

Peppermint Rooster Review

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Dear Reader,

This is the eleventh 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 ninth 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 Avalon Eales.

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 LCCC 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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Ciara Cook

Pulled Under

When I was a child, summer break meant being outside. As soon as the sun came up I would spend my days climbing to the top of the pine trees, roaming our woods, and stomping through the creek. My parents would take my sisters and me to the Raging Rivers water park and our neighborhood's small pool to cool off on sunny days. Our family consisted of the five of us. My father was a tall, athletic man with chestnut brown hair and skin that tanned easily in the sun. My mother had blonde hair that she kept cut to her ears, and she was short in stature. Together they had three girls. Lauren was the oldest, I was the middle child, and Morgan was the youngest. We all had different shades of blonde hair like our mom and we tanned in the sun like our dad. During the summer Lauren and Morgan would often join me on my outdoor adventures.

One of the largest parts of my childhood, though, was my father taking us all out on the Mississippi River in his boat. My dad bought his 18-foot open bow runabout in 1993, a forest green and white boat with the word *Mariah* on the side. He'd load it on to his matching green trailer and we would pull it to a small boat ramp off the River Road. My parents would strap my two sisters and I into thick life jackets before we would all pile on board and pull away. The day would then be spent riding up and down the river, taking different water channels between Alton and Grafton.

Some of my earliest memories on the Mississippi River consist of floating in the water with my dad in a pair of skis. He would put my feet in front of his and hold on to me while the boat pulled us up and out of the water, until we were gliding across the top of it. When I was a little older I got my own pair of skis. They were wooden, covered in chipped white paint, and tied together by an old rope. Even though they were used and ancient, I thought my skis were the

coolest thing ever and practiced until I could successfully use them.

When none of us were skiing, we would spend our time floating in the water, riding an inner tube, or pulled up on a sandbar. No matter what we were doing, though, my parents had strict safety rules. My sisters and I always had to have our life jackets on and buckled. If we got into the water to swim there was always a floating ski rope thrown in, we were supposed to stay by or hold on to. From the time we could understand, our parents made it clear to us that the river can be very dangerous, that hidden under the water there are strong currents that could pull you under and sweep you away. Even though I always followed these rules and understood why we had them, I never felt fear on the river. I never thought that would change, until it did.

On this particular summer day my family woke up with plans to spend it on the boat. It was a hot and sticky day. Being out on the water was the perfect way to keep my sisters and me cool and busy. My mom put us all in our swimsuits and started packing sandwiches in one of those small blue plastic coolers while my father was outside prepping the boat. When everything was ready, we piled into the car and headed five minutes down the road to the boat ramp.

In the parking lot my mom put us in our lifejackets while my dad got the boat in the water. Once everything was ready we climbed off the docks and slowly pulled away. After we got out of the no wake zone, my dad turned around and asked us what we wanted to do.

"Pull us on the inner tube!" I said.

Lauren agreed that she would ride with me so my dad threw it off the back of the boat and we hopped on. It was a big red and yellow tube with holes two blow up seats sat in. Lauren and I climbed into the seats and got comfortable as my dad started pulling us across the water. After about 15 minutes of tubing Lauren decided she was ready to get back into the boat so she signaled for my dad to stop. He

pulled us back and she hopped off but I decided I wasn't ready to get out of the water.

"Can I stay in and ski?" I asked.

"Mom and I want to go to the sandbar and hang out there for a bit. You can ski while we head that way," my dad answered as he was tying up the tube.

Once everything was secured, he threw out my rope and helped me slip my feet into the skis before lowing me into the river. I got into position and the boat pulled me up and out of the water. As we began going down the river, I looked out around me towards the bluffs. They were covered in trees, thick with green foliage. I glided across the river, keeping my mind busy creating stories about different creatures that lived in the caverns and crevices I spotted in the rocks. Soon, I felt the boat slow causing me to sink back into the water. We had reached our destination and I held onto the rope as my dad pulled me back to them.

Once I was back in and situated in my seat, our father started to steer towards the shore to beach the boat. He slowly drove the tip up onto the sand and my mom tossed out a metal anchor to secure the boat if it came loose. Lauren, Morgan, and myself started tossing our buckets and shovels onto the shore to play with before our parents helped us to the sand. I looked around us and spotted two more boats further down with a group of adults and a couple of kids circled around them.

"Ciara, help me make a castle!" Morgan said as she started filling her bucket.

I agreed and got down beside her. The sandbar was a mixture of sand and mud so when we pulled off the bucket our castle came out lumpy and drooping but we didn't mind. We made one castle after another, digging a large moat around them as we went. My parents and Lauren sat in fold out chairs watching and enjoying the sun. We sat immersed in making our sand kingdom when suddenly we were startled by panicked screams.

I fell back as I turned towards the noise. The other group

of adults down the beach were running in and along the edge of the water in a frenzy. My parents jumped up and we all looked around, confused about what was happening. I looked out to the river and that's when I saw it. A man's forearm was thrashing out of the water as it was pulled past us. It seemed like only a moment until the hand disappeared completely, going under the waves. I was horrified and felt frozen in place with my heartbeat hammering in my ears.

"Everyone, get back in the boat now!" my father yelled, snapping me back to reality.

He frantically grabbed all our things as mom hoisted my sisters and me back into the boat, trying to keep us calm. Once in, my dad backed us off the shore and started slowly going around the sandbar, desperately looking for any sign of the man. I sat in my seat and began to cry as the realization of what we had just witnessed set in. It was all too much for me to deal with so I pulled my knees to my chest and covered my head with a towel. I wasn't sure how long I stayed like that but eventually I heard my mom say we were back at the docks. We loaded the boat back onto the trailer and returned home. My mom spent the rest of the evening trying to reassure Lauren, Morgan and me, but I wasn't convinced. The sight of the hand going under kept replaying in my mind. I laid awake in bed that night, tossing and turning unable to sleep.

During the following weeks I would hear my parents discussing the incident and was finally able to piece together what happened. The man was playing in the water with some of the children in the group. The children all had lifejackets on, but he wasn't wearing one. At some point a child floated away from the shore and he went to get them. The man waded to them and pushed them back towards the land then he took a wrong step, not realizing the sandbar suddenly dropped off to deep water. He could no longer stand anywhere and started struggling as the currents pulled him away and under. He did in fact end up drowning. Responders eventually located his body and he

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was able to be returned home. This was the first time I really thought about death and it put a caution in me that wasn't there before. My family still goes boating on the Mississippi River, but we have never gone back to a sandbar, and the memory of that day is something that continues to stay with me.

Jacob Grandone

The Search for a Cultist

October 3, 1857

It has been three months since Chanson Minor's attack on Crescendious, a nation where music is incorporated into nearly everything people do. For those that may be reading this far into the future, Chanson Minor, a deity of Crescendious, launched an assault on the nation in a bid for ultimate power. Luckily heroes stepped up. Many people, including myself, Sir Bryon--a human who took an oath to devote myself to the protecting people--fought alongside the heroes to stop Chanson Minor from gaining the power he craved. I am now on my way to Forgentif, a nation of mechanical invention and innovation, both new and plagiarized, in search of some remaining cultists of Chanson Minor. Through some investigation, I have a good lead as to where to start, but I am not sure where it will take me.

I figured going to ask the heads of A.C.I.D. Company would be a good place to start. There is Abe S. Traction, a short, pale, and pudgy human, and Ben Ary, a tall, lean, and athletic looking elf. I tried to see if they would know where to start. A.C.I.D. Company is the biggest company in Forgentif currently, with their specialties being in machines and prosthetic limbs. I have had the pleasure of working with them before, in getting my now prosthetic leg. (I needed it after the battle with Chanson Minor).

We met in their main office, a decently sized room. As you enter, there are bookshelves on all the walls, with the main door on one of the walls, and a doorway on the left wall, which seems to lead to a secondary office area/break room area. A good-sized wooden desk sits in the middle of this main room.

"You would have better luck finding who you are looking for in the Undercity," Abe said.

"You need to go to the Algorithm Muggers bar, in the

shopping district, and mention to the barkeep that "it seems like this city was built on respect and lies," Ben chimes in. "Also I heard the leader is a half-orc named Holg, so be on the lookout for him."

So, I am off. I manage to find my way to the bar just fine, while taking in some of the scenery while I am here. It's a grand country. Most of it is one big city, with some grasslands in the south of it. There are skyscrapers, plazas, restaurants, food stands, and more stores than anyone can ever go to in one lifetime.

It is about a three-hour walk from the main A.C.I.D. Company building, but it's a fairly easy walk, since I don't really have to trek over lots of grass or through forests or anything like that.

The well-lit bar seems like nothing special. It has a somewhat ragged look, and the wallpaper was peeling in some of the corners. The tables were chipped in some places, and there was a musty feel to the room. I suspect it's to make it look unassuming. I go up and talk to the current barkeep, a short and tan gnomish lady, and mention that "It seems this city was built on respect and lies."

"Ah I see, I have some people you can talk to about that," the barkeep says. In a more hushed tone she says, "Go upstairs, take a left, go to the end of the hall. It should be the last door on the right, pull the plunger handle forward like you would a lever and that should help you out."

So, I follow her directions, and find myself at a supply closet. I look down at the plunger stuck to the ground, think for a second, and do as I was told. When I release the handle, the entire closet seems to shift. The whole thing slides back and reveals a hidden staircase! As the sound of the bigger crowd coming from the bottom of the stairs hits me, I decide to go down.

This main area is smaller than expected. There is a bar, which lines the entire back wall, directly across from the stairs, and some seating to the left of the stairs. To the right of the stairs, there is an area with a large table filled

with people drinking and gambling. Beyond that, there is an opening that leads to what seems to be a fighting pit with spectator seating. The only other area I see is another opening, this time on the wall that the stairs are on, that leads to a room where people seem to be smoking, but none of the smoke is able to escape the room, for some reason.

Not seeing any half-orcs in this main room, I decide to start looking around. I walk over to the room where people are smoking, not entering, and peer in, to see if I see anyone. The most notable thing in there is an elven woman humoring a couple of human men.

Making my way over to the room with the fighting ring, a dwarven man calls me over and tries to get me to start gambling with him and his group.

"Oi! You there, with the armor! Why don't you come over and play a few rounds with us?"

"No thank you," I politely reply as I start back in on walking over to the other room.

As I enter the other room, I see a few half-orcs, but I am able to pick out the one I am looking for. Holg is standing behind the bleachers. He is a tall and slender half-orc, and he has artificial legs from the knees down, with "feet" being replaced with turret like bases.

I make my approach. As I am about to get up to him, he turns, and stares right at me.

"Can I help you sir?" he asks.

"Yes," I reply, "I am looking for someone, specifically someone who serves Chanson Minor."

"I can help you, but you need to prove yourself first." He motions with his head over to the fighting pit.

I reluctantly agree. Holg gives me a quick look over, as to gauge who should be my opponent, and calls a green dragonborn over. He then lets us in the ring and explains the rules.

"You are each only allowed one weapon. Whoever knocks the other out first wins. And if you want your information," he

says as he looks over to me, "I recommend you either win, or put on a good show!"

The match starts. I was armed with my longsword and my opponent, his great ax. He starts by taking a strong downswing with his ax, and I barely manage to dodge. I counter with a slash from my sword. This goes on for what feels like an eternity, trading blows, and standing firm, neither of us willing to lose. I end up managing to get behind him and put myself into a position which would allow me to force him to surrender.

"Give up now. I have you beat," I say out of breath.

For a moment it looks like he wants to strike back, but he doesn't. He surrenders and the crowd goes wild. I had won. It was quite exhilarating, yet quite tiring.

After we get out of the ring and bandaged up, Holg approaches me. "Well fought," he said, "now as for the information you requested, there were some people here that some patrons had said were going on about this 'Chanson Minor' and complained about it to the staff. The staff had the people leave, but with someone trailing them. From what the trail told me they are off to the country of Boutenta, I am not sure why, and this was a week ago, I think."

I make sure to thank him and I am on my way. I don't know why, but I need to find out. I think that will be for tomorrow, though, because I can't go after them in my current, battered, state. So, I find a place to sleep and I take a night's rest, resolved to go after this cultist tomorrow.

Elizabeth Gross

The Harsh Rippling Waves

The weather was cold and gray while the sky was spitting mist onto our faces. My family and I were all suited up and ready for possibly one of the most extreme and memorable adventures we have experienced yet. Two years ago, we were in the deep, rocky whitewater of Tennessee. On this trip, we learned many lessons from our experience while rafting and gained respect for those that raft on the whitewater daily to provide this enthralling adventure to all.

Each one of us had a different expectation and view of the journey we were all about to experience. My father and I were super stoked and ready to go—we are always up to try new things and put ourselves out there. My two stepsisters, Chloe, and Savannah, were incredibly nervous and hesitant about going through with the entire rafting trip because neither one was very adventurous. My stepmom and my sister Cassie were quite nervous and worrying that something bad may happen, yet they were still excited. Before signing up we all discussed what we expected, and we were all split between looking forward to the raft and fearing what could happen if the water were to be too rough.

We began our journey as we pushed our raft off the bank and away from the other groups. The raft was full to its limit: while my dad and I were in the front, my two sisters were in the middle, my other sister and my stepmom were in the third row, and the instructor was all the way in the back. Our raft was about 50 yards in, and we dropped from a small waterfall, which threw everyone in the raft forward. This left my sister and my stepmom struggling to get themselves upright and back into the row they started in. Moments later, the raft got stuck on a large rock in the middle of the water. After about 10 minutes of being stuck, a few rafts purposely bumped into us to help us out, and we were finally set free from the rock. This was a big relief to my dad and me as we

started to get anxious watching all the rafts float past us and continue down the river.

We continued down the flowing stream of whitewater, dodging numerous rocks and using all the strength in our arms to steer with our oars. The speed of the water was picking up, so our raft began to drift through the water and right over some of the rigid rocks. Finally, the water began slowing down and our raft was gliding over the smooth, flowing waters. My family and I took a break and hopped in the water to cool off from working ourselves up after the first half of our stressful journey.

As we took a break from the action, I reminisced about the time my family and I were on a very relaxing float trip for the weekend. We were floating down the Black River in a raft; my family had four separate rafts, while I was on the one that held my five cousins. These trips while floating were always so refreshing. We take the entire day to float five miles down the river. The sound of the river was very calming, while the warm sun was hitting our raft just right.

Our raft hardly needed to be steered in any direction, as the steady water easily took us down the river and kept us away from each side of the bank. At one point, the float was so smooth that everyone on the raft lay down and stared up at the bright, blue sky. After lying down, I could feel the water slowly taking us down the river and with each slight turn, my eyes grew heavier and heavier. I could not describe a more relaxing feeling than the warm sun hitting my skin, the soothing feeling of the water taking us down its own path, and the tranquil sound of the river flowing downstream.

It was now time to get back on the whitewater and finish the second half of our journey. We eased out of the slow waters and began to see more whitewater ahead. Our raft was now going over the most rough and perilous part of the river. The front end of the raft, which my dad and I were on, swiftly dipped deep into the river. The front end was flooded with water; my dad and I had to climb up onto the middle of the raft to try to keep the raft from continuing to

go under. Nevertheless, the middle of the raft then sank under the water, leaving half of my family climbing to the back of the raft with nowhere else to go.

The tour guide, who was all the way in the back, gave my sister and my stepmom instructions for what to do. He said, "Hurry, drag your oars into the water and push them as deep and hard as they can go." After about another onerous minute of our raft going under, the water slowly started to drain out of the raft. It now began rising on top of the water again, which was such a relief for everyone.

Now that our raft was straightened out again and on track, we all got back to our spots and grabbed our oars. We began making our way down the untamed waters, and suddenly we saw a huge boulder ahead. The rocky boulder was at least 10 feet tall in the front, but towards the back near us, it was shaped like a ramp, inclining to the high end of the rock. Our tour guide told us to paddle as close to the rock as we could. We had no clue why he was instructing us to do this, but we did it anyway.

Suddenly, as the back end of the raft was passing the inclining part of the rock, our tour guide jumped out of the raft and onto the boulder. He ran as fast as he could up to the tallest part of the rock and astonishingly, jumped off the tip of the boulder and did a front flip. He landed in the deep blue water and popped his head right back out of the water. We were all so shocked as he made his way right back onto the raft and watched us all in awe. A few moments later, he casually says to us, "By the way guys, my name is Wild Jack. They call me Wild Jack because I am the craziest tour guide here that loves to do crazy things." Together, we all let out a howling, boisterous laugh. After that, we carried on and paddled our way down the last sectors of the choppy waters.

At last, our journey came to an end, but the memories of it would never leave. This was definitely an unforgettable experience that my family and I were able to have together. We gained a better understanding of whitewater rafting; we

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learned that if we all work together, we can easily get out of a problem, and we learned small tips and tricks about how to use our oars and steer. However, out of everything from the trip, the biggest thing we gained was respect for the instructors that work on the waters every day and provide this amazing experience for anyone that wants to test it out! Since this whitewater rafting trip, my family has been on two more trips just like this in Montana and Colorado, and we had a blast yet again.

Justine LaPlante

Stairway To Heaven (The Climb)

It was finally the day! The excitement had kept me up all night, just knowing that I would have to begin my climb under the cover of darkness and not wanting to miss my chance for this "once in a lifetime" experience. I had been thinking about doing this hike ever since I first moved to Hawaii and heard about it. Seeing the island from the ground was a spectacular thing itself, but today I was going to face my debilitating fear of heights and see it from the top of Stairway to Heaven! Struggling to contain my excitement and anxiety, I pulled into the neighborhood I needed to park in. Engaging my car's clutch and brake I shifted out of first gear into neutral and pulled up my parking brake. Switching off the ignition, I was immediately immersed in complete darkness; the only light was the clock on the dashboard with glowing green numbers reading 3:00am.

I reached around in the dark for the small door handle on the driver's side of my car, until finally, I felt the familiar smooth hard plastic underneath my fingertips. Pulling my door open. I stepped out onto the shadowy street. Feeling my anxiety start to creep in I tried to ground myself. What did I see? Mostly, shadows, but I let my eyes start to focus on the lack of light. I could see the cul-de-sac I had parked in, with huge homes surrounding it. Sight wasn't going to help me much here, so what could I feel? Closing my eyes and taking a deep steadying breath, I felt the light morning ocean breeze dancing across my skin. Tasting the saltwater in the air, I listened until I could pinpoint the sound of the ocean surf hitting the coast nearby. Getting myself feeling better, it was time to get moving.

The directions I had found on the internet hiking boards took me through another adjacent neighborhood, where I had to ignore a fence and drop into an empty drainage ditch. Due to the dangerous nature of the hike, it's not open

to the public, and therefore not easy to get to. Following the directions, I broke off onto a narrow footpath with tall trees encroaching on both sides. After taking a wrong turn when the path got a little too overgrown with underbrush, I stumbled onto another person.

"Are you heading to the stairs too?" the male stranger called over to me.

"I am! Am I going the right way?" I asked.

"Yeah! They're right over here. Follow me if you want!" he responded.

Now, normally, I wouldn't go following some stranger I had found in the woods in the middle of the night, but I was feeling a little lost and was starting to worry slightly surrounded by only trees draped in shadows. Following him, I passed by the (thankfully) empty guard shack. From there, I carefully navigated through the chain-link fence until coming to what I was searching for: the base of the stairs.

Shuffling off to the side so the others could pass and begin their ascent, I double-checked myself one last time. My black and pink Nike sneakers were firmly in place so shoes, *check*. I made sure that I wore my skinny jeans so I wouldn't slip on my pants hem, so all good there. My pink Domo old-school seatbelt style belt was secure around my hips, *check*. My lightweight long sleeve gray and purple athletic jacket was zipped up perfectly, *check*. My baseball cap was in place and my long dark brown/red hair was tightly pulled back into a ponytail ensuring my hair would not impede my mission. *Only missing one thing*. Slipping my black, purple, and gray backpack off my shoulders I unzipped the small front pouch and pulled out my small black headlamp, and slid it onto my head over my hat. Re-securing my bag pocket, I slung my bag back onto my shoulders and ensured the straps were tight. Switching on my headlamp, I stepped up to the "stairs". Now, calling these stairs is a bit of a stretch--they are essentially just a ladder bolted into the side of a mountain and were only used as

a maintenance route a long time ago. Taking a last deep breath with the earth beneath me, I grabbed onto the cold metal sides of the ladder and began my climb. Step after step with only a headlamp to guide the way I kept moving. Luckily, in utter darkness, you don't fully realize the scope of the situation. All you know is that you keep moving up, you can't see where up ends or down begins so you aren't thinking about anything but the steps, one after another.

After what had to have been hours of darkness and step after step, the sun began to slowly lift the darkness around me. Feeling the sun's first morning rays warming my skin felt so amazing, that I decided to pause for a moment to enjoy it. Suddenly, clinging to the ladder and realizing I could see the world around me made my heart leap in my chest as I gripped the cold metal even tighter. Looking up, all I could see was endless stairs running along the finger of a mountain, hundreds of them until they disappeared into a plateau out of view. Not wanting to see what awaited me above, I decided to look around instead. On the horizon was ocean as far as the eye could see, in every direction except in front of me. A little further to the left was the elevated highway tunnel I had come from which had been built through the mountain. It was breathtaking. Remembering not to look down, I continued to climb. Step by step, rung after rung. Finally, up above, I could see a large metal platform! *I did it! I made it!* Pulling myself up onto the platform where a few other groups were having a snack break, I looked around and saw that the stairs keep going.

Noticing the stranger I had met in the woods below, I asked, "I must be getting close to the top though, right?"

With a chuckle he responded, "No, this is only the first of three stops on the way to the top."

Thanking him and trying not to let this dampen my spirits, I decided to unpack a protein bar and a water from my bag. I sat there, eating and enjoying the view of the ocean on the horizon for a few minutes until I finished my snacks, then I secured the wrapper and water bottle back in my bag to

dispose of later, along with my headlamp since I wouldn't need it anymore. Then it was time to resume the climb.

Finally, after hours of climbing the straight up-and-down ladder, it began to slant as I crested one of the peaks. The ladder started becoming more like a bridge, which I preferred a little bit more. Here the climb became more relaxing, so I decided to take the opportunity to flex my hands while I walked the more even area. With every stretch of my hands, I could feel the blood rushing back to my fingertips. Still, I kept going, hour after hour, step after step until I came to where the slope became almost straight up and down again. Giving my hands one more stretch, I gripped the ladder. Both my hands and legs were beginning to protest after every few steps until finally, I came to the next plateau. From this one, you could still see the ocean on the horizon but below that, all you saw was the mountain slope off into nothingness. Looking around started to bring back my fear of heights so I decided I shouldn't stay long and needed to keep moving.

Again, I started climbing, too tired to even think and not wanting to look around I kept my attention on the stairs in front of me--one after the other until the slope started to even out slightly again. Looking up I could see the stairs above me running along the edge of the mountain until they disappeared into the clouds above. *I can see the clouds; I can make it.* I told myself repeatedly until my head was just filled with a mantra of, *I can make it.* Step after step I kept climbing until finally, *I could feel the clouds around me.* The coldness of the cloud enveloping me and the weird way my vision was getting pulled me out of my mantra. Smiling to myself I paused for a moment and took it in, *I am in a cloud!* After realizing I'm still clinging to a sketchy ladder on a mountainside, I forced myself to keep moving.

For what felt like another couple of hours of autopilot climbing, I could see the old weather station and stone tower ruin. *This was really it... I finally made it!* Once I felt the cold stone of the tower beneath my feet, I found the nearest

wall and sank into it, letting the exhaustion pass through my muscles until the numbness seeped in. The hard part was finished, and I had done what I had thought was impossible for myself. I said I was going to make it and not even my fear of heights had stopped me. Here I was, above the clouds on what felt like the top of the world. All that was left for me to do was to descend the 3,922 steps back down the mountain.

Hawaii is full of beautiful landscapes, from ocean, mountains, waterfalls, volcanoes, etc., and after everywhere I visited there, Stairway to Heaven was my absolute favorite. I loved it so much that not only did I reach the top once, but I did it again a few months later, before the steps were vandalized to the point of making the trek impassable. Looking back now, I am so glad that I did this and honestly wish I could do it at least one more time.

Violet Elizabeth Mayes

Angus Mcgee and the Saloon

The entrance to the saloon was worn and splintered, both from an uncountable number of tough, beefy customers barging through and from an immeasurable number of bar fights ending with one or both parties being thrown out on their backsides. Angus Mcgee gulped and shuddered as he stood at the edge of the unknown. "Today's the day yer going to do it," the scrawny cowboy thought to himself, "Today you will become a man."

He took a deep breath and puffed out his chest, then slowly opened the door. The inside was dark, and there were many shadowy figures sitting at the tables. It was too dark to make out any of their features, but there was just enough light to see that they were huge.

Angus shuddered to himself. He had heard tales about the many fearsome characters that frequented this establishment. There was One-Eyed Willie, who lost his eye to a dynamite explosion during a train robbery; there was Terrible Charlie, who cut his own arm off and replaced it with a massive knife; and then there was the most vicious of them all--Ted Wilkinson. All the stories around town say he is handsome, well-groomed, good smelling, and has perfect teeth.

None of these things were true, but nobody had the courage to say otherwise. They say he could kill a man just with a gaze alone.

Angus whimpered as he looked around him. There were many menacing faces, a guy with a hook for a hand stabbed his knife into the table. Several prospectors were celebrating a newly found motherload of silver, loudly cackling and chugging down pints of beer. At a table shrouded in darkness, several women sat; they looked at Angus from across the room, their serpentine faces visible in the inky blackness, their slit pupils glowing like a full

moon against the midnight sky. They hissed at him as he walked past. He couldn't see them, but he could feel the spit from their split tongues flicking at him.

In the center of the saloon a pillar of light shone in the middle of the dark like an oasis in the unrelenting desert outside. Underneath the pillar was the bartender, pouring drinks and chatting with the customers.

Angus quickly and quietly made his way over to the bar. "Well, hello, I haven't seen you here before. You look a little scrawny for this kind of establishment," the barkeep said.

Angus puffed out his chest, licked his hand and slicked his hair back. In the best tough guy voice he could muster, which sounded more like a farmer who had been kicked straight in the gonads by an unruly mule, he decided to order a drink. "Give me the strongest drink you got."

"You sure?" the bartender asked. "I don't think a lily liver like you should be drinking this stuff."

Angus didn't answer and instead plopped a massive sack of cash onto the bar table.

"Woah! Forget I said anything."

The bartender immediately began mixing the drink. He began by pouring pure chemical ethanol into the shaker, then added a bottle of Eastern Brown Snake venom, the eye of a toad, a fang from the beast that will end the world, a bottle of the raw concept of rage, dandruff from Robert (43, unemployed), and phoenix snot and shook it like it owed him money.

He cracked open the cap of the shaker, releasing vibrant glowing green fumes and ghastly moans. He poured it into the glass, a few drops splattering onto the table and eating holes straight through it.

Angus whimpered quietly and loudly gulped. "Bottoms up!" he grabbed the glass and steadily moved it up to his lips. Slowly, he took a tiny sip. Immediately upon the toxic sludge touching the inside of his mouth he became drunker than he ever had before.

Stumbling around the room, he attempted to make

conversation with the other saloon goers.

"Hey! Watch where yer goin!" the prospectors yelled as he bumped into their table, knocking their mugs onto the floor and shattering them.

"MMmgrphgl," Angus slurred as he played with the hair of one of the snake women.

"Creep!" One of the snake women hissed as she bared her fangs and lunged at Angus. She barely missed as he drunkenly fell onto the floor.

He somehow got back onto his feet and waltzed to the table of a lone man, sitting away from everybody else.

"Mmmmwhaatsyournaameee," Angus tried to get out.

"The name's Ted Wilkinson," the lone man replied.

"Yeeer naame souunds awflly famillliar, Il thinky I did yer wife once."

There was a sudden silence in the building, the only noise being the squeaking of a mouse trying to get out of the building as quickly as possible.

Suddenly, the effects of the drink wore off and he became sober.

"WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY!?" Angus received a blast of toxic breath that smelled like the deepest, warmest depths of an industrial landfill.

"What did I say?" Angus sincerely asked.

"You said ya screwed Ted Wilkinson's wife, son!" one of the prospectors yelled out.

GULP! "Uh oh."

Angus made a run for it, charging out through the crooked saloon doors, Ted following suit.

"HEY!" Angus heard a voice call out, but it wasn't Ted--it was the barkeep. He looked back and behind Ted he saw the bartender angrily waving his fist, after opening the sack of money and realizing he had been duped with a bag of rocks.

Angus gulped and ran even faster than he ever had.

He ran through the town as he heard gunshots ringing out around him.

BANG! DING! POW!

Ted could be called a lot of things, but a good shot was not one of them. His revolver quickly ran out of bullets. Angus yelped and ran into a nearby bank.

Ted entered the bank and scanned the premises. The patrons were shaking in their boots at Ted's presence, but there was no sign of Angus anywhere. Out of the corner of Ted's eye he spotted a box rattling. "Oh-hohoho. I've got you now!" He opened the box to find it empty. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a tiny blip of Angus leaving through the door. "ANGUS!" he yelled as he ran back out into the town.

By the time he exited the bank however, he had already lost sight of Angus. Just then he noticed a small dot out in the desert, with what looked like a familiar handkerchief. Ted quickly looked around for something he could continue the chase on. He spotted a bike that someone had left unattended and ran over to it. He quickly hotwired it and zoomed off into the desert.

Angus was slowing down as he ran out of breath. He stopped a moment to catch himself. Just then he heard the sound of a plasma thruster firing at full throttle in the distance. It was getting louder and louder and closer and closer. Angus panicked and began digging himself in the sand.

He only got about three inches down before the noise came to a crescendo and then suddenly stopped. All there was was the rattling and popping of metal in the hot sun, and the sound of an engine idling.

Angus slowly looked up to see Ted sitting on the bike. Ted silently turned around to get off the bike. As soon as his back was turned...

POW!

Ted was out cold. Angus didn't know he had the strength in him to sock a huge guy like that out. Quickly, he clambered onto the bike and headed back toward the town.

As he entered the main thoroughfare, he felt something was off. He looked behind him to see Ted catching up to

him. He sped up through the main street. With Ted not far behind he raced through the streets, plowing through a wagon and scattering fruit all over the street. Pedestrians dodged and ducked out of the way of the pursuit. The two continued the chase until they made it to the Starport. Angus saw an unattended tourist rocket and made a beeline for it, knocking over an oil barrel. The barrel split open as it hit the ground and blinded Ted.

Angus tumbled off of his bike and sped into the rocket.

Ted stumbled around in the dark.

Panicked, Angus fumbled for the door latch. He pulled it, teeth clattering as the heavy door closed shut, the ramp retracting.

Ted fell into an open hole in the ground.

The cabin attendant came online with a whir and a creak and began its annoying spiel. "Welco-come aa-aboard, Startraveller! A universe of wonders awaits you..."

The spiel continued as Angus frantically searched for any way to skip ahead.

"And now with our Deluxe Economy Package, even Forsetian slime miners can afford a journey away from the trudgeries of life."

"YES. OKAY. ANYTHING TO GET ME OFF THIS CAELESTIS FORSAKEN BALL OF DANDRUFF!" Angus yelled.

"ID Implant successfully identified: Angus Mcgee. Your account will be charged (999.99 GAL). ERROR! Insufficient balance to cover amount. Would you like to take out a loan?"

"YES!" Angus yelped.

"Connecting to Galactic Central Bank... ERROR! Out of range! Searching for other possible connections... Connecting to Kraal Nosh and sons LLC... Connected. Transaction successful. Welcome Aboard, Startraveller! Where would you like to go?"

Angus chose the furthest planet available.

"Destination: Earth. Countdown in 10 minutes. Please do not attempt to leave the rocket. Please fasten yourself down at this moment."

The rocket shook and clattered as it took off, fire filling the grating underneath the launch pad.

Ted stumbled around in the dark, trying to figure out where he was. Suddenly, a deafening roar began booming out somewhere in front of him. A light grew brighter and brighter as fire filled the exhaust pipe Ted was standing in.

The rocket became a tiny speck in the sky above as the townsfolk gathered around the manhole, staring at Ted's burned remains. The menace that had haunted the town was no more.

"Wow, Ted's dead!" someone said.

"Whoever did him in must have been a real monster."

Angus sighed in relief as the rocket exited hyperspace, the seatbelt no longer pressing hard into his gaunt body.

There was no way he was going to pay off that loan. He would have to move to a new planet, change his name, change his face...

He looked down at the new planet, brilliant blue and shining with new possibilities. He wondered about what his new life would be like.

As the rocket began its landing maneuver, he decided what his new name would be.

George.

George Washington.

Lydia Randazzo

A Day at The J

Do you ever get tired of telling a little kid, over and over, to stop doing something after they repeatedly do it? Well, welcome to the day in the life of a lifeguard at The J. What is "The J," you might ask? The St. Louis Jewish Community Center, located off of N. Lindbergh Boulevard and Schuetz Road, is a welcoming community that offers a variety of features, programs, and services for those who are members. These include: a fitness center with an array of classes available, two basketball courts, 5 pickleball courts, locker rooms equipped with a sauna, steam room, whirlpools, and towel and locker usage. Last but not least, you cannot forget about the indoor and outdoor pools. With Olympic sized pools, kiddie features, and ginormous slides, you can't go wrong! Let us address the next question... "Are you Jewish?" No, I am not personally Jewish, but I am surrounded by other people of all different backgrounds and cultures here at The J. It really is the best job, most days at least, but I will get into that.

On an average day, I wake up a couple of hours before my shift starts which allows me to get ready, eat, and ultimately relax before the sound of kids screaming meets my ears. I leave my house forty-five minutes before my shift starts to make sure I am fifteen minutes early to prepare myself. During those fifteen minutes, I put on sunscreen, sunglasses, and my hip pack, fill up my water bottle, and observe the pool to see whether these next thirty minutes will go by fast or slow.

As I leave the break room, I grab the most essential thing, a lifeguard tube, and head towards my assigned position. When I open the door, the smell of chlorine hits my nostrils, which will most likely linger in my nose for the rest of the day. The sound of whistles blowing and lifeguards screaming, "WALK," every five seconds fills the void of my empty head.

Specifically, on this day, I started off at the Olympic pool. The Olympic pool contains five, twenty-five yard lap lanes with diving blocks, and an open area for free swim of all ages.

I approach the high-stand, looking over the entire pool, and say to Gabby, "I got it!" Gabby is also a lifeguard here at The Jewish Center. Gabby then climbs down from the stand and stands next to it, watching the water since my back is turned to it, and I climb up. Once I am settled into the chair, I look at Gabby and say, "All good!" Gabby then leaves the area and heads towards the break room.

Now, I am in charge of the whole pool. What could go wrong? Many things, quite frankly. Within these next thirty minutes, I scan the pool and ensure the safety of the patrons. As I am doing the regular scan, I see people swimming laps, kids playing tag, people playing with a beach ball, nothing out of the ordinary. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a little girl wearing a pink swimsuit and her hair in pigtails on the diving block.

I blow my whistle, followed by, "Hey sweetie, you cannot be on the block. Can you please get down?"

She looks right at me with a blank stare, not knowing what to do. I thought to myself, Where are her parents? As she stayed up on the block, I blew my whistle and told her to get down again. There is no response, no movement, nothing. *Does she not understand English? Is she too young to comprehend? This is going to be a long thirty minute rotation.* I am starting to become frustrated as all of my attention is now turned towards her, but I also have the entire pool to watch with many people in it. I climb down from my stand, still trying to watch the other patrons, but also keep my eye on her.

I then walk over to her and say, "You cannot be on the block. What if you fall off and get hurt?"

Once again, the same blank stare, looking into my eyes as if I am speaking a foreign language from a different universe. I start to look around the pool deck to see if her

parents are looking for her. There seems to be no one in sight. I then proceed to take her hand and try to guide her down off the block. Once again, for the third time, no comprehension of what was going on. Finally, she gets off of the block. *But where are her parents?*

"Where are your parents, baby?" I then asked.

I finally got a response out of her, not a verbal response, but at that point, I was looking for any comprehension. She points north of the pool to where two people, a man and a woman, are laying down on the chairs. I then double whistle, which is a call for the manger to come over if there is an issue. My twin brother, Logan, comes marching over in his red "Manager" polo and polarized sunglasses with Adidas slides.

"What is the problem?" says Logan.

I look at him as I am still holding the little girl's hand, and say, "She needs to go to her parents, but does not understand what I am saying. Can I walk her over there?"

Logan says okay and proceeds to take my place on the high-stand, putting on my lifeguard tube to watch the remaining patrons swimming. The little girl, now as confused as ever, and I walk over to her parents. As I approach them, the mother was also wearing a pink swim suit and was sleeping. The father had earphones on, listening to music on his phone, neither of them paying attention to their daughter.

"Hi, sir, your daughter was over by the main pool on the block, which can be very dangerous, especially without a parent," I say.

He looks at me with the same blank stare, looking into my soul with no clue of what is going on. I wonder where his daughter got the look from. As we both are looking at each other, his lips start to move and his mouth opens.

"Español," says the large, buff man, now trying to wake up his wife.

His wife awakes from her slumber, with weary eyes and also a sense of confusion as I am standing in front of them

with their daughter. The man looks at his wife and points to me.

She says, "Hi, is there a problem?" *Is she an idiot? I'm holding their daughter's hand in front of them. What could possibly be the problem?*

"Your daughter was on top of the block and could get hurt very easily, especially with no parent-supervision," I comment back to the mother.

She responds back, in a pretty heavy accent, but finally speaking English, "Oh no! She completely ran out of our sight! Thank you so much for keeping her safe."

Although I could barely understand her, I made out enough of what she was saying.

I said, "You're welcome. Make sure you keep an eye on her this time!"

Walking away from their chairs, heading back towards my stand, I can hear the parents bickering back and forth in Spanish while the little girl sat on her mother's lap.

I get back on the stand where Logan is now in control of the pool and wait for him to get down from the stand. I am then back on my normal schedule, scanning the pool back and forth. I glance down at my watch. *It is 1:20! I only have 10 more minutes left. That's gone by fast!* The next five minutes consisted of the normal. Patrons playing in the pool and swimming laps. *Five more minutes left, I got this!*

All of a sudden, I look over and there are teenagers rough-housing in the pool. Once again, I blow my whistle and get the teenage boys' attention. One of the boys, wearing bright-colored swim trunks, looks up at me and nods his head. *Thank God he actually understands,* I think to myself. Nope, not quite. Out of the three boys, one of them is underwater, essentially getting drowned by the other boy while the boy with bright-colored trunks observes and moves his eyes back and forth from me to his friends. I blow my whistle again, with more force this time, making the whistle louder. At this point, I think the whole pool could hear the whistle, everyone but those boys, of course.

Once again, I now have to crawl down from the stand for the second time. I walk over to the wall, where the boys are still naturally killing each other.

I yell, "Boys! Quit wrestling!"

They all stop their movements, as if they were frozen. They look up at me with the same blank stare as the little girl previously, ten minutes ago.

The one that was underwater comes up from the bottom of the pool and says, "We aren't even playing rough. I was fine under the water."

At this point, I am livid. *These boys are old enough to know right from wrong! I've had enough of this!*

"No, it is too rough and very dangerous. Knock it off or leave," I say back in a stern tone.

I look down at my watch--it has been five minutes and these boys are now running into my break time. I'm fuming with anger out of my ears at this point. Between telling the little girl over and over to get off the block with no comprehension whatsoever, to telling these boys to knock it off and them refusing, now cutting into my thirty minute break, is my ending point. I say one more time, now screaming at these boys with all of the patrons' attention on me.

"Get off of each other or get out!"

Like a deer in headlights, the boys look at each other, and then look at me.

"Okay," they all say, in a condescending tone.

The next guard, Hunter, has now been standing by the high-stand for a couple of minutes, waiting for me, while I dealt with the troublesome menaces. Hunter was the perfect lifeguard to show up after me because he does not deal with anyone's nonsense. Standing at 6 feet tall and built like linebacker, he is someone not to be messed with and the kids are usually scared of him.

It is now my time to go on break. I wait for Hunter to climb up and then go decompress about all of the things that have happened in just a span of thirty minutes on my break.

Since then, there have been many of the same occurrences every weekend at The J. It really is a normal thing! Kids will always break the rules and I will always be there to shut them down to ensure the safety of the patrons. Although it can be draining, I wouldn't trade this job for the world.

Karli Talley

My First Time Drag Racing

Every Wednesday from April to November, Gateway International Raceway in Madison, Illinois, holds a high school drag race. Anyone 16-18 years old with a street legal car can come enter, pay, and race. On the fine evening of July 1, 2020, I decided I was going to participate in the high school drag races.

That Wednesday around 3:30 pm, my best friend Emma and I started getting ready to head to Madison. Emma is a small, short girl with long brown hair to her thighs that was always perfectly straightened. She was very tan with olive toned skin and was feisty when needed, but very nice. Her voice was a little high pitched but not annoying. While we were waiting for my dad, who was just getting off work, we listened to our favorite song "Stick By My Side" by NLE Choppa and Clever on repeat.

My dad, who is average height, with strawberry blonde hair that is starting to turn grey, loves fast cars. He has pasty skin with lots and lots of freckles, and the brightest of blue eyes. He has a distinct Irish look to him, and he is where I got my interest in cars from. When I was very small, he would always take me to car shows and drag races. The older I got, the more I loved the same things as him.

My dad had a 2007 Chevrolet regular cab short bed Silverado truck. It was glossy black, lowered, with chrome after market rims. It had a LS V8 engine with several bolt on performance modifications. It performed exceptionally better than a typical, stock, daily driver vehicle. It was aging well and on its way to being classified as a "desirable classic truck."

We arrive around 5 pm to Gateway. The first step was going through the tech line where the crew members check your vehicle for safety issues such as visible fluid leaks, no seatbelt malfunctions, and no unsafe modifications. After

check-in we go back to our group of supporters, friends, and family. As Emma and I are standing around talking to some other kids in our class that are also participating, Paul, the director of the high school drag race walks up to us. He's very friendly, but slightly intimidating. He welcomes us and begins to tell me how everything works, but in the middle of his sentence he says, "I'm not sure if you knew this, but you aren't supposed to wear ripped jeans."

In my head, all I can think about is how I'm already not giving this guy very much confidence in me. I am one of 5 girls in the races and I'm wearing the most ripped jeans one can imagine. I feel so dumb.

I reply, "I'm so sorry! I had no idea."

He says, "It's okay this time. I'll let it slide."

I look to Emma and beg her to go to the bathroom and trade me pants since she was wearing leggings.

She says, "Karli, you're 5 inches taller than me. Your pants won't fit me!"

I say, "Emma, PLEASE! I'm begging you, I'm so embarrassed."

As we go back and forth, my dad says it's time to load up for the practice run.

When 6 pm rolls around, my dad and I get in the truck and drive towards the line for my practice run. While I sit nervously in the driver's seat, he reassures me that it will be fun. As we're sitting and chatting about what's about to go down, my dad shuts the air off and I say, "What was that for?"

"You can't race with it on--it leaks moisture from underneath. You can't get water on the track," he replies.

Annoyed and sweaty, I say, "Ugh, okay."

In my mind, I thought that this experience was going to be easy and painless, but I had it all wrong. I'm coming around the corner of the building where I watch the people ahead of me do their practice run. Everyone does a burn out and takes off. Easy, right?

Now it's my turn. We get to the water box, where I attempt my burn out to get the tires hot. It was mildly embarrassing since I let off early from the results of my nervousness. I pull forward to the .500 second tree, I trip the first light, as I wait on the car next to me, and I am revving the engine to approximately 1,800 rpms. As I wait for the tree light to fall, it feels like an eternity. Finally, we take off, and I push the gas as far in as I possibly can and just hold it. We are flying, well it feels like we are flying. By the time we arrived at the finish line we were going 97 miles per hour. I don't think I have ever drove that fast in my entire life, until that day. We pull off the strip to the right and head towards the back of the line. I couldn't contain my excitement; I felt like the most badass person in the world.

It was now time for the real thing--but this time by myself. My dad rides back up to the starting point with me but hops out just before my turn. I am alone in the truck, no air conditioning, again, sweating profusely. I thought all my nerves disappeared, but I was wrong, this time I was 10x more nervous than the first time. I finally reach the water box. I attempt my burnout and to my surprise it was much better than the first time. This made me have a little hope that I could do it. I roll my window down in excitement to tell my dad, who was standing by the light, how good I did. At last, I pull up to the light, rev my engine up to 1,800 rpms in preparation to taking off. I sit and wait for the person I was racing to do the same. The lights fall and I let off my brakes, eager to have a good reaction time. I red lighted! As I realize what I am doing I slam on my breaks and hope I didn't false start.

Finally, the light turns green, I take off. In my head, all I keep repeating is "I did it!" I soon come back to reality to realize that my tires never had stopped spinning from seconds ago. I get about 50 feet down the quarter mile track when I realize the truck is starting to fishtail, it starts slightly, but out of fear I begin turning the wheel as fast as I can in the opposite direction of the truck. I am just cranking

this steering wheel as hard as I possibly can in the moment. Boom! My vision goes black, I can't hear anything. I think I blacked out in this moment, but I'm not 100% sure. After I gather my senses, I look up and realize I did a complete 180 degree turn and am facing the starting line on the left side of the track, opposite of where I started.

As I sit there trying to comprehend what just happened, I hear ambulance sirens and see my dad sprinting towards me. I sit for a moment, trying to decide whether I should get out or stay put. I decide to get out. I am almost falling on the ground because my legs feel like noodles. I am standing in complete and utter shock to this whole situation. My feet are stuck to the sticky tar on the track, and I am staring as if I were a deer in headlights.

Once my dad and the ambulance come to save me, I am sobbing like a baby with more emotions running through my head than I thought were possible. The EMTs made me get into the ambulance after I told them countless times that I was perfectly fine, but they insisted. The EMT started asking me all these questions.

He says, "Hi Karli, I am here just to make sure you are doing alright. Are you doing, okay?"

I really wanted to respond with a smart aleck response like "No I'm not doing okay! I just wrecked my dad's truck!" But to my better judgment I didn't.

He proceeds to ask me all the questions one would probably be asked when they are sitting in the back of an ambulance, sobbing uncontrollably, with their dad. He was trying to lighten the mood by saying, "You know it's just a truck, your dad can always get a new one."

This infuriated me. In the moment, I really thought this guy was plain dumb and he obviously didn't understand how I felt.

"He can't just buy a new one. They don't make that identical truck!" I respond with a slight tone of attitude.

By this time, he finally realized I wasn't internally bleeding, or had a broken bone or whatever he was trying

to determine. We pull off the track and they let us out by our fan club group. Everyone rushes towards me and asks me if I am okay--*like I haven't been asked a million and one times already*--and tries to tell me everything is fine. I finally calm down and walk with Emma to bathroom to find some peace and quiet. She reassures me that it will all be fine in the end. We then go sit in the bleachers to watch the rest of the races.

Fast forward a year or so, the truck is still totaled and not fixed, but my dad made me a promise that one day it would be and that I would be able to drive it again. I have learned a valuable lesson, which is: I am not good at drag racing. I will probably never try it again in my life, but I am perfectly fine with that.

Catherine Wieneke

Snow Day

Among the rolling hills of Calhoun County, Illinois, one could find a quiet, small farmhouse lying in the newly fallen snow. Every morning when I was younger, it was my duty to make sure that the animals were fed and had fresh water. Even though this meant that I had to get up before the sun shone over the rolling hills of my county, I always looked forward to going outside at dawn.

My partner in chores was my little sister Jane. She had dark blonde hair, brown eyes, and loved to carry her toy pistol so she could pretend that she was Annie Oakley. Jane was a quiet eight year girl who loved being around animals. Thus, she was a perfect partner because the farm animals trusted her.

After rising from my warm bed, I peered out the dim, frosted window to see if the ground had any snow on it. To my delight, I found that there was a heavy blanket of cold, milky-white snow covering the farm. I hurriedly pulled on my warmest outdoor clothing which consisted of many layers of jackets and warm woolen socks underneath my light brown Carhartt Overalls. A few minutes later, Jane, equally excited, came flying down the stairs still clad in her pajamas.

"Did you see all the snow we got last night?" she asked with extreme enthusiasm.

"Yes!" I replied. "Hopefully Mom will let us have a snow day!"

We quickly finished getting dressed and hurried outside. As I stepped out the door, my breath was taken away by the majestic picture that the Divine Painter had painted for me. I gazed up at the towering hill which resembled a huge mountain of pure white snow, over which the first rays of sunlight cast their golden glow. Next, my attention was caught by the hungry scarlet cardinals and the earthen

colored chickadees hunting on the snow covered ground for food. The birds flew away as my joyful sister and I trudged through the snow to feed the animals. When I breathed in the thick cold air, I realized that it was delightfully fresh and crisp. I then ran to let our brown Brittany Spaniel out of his pen.

I called: "Good-morning, Mr. Bartimaeus!"

"Yip-yip!" he replied with delight.

Pausing, I heard the shrill cries of coyote hounds piercing the frozen air as they followed the strong scent of the rascally coyotes.

Upon liberation from his kennel, Bartimaeus went crazy and dashed over the snow. Seeing that he was thoroughly enjoying his first snowfall, I smiled and laughed in delight at his antics. After watching him awhile, I threw a snowball in the air to see if he could catch it. Quick as a bolt, he chased it and succeeded to catch it in his mouth. I then directed my steps back to the house to take some water to the other animals. As I lugged the heavy steaming buckets of warm water out of the garage I called to Jane: "Make sure you let the chickens out of the coop and get the ice out of their water bowl."

"Okay," Jane said as she looked up from the snowman that she was already rolling.

Next, I headed to the pasture where the sheep and goats resided. I looked down into the snowy woods and saw the sheep and goats snuggling together for warmth. These goats sure do blend in with the snow with their thick white coats, I thought. The sheep are easier to see though in their black and white wool.

"Baaa!" the sheep greeted me with lusty cries.

"Good-morning Joy, Milky, Snowy, Jolene!" I called out to the sheep herd. "Y'all look warm with your woolen coats!"

As I said this, I noticed that their water, from the night before, had almost completely frozen over, so I carefully broke the thick ice from their black water bowl. Redirecting my attention to the herd, I saw that the sheep were now

quietly munching on their dry hay and the goats were perched on top of the mangers. When I walked back to the house I noticed that the snow made lovely crunching sounds beneath my feet.

My final duty was to carry water to the chickens. I went back outside towards the chicken coop. When I walked out the door once more, my sense of smell was aroused as I caught the sweet woody aroma of smoke from the warm fire burning in our wood stove. I turned my steps towards the wooden coop that my father had built to pour fresh water into the chickens' water bowl.

"Good-morning, ladies!" I sang out to the black and white speckled chickens.

They were peeking out of the coop not sure if they should come out into the cold snow with their bare feet. I then used the snow shovel to clear a path for the sun to melt the snow so that they could leave their captivity inside the coop.

"Cock-a-doodle-do" crowed the rooster.

"And yes! Good-morning to you too, Mr. Alexander!" I replied.

As I headed away from the coop, I saw that Jane had abandoned her big snowballs and was running through the snow with her beloved Bart. Now that I had finished my chores, I decided to help my sister place her large cold snowballs together to form a snowman.

"Remember when we made the giant snowman a couple of years ago?" I asked her. "It must have been around eight feet high."

"I sure do," she said. "It seemed taller than that because I'm shorter than you. We should have Pop and Matthew help us build a bigger one this year!"

We then decided that it was a good time to make snow angels in the front lawn so that our two-year-old baby sister could see them. When we were done rolling in the snow and making snow angels, we looked as though two snowmen had come to life.

"Well, if we're going to get Pop and Matthew to help us make a giant snowman, we should head inside for breakfast. I'm hungry!" I proposed.

"Me too!" Jane admitted.

"Hopefully Mom lets us have a snow day and maybe Pops will have one too," I said as we headed for the warm house.

In the warm house, we peeled off all the warm winter clothes and washed up our snow covered faces. We then sat down to a warm breakfast of delicious homemade oatmeal topped with vanilla yogurt. Much to our delight, we soon found out that the whole family would get a whole day to spend outside in the winter wonderland building our giant snowman and sledding down the majestic hills of our beloved county. This was one of the snow days that I would always remember.

Contributors

Ciara Cook currently attends Lewis and Clark with the aim of getting an Associates Degree. She is learning to weld and has plans to pursue a career in this field. She stated, "I work for Bunny Bread at night, and, when I am not at school or work, I am with my amazing four year old son."

Avalon Eales – "I am a graphic design student at Lewis and Clark Community College! I have a passion for arts and have been drawing ever since I can remember. I grew up with a very creative family that helped push me to go farther in my art journey. I really love to push myself and try to do better, improvement is one of my favorite things. I'm looking forward to what the future holds with my art and design career!"

Jacob Grandone is originally from Monmouth Illinois, but he currently lives in Glen Carbon Illinois. He has participated in swimming for many years, and he has run cross country for 5 years. He enjoys playing games like D&D, Magic the Gathering, and many others.

Elizabeth Gross is attending L&C for her Associate Degree, and she's currently going into Real Estate outside of Lewis and Clark. She stated, "I enjoy doing essays like these when I'm able to tell a fun story or experience that I have been through."

Justine LaPlante is a student at Lewis and Clark Community College.

Violet Elizabeth Mayes lives in a small, isolated country home in the middle of the endless abyssal plane of corn known to mortals as south Illinois. She loves weird, dark settings and imagery, magic and occult themes, whimsical fantasy, and comedic sci fi.

Peppermint Rooster Review

Lydia Randazzo had this to say about herself: "I am a freshman here at L&C. Although I am not pursuing any field involving English, I love writing and everything about English. I am pursuing Dental Hygiene and am looking forward to my future at L&C."

Karli Talley lives in Jerseyville, Il with her family and hopes to join the Nursing Program this October and continue her education here at Lewis and Clark. She likes to read and play pickle ball as well as hangout with friends and family.

Catherine Wieneke is a freshman at Lewis and Clark with high hopes of becoming a businesswoman. When she is not studying, Catherine loves spending time with her seven siblings and parents. She enjoys cooking, drawing, and reading as well as spending time outside.



Avalon Eales