told to watch a safety video and sign the waiver. Now it was time to suit up!

Since it was extra cold that day, around 35 degrees, I had to don a full body windbreaker suit before the harness straps could go on. I felt like I was about to roller-skate right back to the 90s. I met the two men who would be jumping with me, one while strapped to my harness straps and the other wearing a GoPro camera equipped to his helmet. Both men were wearing a full body suit to protect them from the cold, a black harness, and protective eyewear that would come in handy during the jump. The instructor (who would be strapped to the back of my harness) had long, brown dreadlocks wrapped up into a tight knot on top of his head. He was of middle height and appeared to weigh somewhere around 170 pounds, which combined with my weight of 110 pounds did not seem like much to fight against the winds and high speeds that we would soon experience. We shook hands and had a brief introduction before they tightened my harness and made sure it was on and adjusted properly. I tried not to imagine me slipping from the harness straps in mid-air as we made our way back outside and approached the small aircraft. It was small, loud, and not at all what I was expecting to jump from. Then again, what was I expecting? This would only be my third time in an airplane. I had flown to Colorado and back the previous summer, but I had never been in such a small, confined place, especially with complete strangers! I had prepared myself for this experience by watching videos of people going skydiving on the internet. For weeks I had daydreamed about this moment. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with a calm, relaxed sensation. To my surprise, I realized that I was not afraid. I had ended up right there at that moment in time because I had taken the steps

to make one of my dreams into a reality. Looking down from the tiny, square window, I watched the earth grow smaller and smaller until finally, it appeared that I was looking down at a geometric maze. The world did not look like the world anymore at all, in fact, it resembled a giant, world-sized crossword puzzle.

Then reality hit again. The side door of the plane ripped open! The wind smacked against the door of the plane with a loud roar, howling against the sound of the jet engine as if the sounds were competing to see which is the loudest. I looked out and down and all I could see was a vast blue sky with a sheet of white clouds spread gently below like a bed of cotton candy. They appeared so light, yet so heavy at the same time. As a child, I used to wonder what it would feel like to walk on a cloud. Would I simply dance across it like a Care Bear or would it feel like a big cloud of smoke as I sailed downward through the sky? Before I knew it, it was time to scoot out on to the ledge. Crouched down on all fours with my harness strapped to the front of the instructor's harness, I made my way out to the ledge.

"Three! Two! One!" he counted down before jumping off the ledge, propelling us straight out into thin air. There was about sixty seconds of free fall before the parachute opened during which the cold wind kept me completely breathless. The fall was so fast. The average speed to fall while free-falling during a skydive is 120 miles per hour. Suddenly, the parachute flew open, causing us to soar upward another several feet before reaching a steady place in the sky. I took this time to look at what was around me and take in my surroundings. This was truly a beautiful moment. Suddenly, I became so small compared to the rest of the world. I realized how small my problems really were when looking down at the world below me. For about eight minutes, we floated in the sky and time seemed to stand still. I looked down as we moved closer toward the earth, the patches of land becoming larger and larger as we came to a landing. I was instructed to put my legs straight out in front of me to protect them from the quick, hard landing. We landed on our bottoms in the center of a large, green field which to my luck was still wet from the most recent rainfall. I felt the cold, wet mud against the back of my suit. The smile on my face stretched from ear to ear as I had my photos taken. A familiar man on a golf cart was waiting for us in the field. It was Bob! He greeted us with a smile and asked how the experience was, but no words came out. I found myself completely speechless.

My skydiving experience was more than just a thrill. It was a challenge to go outside of my comfort zone and do something that would push my limits. This experience opened my eyes to the realization that I could truly do anything I set out to do. With strong will and determination and the courage to overcome personal fears, you can leap beyond your comfortability levels and discover many meaningful things about yourself. Don't be afraid to take the jump!

Jessica Hamel

Please Don't Take Me Back to Cancun

“Jessica, Jess, Jessica!” my boss was yelling my name as he came bouncing through the salon. “Girl we are having a swimsuit fashion show—you have to be in it!” *Um have they lost their minds? I stand 5'1, and I'm as pale as a porcelain doll. I'm also about sixty pounds overweight, and I had just given birth a few months ago. I have no business being in a swimming suit fashion show.* Fashion show day had come. As I walked down the makeshift runway as the whole JCP store watched on. I had never been more embarrassed in my life. I got down to the end of the runway where my boss stood. I heard him announce, “Jessica was our top CHI haircare seller in the salon. We are sending her on an all-inclusive trip to Cancun paid for by CHI.” *Oh my god what? But did you really have to put me through all that embarrassment to announce that?* That should had been my first clue as to how bad the trip could go. Never go to Cancun Mexico on a trip organized by a large company completely alone; you will get paired with a horrendous roommate, get stuck in Mexico, your flight home will be the flight from hell.

Spending days in a small room with a drunken stranger is absolute torture. My flight landed; customs check was completed. All I could think about was making it to the resort to find some food. I made it to the check in desk. I gave them my name they started to act like they had no record of a room reserved for me. The man started to speak to the other clerks in Spanish.

He turned back to me and said, “What is your roommate’s name?”

I said, “I am not sure my company never gave me any info on a roommate.”

He just looked at me with a blank stare. I’m thinking, *Oh gosh he doesn't understand a word I'm saying. I'm going to end up room less in Mexico.* After a long run around they eventually found my room under my roommate’s name, which happened to be Crystal. At least know I have a name to my mystery roommate. I made the thirty-minute walk to find my room. I finally found it, as I now was a hot and sweaty mess. I opened the door to a large room with one king size bed. *How will this work? I don't want to sleep in the same bed as a stranger.* Over in the corner of the room was a large jetted bathtub. Behind the curtains there

was a sliding door that lead out to a balcony. I got all settled and ordered room service. By that time, it had gotten late, and still no sign of Crystal. *Maybe she was not coming. So, I might end up with the room to myself.* I had started to get a headache from all the stress of that day. I decided I would go ahead and relax in the jetted bath. As I stepped into the tub, I heard bang bang bang on the door. I quickly changed back into my clothes to answer the door. There stood Crystal she looked as thou she had just stepped out of a body building magazine. I held the door as she lugged in all her bags. I informed her of the bed situation.

She said, “Ok I will call down to see if they can bring a cot up.” She told me she had friends staying across the resort. She was going to have drinks with them. The maid brought up her cot; we got that set up. She left to go for her drinks with her friends. I decided to go ahead and get some sleep. I was woken hours later as she stumbled back into the room. I could tell she was wasted as she could barely walk or stand in her stiletto heels. She tripped and fell landing on top of my legs as I laid there. *What in the world get your drunk butt off me.* She then jumped back up and stumbled to the bathroom. I could hear her getting sick through the thin walls. Finally, she appeared back into the room, and made it to her cot. *I better go check on the bathroom.* I walked into puke on the floor, the walls, everywhere but the toilet. *Great now I must clean up a stranger’s puke.* I made it back to bed after I cleaned up the mess. The morning sun came shining through the curtains to wake me. I then realized at some point in the night Crystal had gotten up and stripped naked. She was passed out all sprawled out with no blankets on. *I cannot stay in this room with this mess of a roommate. I did not come on this trip to babysit a grown adult.* I quickly changed to head to the beach.

Taking a trip like this you are at the mercy of the airlines and the company paying for the trip. As the days went by, I had started to get homesick. This was the first time I had ever left my six-month-old baby girl. I had started to count down the days. Only one more day then I will be home to my baby. Bing my notification from my southwest app went off. A hurricane had hit Texas. The airport my connecting flight was out of had been shut down due to flooding. My flight had been cancelled; not rescheduled just cancelled. I had started to freak; Finally, I got through to someone at Southwest they informed me the next

available flight to St. Louis was three days away. I ran down to the lobby to try and find the coordinator from CHI to see if there were any more options. We had gotten my flight scheduled, which still meant I was stuck for three extra days now. I asked do I still have a room to stay in, and a meal plan? As I only had one hundred dollars left on me. I had just finished buying souvenirs to take back. As I had planned on being home the next day. She carelessly says, "Right now we are not sure. You may not have a room or a food plan still." So basically, they told me I may be homeless in Mexico in a few short hours. My stress levels skyrocketed. As I waited for a clear answer my phone rang. It was my boyfriend. I gladly answered as I thought he would understand my stress. Boy was I wrong! I told him what all had happened with my flight, and with the room and food plan. He started to yell. He did not understand why I was upset as most people would be happy to be stuck in Mexico. I tried my best to explain my stress and fear. They eventually told me I would be able to stay in my room and my meal plan would still be effective. That was a relief, but I still just wanted out of Cancun.

Large airports and crowded planes are the devil. The day finally came I got to go home. I could not get my bags packed fast enough. The shuttle from the resort arrived at the Cancun airport. Staff stood waiting to help get your bags to the right place. I gladly accepted the help. As I handed the man a ten dollar tip, he stopped dead in the middle of the walkway to demand more. I glanced at the time I was about to miss my flight. Reluctantly I gave him what I had left. Ten more dollars that I had saved back for food to eat on my layover. I could not miss that flight; food was the last thing on my mind. The plane boards I made it I'm going home! We landed in Atlanta where my connecting flight to St. Louis was to depart from. I was in complete shock at how big Atlanta airport was. I realized I had to get on a tram to get to the area of the airport my St. Louis flight was to depart from. The tram doors seemed to smash people as fast as they moved. My reaction times had slowed way down as my blood sugar had started to drop. *Why did I let that bag guy talk me out of my food money?* I made it onto the tram, as it sped off, I almost fell backwards from dizziness. *I should have put my medical ID card in my wallet. If I pass out in this airport no one will know how to treat my rare blood sugar disorder. Please just let me make it to St. Louis safe.* My sunburn had also started to blister. I knew I had sun

poisoning on top of my blood sugar dropping rapidly. The airline came over the speaker the flight to St. Louis will start boarding in five minutes. This flight has full capacity, so please do not block seats. Take the seats farthest away from center aisle first. I found the first seat I could in my dizzy haze. I took a seat in the middle next to a very tall, large man that had taken the window seat. A few moments later another large man takes the aisle seat next to me. He almost immediately sprawls out spilling his body into my personal space. So now I was smashed between these two men. The pain from my sunburned shoulders started as I tried to shrink myself. Then the waves of heat started taking over my body. *I'm not sure I can make it through this flight without passing out or throwing up.* The flight from hell landed in St. Louis. I had never been so happy to see the arch. My parents stood at the gate with my baby. I grabbed her and the tears started to flow.

Cancun may be the perfect place for a private vacation. I may try again someday to have an enjoyable experience in Cancun. Thinking back on my whole experience it was not really Cancun itself that caused all the issues. But more the fact I did not have any control over my vacation, and the planning. I have learned my lesson to never travel thousands of miles away to a foreign country--where all the trip arrangements are completely out of my control.

Jessica Hamel

My Dog's Personalities

My family has a great love for boxer dogs. My father found a reputable breeder close to where we live. We went as a family to pick out our new puppy. I immediately fell in love with the ugly duckling of the litter. He was so chubby he almost looked like a Guinee pig not a boxer puppy. I gave him the name Pablo, after my favorite rapper at the time. He quickly became the best dog we had ever owned. When Pablo passed, I was not sure I ever wanted another dog. Well fast forward a few years. I had gotten myself out of a severely physically abusive relationship. I was about to move back out on my own again. After I had spent months healing mentally and physically at my parents' house. I realized I would feel much more protected with a dog in the house. So, I headed back to the same breeder. This time I picked out Onyx, the pretty boy of the litter. I quickly realized he was the dog version of my ex-boyfriend. Pablo was a much better dog because he never tore up anything, would never harm anyone besides lick and cuddle them to death, and he slept all night.

Pablo was a gentle giant that would never tear up anything; Onyx is the master of destruction. Pablo would keep his toys in like new condition for months; he had his babies as we called them. They would go everywhere with him, but they never seemed to have any signs of wear and tear. Any item he knew did not belong to him, he would never think about chewing on. We never had to worry about leaving him to roam freely in the house. As we knew we would return to everything just as we had left it. Adventure was not in his interest. He just seemed to know to not explore into places he had no business being. He used to amaze me on walks as most dogs like to explore new things on walks and sniff out new scents. Pablo would hold his head high as if he had no interest in his surroundings just his walk with me. Onyx on the other hand will go at his toys like it is a contest to see how fast it can be destroyed. I gave him his first tennis ball when he was just a tiny eight-week-old puppy. I walked away for a few minutes when I returned the ball was chewed in half with all the fuzz missing. Toys never seem to be enough destruction for his likening. He will chew furniture legs down to the bare minimum. My poor kitchen table and chairs look as if I have a woodpecker

in the house. His favorite thing to rip to shreds is my panties and bras. I feel as though we live at the vet's office with all the complications he has incurred from ingesting items. Because of this my salary goes to mainly vet bills; he is slowly putting me in poverty. Onyx is the adventure king, that seems to have no clue that everything in the house is not for dog's enjoyment. My little explorer has learned how to open the kitchen base cabinets. I will walk into the kitchen to him in the middle of all the pots and pans he has dragged out. The first time he pulled this stunt he got into a container of oatmeal and proceeded to empty it onto the floor and pee on it.

If you were to ever look up the term so gentle could only lick and cuddle you to death, you would find Pablo's picture, but Onyx is like a bull in a china shop. Watching tv and spending time chilling was his favorite past time. Pablo was the best cuddler for an eighty-pound lap dog. He seemed to know how to cuddle up next to you in a way you never realized how big he was. If anyone would come to visit or come home, he would get excited and stand by the door wagging his whole butt. As he patiently was waiting for that person to acknowledge him to get their kisses. His idea of playing involved a game of fetch, and a good dose of being licked half to death. But Onyx also known as the spawn of my devil ex. Has no care as to how rough he is or if he will hurt you. With Onyx there is no relaxing, cuddling, or tv time. His version of cuddling involves stomping across your lap rapidly all 70lbs of him. All my family and friends have stopped coming to visit. They have informed me that unless I get rid of Onyx, they will not be visiting any longer. They can barely make it into the door with out being tackled full force to the ground and stood on. I can manage to wrestle Onyx off them to help them back to their feet.

Like me, Pablo loved his sleep while Onyx seems to hate it. When he would realize it was bedtime, he would sprint to beat you to bed. Once asleep he would not move a muscle till morning. When the sun would peak through in the morning, he would look at you as if he was saying do, we really have to get up. Naps were also the best cuddled up next to him. Some days that's all we would do just lay cuddled sleeping the day away. I swear Onyx never sleeps. You must basically tie him to the bed to get him calm enough to fall asleep. Then within an hour he is back awake and hitting you in the face with those big paws. This

process goes on all night. It is way worse than having a newborn baby. Don't even think about taking a nap with Onyx around. You will either be beat to death with those boxer paws, or you will be awoken to the house being tore down around you. This has in turn caused me many break ups, as no man wants to be woken up all through the night by a crazy boxer. It's also starting to take a toll on my mental and physical health as I have now gone seven years without a full night's sleep. All I keep asking for is just one full night of great uninterrupted sleep.

Although Onyx is a big pain in the butt, he is so dang cute with so much personality you can not help but to love him. I've come to realize that Pablo was truly an angel sent from god himself. And such a rare form of a dog. Pablo for sure set my standards of a dog very high. It would be very unlikely to get another dog even remotely close to how amazing he was.

Isabella Harned

The Effects of Breaking my Finger

Basketball can be fun to play, but it can also prove quite dangerous. While I was playing basketball with a friend just for fun on January 3rd of this year, my index finger of my right dominant hand ended up colliding with his arm as we both tried to grab the ball at the same time. He complained of getting scratched by my fingernails, but I ended up with much worse—a finger bending backwards. When we came inside a while later, my finger still would not stop hurting, and it swelled up to three or four times its size even with ice all around it. That evening, my mom took me to urgent care, where they told us that I had fractured my finger—indeed, a tiny piece of bone had chipped off the growth plate because the finger had bent too far backwards and put too much pressure on the bone. The nurses splinted it and wrapped it up and ordered us to keep it that way for a long while. The next week, we went to an orthopedic surgeon, who inspected my index finger and at a later visit taped it to my middle finger and told me not to use it for six to eight weeks. Breaking my finger had many more effects on my life than I would have thought, the most significant ones being that I didn't get to learn to play instruments, didn't get to engage in any physical recreation, and had to learn to do everything with my left hand.

One of the effects of breaking my finger was that I did not play anything new on my ukulele, play the piano at all, or learn how to play the banjo. Before, I could pick up my ukulele and strum chords or fingerpick patterns to songs whenever I wanted to, but with my finger in a splint, neither was safe, or even possible. Even though I had only played simple melodies and chords for songs on the piano before, with a splint in the way, I could not play at all. After the orthopedic surgeon took the splint off my finger, I was able to use all of my other fingers to try to fingerpick patterns on my ukulele and eventually try to play the piano as well, both of which proved challenging minus one finger. Strumming was still out of the question, since moving my hand that much made my broken finger hurt. I had not played my banjo (that I had received as a birthday present a few months earlier) very much because school had kept me too busy, but at least I could use it to pick out the simple melodies to songs or

practice some chords. Having

a broken finger in a splint meant neither enough mobility nor available fingers to even attempt anything on the sophisticated instrument, even after the orthopedic surgeon took my finger out of the splint. Although aggravating, not getting to play my instruments for a long time let me become much more prepared and skillful with all of my other fingers before attempting anything new on any of the instruments, so that I would be ready when the time came that I could play them all again.

Another serious effect of breaking my finger was that I didn't get to engage in any physical recreation. Even going to my youth group became jeopardized. Before I had loved meeting with my friends and joining in the group games, but now I hardly dared to go in the fear that my finger would get hurt just by being bumped into. Even when I finally went, I had to sit out the extremely dangerous games at the edge of the room, watching in sadness as all my friends had the time of their lives playing nine square, dodgeball, traffic cone, football, and frisbee. Eventually, Mom let me play nine square with my friends, but I had to hold my unsplinted finger wrapped up with the rest of my hand behind my back and use my left hand to try to hit the ball up and over someone else's square so it wouldn't hit the ground in my square and get me out. After an even longer time, I was able to attempt to throw a frisbee to a friend at youth group using my left hand (still keeping my right hand with the injured finger behind my back) and with her help learn to catch it as well with only my left hand. At home, I could not even throw my baseball in the air and catch it in my glove for months, much less try to make baskets with my basketball in my hoop. Before I could easily climb around all over and do pretty much whatever I wanted to in my tree, but now that part of my world was closed off to me—since I couldn't even get up on the lower level of it using only one hand. At one point, I did learn how to barely use my right hand to help me get up in it and then from then on use my left hand and right arm to get around, but then I ended up just about getting stuck in my tree and hardly finding a way to get down without hurting my finger again. But learning to use my left hand to engage in any and all physical recreation helped me become much stronger and better prepared for everything that came my way.

The most drastic effect of breaking my finger was that I had to learn to do everything with my left hand, including but not

limited to all everyday tasks. Before I could thoroughly brush my teeth without even thinking about it, but now even the most simple tasks that usually didn't require much conscious thought on my part such as opening or shutting a container of food proved terribly difficult; since I not only had to all of a sudden learn to use my left hand for it all, but I also had only one hand to use to do everything. Trying to eat a meal was exhausting, since all the angles to scoop food off my plate with a fork and get it to my mouth seemed opposite to me. But writing anything was a whole other problem. Normally it would have taken me only a few seconds to write out a short sentence or work a simple math problem, but now even writing a single letter or number legibly took that long. Just try completely relearning to write with your left hand at age seventeen when you've been right-handed since birth—and not beginning with tracing huge letters separately with chalk on a chalkboard to practice and get the right shape to start out with, but skipping that and instead jumping straight to writing full sentences of legible words of tiny font in comparison, for grammar assignments. Touch-typing to avoid this problem was impossible as well, since my splint got in the way; and pecking the keys would take hours. Working complicated math problems and making a complete list of the geometry theorems that I would be able to read at a glance when I needed to refer back to it was all much more difficult and time-consuming than I had ever imagined when I had only my left hand to do it with, especially since the physiological issues of writing with my left hand manifested themselves greatly even when I was only endeavoring to logically add or subtract the smallest and simplest numbers. But in the end, doing everything with my left hand for a few months enabled me to use both hands very well to do everything—now I am proficient and strong with both of them and also all the fingers on them—since I ended up having to learn to do everything with other fingers while I lacked the broken one.

Although these were the worst and most substantial effects of breaking my finger, they were all only temporary, to my relief. Even though breaking my finger also kept me from getting a driver's permit and learning to drive, after my finger healed I had the opportunity to do that. However, a few long-term effects followed as well. For example, my finger is still weaker than all the rest and bends too far backwards out of joint now; it aches

a lot sometimes, especially before a storm; it does not have full range of motion anymore; and it gets tired a lot quicker than the others when I use it too much climbing in my tree, writing for school, driving a vehicle, or playing my instruments too much. Also, I did not get to go take classes at a ninja warrior gym as I had been planning on doing and practice completing all the obstacles to see if I was ready for a real course and test and prove my strength and skills. Even now, after almost a year, I still would not dare go do that out of fear that I might end up with something worse than just a broken finger—even if it had not been for the Coronavirus pandemic. But not taking classes at a ninja warrior gym may have protected me and kept me from hurting myself. I also will never play a serious game of basketball with any of my friends to avoid the slight chance of breaking my finger again. All in all, even after all the challenges I had to overcome once again to do everything, fracturing my index finger and not being able to use it again for a long time made me much better and stronger with both my left hand and all my others fingers on both hands, so that I became proficient at using everything I had to learn to play instruments better, engage in all physical recreation, and all the other things that I will ever do in my life.

Isabella Harned

Lightning

A therapy dog is a very useful and completely essential animal that, along with its owner, can work with and visit people of all ages, young children and elderly adults alike, to make their lives better and more joyful. According to the American Kennel Club, “Therapy dogs are dogs who go with their owners to volunteer in settings such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes.” Therapy dogs can help people in many ways- from comforting everyone with doggy attention and joy, to calming down stressed-out people, to being perfect companions for lonely people. I wish to become an occupational therapy assistant, and for a long time I have thought that my dog Lightning would make a great assistant for me as a therapy dog. She has all the characteristics needed to become one.

As a rainbow in the sky giving joy and beauty to all who see it, so Lightning our colorful and friendly dog makes everyone happy who visits her. Even my grandma who does not particularly like dogs now enjoys visiting with Lightning and endeavors to bring her the very best treats that she loves. Our neighbor also loves to visit with Lightning and calls her over to the fence to feed her carrots. One of our friends buys special toys for her, and they have a great time playing with them together. She seems to have adopted him as her boy. People are always commenting on her striking looks and friendly personality. Her eyes--one hazel and one blue--are like the sun in brightness and gladness, so they shine. She listens attentively to whatever commands she may receive, as you can tell by her black ears edged with brown fur that rotate in response to your voice. Her obedience is as pleasing as the rainfall over the farmers’ fields in a time of drought, and the respect and steadfastness on her brown and black face, with its white stripe down the middle leading to her speckled nose, makes you feel as if you could trust her with your life. Her strong white chest she has, combined with her long white front legs and light brown back legs, cause her to be fast like a bolt of lightning, and her bark is as thunder. As people pet her, Lightning’s black tail edged with brown fur and with a white tip wags in happiness, and she politely sits still for their love and affection. No other dog could be as gentle or as wonderful as she, and once people have visited her, they will want none other. She is like a spring day with the sun shining down brightly out of a blue sky across beautiful wildflowers growing out of the ground; and

all people desire her as the best dog they could ever hope for in this world.

Lightning is a very intelligent dog who seems to read your mind and know what you want her to do before you even tell her. Several times, I have been outside in our front yard visiting with her and her kittens, and I have told her: "I need to go get my mask and your brush so I can brush you but for that you need to go back into the backyard." Her ears have perked up at my words, and then when I walk away a few minutes or so later towards our garage, she leaves her kittens and follows me without even being reminded again and even walks into the backyard without me stepping outside first. Even if it's something new that she's learning to do, she will willingly guess what it is and attempt it. One day I tied her leash onto this bar near the back wheel of my bike and rode through our front yard with her attached that way. Even though I had not really done this with her much before or trained her to do it at all, she didn't even have to be told to run alongside me. After a few minutes, I took her out onto the roads of our subdivision. Still, she stayed on the right side of me and matched my pace, not trying to get ahead of me or pull at all. She kept the leash so loose that it sometimes dragged on the road. When the neighbor dogs started barking at her or when I turned toward her onto another road, I only had to speak to her to make her ignore them or turn along with me. We even taught her to run through this cloth tunnel while her kittens were playing in it. First, we threw a piece of a treat that she really loves barely into the opening of the tunnel. We finally put one in the very middle- but she went and got it and then backed out. Eventually we used a tennis ball with her kittens in the middle of the tunnel and stood and called her, one on either end, to bring the ball to us. She's also extremely eager to please me. Whenever I take her for a walk, she looks up at me with her amiable eyes and tries to match my pace. She pays enough attention to be able to keep up with me and not get run over even when I skip. Even without a leash, she follows me as we run across the wide-open grassy valleys and over the hills together.

Lightning also gets along with other people and animals very well. Even the mailman gets gently but merrily greeted when he walks through our yard to deliver our mail. Another one of Lightning's great characteristics is that she likes to be touched. When I brush her, she leans in against the brush and closes her eyes in contentment. She snuggles against me when I hug her and is always happy to have anyone pet her, even a stranger. When we ended up getting two very young kittens, a white one with brown highlights which we named

Cyclone and an all black one which we named Hurricane, because their mother got run over; Lightning almost immediately learned to love them and take care of them. Even though they were tiny babies, she was gentle enough and calm enough with them that we could have left her alone with them and she would have done fine. When they were still tiny babies and one of them climbed up onto this log, Lightning reached out to gently grab him by his neck and take him to safety before we stopped her by assuring her that he'd be fine up there. She also was excited to show her kittens to our grandparents when they came over to our house to visit us. She quickly began to enjoy not only watching the two kittens but also letting them visit with her and climb all over her and also snuggle up against her to sleep. One day, we saw her standing in the doorway to keep the doggy door flap open so the two kittens could pass through the opening and join her in her kennel in our garage. Later, she pushed the flap up again and stood there keeping it open against her back to let her kittens back out with her into the backyard. It wasn't too long before the two kittens figured out how to push the flap open and get in and out themselves, with quite a bit of help from their dog mother, of course. Several times, it began to storm outside and to pour down gallons full enough to drown our kittens- and when we rushed outside to save them, we found that Lightning had taken care of them already by getting them both in her kennel snuggled down in her thick fuzzy dog bed with her. When the kittens got a little bit older, Lightning began to willingly try to teach them to play with ropes and sticks as she did- and before long they were chewing on the opposite end and the middle of her rope right along with her and batting at and clawing the end of her sticks that she left on the ground while she chewed on the other end. Now all three of them play together all the time and also patiently eat treats out of the same bowl together- neither one becoming angry and trying to steal all of the food.

Lightning truly has a great personality. One of her traits is that she's easily able to ignore stimuli. She doesn't leave the front yard to chase after squirrels running across the road, rabbits hopping through the neighbors' yard, or kids walking or biking down the street. Even though she's free she chooses to stay in the yard because she loves me and therefore doesn't have any desire to leave. On a walk, she knows to ignore the barking of the neighbor dogs in our subdivision or any animals that choose to come near and try to distract her from her purpose. She is quite a balanced dog; she knows that I am in charge and she must obey me and is content to live in that manner. We take

her to parks all the time, and on the way she rides lying down in the back seat of our car and stays mostly calm. She chooses to lie down and behave when she's in the front yard when her kittens and I are all high up in my climbing tree, even when I'm busy talking on the phone to someone and pretty much ignoring her; and then acts that same way everywhere we take her. She is so consistent; even when everything else changes she remains the same. When I'm upset I visit her and immediately feel better; for she is not concerned with the global pandemic or anything else that is happening in the world. All she knows is the love that we have for her and the great place she has to live. She can lie contentedly on a small doggy bed that we got her in our kitchen and never set foot on our carpet, while we sit in our living room and watch a movie in the evening; and she has taught her quickly-growing kittens to do the same.

Someday soon perhaps I will go and take Lightning to get the Good Citizen Test to get her certified as a therapy dog. I am certain that she is capable and will be a great help to me even before I become a certified Occupational Therapy Assistant. If you have a dog with the right personality, you can train them to be a therapy dog, as long as you are patient with them while training them and persistent with whatever it is that you want them to do. If you wish to get your dog certified as a therapy dog, I have some websites attached at the bottom for research into the process. Meanwhile, Lightning and her kittens live together happily, and I am content to just enjoy living with her, my sweet dog.

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Isabella Harned

A Tale of Two Dogs

A dog with the right personality can be a great pet to own. We had two dogs, complete opposites, named Lightning and Blessing. Lightning was half Blue Heeler and half Border Collie. She was a mostly black dog with brown and white on her face and legs. Blessing was half Blue Heeler and half Australian Shepherd. She was a gray and white dog with brown on her legs and black splotches across her back and on her colorful face. Blessing had two hazel eyes, while Lightning had one hazel and one blue eye. Both dogs were beautiful, fast, and intelligent; and they both liked to play fetch and do tricks if you gave them treats for it--but they had completely opposite personalities. Lightning made a much better pet for us than Blessing because she was peaceful, got along with everyone, and was obedient.

Lightning made a much better family pet than Blessing because Lightning was peaceful to be around, while Blessing caused stress and destroyed things. Lightning would lie down and rest and let us pet her and visit with her in peace. She was even calm enough that we could let her in our house on her dog bed, and she would just lie down and enjoy being with us. She did not dare to tear apart a toy since she had seen us yell at Blessing so many times for doing that. Never did she chew up plants or boards or any other material, or eat our insulation or anything else that she had access to. Blessing, on the other hand, was always hyper with everyone that she was around--she would never just settle down and relax or sit still and let us pet her. Even worse, she chewed up everything. Any toy we left outside we found torn to bits, and even our plants began to die after being chewed down to the ground so many times. We got Blessing a dog bed to sleep in so she would stay warm, and in the space of half an hour she took it outside and shredded it and then strewed it all over our backyard. She also pulled the insulation out of the walls of our garage and tried to eat it, and she tore apart the edge of the seat on our porch swing. She even chewed a large hole through the floorboards of our deck and tried to do the same to the walls of our house. Good thing we left her outside, or she would have eaten us out of house and home.

Another reason Lightning made a much better family pet

than Blessing was that Lightning got along with everyone she was around, whether it was her owners or new people or other animals, while Blessing was too hyper and obnoxious to behave around anyone. Lightning was calm and gentle around all people. She wouldn't jump on them or scratch or bite or do anything of that sort. Even though she didn't really like other dogs, we could get her not to bark at them and to leave them alone. She loved to be petted and brushed and hugged by all. However, Blessing jumped on people, licked them, scratched them with her claws, and used her teeth on them--no matter how hard we tried to train her out of it. Somehow it was just her nature to be rough with everyone and everything; she just didn't seem to know how to be calm and gentle. She also hated all other dogs except Lightning. They stressed her out so much that she tried to bark them to death. She wanted to kill them just like she killed all her toys. She wouldn't stay still and let me pet her or brush her or even visit her either, since she hated being touched.

Lightning also made a much better family pet than Blessing because Lightning was always obedient and cooperative, while Blessing wouldn't listen because she always wanted to be in charge. Lightning let us do whatever we wanted with her toys without ever trying to bite us, and we were able to train her to walk right beside us, ignore stimuli, and cooperate perfectly. Like Blessing, she had enough intelligence to know exactly what we wanted from her; however, she was content to let us lead and be in charge. If we told her not to do something, she would not do it, and if we told her to do something, she would try her hardest to obey. She was much more balanced than Blessing; it wasn't even doubtful that we could have taken her to a park and gotten her to behave perfectly--it would not have even been stressful or dangerous at all because she would have done exactly what we told her to do. On the contrary, Blessing tried to keep us from taking her toys away when she was little by putting her teeth on us until we trained her not to. On walks, she tried to drag us forward or backward wherever she wanted to go. Several times, she lunged forward suddenly to chase after a squirrel or a rabbit, breaking free by ripping her leash out of our hands. Then she would race mindlessly across roads and anything else in her way to try to get her prey, ignoring us when we called her and never coming back until she had had her fill of running. She always wanted to take control and be in charge of us and anyone else

who dared to challenge her leadership. She was also intelligent enough to know exactly what we wanted from her even if we didn't tell her; but she always did the opposite just to displease and aggravate us. If we told her not to do something, it was a surety that she would immediately go and do just that. Sometimes, when it fulfilled her purposes, she would obey us--but not unless she really wanted to. She also could not handle any change at all because she just wasn't balanced. How were we supposed to take her to a park to walk if she did not obey us at home? It would have just been too dangerous.

Eventually, before she was even two years old, Blessing started having grand mal seizures that just got worse and more frequent the longer they continued. She lost all sense of sight, smell, and taste for long periods at a time after each seizure, stopped recognizing Lightning and us, didn't seem to know how to play with any toys, and could only keep eating more and more food. We finally convinced a veterinarian that there was nothing anyone could do to save her since the last seizure had left her barely breathing, and then he and his assistant put her down. We think she probably had a brain tumor and that was why she had acted the way she had all her short life. But it turned out better for us, since after Blessing was gone Lightning began to flourish without any bad influence from her companion. We started taking her to various parks and leaving her loose in our front yard while we were out there working, and it was great fun to not have to feel stressed or worry about her running away or being too rough with anyone or anything. We were left with the (almost) perfect pet dog.

Isabella Harned

Peace in the Midst of a Pandemic

Dazzling sunlight startled me awake. All around me, birds chirped and sang their joyful choruses at the top of their lungs, while an obnoxious crow cawed repeatedly. *Is it already morning?* I wondered, my brain dazed even as I slowly opened my eyes from my position on my back. *I'm so tired... wonder what time the sun rises here?*

For a while I just lay in that same position from which I had been awakened, striving to go back to sleep. Eventually, however, curiosity won, and I slowly reopened my eyes and leaned over to the black folding table we had set up yesterday in our screen room tent to check my watch. Only five thirty! I shook my head in disbelief, then turned over on my stomach and pulled the blankets over my head. There would be no point in waking my mom and my grandparents this early in the morning. I must find a way to get back to sleep.

The next thing I knew, my watch read seven o'clock, and both my body and my brain felt refreshed and ready to greet the new day. As I sat up on my cot, turning and putting my feet down on the large rug we had laid in our tent, my older sister's empty blanket-covered cot a few feet away from my own met my sleepy eyes. She must have already gotten up. I cast my gaze back to the black table, the only other large object in our screen room.

Underneath the folding table and our cots, we had stacked all our green-lidded clear plastic large rubbermaid tubs filled with all our clothes and all other belongings we had brought with us. Only yesterday my mom, my sister, my grandparents, and I had left our home state of Illinois to drive our two vehicles the few hours to Twin Rivers Landing, Missouri, where we would camp for this week in late June--to have a vacation and at the same time escape the fears and the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic. We planned to spend most of our time here tubing and possibly even canoeing down the Black River.

Yawning, I stood up, stepped to the front of the screen room tent, unzipped the flap, slipped out, and zipped it back to keep the bugs out. A pleasant cloudy day met me with its coolness and peacefulness. I walked slowly around our small campsite, composed of our grandparents' hybrid camper that they and our

mom were staying in for the duration of our trip and the picnic table a few yards or so in front of it, their screen room they had set up for my sister and I to sleep in farther back and near to the dirt road behind our campsite, at the edge opposite their camper a cluster of four tall slender trees which we had strung ropes between to hang our wet clothes over, and the small fire pit near the trees.

Looking out straight in front of me beyond our campsite, I saw many more campers and tents and also a few people beginning to wander around outside them. After standing in front of a folding mirror we had brought that I set on the picnic table and braiding my hair, I managed to sneak into the camper and steal a muffin or two that we had brought with us for a snack to grab. It took awhile for my mom and my grandparents to get up, and none of us exchanged many words until a few hours or so later.

“Can we go tube down the river yet?” I finally asked.

“Alright. You two and Papa can go ahead and head out there with your tubes, and Grandma and I will join you soon,” Mom told me.

My mom is rather short, only five feet, five inches; with light skin and very dark, almost black curly hair, set off by long streaks of silver all throughout. Her dark brown eyes calmly study you through her dark-rimmed glasses.

“Should we bring all six of the tubes with us?” My sister studied the faces of the adults, waiting for an answer.

My sister Mariah is the tallest one of us all, with her single thick long braid of dark hair hanging smoothly at her side. She also has light skin and wears dark glasses, just like the other three of us females. Her blue eyes peer confidently at your mouth, to read your lips, as she listens to you speak.

Grandma nodded and answered Mariah’s question. “Yes, you guys can go ahead and take all the tubes to the river in the truck, and we’ll come along later in Mom’s blue car.”

I glanced at Grandma, listening carefully to her words. Just like Mom, she wears glasses over her brown eyes and pale skin. Only she is a lot taller than Mom and also somewhat thinner, and her curly short hair has turned almost completely grey. She also wears tiny hearing aids that hide in her ear and reads peoples’ lips when they talk, the same as Mariah.

Many people often comment on our striking family resemblance, but somehow I especially fail to see how I could

look very similar to Mom, Mariah, or Grandma; with my lighter brown hair and green eyes.

At the thought of finally getting to tube down the calm Black River, excitement, and also anxiety; quickly filled me. *This will be great fun! But what if I cannot figure out how to use and control my tube properly and run into sticks and pop it before I've hardly been on the river for very long?*

"Can you guys help me tie the tubes in the truck so they won't fall out?" Papa interrupted my doubtful thinking.

Grandma and Mom headed back inside their camper to finish getting ready to go to the river, while I joined Mariah, trying to keep the six tubes from flopping over in the red truck while Papa strung them together with nylon rope.

Papa is an older man, with skin that is much more darkly suntanned than the rest of us and fully white short thick hair growing all over his head, arms, legs, and face. His brown eyes match his wife's, and he is shorter than Grandma but taller than Mom.

After the six tubes, one with a short blue bucket to carry stuff along on our float trip tied inside it, were securely tied together onto the bed in the back of Grandma and Papa's ruby-red pickup truck, Mariah and I climbed in behind Papa; and we left.

It seemed to take forever to reach the river moving at the crawling pace of five miles per hour along the dusty dirt roads that criss-crossed each other all around the Twin Rivers landing campsites. Finally, Papa stopped the truck, and Mariah and I got out and helped him untie the tubes.

Then we all struggled to climb up the steep slope of rocks piled together, while each carrying two tubes, one on either side of us. To get to the river we had to cross more small rocks that tried to trip us up. Luckily I didn't have to worry about my hair falling in my face, since I had it held fast in two braids that I put it in a few hours earlier that morning.

When we had almost reached the river, Papa set his two tubes down on the rocks. "You guys stay here near all the tubes and watch to make sure no one bothers them while I go park the truck somewhere else," he instructed us.

As Papa walked away, Mariah and I stepped across the uneven ground of countless rocks into the shallow edge of the river. A few inches deeper, and my flower-patterned water shoes sucked unbelievably cold river water straight into them and became

weighed down to the rocky bottom of the river.

Now I got my first look into the deeper part of the river, as we continued to venture further out into it. It was like looking through glass and seeing exactly what lay beneath it, at the very bottom of the river. There I saw innumerable rocks of every size, shape, and color imaginable; even more distinct than the ones we had seen before we entered the river.

Soon, we decided to endeavour to walk across the river to this small “island” of rocks about halfway across it, while we waited for Papa to return. Before we had seen nor felt no current to mention, just calm water sitting there above the rocks. But as Mariah and I stumbled deeper into the midst of the cold river, it became a mass of much more powerful water rushing madly at and through our legs to strive to drag us under the surface and tow us off further downriver. We struggled to keep our footing on the precarious rocks as we staggered through its depths. Each rush of water threw tiny sharp rocks into our shoes that poked our feet with each step. As we made our way further out, the flowing river also became unsettlingly deep- very quickly it had reached all the way up to my chest. Through the raging river, I could hardly make out the multitude of rocks beneath my feet; therefore, it became much more of a challenge to pick the most level places to step and thereby keep my balance.

By the time Mariah and I reached the shallow water covering the rocks in the midst of the river, I felt more than ready for a rest. Unfortunately, we had sat there but a few minutes when Papa returned. The trip back to the bank of the river, fighting through the current that almost knocked us over and the uneven rocks that slid underneath our feet, seemed even harder. But now we had experience crossing the river, understood the strength of its current, and also had water shoes filled with tiny sharp rocks that we had tried and failed to dump out of them.

Although, it quickly became obvious to me that my tube would be much harder to master. As we all three tried to sit down in them after carrying them further upriver, they tried to take off underneath us. When I finally managed to get in mine, it wouldn't move, and Mariah and Papa sped ahead of me.

“Just sit back and relax, and then your tube will go,” Papa looked back to instruct me. “And if you want to go faster, paddle with your hands like this.” He put his hands in the water and began paddling to demonstrate, taking him further away from me.

“Wait for me!” I frantically tried to paddle to catch up, but with no luck. Now I just felt trapped and helpless in my large tube. As we neared the first small rapid, I started to panic. How would I ever figure out how to position myself better before I crashed into the logs surrounding it? I called for help again, but the others were too far ahead to hear me. I don’t know how I didn’t pop my tube going over those big thick sticks--but somehow I managed.

Even after Mom and Grandma arrived and walked down the steep hill of rocks towards us, I still had not figured out how to control my tube. Papa had tried to help me, but I was so worried about making a mistake and poking a hole in my tube that I couldn’t make sense of his advice much less make myself relax immobilized in my tube. It started to rain over our heads as we joined the other two members of our group on the bank of the river, but by now Papa, Mariah, and I didn’t care because we had already gotten so wet.

Mom stayed underneath the trees growing beside the river, and Grandma tried to keep the tube with the bucket in it over her head to stay dry; but we made Mom come out and took the tube away from Grandma- because we felt that they needed to get as wet as we were!

Now we could all five together admire and inspect the rocks lining the bottom of the river. Many of the rocks were made up of several colors or speckled with bits of color. Various shades of bright and dark red, brownish-yellow, brownish-orange, light and dark pink, white, dark and light gray, black, and dark and light purple all abounded. Each one I picked up to study, I marveled at. Some of them sparkled and glittered, some shone as if they had been polished. We kept bending down and picking up different ones to show them to each other and comment on how cool they looked, and then I pocketed a few to keep for later, hoping that they would stay in my pockets while I swam and tubed down the river.

As we all explored the water even more in our tubes, we spotted many large greenish-brownish-gray tadpoles, all at different stages, swimming around in the dirtier parts of the creek, nearer to shore, and usually underneath thick sticks and brush. I even managed to catch a few slimy ones with my bare hands and show them to the others before I let them go, but not very many, because they swam away so quickly and were so slippery to keep a hold of.

It didn't take us all a very long time of stumbling over the rocks underfoot a long way up the bank or through the shallower water upriver and then only tubing a short distance down to decide that it was too much work to keep walking upriver so far and only tubing down for a few minutes. Therefore, we all walked back to Grandma and Papa's red truck, helped tie the tubes in the back, and climbed in--soaking wet shoes, shirts, pants, hats, and sunscreen-covered skin and all--with no towels since we had forgotten to bring any with us.

A beautiful ride upriver to another campsite called Parks Bluff, Lesterville, followed. Once we were out of sight of the river, the countryside rose steeply on our left, and on our right the land dropped away to valleys below. As we drove to the place where we would park our truck, we also saw many beautiful, colorful wildflowers decorating the forest-filled land.

"We're losing our tubes!" Mom suddenly exclaimed, causing me to look out the glass window behind me and see that, indeed, the tubes had fallen low enough that I could no longer see them.

My expression changed to horror. "Oh no! What are we going to do?!"

"Oh, you're right! We are!" Papa quickly pulled off the road, stopped the truck, and climbed out to tie the tubes on more securely. Some of us got out to help him, and once we felt satisfied that those inner tubes should stay put this time around, we all got back in the truck and started slowly forward once again.

Everyone else in the vehicle thought that this longer tubing trip would be great fun, but I still wasn't so sure. I knew that controlling my tube had proven to be quite a huge challenge for me, and taking a two-hour tubing trip through larger rapids and between huge sticks and rocks, among other dangerous obstacles, didn't seem like the smartest plan at this point. Before I could formulate a plan of action, we had reached the entrance point for the river. Once again we had to untie and unload our tubes from the truck, and Papa had to leave the intertubes with us and go park his truck elsewhere.

As we reentered the water with our tubes, the coldness once again struck us hard. "Now how am I supposed to do this again? How do I control my tube?"

My question didn't shock anyone. Once again Papa explained and demonstrated how I was supposed to reach back behind my tube and push myself by rowing with my hands cupped. I wasn't very convinced.

Mom remarked, as she struggled to get into her tube, “We’re all having trouble learning how to do this. It’s difficult for all of us to control our tubes.”

“You just need to strive to think positively, try to have fun, and not worry at all about popping your tube,” Grandma continued for her.

I shook my head at them. “I’ll certainly try, but it won’t be very easy.”

“Even if you run into sharp logs and rocks, these intertubes are very strong and won’t pop very easily,” Papa added, leaning back comfortably in his tube as he floated forward. “They also have a second tube inside of them- it’s just smaller. So even if you pop the first one, you’ll still float and be all right.”

Completely full of doubt, I tried to sit in my tube and practice making myself go in the right direction, but it just wasn’t working. As we neared the first big rapid, concern filled me once again. However, all the others seemed pretty sure that we would all survive this, so maybe I should just try to relax, I made up my mind.

“Which side should I aim for?”

“I’m thinking of trying to go to the right,” Mariah stated in answer to my question.

Mom turned her back to the right and paddled toward it with her hands. “Me, too!”

Grandma said, “I’m going to the left, if I can get over there!”

“I’m heading through the middle, I guess.”

I wandered over to follow Papa. “That sounds like a good idea. If only I could make it!”

“Just let the water carry you, and it should take you through there,” he advised me.

I tried to relax, but all I could see were all the obstacles around the rapid- sticks, rocks, and everything else you could think of. Luckily, the water did take me through in a good place, and I didn’t get hurt as long as I held myself up high enough in my tube above the big rocks. Finally I got moving fast enough to catch up with the rest of the group, who went through the rapid before me.

“Look below us at all the pretty rocks,” Mom remarked.

I obeyed, trying to reach down and grab the rocks, but the water was just too deep for me to reach them; and still I couldn’t get myself to relax. There we were- five tubes all floating slowly along the wide river, sometimes very far apart from each other

taking completely different paths through the water, sometimes moving close together in groups or even one group holding onto each other and coasting through the river peacefully- except when we came to a rapid, that is!

Mariah exclaimed, “Look how deep that water is! It seems to go on forever!”

We all glanced down at the mesmerizing deep blue hole beneath us at her words. “We should try to get out and swim in it,” Grandma suggested.

We all made our way to the shore, where we climbed out of our tubes and left them, and then we walked back through the water near to the big deep hole and attempted to swim in it. The further in I went, the closer the water came to being above my head. “How cool!”

Papa nodded at my words. After a little bit, we all returned to our tubes and started off on our slow, somewhat relaxing journey once again.

I almost began to get sleepy as we just floated peacefully along through the river. Underneath us now were huge rock shelves with some green soft substance like moss growing on them.

“Eek! A snake!” Mom suddenly exclaimed, zapping me out of my daydreaming.

“Where? Where?!” I twisted my head around and around, trying to spot the snake.

“It was right underneath me!”

Grandma frantically hit the water in front of her. “Aaa! It’s coming right towards me! Get away, snake!”

Mariah paddled to adjust her course away from the commotion and the snake.

Papa tried to reassure us, “It won’t hurt you. It just wants to visit!”

Just then, I realized that we were heading straight towards another rapid. “How should we take this one?” I wondered aloud.

Once again they all stated their plans, this time to go to the left because it looked like the water got too shallow for us to pass on the right. I headed out to follow them, but shortly into it I heard the scraping of tubes on rocks. “Are you *sure* this side is deeper?!”

“Well I thought it was!” Mariah, the one in front, quickly answered.

I reached down and grabbed a stunning rock below me. “Look at this!”

They all admired it, before we all headed over to the other side and safely made it through the rapid.

Just then, I felt myself dragged towards the bank of the river, where sharp rocks and pointy logs abounded. “Oh, no! Help! I’m being dragged to shore!” Horror filled me, as I spotted the trees hanging out over the water ahead. “I’m going to hit the trees!”

“Turn around and paddle away!” Papa instructed me from the side.

“It’s too late!” I held my hands in front of my face and leaned over, trying to avoid being scratched or stopped by the tree- but it caught me! In seconds, however, the rapids dragged me away, out from underneath it. “I’m freed!”

Behind me, Mom, Grandma, and Mariah were frantically trying to paddle away from the tree, but one by one they all passed partially through it and came out the other side.

Thus we progressed along the river, fighting to make our tubes go where we wanted them to and to survive the rapids. Between exciting rapids though, we could relax in the peace of all the nature around us- leaning back in our tubes and looking at the bright blue sky and the tops of the leafy trees around the river, or leaning forward and staring down into the perfectly clear water at all the marvels of nature- like rocks, huge rock formations with moss covering them, deep holes of blue water, and so on.

“Hey! That’s a bald eagle!” Mom exclaimed all of a sudden, startling me out of my reverie.

I looked around me, trying to spot the bald eagle. “Where is it?” At that moment, I heard its wild screech.

“Now it flew up to those trees right above us,” Mariah informed me.

I glanced up at the trees overhead as I passed directly underneath the bald eagle.

“That’s really neat!” Grandma stared up at the bald eagle perched in the tree.

One by one we all went underneath it through the water, and then the bald eagle flew forward to greet us again as we floated towards it.

We had many adventures on our floating trip- but it still seemed like too short of time when we got back to the bank at Twin Rivers. We ended up having a rather large problem losing

our car, truck, and camper keys or ending up locked out of those places after our floating trips and also having to accept the help of a generous stranger to solve those problems; indeed, Papa had to actually ride in his truck with him at one point to get the keys to one of our vehicles while the rest of us rode on the back of Grandma and Papa's red pickup truck while dripping wet and holding our tubes with our legs hanging down--but that's a story for another time.

Later that afternoon, Papa, Mariah, Mom, and I rode a bus a long distance upriver to go on a canoeing trip. We all climbed out of the bus near the entrance into the river. Nearby, the other bus also sat parked. Quite a few large narrow tapering boats of unpainted silver metal sat on the ground near the buses. "I guess these are our canoes." Thus saying, Papa grabbed onto one and began to drag it down towards the slight slope to the river. "Here, you and Mariah take this one," he told Mom, after pushing the front end into the shallow water.

I tried to help Papa get the next canoe down to the water, but he wouldn't let me assist him in any way, because he's a boy who wants to do everything for himself. He just said, "No, let me do it," and took the heavy canoe and dragged it to the river and into the shallow water.

After pushing it out a little further into the water, he had me climb over the thick metal side and sit on the front thick metal seat of the canoe while he pushed the back end further out using his legs. Before continuing, he gave Mom and Mariah instructions and helped them to get their canoe into deeper water and start off. Finally, Papa managed to get into the back of our canoe while I held the canoe steady; and then he and I utilized the wooden oars to push off from shore and join Mom and Mariah heading down the river.

We all agreed that Papa and I should lead the way in our canoe, and Mariah and Mom should follow. Before we had even gotten very far down the river or I had quite gotten the hang of rowing in the right direction at the right time, I heard commotion behind me. When I caught the words, Mom, who sat in the front of the canoe, was saying, "We're going sideways down the river! You must not be rowing in the right direction, Mariah!"

"I'm trying! I'm trying! But the canoe just won't go in the direction that I want it to!"

"No! We're going to hit the tree! Stop rowing and let me

row!” Mom cried out a few minutes later.

Straining my neck to scan the area of the river behind me, I spotted our partners a few feet away from a tree growing out from the bank of the river. They were headed straight towards the rather large obstacle.

“I’m trying to row away from it! Why isn’t this working?!” Mariah frantically pushed her oar through the water, and Mom followed suit just as frantically.

A loud crash quickly followed, and immediately after a shout for help. “Papa! Come help us!”

My companion sighed. “Row hard on your left side towards the shore,” he instructed me. “Keep going.” The very distinctive and awful sound of metal scraping against rocks soon filled my ears, as our canoe went up onto the bank.

Papa climbed out and went to instruct Mom and Mariah in the proper way to row a canoe, and eventually I also got out into the shallow water and looked at all the pretty rocks. Once again, I put some more of the more colorful and amazing rocks in my pockets, wondering if they would stay there if we got out and swam as we planned to to cool off during our canoe trip.

“I fell back and hit my back really hard on the metal bar because I was sitting on this life jacket,” Mom complained, rubbing her injury.

After that we decided not to sit on the life jackets but just to have them in the canoe with us- since after all we weren’t really going through that deep of water, and we all knew how to swim anyway. This time Mariah and Mom decided to lead the way and leave us in the back just in case they had more trouble. Not too long after we pushed off from the bank and made our way back into the current, we began to near the first rapid. “Don’t worry about the rapids- I’ll take care of them,” Papa instructed me. “Let me row through them.”

For the first few rapids, we all survived decently--pushing the water on both sides of us backwards if we got too close to each other and both too near the rapids at the same time. But then, with the next rapid, came deep trouble for Papa and I. He told me yet again to let him handle rowing, but this time he rowed us straight towards a tree hanging out into the water.

I exclaimed in horror, “Watch out for that tree!”

“You guys are going to hit that tree!” Mom warned us.

Papa replied, “I know- I’m trying to steer away from it!”

I leaned back against the canoe to try to avoid the tree, and then ended up falling back on that same metal bar that Mom had mentioned before, not to mention getting tree branches right in my face. Needless to say, my back hurt, and I blamed Papa for it; with good natured joking of course! “Papa ran me into the tree!”

Mariah just laughed.

At the next rapid, when Papa told me to let him handle it, I remarked teasingly, “But with the last rapid that I let you handle, you steered me straight into a tree!”

“Oh, don’t worry- I’ll try to do better this time!”

I shook my head and started to row in the way I thought I should. The rapids this far upriver were much fiercer and more difficult to maneuver our canoes through than the ones we had gone over with our tubes a long way downriver from here. Great excitement and some concern filled me every time I saw a rapid up ahead.

After a little while, we all began to get rather warm from all our rowing, even though the day was still just about as cloudy and cool as it had been earlier when we tubed down the river. Therefore, we watched for a deep blue waterhole, “beached” our canoes on the rocky bank nearest to the deep water, and got out into the water to swim and cool off.

Instead of rocks, this part of the river had sand at the bottom of it. Taking off my shoes to dump out more of the tiny rocks that I had collected walking through the rushing water while tubing and canoeing, I couldn’t help but place my bare feet in the soft and smooth delightful sand. I also reached down and collected more rocks. After swimming and splashing around near the deep hole, I spotted a log underneath the deep water, sort of higher up and nearer to the surface than everything else in that deep blue hole. Somehow I managed to climb onto it and sort of sit there for a few minutes before I gave way to the current, let myself be pulled off the log, and then swam back to where I could easily stand.

By this time, I had gotten good enough at rowing to finally feel at ease as Papa and I pushed off the shore and found ourselves back in the lead, with Mariah and Mom bringing up the rear once more. At the next rapid, we slowed down to let them pass us and go through it first, to see which side they would take and how they would get over it. They ended up getting stuck in the shallows, grounded on rocks- thus we knew to take the other side

of the rapid into deeper water.

Before too long, we ended up back at Twin Rivers and managed to drive our canoes into the rocky shore at the edge of the river. To our relief, Grandma sat there on a folding chair on the rocks waiting for us with our lunch, water bottles, and more sunscreen. After enjoying a nice lunch on the rocky bank above the river and utilizing the other supplies that we had on hand as well, we finally got going again after tying a rope around Grandma's tube (which she had brought with her in the truck when she came at a certain time to wait for us at Twin Rivers) that Papa could hold from our canoe to pull her along with us.

This time Mariah and Mom took the lead again. Towing Grandma on a tube behind our canoe worked decently well except when we caught in trees or when she wanted to stop and get out and we had to get our canoes stuck on a bank and help her out of her tube. Whenever we got to a rapid, we let her go and went over it first ourselves.

"Hey, there's a whole school of tiny fish down here!" Mariah remarked.

Sure enough, little fish swam through the clear water beneath us.

Not too long later, we got hot once again and decided to stop our canoes and swim some more at this deep waterhole we found. This time, huge shelves of rocks with slippery moss on them lay slightly beneath the surface. Once again, I climbed the ledges and this time stood there in the flowing water. After a while, we also left that spot in the river to row downriver and ride more rapids yet again, this time with Papa and I in the lead.

"I say! Look at those fish! They must be *two* feet long!"

At Mom's exclamation, I peered beside our canoe down into the deep blue water beneath us to try to spot the fish. "I don't see any fish! Where are they?"

"There they are!" Grandma called out from atop her tube.

Papa realized, "Oh, back there, near the bank, must have been the huge fish."

"Can we turn our canoe around in a circle and go look at them?"

"Yes, certainly."

We managed to, with a decent amount of rowing, get around behind where the fish had been and go straight forward in the right place to spot them. "Those *are* huge fish!" I stared down

into the water, watching the group of fish swim away from us. “They must *be* more than three feet long!”

As we both rowed forward in our canoes, we saw a few more huge schools of the huge fish. We also saw some extremely deep abysses, even deeper than the ones that we saw when we were tubing, that seemed to go down forever. How weird it felt to look down into such a void of clear water, to be able to see into such depths.

Just when everything was beginning to get too calm, we neared another rapid. “You guys can go first and demonstrate to us amateurs what the best way to take is,” Mom told us, chuckling along with Mariah.

“Which side of this one should we go to?” I wondered.

“Ah, we’d better try the left. It looks safer.”

“Okay.” I rowed on the right of our canoe to head toward the left of the rapid.

Just before we hit it, Papa changed his mind. “You know what, it looks like we’d have a better chance if we go through the middle.”

“But what about those sharp rocks and logs sticking out?”

“Oh, we’ll be fine. The canoe’s metal, so it won’t hurt if it hits it.”

I hurriedly steered us back more to the right, and as we hit the rapid, we were lined up perfectly in the middle. However, what we had expected didn’t happen at all. My heart beat rapidly, as I watched and felt our canoe catch on the logs and small rocks. The current seized our canoe, whipped it loose around the rapid, and then spun us around with great speed and power so that we were facing backwards- but then our canoe got caught once again, this time almost beached on the large rocks sticking out of the water.

It seemed like forever that we remained stuck, the waves of the rapids crashing with their full force into the side of our canoe, threatening to tip us over at any moment. We strived with all our might and strength to use our oars to push us off of the rocks, but the current was just too strong; it undid any progress we made. Finally, we somehow managed to rock our canoe from side to side and get it loose.

The current then thrust us forward, straight in the path of Mom and Mariah, who had taken a different path and made it over the rapid and then dropped their oars in the boat, put their hands in the air, and shouted their victory. They almost crashed

their canoe into us in their unpreparedness. A rather large crowd of people, mostly men, stood on the edge of the water, and up ahead of them was a bridge.

“Oh no! How can we avoid all these people?” I hurriedly rowed on the side nearest to the group to try to escape hitting them.

“We must be getting about to River’s Edge,” Papa said. “It can’t be too far now, since the bridge is there.”

Sure enough, but a few minutes later we reached the bank of the river. Now I felt extremely exhausted as I climbed out of the canoe and helped Papa push it up further on the bank. To my shock and surprise, even after all the swimming in deep water and climbing of rock ledges and logs that I had done, every one of the rocks I had collected while tubing and canoeing were still firmly lodged in my deep pockets.

After we dragged both the canoes up the steep rocky hill even farther, we all five left, carrying Grandma’s tube, to walk to our truck and ride home. Eventually, we ended up getting to enjoy roasting and cooking food and desserts over a campfire all together before we all went to our beds; Grandma, Papa, and Mom in their camper, and Mariah and I in our screen tent. As I lay down on my cot, though very exhausted, I was still completely filled with peace, just as I had been for the whole day that we spent here.

I knew very well that we would have to leave Twin Rivers, Missouri and drive back to Illinois in just a few days, at the most, but even though I felt extremely exhausted from all our crazy fun, I also felt extremely thankful that we got to go on this trip and have fun safely in the midst of a horrible pandemic.

It’s so very simple out here in the wilderness, away from all the clutter and business of life, I thought as I began to drift off to the most peaceful sleep I had ever slept. If only it could just be that simple at home. There we’re just surrounded by fear and uncertainty. But here, in sharp contrast, we can just rest in peace and enjoy God’s creation.

Wyatt Heflin

The People You See At Guitar Center

Ah, Guitar Center, a place of music and wonder--and typically a poorly kept up restroom. A musician's safe space where they can purchase the gear and equipment they need. Guitar Center has it all: recording setups, live sound hardware, practice materials, etc. But the main attraction, the company's namesake, can be found lining the walls throughout the main room of the store - guitars, guitars, guitars! Dozens of them from different brands, each with a different color, body, and finish. Guitar Center has a guitar for every player, providing more affordable options to those on a budget while supplying higher-end products to anyone willing to pay the money. The variety of options at Guitar Center attracts a lot of different musicians. However, even though there are lots of different musicians that come in, the customers can usually fit into one of these five categories: the shredders, the shy players, the experts, the confused tag-a-longs, and the one riff ponies.

The first thing you'll usually hear when stepping foot into a Guitar Center is your average Shredder doing what they do best--shredding! You'll come in and see them bobbing their head along with their playing. You're intimidated by how fast their fingers are fleeting across the fretboard and you have no idea how someone can be confident enough to have their gain turned up that high. You swear that you can see the effect pedals rattling in their display cases from all of the noise! Your typical Shredder is usually a decent metal player. They'll have the token long hair and goatee; a black band tee, usually Metallica, Slayer, or Iron Maiden; and maybe even a few other accessories, like a chain or spiked cuffs. When picking their 'Poison' (haha metal band joke), shredders will almost always choose anything with humbucker pickups -- usually a Jackson, an Epiphone, an Ibanez, etc. They might also go for a 7-string or even an 8-string, if not they'll probably tune the guitar down to Drop C or something and start thrashing away. However, not all Shredders are metalheads -- sometimes they're not even playing guitar. On a busy day at Guitar Center you might see someone banging out fills on a drum kit or someone playing around with some loops on a synth. There are Shredders that fiddle around with the effects pedal board while playing a prog rock song; you might see an older dude playing some fuzzed out classic rock; and then there's the particularly rare

shredder variant -- the child prodigy. One time there was this kid that couldn't have been older than 10 years old that came in with his parents. He asked to play this Gibson Firebird that was on display and just started going crazy to an eight-bar blues progression. He even drew a crowd and had people applauding for him when he was done! It's unbelievable how talented some Shredders that come into Guitar Center are.

Behind the crowd surrounding the blues boy wonder is a guy that's rather new to music trying to find his first guitar--a classic example of the Shy Player. All he wanted to do was test out a couple cheaper guitars and purchase the one he liked, but now he's nervous about how many people there are at the store that can hear him play! He only knows a couple of riffs that he can play semi-correctly, while there's a literal child over there that plays like Howlin' Wolf! Every guitarist--every musician in general--has most likely been in this position at some point in their lives. It's hard to be confident in your playing, even when you're not a beginner. There are so many phenomenal players out there and you're worried about being seen as a bad player because of how much more you have to learn. Shy Players typically come in and try to avoid asking the employees for assistance as much as possible. If there aren't a lot of people in the store they'll grab a guitar that they don't need help getting down. They'll plug it in and turn all of their settings down as much as possible so that nobody can hear them play. If someone happens to get too close to them while they're playing, they'll stop and act like they're tuning. If there are too many other customers in the store, a Shy Player will walk around and pretend to be interested in other things. A majority of Shy Players are younger beginners, although there is a rare variant--the sweet old couple buying ukuleles. Every once in a while some recent-retirees will come in together looking to learn an instrument in their newfound abundance of freetime. They're very nice to all of the employees and amazed at all of the different people in the store playing. After hanging out in the store for a bit they'll purchase two affordable ukuleles for themselves--one of the best instruments for beginners to learn with. Old ukulele couples aren't as nervous as other Shy Players; however, they aren't keen on showing off or anything.

However, not everybody that comes into Guitar Center can be as wholesome as the elderly ukulele couple. Every community surrounding an art, hobby, etc. comes with its fair share of snobs. Music is most definitely no exception. Anyone that comes into Guitar

Center with a smug, condescending attitude towards everyone else is an “Expert.” Experts are typically older men that have a lot of experience with playing guitar, which they’ve let go to their head. Experts come in and ask the employees a multitude of different questions about the instruments and the gear, almost testing their knowledge, ready to correct them if they happen to be wrong about anything. They rarely play any of the instruments, though they might have an employee grab a more expensive guitar from the top racks for them to look at. They’ll probably complain about some kind of design flaw after inspecting it for 10 minutes and have the employee put it back. Experts also LOVE telling stories about their time in the music biz. There was one older dude in particular that went on and on unprovoked about this one time he played with Eric Clapton. Customers came and left all while this guy talked a poor employee’s ear off. This particular Expert finished his rather gratuitous story and proceeded to leave without buying a thing.

Unlike Experts, Confused Parents come into Guitar Center knowing absolutely nothing about music. You can usually see the panicked deer-in-headlights look in their eyes as they enter this uncharted, almost alien environment. There are so many different loud sounds and unfamiliar objects, it can be overwhelming at first. But once they calm down they’ll usually retreat into the comforts of their cellphone, or they might have to hold guitars and other gear for their kids. Confused Parents almost always come in because their children can’t drive, or they might be buying them a gift. They won’t ever play any of the instruments, but they almost always will tell the workers at Guitar Center how proud they are of their child. Confused Parents will take pictures of their kids playing to post on social media, encourage their kids to play out more; and probably put items back the wrong way. The parents of the 10 year old blues player are a perfect example of this! What started as a visit to the music store turned into them livestreaming their son’s impromptu concert on Facebook. They are absolutely eating up the attention their kid is getting as everyone swoons over him and his talent.

Unbeknownst to you and everyone else in the Guitar Center, a monster has been lurking in the store for sometime now, waiting for the perfect time to strike. Nobody saw it coming; not the proud parents adoring their young virtuoso; not the kind grandparents purchasing their first instrument; not even Eric Clapton’s self-proclaimed biggest fan. Almost a week had gone by without an incident for Guitar Center’s staff. They were hopeful, but they were about to have

their hopes absolutely obliterated. Out of nowhere, this zooplankton of a guy turns on an amp and plugs in the instrument cable after doing so, causing a loud buzzing sound to ring throughout the store. He sloppily wipes and proceeds to plug in the \$3,000 Gibson Les Paul he somehow managed to get his grubby paws on, which causes another loud “CRACK!” to echo throughout the store. You and everyone else in the store watch in horror as this guy, with his gain higher than a Shredder would even dare to turn to, starts to play the “Smoke On The Water” by Deep Purple. One of the forbidden riffs. Probably the worst forbidden riff, the Guitar Center equivalent of the most offensive slur you can think of. This troglodyte is the perfect example of a One Riff Pony--anybody that plays any of these forbidden riffs louder than a Shredder plays: “Smoke On The Water” by Deep Purple, “Stairway To Heaven” by Led Zeppelin, “Seven Nation Army” by the White Stripes, “Iron Man” by Black Sabbath, “Enter Sandman” by Metallica, “Back In Black” by AC/DC, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana, “Sweet Child O’ Mine” by Guns N’ Roses, “Basket Case” by Green Day, “Say It Ain’t So” by Weezer, “Sweet Home Alabama” by Lynyrd Skynyrd, etc. These riffs, amongst a multitude of others, have haunted every Guitar Center for ages. So many players come in and play one of these riffs--usually incorrectly in some way--and workers have grown sick of hearing them. If you have a single decent bone in your body, you’ll abstain from playing these riffs in a store. If not, you might be a One Riff Pony.

As you leave Guitar Center with the gear you purchased you think about that really sick axe you hope you’ll be able to afford one day, and about all of the different people you encountered during your time there. You’re happy that the young blues player and his parents were having fun, maybe they’ll get that Firebird for him as a gift? You hope that that elderly couple enjoys their retirement strumming away on their ukuleles. And maybe that smug guy will meet someone that actually listens to his stories about him meeting famous guitarists. You smile, thinking about how you and all of these different people are all connected by music. But then you remember that greasy guy playing “Smoke On The Water too loud and quickly push that thought out of your head.

Allen Hornbeck

How A Major War Can Change A Kid

As a teenager of the 40's, I, John Jackson, want to tell you a tale of how my father lost his life in World War II.

I remember the cold and lifeless stare he would give as he creaked back and forth in our old rocking chair, his dead eyes filled with victims of the war.

No, he didn't die on the front line of the battlefield. It was the rest of him that did. Everything else

Lost his personality
Lost his happiness
Lost his ability to speak properly

I would sit back and watch him, thinking "does he remember who I am half the time? Does he think I am a stranger who decided to take refuge in his home?"

All that was there was a lifeless husk with moons under his eyes.

His face lacking strength due to malnutrition from his extreme depression.

He sat alone, drinking bottle after bottle of whiskey, just to feel something for once.

Even though he was basically overall dead, my true father was inside him.

The father that exploded with charisma and happiness no matter how hard times got.

The father who played with me all day just to see me laugh and smile.

The father that showed me how to take care of a woman by me watching him and mom.

When he was drafted, he seemed so invincible at first, no object could hurt him at all. He was a strong man but deep down, he felt scared and terrified.

“If there is a God out there, may he have mercy on myself.” This quote he said to me hits hard. He doesn’t know how tragically ironic that was.

Over the years while father was in war, mother became deathly ill with a jarring flu that got worse every day it seemed like.

My neighbors came by almost every day to check on me and mother by bringing snacks and homemade medicines. As time went by, the days they came over were more delayed and then eventually, they stopped coming. They knew she was gone.

The day I went to her bedroom and found her lying in bed, dead on the mattress, I knew one new thing: I was removed from my childhood and quickly jumped into adulthood.

I buried her with her favorite tulips in the garden but what is upsetting is I didn’t shed a tear at the funeral.

Before she passed, she baked an apple pie and set it out to cool off, hoping the sweet smell would bring my dad home

With all these tragedies going on day by day, all I could do is just look in the mirror and think.

“How bad will my father slip?”

“How will we carry on without mother?”

“How will I live with myself with this?”

I can keep staring at my reflection but that reflection is just a boy who became a man with bloodshot eyes from the leaking amount of tears that have formed due to my recent tragedies. I’m on my own basically. Mother died and father has basically died. No one around can really take care of me and my well being. I guess I’ll have to stay with a neighbor or friend around the corner for now and have the adults take care of the estate.

I’m 15. Just a kid now trapped in an adult world.

In a few years, I can be drafted and turn into my father and have no life left in me. Circle of life I suppose...

Allen Hornbeck

Patch of Ice, Patch of Lies

A cold and arctic winter's night, snow shooting out the sky like a submachine gun and ice crystals forming over the rooftops. Wind blowing so hard, it could knock the house down.

Only light source we had was the candle light, due to the power outages around the whole town.

The night, barely visible from the window, was so dark, you couldn't see the moon illuminating the sky.

Only thing on our minds is dad isn't home yet. Hasn't even called. He comes home around 9:00, but it is currently 10:30. Since the power is out, the cellphone is dead, and it is too dangerous to go to the neighbors to use their phone, we were stuck in a dilemma.

The snow bullets kept shooting at the house while we waited. We could only drink water and play chess.

As I put my brother in check with my bishop, a car pulled in. We were glad dad was home until the car wasn't dad's. The car had a police officer exit it.

As he knocked on the door, we were afraid to answer. Once mom answered the door, the officer walked in.

"Sorry to just barge in your home. It is cold and dangerous outside so I didn't want to stand on your porch."

"It's fine" mom responded.

"Anyway, ma'am, is Thomas Johnson your husband?"

"Yes" mom responded, with fear in her tone and a tear in her eye.

"I hate being the bearer of bad news, but your husband's car slid on ice and fell off the bridge. Once we got him out of the car, there was nothing we could do."

"Is he...is he...dead?"

"Yes, ma'am. I was told to sit here for a few minutes to make sure you are stable along with the children."

Man, I put my brother in check but now the ice put dad in

checkmate. I was at a stalemate for words, as for the rest of the family was.

“Kid, why are you using chess terms?” the officer asked.

I didn’t know I was speaking out loud.

“Sorry, I’m playing chess and metaphors are striking my head” I responded.

“I don’t think they are appropriate for what is going on” he said aggressively.

Alright, this is confusing. I’m trying to keep my head steady and now I’m told to shut up basically.

At least this thought is in my head and not out loud this time.

The officer decided to break a weird silence with “how do you guys feel currently with your dad?”

My poor little sister was crushed. “I want daddy to be home. I want to hug him like I hug my teddy bear.”

“I’m sorry little girl but daddy isn’t coming back.”

My brother was in complete shock also. Held his chess piece tightly, looking as if he was going to crush it with his fist shaking.

“Calm down, little bro” I exclaimed

“It’s hard when we find out our father’s dead” my brother screamed.

“I know but we will make it through the night.” Yeah, that’s how comforting I am towards people.

As the conversation ended, the officer put his cap back on and said “well, I will be on my way now. More traumas to discuss with families around here.”

As he walked out the door, all I could do was be silent.

“Honey, what’s wrong” mom interrupted my thoughts.

“He said he had to go on his way to tell more traumas. Isn’t that odd?”

“Honey, maybe you need to go lay down. We can talk in the morning” mom said.

As I laid across the bed on my side of the room, my brother from the other side of the room on his bed asked “is he gone?”

“Yes, the officer is gone.”

“I meant dad, but what are you talking about bubby?”

“Little bro, lay down and sleep.”

This was hypocritical of me to say that because we know I’m not sleeping with the wind blowing and the thought of dad being gone.

I almost fell asleep when I heard “kids, I’m home!”

I woke up my brother and went downstairs to the kitchen.

Dad was standing here.

“Dad, we were told you died.”

“What?”

“An officer said you crashed your car off the bridge and you died.”

“Yes, I was in an accident, but I didn’t go off a bridge and die. I walked away with a few cuts and bruises from smacking a light pole at a fast speed but I’m not dead.”

“Daddy!” My little sister barged mid conversation.

“Alright, sweetie, go back to bed. You have school tomorrow.”

“Night daddy.”

She gave him a tight hug and ran away.

“Alright you two, where did you get the idea of me dying?”

“Police officer came to the door and said you did?”

“Name?”

“What name?”

“Name of the officer.”

“Not a clue, he didn’t have a name tag.”

That was odd. No name tag or badge now I think about it.

Mother came to the kitchen and said “I thought you died!”

“No, I didn’t die! What is this of me dying tonight?”

“Honey” mom said with a little hesitant tone. “You remember Mike, right?”

“Yes, your old lover.”

“Yeah, he showed up in a uniform to say you were dead.”

“Why?”

“Well, we are seeing each other and you can’t stop us.”

My dad looked at us, a small flare in his eyes, and said “boys, go to your room.”

We laid in our beds and heard two noises from the kitchen: A high pitch scream and then a gunshot.

Starting to cry, my brother whispered “what do you think happened, bubby?”

The only response that made any sense to me to give is “no clue, but it sounds like mom isn’t cooking breakfast or dinner tomorrow.”

Angel Jenkins

The Clock

Before I got guinea pigs, I did as much research as I think a 15-year-old can do. It was hours of YouTube videos, news articles, veterinarian websites, and pet-blogs until I made the plunge and tricked my parents into letting me get my precious piggies. Because of the strict care that rodents need in order to be happy and healthy, I made sure that I never missed a feeding or a cage cleaning in the two years that followed. Food pellets, bedding, hay, and new toys were always purchased weeks in advance to ensure that my babies would not go hungry and sad in a pile of poop and mushed hay. There were only two times that I ever got behind on getting supplies and those were arguably, no, most definitely not my fault. (The first time was when the pandemic first hit, and I was not leaving my house at all, and the second was two weeks later when I did order their items early but then the shipment was delayed, again because of the pandemic.) With all of that evidence, it was clear that I was an excellent guinea pig mom, perhaps the best, and I knew that I was the best, too.

While I know every pig mom probably thinks that they have the best pigs out there, I also know that they are all wrong because I have the best piggies. I got Charlie first, when she was only a few weeks old. Her fur is mostly white with brown spots around her bum and face. The temper she has is hilarious and she will always wheek whenever she needs anything from me. Charlie grew quickly and got louder as she got older. By the time she was a year and a half old, she screamed constantly for attention and treats, which I always gave her. How could I not? Rosie on the other hand was always quiet and calm. Being almost 3 years old she was out of that rambunctious child stage. Her hair was much longer than Charlies and she had almost completely black fur, except for the white spots around her face and the brown spot on her rear. There were very few occasions when she would ever make any noise or beg for anything; Rosie would be happiest if you gave her some cilantro and cucumbers and then left her to sit in her hidie by herself. The two piggies were almost exact opposites and I loved that about them.

It was a cold February weekend when Charlie was wheeking loudly and Rosie was munching quietly that I needed to clean my piggies' cage, like I always do every Sunday. I had no reason to

expect there would be a problem. It was always the same routine. Remove the hidies, toys, and bowl from the cage; scoop all of the old bedding and hay into a trash-bag while trying to stop Charlie from jumping out of the cage and plunging to her death, refill the cage with new bedding, replace the hidies, toys, and bowl; then feed the piggies their favorite veggies and apologize a billion times to Rosie and Charlie for stressing them out, but also reminding them that it's a good thing that I cleaned their cage because otherwise we would be in the sad pile of poop and mushed hay scenario from before, and nobody really wants that.

I got through the first two steps just fine, because why wouldn't I? It is not exactly hard to clean a guinea pig cage. But when I got to step three and opened the 18-gallon-black tub that I kept all the piggies' extra bedding in I may or may not have let out an unsavory word or two. The amount of pine shavings in the bin were not nearly enough to fill up the cage. There was the equivalent of 1/16th of a bag of bedding in the tub, and I needed at least an eighth, so if my math was correct (and it may not be because I am awful at math) then I only had about half as much bedding as I needed. As panic filled me, I grabbed my phone to check what time it was: 6:25pm. For a Sunday night, that was late, as the pet store which sold the type of bedding my piggies needed closed at 7pm. With that realization I said a frantic apology to my babies while they stared at me from their bedding-less cage and then I bolted out my bedroom door.

I ran through my kitchen into the living room and quickly ducked under the screen of the tv where two of my siblings and dad were playing Super Smash Bros Ultimate on our new Nintendo Switch. From the glimpse I got of the screen I think my nine-year-old sister was very obviously beating my dad and brother at the game. Whether they were letting her win or she was actually good at it I would never know. I reached the front door and grabbed my coat to put on and then started to put on my shoes when their battle ended, and my little sister started talking to me.

"Where are you going Ang-ey?" my little sister asked. My sister was loud and excited constantly, which was normal for her age, but she wasn't some kid at the park that I could ignore. She was my littlest sister, the most dependent one, as she hadn't reached her phase of wanting to ignore me and slam doors in my phase like our other sister did. Yet, she still behaved like a moody teenager sometimes. The family was reminded of this every time we looked at the choppy half side bangs that she cut into her dishwasher blonde

hair. Her eyes were big and blue, like everyone else in our family, but hers had one key difference. When she looked at you she could get you to do whatever she wanted. I knew that I was absolutely screwed when she looked at me with her big puppy dog eyes and said my name like that. Anytime she says it in that particular way, the way where she makes it sound like she's four-years-old again and still can't pronounce the "-el" sound, it means she wants my attention, and she will do anything in the world to keep my attention on her and her only.

As I tied the laces on my second shoe, I replied to her, mentally crossing my fingers that this would be the shortest conversation with Annabella that I had ever been in. "I just need to run to the pet store really quick. I was cleaning the piggies cage and realized I didn't have enough bedding so I'm kind of in a hurry Bella."

When I stood up from tying my shoe to finish putting my coat on, she started talking again and her tone switched slightly in a way that you would only understand was bad if you knew Bella yourself. "Okay, but first can I show you the character I unlocked in the game?"

"Can it wait until I get home?" I said as I grabbed my keys, wallet, and mask from the table by the front door. "I promise I will look right when I get back, but the store closes soon and I can't risk having to wait 'til tomorrow to get their bedding."

"It'll be so quick I promise!" Bella wasn't going to let me go without her getting upset.

I was going to just ignore her and walk out the door anyway. Learning a little patience would benefit her a lot. Then, I remembered how I had not been spending much time with her because of working full days on the weekends and going to school for the whole day during the week. Between those things and my boyfriend, my pets, and the few minutes I had spent on my hobbies, I had not spent any time on her at all lately. I sighed but agreed anyway. "Go ahead Bella but make it quick!"

So, I set my things back down on the table and watched her show me her new Jigglypuff character. Then I let her show me all the different hats you could put on Jigglypuff, and I let her show me how her favorite one was the pink flower because it made her look like she was from an island like Lilo from Lilo and Stitch. Bella tried to start showing me some more characters too, but I made eye contact with my brother and gave him a look that I could only describe as the look you give your siblings when you need them to

get you out of something. My brother distracted her, and I quickly grabbed my keys, phone, and mask before I slipped out the door and ran to the car.

Now, it should be noted that it was pouring rain outside. I had not realized this before I stepped out the front door but there wasn't a moment to spare to even put the hood of my coat on. I slid into the driver's seat of my car and turned it on, only to glance at the clock and see the time 6:33pm. The panic I felt had before came back even stronger this time as I reversed out of my driveway and began the drive to the pet store. At this moment, I was doing the math in my head (but, as I said before, I am very bad at math). It takes about 5 minutes to get to the store and park on a sunny day with little traffic. If I am lucky it'll only take 7 or so minutes to get there on this disgusting rainy day. I should still get to the store with 10 minutes to spare.

When I pulled into the parking spot it was 6:39 pm. One minute earlier than calculated and I felt nothing but relief wash over me. I had over 20 minutes before the store closed, everything was going to be okay! Until I put the car into park and turned it off only to reach for my wallet on the seat next to me and realize that it was not there. If I "may or may not have" let out some unsavory words before, then I definitely said "Oh shit" in this moment.

I slammed the passenger seat backward and began digging around in the car for my precious wallet. I looked on the seat, in between the seats, under the chair, in the door, in the backseat; I essentially tore the car apart. When the clock hit 6:45 I called my brother to have him check the table for my wallet. No answer. I called my dad, again no answer. I called my mom, and for the third time there was nobody picked up. Seriously, in a house where everyone is either on a phone or computer at all times, our family is very bad at answering their calls and messages. With a heavy breath I called my other sister, the one who was not playing Super Smash Bros Ultimate. When it felt like the call was going to go to voicemail she finally answered, "Hello?"

"I need you to check the table in the living room for my phone! Quickly, I am in a very big rush." I bit my lip as she went to check the table, drawing blood with how hard I was doing so.

After what felt like an eternity of rummaging sounds on the phone she said. "Yeah, it's here. Why?"

I hung up on her without responding as I restarted the car and pulled out of the parking lot. There was absolutely no way I was

going to make it on time. My piggies were going to have to spend a night in their cage bedding-less and they were going to die of depression and sore feet because of it.

The speed-limit was only 45mph, and I was going 60. I had never sped intentionally before this day, but what other choice did I have? It was a race against the clock, and I was losing horribly.

When I made it home the clock read 6:50 p.m. I ran into the house and knocked over the weird flag decoration my mom has in our front yard in the process. I grabbed my wallet and ignored whatever my family was trying to say to me. I didn't have time! My baby's happiness was on the line and I was not prepared to give up my best piggy-mom status yet.

6:51pm, I could do this. I drove back to the store, going 65mph this time, while praying to any possible god that might be up in the sky that I would not hit a puddle on the road and hydroplane to my death and that a cop wasn't waiting on the side of the road to pull me over. A good cop would not give a ticket to a 17-year-old trying to ensure the health of her beloved fur-children, would they? Anyway, it didn't matter, because I pulled into the parking lot without getting pulled over or crashing my car and it was 6:57 p.m.

What happened next is a blur. I got the bedding without another problem while profusely apologizing to the store cashier for being there so close to closing since I work in retail and know how much I absolutely hate when customers do that to me. I made it home and finished the steps in cleaning my piggies cage before flopping onto my bed to call my boyfriend and tell him about my horrible store trip. Before I could call him, a realization hit me, I was still the best guinea pig momma out there, and no clock was going to take that title away from me.

Elyssa Landrum

First Blizzard

It was my first, and only, winter in Denver. Our family moved to the Mile High city from the Midwest in summer of 2009, only staying for about eleven months. We moved purely for the adventure; we were curious to see what it would bring. Growing up in the Missouri, I thought I knew snow. St. Louis has all four seasons, and sometimes you get all four in one day. The one thing that always sticks with me about Missouri is that you cannot trust the weatherman. However, the thing that now sticks with me about Denver is when the meteorologist says to stay indoors during the winter months, you listen.

Saturday morning, sometime in December, I woke up in my dark, windowless room. My sister, five years younger than me, seemed to already be up and out of bed. Even for a six-year-old, my little sister was small. She had short, shoulder-length hair like mom, but it was a sandy brownish color. The child also had mom's dark green eyes and subtle mess of freckles. Usually, she would have been snoring beside me this early in the morning, but her bed was empty.

I swung my legs over the side of my bed, stretched my arms, and pushed myself to my feet. Fingers ran along the wall, in search of the light's switch. With a lazy flick, the room was illuminated, and I stepped over my sister's mess of toys to get to the door. Within seconds I had crossed the hallway and ran up the stairs.

Once I reached the first floor, I searched the open space before me. This room was the biggest in the townhouse, housing the living room, dining room, and office space all in one open floor plan. The walls reflected a soft glow from the open windows and the carpet was soft under my toes. My eyes scanned the soft, grey couches, arranged in an L shape to create the illusion of a separate family room space--no one was there. The only thing that stood out was the quiet hum of the television with 9news talking about the snowfall outside. As my gaze moved left towards the computer area, I realized the balcony door was open.

The balcony was small, only big enough to fit one chair and a small child--which is exactly what I found there. My mom and sister were sitting out there staring in awe at the bright pink sky. It was surely morning, so how was the sky pink? Mom noticed me then and turned toward me. Her forest green eyes brimmed with so much

excitement it was almost tangible. The apples of her cheeks flushed red from happiness or cold, I could not tell. Her dark brownish, black hair was damp with snow and fell just past her shoulders. The only thing that protected her from the cold was a fluffy black robe and some sweatpants.

Mom motioned for me to sit by the door. I plopped at her feet despite the heavy, cold draft seeping into the room. I noticed my sister dangled her tiny legs through the metal bars that protected her from dropping right off. Her cold, red fingers gripped the same bars tightly as her face pressed against them to see the strange sight.

“Why is the sky so pink right now?” I asked in awe, despite how the chill nipped my cheeks and arms. I had never been a fan of the cold, never been the kid playing in the snow, but this was impossible not to look at.

“A blizzard is coming,” Mom said. Most people would sound nervous or concerned, but never my mom. Mom was the kind of person that goes into the Smokey Mountains and called out to bears in the middle of the night. She would go to a new city, find the part that scared even the locals, and make new, lifelong friends. She loved adventure, and never turned down the opportunity to have one. To me, it sounded as though she wanted to run full speed into the eye of the storm. I had heard her sound this way plenty of times before with tornadoes. “Get the candles, board games, and make anything you want to eat that has to be cooked. Power might go out.” She directed without even turning to look at me. “Eve, help your sister.” Unfortunately, I would not have the time to make any food.

Within the next hour, thick, white chunks of snow began to fall with such fury that the townhouses not even ten feet away were blocked from our vision. The power went out early in the blizzard, giving us just enough time to have two candles in each of the first-floor rooms. My fear of the dark stopped me from having done anymore. After we watched the storm in awe for a while, we formed a circle on the floor by the balcony door. There was a candle to my left, my sister to my right, and my mom across from me with board games.

It was around seven o'clock in the evening when the lights returned. We played Monopoly, Sorry, and Clue until the blink of soft, white rays of light flickered and settled. Simultaneously, the three of us looked up at the ceiling to see the bulb illuminating the room around us. The blizzard still raged outside; the snowflakes fell vigorously. Mom sprung to her feet and walked quickly toward the

electric fireplace imbedded in the wall near the television.

Fake flames rolled gently behind the glass screen that held them, the fireplace seeped with real heat. My sister crawled from the games towards the warmth, she buzzed with excitement. I sauntered to the balcony door and stared out at the soft blanket of snow on our balcony. My hands pressed against cold, damp glass of the balcony door and slid it shut. As the door shut with a thud, it felt as though the blizzard no longer existed.

“Well,” Mom said with a light sigh, “I’m not going to work tomorrow. Movie night?” In unison, my sister and I yelled in agreement. Within minutes, we curled up together on the couch with the lights out, fixated on the movie in front of us.

The rest of our night was spent watching *The Legend of Billie Jean* and *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*. In May of the following year, we moved back to St. Louis after my sister and I made it clear that we missed home. Looking back, it is interesting to see what parts of my life stick out now, not the altitude sickness, the cold, or the traffic on the way to school. There was a plethora of things that contributed to us begging my mother to take us home, but none of those things mean anything to me now. These days I reminisce about exploring the horse trails behind our complex, the day we went into the mountains, and of course, my first blizzard.

Joe Moran

A Decade in Review

April 30, 2008

Charlie and I shared a joint and listened to the Dead as we drove up to Sedona to hike a creek and get right with nature. The creek led to a 'holy place' a vortex of enlightenment.

July 21, 2009

It's only in God where I feel alive. I forget who I am, or Who I was at times. The church reminds me not to waver, but To hold fast to God's word and surround myself with a body of believers.

April 24, 2011

The man I never knew had both cars paid off and doubled his house payment every other month. He could talk politics and sports with the best of them, he was always slow to express his opinions and his dog had all its shots. Oh, the wrestle.

October 28, 2012

"Take my picture, let not my second chin show. But hurry! I've got my eyes lashed and I've polished my nose, and I'm dressed up down to my toes. I Like this one, I'll post it I suppose. Folks'll think I look like Marilyn Monroe."

March 29, 2013

Back and forth goes the swing, never really moving. When the Motion is over the swing stays in one place. The piano moves from one room to the next under the same roof and still out of tune.

April 18, 2015

I found a piece of myself in a memory that I thought I had forgotten. It was the peace I felt then, different than the peace I feel now. Peace or a piece, all is vanity.

September 20, 2017

Wings will fly until they die. A mole will dig its hole
And faith will always believe. But like the tide, I rise when
I am told and fall when it is time. Humility is pride and pride
humility.

July 10, 2018

If Christianity is the body of Christ, then Christ must be a paranoid
schizophrenic,
a double minded fool unstable in all his ways. What can he do but
look down and
shake his head like an angry mother.

April 30, 2008

The positive energy helps people reflect. Whether it was the vortex,
the green
trees at the top of the red canyon walls or, the green in the grass,
Charlie and I are ready to take on whatever road may lie ahead.

Jill Pohlman

Names are changed in this essay.Types of Coworkers*

Sheryl Sandberg stated, “Motivation comes from working on things we care about. It also comes from working with people we care about.” Coworkers are never the same, even at the same location. Every person has a different mindset and it shows in the workplace, good or bad. One coworker’s actions and words can change the whole dynamic of an entire workplace. By looking at different coworkers in a grocery store, a public pool, and a tanning salon the types can repeat in each setting--Jill knows this. She has worked at all three. Jill is nineteen and has had jobs since she was sixteen with many different types of coworkers, some more memorable than others. Bosses hire four main types of people: the know it all, the I-do-not-want-to-be-here, the nothing but drama, and the friend you never knew you needed.

The know it all coworker is sometimes one of the best coworkers to work with, even though they are incredibly annoying. Jill has worked with many know it all coworkers. This type of coworker could really know everything about the job, for example the cashiers at a local grocery store who have been there for thirty years, or they just like to think they know it all. The know it all always makes it known to the customers that they know more than everyone else in the store. The know it all is sometimes a great person to work with when unknown situations come up in the workplace. The know it all’s can be very helpful at times. An example of a know it all in a grocery store is they have all of the fruit and vegetable codes memorized, which is helpful to the other checkers who have no idea what they are doing. While working a frantic shift during the holiday season in a grocery store, Jill holds up a yam not knowing the code and Darci, a know it all, shouts “4074”. Although not knowing codes to vegetables can be embarrassing, it is nice when someone is there to help a coworker out. An example of a know it all at a public pool, is a lifeguard who knows every swimmer and makes it known--this can often be found as annoying to other lifeguards because truthfully no one cares. Libby, a coworker to Jill at the public pool in Jerseyville, knows every child that is swimming and became friends with the children so now she does not yell at them. To the other lifeguards that work with Libby find it annoying that she is busy becoming buddies with the swimmers. The final example of a know it all is

the tanning consultant who knows the customer that is coming in the salon to tan before they even get out of their car. Funny how wherever you work, a know it all will always be there.

The absolute worst person to work with is the person who just does not want to be at work. Any person that has a job has days where they don't want to work, but when your coworker's personality is just that, it is hard to have a good day. When a coworker constantly says and has actions of not wanting to be at work it brings production and efficiency down, causing other coworkers to bring up their slack. Why don't coworkers who don't want to be at work just quit? Why must they bring all the employees down with their negative energy towards the workplace? People should not hate their jobs, that brings so much stress on a person's life. An example of what an I-don't-want-to-be-here coworker at a grocery store is when they call off; it is the worst when it is last minute causing another coworker's panic. Another example but at a public pool is the bad coworker gets distracted thinking about what they are doing after work not paying attention to the kids in the pool. Them not wanting to be there causes a negative impact on the wellbeing of the children. A particular lifeguard who did this many times was later fired by management. The final example of a coworker not wanting to be at work is a tanning consultant named Rachel. Rachel made it very known to everyone she worked with that she hated her job and only stayed for the benefits. Rachel became lazy and did not clean or wear her mask at work, which is required. The boss at the tanning salon noticed Rachel's bad attitude towards other coworkers and the workplace and let her go. At any job there will be people who do not want to be there; it will be known and often times they are fired or finally quit after all the complaining they do.

Another not so fun coworker is the nothing but drama; you can spot them a mile away with their hand covering their mouth whispering into another coworker's ear or blowing up your phone about other employees. The nothing but drama coworker says so many harsh comments about others, what do they say about me? Although their comments are rude it is very entertaining to work with them and work is never boring with them. While Jill worked at a public pool, she worked with a coworker named Lisa. Lisa would come in from the guard stand to take her break and start talking badly of other coworkers and swimmers as soon as she stepped foot into the break room. Lisa once came in on break calling lifeguards names and telling people's personal secrets. Jill

just sat in the break room and wondered if Lisa had told others about her secrets. All of the lifeguards soon realized that Lisa could not be trusted with secrets or and personal information at all. The rest of the summer Lisa had no one to gossip about only made up scenarios. The next summer Lisa did not return to the pool for another season. A lesson Jill learned with this type of coworker is to distance from them and to never feed into their drama.

The best coworker to ever work with is the friend you never knew you needed. One coworker who fits this category sticks out to Jill; her name is Lauren. An example of Lauren being the friend Jill never knew she needed was when Jill started working at the tanning salon. When Jill started at the tanning salon she was in a bad mental state; she was beginning college and lost some friends. The first day Jill worked with Lauren; Lauren asked Jill, "Do you want to come over tonight?" Even though it was such a simple question, Jill felt so lucky to find a friend at a low point in her life. If anyone can find a friend at work, they are lucky. Lauren is so special to Jill because she came at such a wonderful time in Jill's life at an unknown time. When work friends become friends outside of work it can go over well, or very poorly. With Lauren and Jill, it went over really well and Jill is lucky to have a friend and work and outside of work. At any job, workers can get lucky and become friends with each other and unknown times, consider it lucky.

Bosses hire different types of people: the I-do-not-want-to-be-here, the nothing but drama, and the friend you never knew you needed. As the reader, which coworker are you? Jill has advice to the reader: when working with the know it all, let them be. When working with the I-do-not-want-to-be-here, change the subject when they start complaining about the job. When working with the nothing but drama, distance yourself and do not feed into their drama. When working with the friend you never knew you needed, hold onto them and be grateful for them. Another type of coworker is the person you never see, Jill does not have much to say about this group because she never sees them at work, either because they have different shifts, or they never work. Advice for the people you hardly see is, when you do see them be nice and create a bond, you never know when you will need a shift covered or a friend to vent to about work. Whatever type of coworker the reader finds themselves working with, be thankful to have a job and make money in this world.

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Olivia Scifres

Marching 100

When going to a new school, everyone always tells you to join a club, try out for a sport or basically anything that will get you to make new friends. It is hard at first because you are not familiar with the people at the school; it can be very intimidating at times as well. Marching 100 is a marching band at Alton High School where band students perform during football games but most importantly competitions. These competitions are where you go up against other marching bands and perform for judges and the audience. Marching 100 is the best way to not just meet new people but to also join an amazing family. You make unforgettable memories and create unbreakable bonds with others.

It is not only the perfect way to work on your social skills but is also a great way to figure out which friend group you belong to. Marching 100 also helps when trying to figure out the type of people you feel most connected with. There are over one hundred students who are a part of Marching 100, so you are bound to make at least one friend in the actual band. Then they will begin to introduce you to others even if they aren't a part of the band. It is always nice to see a familiar face in the halls, classrooms, and wherever you might end up. This is the perfect way to work on making new friends and stepping out of your comfort zone by trying new things. Being able to know people better that are in the same things as you is fun and exciting. You already have some things in common and it is a great way to work on your social skills and your interactions with others. Even though everyone comes together to perform, we still have separate lives and even different social statuses. Everyone still has their own beliefs and may even feel differently about marching than other students. Some students in a marching band can also be juggling other sports, clubs, and even a job. They are friends with others who share the same interest that might not be an interest in marching. Some of my friends in Marching 100 were in sports such as volleyball, golf, and cross country. They often had to go to both practices and would participate in both the games and competitions. Sometimes the schedules crossed paths and they had to make a decision of which activity to participate in and would often leave earlier or show up late in order to make it to the others practice. Regardless of what each one of us had going on outside of Marching

100, we all still connected with our interests for the marching band and competing in competitions.

Not only is it the perfect way to increase your social status but you also learn a lot from the overall experience. Competitions are the most important events to band kids. It is a great way to stay fit and create something that is so amazing. Blood, sweat, and tears are put into every performance and into every practice session to make sure that everyone is well prepared to give it their all. The amount of love that everyone shares is worth all the embarrassment of the silly uniforms and geeky visuals. Though it is often funny to look at someone doing the visuals; it is actually quite complex and can even be dangerous. Visuals are added into the show to make the boring or long parts much more interesting. Visuals often occur when there is a hold, and we don't move for a lengthy time. They can be as simple as turning our bodies to a specific direction or as hard as squatting and doing a short dance. It takes a lot of strength, patience, time, practice, and a lot of talent to be a part of a marching band. Any band member will tell you that the most important thing is your technique. You aren't just performing for the audience; you are performing for judges. They watch your every move, your every visual, and listen to every note. You must focus on the way you are marching, make sure you are hitting your spots perfectly, counting to keep in time for visuals and music, and make sure that you have memorized and can play the music perfectly all at the same time. As you perform the judges record their reactions and thought process. They let you know what you are doing wrong and give you examples or tips on how to fix it. You aren't just learning how to march, you are also learning how to improve your playing and bettering yourself on things like working with others, as well as trusting your bandmates. When you are performing, you are focused on what you are doing and playing your own part. You aren't focused on what the others are doing—you are only focused on yourself. Any mistake that is made can affect the entire band, even if it is just one person. One wrong move can hurt yourself or others so you must trust in yourself and others that nothing bad will happen and that you know what to do.

Marching 100 is a lot of things and there are so many words that can be used to describe it, but I would say that the best way to describe it is the band becomes your family. Each section of instruments has their own personalities and some sections just cannot get along with one another. There are some people and sections that are more popular and liked more than others. It has

their troublemakers, the talented section and the loner section. In Marching 100, the flute section and the trumpet section are always the two sections to not get along. The flutes and the trumpets are very different from one another. They have different personalities that often affect one another. Like every other section, the flutes and trumpets have their own personality. The flutes are more prim and proper. They often stay to themselves and to their tight circle. The flutes are often given the harder parts of the melody and are perfectionist about it. The flutes take things more seriously and often come off as rude and unfriendly. The trumpets on the other hand are the complete opposite of the flutes. They are very loud and outgoing. They have friends in the band and outside of school. Even though the parts that the trumpets play are often seen as easy it takes a lot of control and air power in order for it to really be correct. A lot of the time they are the clowns but when it comes down to it they take performing a lot more seriously than others. The trumpets are very talented, and they know it. They are often seen as egotistical and overly confident. Both sections often have the melody and all the important musical parts, so we often find ourselves trying to show up to each other. When the musicians in the section try to one up each other, it often ends up sounding out of tune and the overall performance is compromised. It doesn't matter how different each section is though because at the end of the day we are family, and we will always have each other's backs. The best way to put it is that the only people who will criticize us are us. If you mess with one band member, you are messing with all the band kids.

It's not just Marching 100 that is seen as a big nerdy family who shares too much and are a little too close for comfort when it comes to each other's personal life and personal space. You can ask anyone who is a part of a marching band and I can assure you they would say the same thing. Almost everything that they know, love, trust, and care about and have learned all has come from the marching band. It is the best family you could ever ask for and one of the most life changing experiences you could ever have. Even if you end up graduating and leave the marching band, it doesn't mean that you are forgotten or immediately kicked out. You are always welcomed and always a part of the family. Every marching band can help you grow socially, teach you things that you might not learn anywhere else, and regardless of any bad blood in the band there are always the people you can count on the most when you are in trouble.

Ashlyn Sutton

Living with Divorced Parents

“SNAP!!!” is the sound you hear when two people are playing tug-o-war with a rubber band...or in this case heartstrings going through a divorce. Divorce doesn't just hurt the two people involved; it can hurt everybody around them. Typically, it hurts the children the most, but it can hurt various family members, friends, and maybe even the family pets as they feel the tension and pulling of the thin rubber bands. For my three brothers and me, the hard parts were watching Mom and Dad constantly fight, having to grow up in two separate homes, and having to grow up way too quick to take care of younger siblings.

Growing up with divorced parents it was always fight after fight and argument after argument; even before their divorce it was never a walk in the park. Sometimes it got so bad that my dad would leave and stay with his mom, our Grandma Linda, for a while. There were times he'd be gone for so long I didn't think he would ever come home. But after the divorce the fighting got ten times worse because they always managed to involve us into the arguments as if we were just pawns in their intense game of chess. One of the biggest and reoccurring arguments they always had was how my dad would treat me. In fact, the day they split up for good, I was the source of the argument.

“I'm tired of the way you treat the kids and I!” my mom screeched at my dad.

“They have to learn how to behave properly and need to be taught a lesson when they're bad!” my dad howled as he cracked his belt with his hands.

“I'm packing up the kids and leaving you,” my mom said with sorrow in her voice. “I want a divorce!” I wasn't always the easiest child to deal with. I never wanted to sit still, I was always impulsive, and I argued A LOT; to my dad I was the complicated child. If I so much as said, “Daddy, can we do something today?” he would get mad—if I wanted to go outside and play for a while, he'd get mad. If I got hungry and asked to make food, he'd of course get mad. My mom never agreed with my dad's reasoning and the way he chose to punish us, even when they were still together. Every time she'd come and pick us up on the weekend they'd get into a screaming match while I sat in the back seat of our blue Pontiac Grand Am

comforting Austin, my little brother.

“They’re just kids. They need to be outside and running around; not cooped up like chickens in a hen house,” my mom would say.

“I’ll do my weekends with them how I want to, woman!” my dad would shout.

Sometimes, they’d even argue about how much our dad drank while he had us. He always drank as if it was some type of sport. Every day he would get off work he’d stop at a Casey’s and pick up a pint of Captain Morgan, a hardly filled Polar Pop with ice and Coca-Cola, and a 30 pack of Natural Light. Within the 20 minute drive from Decatur to house in Cerro Gordo he would have the Captain Morgan and Coca-Cola completely gone and would be starting in on the beer. To say he had a problem would be an understatement. On the weekends his drinking would almost double; my mom always fought with him about how irresponsible it was to drink so heavy when he had us and he’d always argue that he didn’t have a problem and that he didn’t care.

One of the hardships of a split family nobody prepared me for was living in two separate homes. Nobody explained how hard it’d be—the two toothbrushes, two tooth pastes, two deodorants, two beds, two comforter sets, and two of your favorite blankets and stuffed animals so you would know you’d never forget it somewhere. It was always harder for me to stay with our dad on the weekend because I always wanted to be on the go. There would be nights I fell asleep crying because I knew the next day we had to do everything all over again like a broken record. Staying with our mom was completely different compared to staying with him. When we stayed with our dad we stayed in a two-toned green, single wide mobile home. There was a small kitchen that could barely fit a small, circular 4 person table in it, a living room that basically made up the entire trailer, two bedrooms and one bathroom. Dad obviously took one of the bedrooms and I had the back bedroom that barely fit my twin size bed because the washer and dryer took up most of the room. I was just grateful to have a room, because Mason and Austin had to sleep on the pull out couch in the living room. During the day when we were there, we weren’t allowed to play outside that often because dad didn’t want the responsibility of standing outside and watching us. But being with mom was complete paradise. When our parents got divorced, Dad took the mobile home and having us every other weekend, while mom took the car and us kids. We didn’t have anywhere to go so we ended up moving in with my mom’s parents

until we had enough money saved up for an apartment. They owned a two-story house in Decatur that was HUGE compared to the stinky trailer we lived in, or as I say crammed into. It had two and a half bathrooms, four bedrooms, a full basement, a separate dining room, and a living room, reading nook, kitchen, and eat-in kitchen area that was bigger than dad's trailer. When we were there, we were allowed to actually go outside and play with the other children in the neighborhood. Sometimes, we all would walk to our school to play on the playground, ride our bikes or scooters up and down the street until it was dark or even go down to the woods and find a creek to play in. On the other days when I didn't feel like going outside, I'd invite some friends over for tea parties and play dress up with my mom and Aunt Jenny's old prom dresses. As we grew older, my siblings and me started to understand what had happened with our parents divorce and all the constant problems that came from our dad's drinking habit, we slowly stopped going to see him. Our oldest brother Cody was grown up and had lived in Florida for years already so he didn't really have any clue what Mason, Austin and I were going through. Mason was the first one that stopped going to see Dad which left me receiving the brunt of his anger. After a while I got tired of the emotional abuse and disappointment which eventually caused me to stop going over to see him. Austin still went to see him when he could for a while between school, work and baseball but he eventually grew tired of our dad's ways.

With divorced parents comes a lot of tears and heart break, along with everybody expecting the older children to step up and take care of the younger ones. Mason was the oldest between Austin and me; he always did his best to look out for the both of us. But most of the time it was just me taking care of Austin. Our mom always worked two to three jobs at a time trying to save up enough money for us to get out of our grandparents' house into an apartment, and our grandparents were always busy doing something else. When we would go over to our dad's house I not only had to care for Austin, but I also took care of our dad to make sure he never fell or tripped over anything and got hurt. One night, I put Austin to bed and then I went to lie down in my bed when I hear a loud crash and my dad screaming "OH SHIT!" I ran into the bedroom to find my dad lying face down on the floor with his head cut open. He had gotten so drunk that, when he went in to tell Austin good night he tripped over his feet and cracked his head on the corner of the metal bed frame. I was only eight when this happened and all I could think

was, *Children should be out playing in dirt with their friends, learning to fish, go to the neighborhood swimming pool during the summer, riding their bikes or scooters around, having both parents at school sporting events—not cooped up inside taking care of another child or drunken adult basically acting like a child.* The only times I remember both of my parents were at my softball games was before they got divorced. After they separated my dad couldn't even manage to walk up the street to the baseball diamonds when I had games in the town he lived in—all because he couldn't bring his alcohol with him. And my mom always worked so much it was rare to see her out in the bleachers as well, but I always knew I'd see Mason, Austin, and my grandparents out in the crowd.

Adults often get too wrapped up into the fights and arguments during the divorce; they forget to think about what's going on in their children's minds. Even with all the ups and downs I've been through in my life so far I continue looking towards the future. I haven't always been dealt the best cards, but I have so much to look forward to in this life! I have so much love in my soul waiting for the right person to start a new chapter in life and start a family with. From my experience, I've been taught how NOT to act in a relationship, how to NOT get caught up in addiction, how I want to raise my own children one day, and how I want them growing up. I was taught to be better and live wiser than my parents.

Ashlyn Sutton

My First Float Trip

The sun was shining; the temperature was in the 90's, and the smell of sunscreen and tanning lotion was strong! Oh sweet summertime, how you bring so much adventure and joy into my life. Finally, the weekend that was going to turn the year of 2019 around for me was here.

It was July 5th, 2019 and I had just gotten off after a hot, lingering day at work. As I drive back home to Jerseyville to pack all of my things into the car I had the hottest summer hits blaring and the windows rolled down. When I got home I gathered all of the camping/float trip essentials I could find: sunglasses, bathing suits, towels, a couple changes of my comfiest clothes, bug spray, water shoes, tanning lotion, blankets and pillows, and of course **BOOZE!** After getting everything situated in the car, I hopped in and eagerly drove to meet up with my boyfriend, Jake, so we could drive to the campground together.

Seeing Jake is always my favorite. I pull into the parking lot of his burnt red brick apartment complex as he comes walking up to greet me with the biggest hug. Jake has his cut off flannel shirt on, unbuttoned making his chiseled torso completely visible, his self-cut jean shorts that have a rip up the side--because he got frustrated that it was so hard to ease the scissors through the fabric and he ripped it--dirty cowboy boots, and his worn in ball cap on backwards with his dark brown mullet flowing in the wind. After we get all of the hugs and kisses in that's needed to make up for the lost time, Jake and I loaded the stuff from my run down, black Toyota Corolla into his beefed up, white Chevrolet pick up truck. On our way out of town, Jake and I stopped to pick up Zack and Nick, two of Jake's childhood friends. Zack walked up to us with his turquoise, pink and blue Hawaiian shirt, khaki colored swim trunks, too big for his face Oakley sunglasses and his tan bucket hat on; while Nick walked up to the truck with no shirt on, deep sunglasses, and bright red, above the knee swim trunks on looking like he just walked out of the "Baywatch" movie. The four of us crammed in and were finally ready to hit the road!

By the time we make it to Parks Bluff Campground in Lesterville, Missouri, it was almost nine in the evening. Getting

settled into our campsite was anything but simple. With the sun going down it made it a bit perplexing to set up the tents that Jake, Nick and I would be sharing. As ten o'clock rolled around, we managed to get the tent all set up, or at least sufficient enough to make it last all weekend. After everyone got their tents set up, or in Zack's case; his hammock set up, our gigantic group of 30 busted out the drinks and toasted a shot of fireball to the weekend and we partied into the night.

Finally, the day has come! **FLOAT DAY!** I'm the first to wake up; I roll jake over and expose his scruffy, bearded face. As he opens his sleepy ocean blue eyes I scream "**IT'S FLOAT DAY! IT'S FLOAT DAY!**" Jake goes to wake up Nick while I fling Zack out of his hammock that he set up tied to two trees. The four of us get ready and head into town to get breakfast at Lesterville's quaint, barn red diner called Paula's Home Cooking. As we walk in all I can smell is the sweet, scrumptious odor of the bacon and homemade sausage gravy. It was a home-y environment; you could immediately tell that the owners wanted to welcome every single one of their guests with open arms as if they were family. The walls were covered with shelves that were full of thousands of trinkets and antiques. From antique salt shakers to old tattered books to outdated vinyl records, they had it all! But, the best part was of course the mouthwatering, homemade food. The guys' plates were just mounds of food consisting of scrambled eggs, and biscuits and sausage gravy; they grabbed everything they could fit onto one plate. My belly was brimming with biscuits and gravy, bacon, sausage and of course some waffles as an enriching breakfast to start the day.

Once all of us have full bellies, Jake, Nick, Zack and I cram back into the truck and head back to the campground. Before we make it back to the campground, Jake spots the small town's only convenient store and decides he wants to make a quick stop. Walking in, to the right was the checkout counter and standing behind it was the blonde, curly haired cashier, with shelves of liquor and cigarettes behind her. Straight ahead towards the back I saw tourist central: t-shirts, koozies, disposable cameras, magnets, you name it! But most importantly, the beer coolers were also back there. That's where Jake, Nick and Zack move towards, while I move to the left side of the store where they had the chips, pre-made sandwiches, lunch meat and bread, cheese, any snack you could think of honestly--basically the most perfect

convenient store for campers and floaters coming to visit for the summer! Before the four of us left we grabbed some sandwiches and chips for lunch, waters to keep us hydrated throughout the day, beer (and Smirnoff Ice for me since I'm picky and don't care for beer), and of course a couple bags of ice for the multiple coolers we had between the whole group. We loaded everything into the truck and headed back to the campground.

As we got back to the campground everybody else was finally up and getting ready for the day. Bathing suits on, **CHECK!** Sunscreen or tanning lotion on, **CHECK!** Sunglasses and bucket hats on, **CHECK!** Fanny packs full of snacks and my hydrapak back pack full of my Smirnoff Ice, **CHECK!** Drinks and Jell-O shots in the coolers with ice in the back of the truck, **CHECK!**

As we get down to the gravel bar you can hear everybody's music blaring with the smell of beer and sunscreen in the air. Before we unloaded everything to walk down to the river where the campground employees were handing out the rafts, the group had to make a toast. The guys and Jake are off to one side shot gunning beers to kick off the float, while us girls were doing Jell-O shots and applying body glitter EVERYWHERE. Jake, Nick and Zack got in line to get our rafts for the group. We got our three 8-person rafts and one 6-person raft all lined up on the edge of the river and tied together so the group wouldn't get separated later on. The guys tossed in the coolers while the girls and I jumped into the rafts with the ginormous blue tooth speaker and we were off!

The first song on the playlist was "Chattahoochee" by Alan Jackson, and the way all of us were singing you would've thought we were trying out for The Voice. As we're floating down the river Jake, Nick, Zack and I are all in one float; while everyone else is laughing and enjoying each other's company in the other three rafts. I take a couple minutes to absorb the beauty of the nature surrounding us. It's hard for me to focus on one thing, from the voluminous trees to how clear the water is even though it's starting to get deeper the farther we go out, to the birds chirping all around us and the butterflies and dragon flies zooming past us. It was all so breathtaking!

Now we're about ten minutes into the float and all we hear is "**POP!**" Everybody turns to see a flushed, baby face named Dylan attempting to plug a poorly repaired hole.

"The patch busted!" Dylan bellowed in his panicked, hillbilly

accent. “We gotta stop before all the air comes out!”

As he holds his hand over the hole attempting to keep as much air in as he could, we paddled the rafts as fast as we could to get to the closest gravel bar. After the guys successfully get us to the gravel bar before the raft deflated, Brian, one of Jake’s coworkers, calls the campground and they promptly brought us a new raft in about twenty minutes. In the meantime, to pass time we all did a group shot together (or shot gun a beer if you were a beefcake of a man *insert eye roll*). Some of us found a rope swing to swing from, and others just sunbathed along the side of the rafts.

Finally, we are all set to start floating down the river again; drinks are flowing and the music is blaring. Laughter and smiles are being shared and suddenly “Truth Hurts” by Lizzo starts playing. Almost instantly the girls and I stand up in the raft, flailing our arms in the air and screaming along to the females all around the world’s summer anthem. Meanwhile all the guys laugh and sing along while pushing us into the crisp water that makes our already sunburn sting a little bit.

At this point in the float, it’s almost two in the afternoon and we’re all starting to get hungry. In the distance we see the next gravel bar we can stop at and eat lunch. It’s larger than the others and the water is much deeper than the rest of the river we’d been on so far, perfect for a swimming break after we finish eating. After all of us finish our sandwich and chips and our second or third drink, maybe starting our fourth since we’ve stopped, the guys untied one of the rafts and flipped it over. **SLIP AND SLIDE TIME!** The girls and I sat our drinks down while the guys situated themselves along the sides of the raft to hold on to. I was up first, talk about nerves! They counted down from three, “3..! 2..! 1..!” And off I went, getting the best running start I could get with my feet sinking into the gravel, and I feel my belly slide down the bottom of the raft as the guys lifted the raft up launching me into the air and crashing into the water. I was having so much fun, I didn’t want us to stop. We continued for about an hour and a half to two hours on the slip and slide and taking a little swimming break before it was time to venture off and finish our float.

As our float was coming to an end, with the final gravel bar getting closer and closer, I looked back on how amazing that one day actually was. We were finally reaching our final destination,

pulling out all of our coolers and unsticking Nick and Zack's drunk, sunburnt bodies from the sides of the raft and head to the line for the bus to go back. All of the guys do one more celebratory shot gun before the bus arrives to pick us up, while all of us girls stand back and roll our eyes and laugh. The bus finally arrives and the group loads up the coolers and struggles to find a seat in the already packed bus and head back to the gravel bar that the trucks are parked at. As we pull into the parking lot Jake, Nick, Zack and I grab our cooler and hop off the bus and hear music blaring down by the river from the DJ who was set up on the bank. We run into Jake's boss with his gray hair and sunburn glistening, beer in one hand and food in the other. Some of the group went back to our campsite for a nap, but Jake, Nick, Zack and I stayed down at the gravel bar to party until the sun set. Everybody was passing around drinks and food while wading in the river and enjoying each other's company.

After the sun set the boys and I packed everything into the truck and snuck off to go into town and ordered pizza before everything closed for the evening. We returned to the campsite with hands full of pizzas and smiles from ear to ear. Jake and I ended the night laying our warm, sunburnt bodies in the cool, dewy grass talking each other's ears off as I talked about how rough my year had started and what our future together looked like; all while the 4th of July fireworks were going off above us.

When we finally settled down, for a split second, my body filled with sadness because that meant one of the best days of 2019 had finally come to an end. But, with the day ending also comes with the wonderful memories that I will forever be able to keep of my first float trip and the wonderful group of people I met for the first time. It was a fun day that included laughter, drinks and even better friends. Until next time, Black River.

Samantha Voss

Bar Fly

He's first to the bar
The silver **fox barks** hello
Hyenas in sight,
"One for them too, before you go!"

The hyenas start to swoon
Let me guess, white claw for you too?
They're Young, pretty. And yes it is black cherry.
One 22, other 23, but to the fox... just a piece of meat

A cougar struts on by
With the silver fox, directly in sight
Drinking a Tito's, Sprite and a twist of lime
She's on the prowl, with a snack on the mind

Now here's the big bad bear
The one who'd never hurt a fly
Bearded, tattooed, that cougars perfect guy
Fireball for him and tequila for you, my oh my

The queen of the bar, lioness if you will
Shouts last call, no more watering hole
A bar is a jungle, enter if you will
Until another time, my fellow bar flies

Samantha Voss

Middle of the Action

Should we have left, probably not, not with “risking our moms throwing a fit and what not”. But did we follow the rules sticking to our roles but just as a lawyer does, we jumped right through the loophole. Social Distancing is no problem when two writing fools have nothing else better to do, notebook and keys in hand... “We have so much catching up to do.” He agrees and reminds me of the last time we sat in our seats or really did anything.

We walked and we talked, we saw everything, and then saw more but then I see a stoop “right in the middle of the action.” plenty of space so we can converse a little while longer. It was chipped in some places, but neither of us cared. It was worth breaking away. It was mid afternoon, a little after 3 but still warm until the breeze blew it cool. It could have waited but then i’d be sitting here thinking of an idea when instead I could just be writing. I paid for it trust me, I won’t be leaving again. I thought we could go outside and long as we don’t walk 6 feet of each other’s sides. It was needed time, the sunshine, the gloom, and and the company of another person. I’ve missed everything and everyone, especially you.

"72 hours of **peanuts**"

By. Samantha Voss

I am crazy,

She is crazy,

He is also crazy,

That one? Yes, you my friend-you guessed correctly,

(Batshit) crazy, aint nobody special..

Not a single one of us is any more than your average **Peanut** at you're more than the average baseball game in one **-big-** stuffed to its brim bag at the one of many shitty concession stands

waiting for some snot **NOSE** small child to

**Pitter and
patter on down to**

tug on their fathers jersey

Hoping for a bag to call munch on.

Waiting, waiting, and waiting even longer
for someone to open the bag.

Waiting to expose its contents

Baseball **peanuts**, *iconic, salty, crunchy,*
the one thing (besides the game) that makes

Baseball

Baseball.

It's the rush you dont even recognize you know? Waiting for someone to reach for the obnoxiously loud plastic bag, rip it open, pick up the first one, open it and

SMACK

"Home Run!!!!" See.

Peppermint Rooster Review

This is all so mesmerizing for a baseball fan, which I am surely not. Which makes this entire thing as little amount of fun as someone can have.

Can you imagine being *that peanut*? Can you imagine being trapped
in that bag until someone decides it's time
You should be freed??

You literally feel suffocated surrounded by 50 other
seemingly

identical

peanuts

that are also

desperately waiting for someone to get hungry and spend an unfair amount of
money on a bag of us; chosen,
broken, set free and then to **eat**
(*metaphorically*).

That's how it feels being in here
The difference is

...

...

Our bag open, even if you pry.
This game never ends, so
go give her a whirl, and
go give him a try

this game never ends

whether it be

BASEBALL....

or just

ALL — IN — MY — MIND.

Contributors

MITCHELL BUSHNELL is originally from a very small town in southeast Texas, called Winnie. He joined the Air Force right after high school, and through the service, he's been stationed in England, Qatar (for a deployment), and Missouri. Mitchell served for six years and then decided to stay in the Midwest where he met his now husband, Andrew. They have two cats (riveting information), August and Milo, and they're both students at L&C. Mitchell added, "Oh, and I love Bubby! It's the greatest drink on the planet!"

ERIN GAMBLIN is a student at L&C.

KALEIGH GRACE is a Lewis and Clark Community College graduate with Associates in both Fine Art and Graphic Design. As a highly creative individual, she has a broad focus and works in illustration, photography, fine art, and publication design. Her art pieces have been featured in galleries and publications across the St. Louis area. Kaleigh will be continuing her professional and creative goals at the University of Missouri St. Louis, seeking a BFA in Graphic Design in the Fall of 2021.

JESSICA HAMEL is a student at L&C.

ISABELLA HARNED is an 18-year-old homeschool student taking classes at L&C. Her writing inspiration comes from her dog and her two cats as well as the traveling she has done with her family.

WYATT HEFLIN is 19 years old, and he's currently attending his second semester at L&C as a Music Production major. Wyatt writes, "My major instrument is the guitar, but I also play the trumpet, bass, and piano. I can sing pretty well too! I'm the rhythm guitarist and vocalist for my band Silver Material--we're a Midwest emo group based in Staunton, IL. We're currently working on releasing a split EP with a friend of ours and hope to be releasing an album at some point later this year. I spend a lot of my free time doing something music related, but I also like playing video games, hanging out with friends, and spending too much money at Germania Brew Haus. (It's worth it honestly)."

ALLEN HORNBECK is a 21 year old Lewis and Clark student and K-8 substitute teacher. He graduated with an Associates in Arts back in December of 2020. In the fall, he will be in the Greenville University program through Lewis and Clark in order to get his bachelors degree in child education to be a full time teacher. Throughout his time in Lewis

and Clark, he wrote different literature including short stories, books, and tv/movie scripts. He writes, “I get inspiration from random stuff I see or do everyday. After seeing the potential I could have after submitting the writings that are in the magazine, I hope to one day publish books or make screenplays that make it big time.”

ANGEL JENKINS is a young creator who focuses mostly on fine art things like painting and drawing. She is in college with the plans to get a Bachelor’s in Art Education. While she doesn’t usually write in her free time, she does enjoy writing creative pieces, especially if they are about her guinea pigs.

ELYSSA LANDRUM grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, and graduated high school at sixteen to move to Northern California. After four years on the west coast, she is now living in Alton, Illinois. She is currently bartending on the weekends and taking classes during the weekdays. Studying, gaming, and lounging with her cats take up most of her free time.

JOE MORAN is a recent former student at L&C.

JILL POHLMAN is a student at L&C.

OLIVIA SCIFRES is a student at L&C.

ASHLYN SUTTON just turned 25 this year, and she’s currently enrolled in the Paralegal Studied program but recently decided to change to Business Administration or Human Services. She has played softball since she was in T-ball. Ashlyn writes, “I enjoy cooking, hiking and getting all dressed up and going out with my boyfriend and our friends. I grew up in Decatur, Illinois with my Mom and Dad. Most of my essays relate to what I went through as I grew up. I hope you all can enjoy them and some can relate to them. Enjoy.

SAMANTHA VOSS recently graduated with an Associate’s degree at L&C pursuing Psychology. In her free time she enjoys abstract painting, creative writing , and yoga on a warm sunny day. She added, “I have always loved writing and had a passion for psychology and how the mind works. ‘Perfect Peanuts’ became a combination of those two passions, and my own interpretation of mental illness from experience and textbooks along many years. Writing Courses at L&C allowed me to explore myself as a writer and a passion to continue in the future.”

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