

Peppermint
Rooster
Review



Peppermint Rooster Review

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"On the Beat"
by Zach Miller

Dear Reader,

This is the twelfth 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, which is intended to showcase outstanding written work from our students.

For the eleventh year, we held a campus-wide contest for a student to design the cover. A panel of judges decided on the winning cover art, titled "On the Beat" submitted by Zach Miller.

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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Alexis Bell

Grafton

My grandpa once said that Grafton was one of Illinois' most hidden treasures. This may have been true at one time but now, since we have the Great Rivers Scenic Byway, that is no longer true. One day, I asked him why he tried to get to know everybody. He simply said, "It pays to know people because one day you might need their help. When you get to know people, you form friendships and you can rely on each other, in times of need." Living here is a blessing because of the engaged people, the tightness within the community, and the diverse activities. While living here, I have never seen this community broken; it has always been whole.

First, getting to know people is a big benefit in Grafton. Everybody knows everybody. If you live in or you have a business in Grafton, most likely almost everyone knows you. Personally, I know almost every person in town, especially the business owners. Part of this happened because of how I was raised by my grandparents. Living with two people that had served on the city council--and my grandma being the first female mayor--provided me with the opportunity to meet new people. Getting to know people also helps local businesses thrive when businesses recommend each other's services to customers. My favorite example is when I got to meet an ex-alderman and current mayor at the time Tom Thompson. Another was when I was introduced to the ex-police chief Chris Sullivan. My grandma also introduced me to several business owners like Jeff Lorton who owns Aries and the condos and David Roth who operates the Grafton Winery. The Grafton Police department and its officers take pride in being involved in the community. This greatly benefits its citizens, especially if you are worried about someone. We are proud to know that if we need a welfare check on someone, they would go and help them

without hesitation. An example of this is when my grandma called a welfare check on Alice and former mayor Windy Narin because they were not answering calls for a couple of days and no one had seen or heard from them. One of our officers knows every dog in Grafton and their owners. So if they get lost, they can be returned to their owners. Another positive aspect of knowing everybody: it's easier to come together as a town to make decisions like during town meetings and activities that the town holds and when, etc. A big example is giving directions to some of the businesses for city parades or where events are. Even when we hold art in the park, we have to direct everybody to their assigned areas for tents and stands.

In Grafton, it never fails that the community always comes together. In 1973 and 1993 Grafton suffered from two major floods that caused over one hundred buildings to be torn down because there was over fifty percent damage. In 1993, FEMA came to Grafton to help the people that had been affected by the flood. Some residents and business owners received help from grants, but some houses and buildings had to be demolished from all of the damage that had occurred. The city was given a new grant to create a new subdivision called Grafton Hills to allow those who could buy land and build new homes. Those who had less damage were able to make repairs and remain in their homes. Everyone worked together to move people to their new homes. Church groups from around the state offered helping hands to the different churches in town that had suffered damage. In 2019, we had yet another bad flood. It didn't create as much damage as in 1993, but Grafton still suffered. This time, the whole town and several surrounding communities rallied together to prepare for the flood. We prepared sandbags and started getting houses ready for the coming two months. When the water finally receded, we had to come together to access the damage. The mayor and city council had to contact the state for FEMA to be sent out to help Grafton once again. My home with my grandma

is on Water Street, which is kind of ironic if I say so myself - our block is on raised ground. To live on the riverfront, the houses have to be above the height of the 1973 flood, meaning being built on stilts or having the ground raised with dirt and rock, which requires permission from the Corps of Engineers. Even with being on raised ground, our house still had about six inches of water on our first floor. With all of the difficulty that comes with living at the river's edge, we have an amazing view, inside or outside of our house.

Along with all of the amazing people, there are many events and attractions available in Grafton. Main Street is formed mainly by businesses and bars including The Zipline, one of the most popular attractions in Grafton. It has seven zip lines and the tours can last up to two and a half hours. You even get to go between bluffs on this exciting adventure. The one downside is it closes during the winter season. We also have many restaurants in town; my favorite is the 3rd Chute. When you first walk in you see a bar and all you can hear is laughing, music, and the sound of the bartender making the drinks. You can spend time with the crowd of people that form around the bar or head up to the second floor where you'll find several tables with additional seating. While walking up the stairs and trying to decide whether to sit inside or out on the balcony, you get distracted by the aroma of the foods offered. Businesses are all along Main Street and offer a wide variety of different things from shirts, fudge, art, and so much more. The Grafton Flea Market is held at the Loading Dock Bar and Grill every third weekend from April through October. Then from November through the end of March (weather permitting) the ice skating rink takes over the Loading Dock. A fun fact is that the Loading Dock used to be the Boat Works where they made boats for the First and Second World Wars. Pere Marquette is one of the most beautiful places that I have seen with all of the large trees that change colors during the fall and the amazing views when you are hiking. Pere Marquette also offers many different activities. They have cabins, campgrounds,

trails, a visitor center, fishing, and stables. Art in the Park is an activity that happens once a year Friday- Sunday usually in September. It offers many different things including art that you can buy, music, and several free activities for kids. Music in the Park occurs every Thursday during the warmer months and offers many different genres of music ranging from blues to country western. They have a 50/50 for charity and a "bring a can" for the food pantry. Raging Rivers Water Park operates from Memorial Day up until Labor Day. They have an area just for younger kids, slides, rides, and food. Personally, I love coming here when it's hot to cool off and have a lot of fun with my family. Eckert's Farm offers apple and pumpkin picking, a small petting zoo, a playground, and a country market. The Edward Amburg History Museum was recently constructed. The History Museum was combined with the Visitor Center, which provides information on Grafton which includes restaurants, local businesses, and events. Mr. Amburg, who was locally known as the Walking History of Grafton, always knew this town was rich in history and which he enjoyed sharing with others. With the help of Bonna Downey, a grant was submitted to the state of Illinois, which was approved and construction began in 2019. It was completed during the fall of 2020. In May of 2021, we held a ceremony to open the new museum in memory of my great-grandfather Edward Amburg. The museum features two large mosaic pieces made from broken and imperfect arrowheads. The arrowheads were found and intricately laid by hand to create both mosaics, by my great-grandfather Edward Amburg. The Mosaics and numerous other historical items from his collection were loaned to the museum for all to see.

We have some possible new developments in town as well. One is that the city is considering creating a historic district through Grafton. That way, the historic buildings have an opportunity to be saved if we have another flood. Also new businesses are coming to town like coffee shops, craft shops, possibly new developments at Raging Rivers

Water Park. A few tips I have for you if you want to come to Grafton are if you want to have a parking spot for most places come early. I say this because this town gets packed way too easily during most months. Another tip I have is if you ever consider going to the water park, pack a lunch and eat out near your vehicle. There is nice shade in some parts and they have picnic tables. It saves you some money. Always have cash on you. It is a lot easier to pay for things in town with cash, especially in certain places like the flea market, Art in the Park, and Raging Rivers.

Alyssa Bonner

Don't You Get Bored?

Don't you hate that question? You know, the question that everyone seems to ask you after finding out information they didn't know about you. Mine would be "Don't you get bored being an only child?" and to their surprise, my answer is always "no." I found it very beneficial being an only child. Brussels, Illinois, is where I was born and raised, a small town where everyone knows everyone. We have one little store, a couple bar and grill restaurants, and one high school that, on average, teaches forty kids every year. Therefore, everyone in my town knows that I'm an only child. However, all my friends outside of my small town are a different story. Since I started college, I have made a few new friends. Typically, I don't see a need to tell them I have no siblings. I don't let being an only child define who I am. However, if it gets brought up in a conversation, then I will tell them. Some people tell me I'm lucky since I don't have any annoying siblings. Others tell me they feel sorry for me and assume I must've been lonely when I was younger. Little do they know I grew up just fine as an only child--I became more creative; I knew I was the favorite and I am independent.

Being an only child made me develop a creative mind. My dad was out of state for work often when I was growing up, so it was just my mom, me and our outdoor cat Gilbert. My mom worked from home and usually spent time in her office, so I always found ways to entertain myself. However, sometimes I had to get creative. In my house we used to have two long windows that sat inches from the floor. The perfect height for me to crawl out of. Usually, these windows stayed locked so I wouldn't go outside, but one day my mom accidentally left them unlocked. Using that to my advantage, I opened the window, crawled outside, grabbed our cat, crawled back into the house with the cat,

then shut the window and acted like nothing ever happened. I played with the cat for a while. Sadly, my mom caught me with Gilbert and put him back outside. She could not figure out how I had gotten the cat in the house. I waited for my mom to go back to her office, then decided to grab the cat again. This had happened six times before my mom finally realized what was going on. Creativity and having a good imagination can get you far. During my high school years, I was able to use my creativity in many classes. Mainly my speech and writing class. We had to create a speech that made being questioned whether the information was true or not. I used my creativity to fool my classmates and my teacher. I didn't need any help. My mind works just fine alone. Though I was alone sometimes, I wasn't always playing by myself or with the cat. I often had my cousins over during the day. All my aunts and uncles had work and since my mom worked from home, she offered to babysit them when needed. As much as I loved having other kids to play with, as I got older, I enjoyed being by myself more and more.

Being an only child, I knew I was the favorite. I do not mean that in a bad way. What I mean is I was able to play sports and do the activities I wanted to do. I did not have to worry about my parents not being able to afford it or worry about whether they could make it to all my games and performances. It was about me. I never felt that they liked another sibling more than me. I always had at least one of my parents at everything I have ever done... unlike my cousin Lacy. She feels that her parents do not love or care about her the way they care about her older and younger sister. Elly, her older sister, got a brand-new car when she turned sixteen, but Lacy got a car that was already five years old when she turned sixteen. Riley, her younger sister, gets to play travel ball all year round. Lacy only gets to play travel volleyball. It is rare for my aunt and uncle to be at Lacy's games, but you always see them at Elly or Riley's. I can see why Lacy is always upset. She doesn't get her parents' attention most of the time. I would not trade having my

parents at everything for the world. My parents are my best friends. I personally am happy I don't have to share their attention and love. I am not spoiled. I don't ask for much if anything at all. All I ask is for time with my parents. I know they will not be here forever; I want to be able to spend as much time with them as possible.

Being an only child helped me become independent. My parents had gotten a divorce around my seventh birthday, and I eventually moved in with my dad full time around the age of twelve. I knew my dad was always there to help me, but I always tried to do anything myself before asking for help. One year for my birthday, he got me a new mirror for my bedroom. He told me "Wait until I get home from work, and we will put it up together." but I was too excited to wait all day for him to get home. I had watched dad hang plenty of pictures and mirrors on the wall, so my thirteen-year-old self knew what she was doing. I grabbed the screws, the screw gun, the stud finder, and the level. I got to work and had my new mirror up in ten minutes. When my dad got home, he was surprised to see that I not only got the mirror up, but that I had done it the correct way. I told him "You sadly won't be here forever, I have to figure it out at some point, might as well be now." From that day forward, I always tried to do it myself before asking dad. Some things are harder than others, but I always try. My independence made my dad more comfortable, knowing that if I were to ever live alone, I would be okay. I not only knew how to hang up my own mirror, but I also learned how to cook, clean, and do the laundry around the age of thirteen. Now, I am nineteen years old and still carry those creative and independent traits. A lot of people tell my parents that they did a good job of raising me, but the truth is, I raised myself. That is my parents' answer also. I was getting myself up and ready for school in the mornings, I was making my own food, and doing my own laundry at a pretty young age. My parents were good parents. They showed me love and cared for me, but they weren't always around to do the basic stuff

around the house. Since they couldn't, I did. I learned how to be responsible at a young age. Growing up in the situation I did truly has prepared me to be on my own. I know a lot of people who are scared to move out and be without their parents. I, however, know I am ready to be on my own. I was always on my own. Being an adult doesn't scare me the way it scares some other kids my age. I know I will always be ok.

Overall, being an only child has developed me into the person I am today and honestly, I am proud of the person I am. I work hard, I am going to school to be a dental hygienist, I am saving money to move out, and I would like to think that I am a good person. I know plenty of people who have siblings and share those characteristics, but I also know a lot of people with siblings who do not. Being an only child helped me be ready to take on the world by myself. It helped me to think outside of the box and take charge of my own life. So, to answer everyone's question, no, I do not get bored. I get creative. I get busy. And I get stuff done.

Star-Crossed

By Logan Buis

The sun fell lazily behind the trees as dusk rolled around. He had worked up the courage to lace his fingers between hers as they walked across the stone bridge. Her hands were soft, warm, and a little slick from her moisturizer. Perhaps they were slick for another reason, though; Jaime had the remarkable ability to sweat in the cold when a pretty girl was involved.

"So why here?" Samantha asked as she studied the little pockets of sunshine in the trees. "I mean, not complaining, but just a tad cliché, isn't it?" Her eyes met his as she squeezed his hand a little.

"Uh..." Jaimie hadn't anticipated that question. He had planned the date so carefully, accounting for every little detail. What table at the restaurant. Who their server would be. If someone were to walk into his room during the planning, they would swear he was crazy. Jaimie began to panic silently; his chest tightened, and he almost forgot to breathe. He had to say something, anything. "I don't know, spur of the moment kinda thing."

A lie. She would see through his deception with ease.

"Well, you chose a good place. Just because it's cliché, doesn't make it bad." In fact, she rather liked this park. The fountain, the trees, the pretty flowers, and shrubbery. This was the park where her dad would take her when she was young. She didn't say, but she often came here to remember him. She would sit on the same stone bench with the sign nailed into it that read, *This bench was crafted by Josiah Mills, town stonemason, 1889*. She watched the fountain in the middle of the pond spurt out the dark-colored water for a long time while she thought about her dad. If no one were around, she would even tell him how her day was and what she had been up to.

Jaimie led his date along the concrete pathway, which

stretched around the lake in a continuously twisting manner. The path was constantly changing its angle; not even for ten feet would the pair be walking in a straight line. He wondered who designed this strange pathway. The pair walked around the pond for one complete loop before stopping for a quick rest on one of the numerous benches planted around the path.

Above them, one of the electric lights suddenly shot, illuminating the park. The rest of the lights quickly followed suit until a ring of electric fire encircled the pond. "Are you getting cold?" Jaimie asked.

"A little, but let's stay here for a minute. Then you can walk me back to the car," Sam said. It was hard to see even with all the street lamps shining brightly, but she could hear the fountain in the middle of the pond shooting water like a miniature geyser.

"Okay," Jamie responded. "Despite the cold, it is a nice night out. The stars are pretty bright."

They both watched the stars for a moment. Each twinkling light in the sky flickered and danced as a part of a magical painting in constant change. Though just one light would be insignificant, just a few more and the image is memorable for life. For just a moment, a small star fell from the heavens and disappeared into burnt ash in the atmosphere. Jaimie wished then and there to be with this girl for the rest of his life. He couldn't quite explain what he was feeling, but after their conversation at dinner just a few minutes before, he didn't have to try hard to envision a life with the woman sitting just a few inches away. As it happens, Samantha made a similar wish, though neither would share what they wished with the other until after it had come true.

After a good long while, Jaimie stood up and held his hand out for Samantha and said, "It's getting pretty cold. I think it's time to go." She took his hand and stood up. As she did, she noticed something she hadn't earlier. This was the bench with the little plaque that said *This bench was crafted by Josiah Mills, town stonemason, 1889*. She couldn't

help but feel like this was her dad's way of telling her he approved of the young man she was with. She smiled and followed Jaimie back to his car.

He opened her door and helped her in before closing it and running around to the driver's side. The latch on that side stuck sometimes and took a little wiggling to open, which is not exactly an impressive thing to happen on a first date. He placed the key in the ignition, and the engine began to hum. The heater in the car took a minute to live up to its namesake, and so the two continued to shiver as he drove her home. Neither wanted the date to end, but it was getting late, and they knew it had to end eventually.

Jaimie pulled up to the curb outside Sam's house and raced around to open her door. They walked as slowly as they could to her door to prolong the date, but in the end, only a few moments were gained. They stood under the porch light for about 30 seconds before Jaimie asked if he could see her again.

Sam smiled and said, "I guess that's alright. You have to promise to take me someplace warmer next time, though." In truth, Sam had forgotten all about the cold a long time ago. When she looked at him, she felt warm inside—a deep warmth set within her soul. She didn't mind the cold as long as he would be there.

"I promise," Jaime said, grinning a little. He was already searching through his memory of any place he remembered to be warm. If warmth was what she wanted, that is what he would give her. "I guess I'll let you know when I'm free. Or you could let me know. When you're free, that is. If you happen to be free before me." He felt pretty dumb after that last string of sentences, and if she weren't there, he'd have slapped himself hard enough to leave a mark for a week.

"I think I'm free tomorrow," Sam replied as she took his hand in hers once more.

Elaina Epperson

A Messy Drill

Ever since I can remember I have wanted to teach kindergarten or preschool. The day I was hired at The Goddard School was one of the most exciting moments of my life. I finally got the job I had always wanted, and I could bring my son. Two years later, I am teaching a three-year-old class with my co-teacher Brianna, and I could not have picked a better age group. Brianna and I worked well together, which makes managing the chaos of twenty three-year-olds a lot more fun and the messes easier to manage.

I originally met Bri when I first started at Goddard; she was teaching in the two-year old class that my son Hunter was going to be starting. I still remember walking in on my first day to meet the woman who would be caring for my son every day. There stood a tall, blonde, twenty something year old, wearing a face mask and glasses. As she came to greet us, she removed her mask and approached with the biggest smile. This warm greeting gave me a slight feeling of ease. It was the first time I had ever left my two and half year old with a stranger. Over the next few months, I watched her care so deeply for Hunter, who was quickly becoming attached to "his Miss Bri." So, when my co teacher reluctantly decided to pursue a different career, it made it easy to say yes when I was offered to work in a classroom with Brianna. Every day is a new adventure in our class and always a new mess. Luckily, neither of us mind too much.

Today started like any other day, breakfast with three-year-olds. And we were having extra juicy strawberries and pancakes. All I could think while watching my class start to eat was, we are going to have some sticky red kids after this. To my surprise, we made it out with only some minor food mishaps. Now it was time for cleanup and to start our morning meeting.

While I led the class, Brianna set up our learning activities for the day. We sang our songs, reviewed our calendar, and each student picked their classroom helper job. Now it was time to start our learning activities for the day.

Our learning activities, or center time, is normally the messiest part of our day outside of mealtimes. Center time allows our students to work on all subjects through play, games, worksheets, and other activities. Today each student had to paint two gifts for our Grandparent's Day celebration the following week. And paint is guaranteed to be the biggest mess any day it is available. I was leading the art activity and did everything I could to minimize the mess. But it went as expected; paint on hands, arms, clothes, and one little girl's forehead. As I try to clean up the first group of children and set out a new gift for my next group, I hear Bri saying something.

"What happened?!" she asked frantically. I look back to hear a mumbled groan come from the bathroom. I already knew it was not good by the sound of her voice. "Did you poop in your underwear? And he peed!" she exclaimed with an apprehensive tone. Already I could tell by her voice this was going to be a huge mess. "Oh no, it's all over the toilet too," she said with a big breath.

She glared over at me, her eyes quickly growing larger than her glasses, and I knew it was time to go assess the situation. As I began to approach and see the mess that had caused her to look so distressed, the smell knocked me back before I even got close. Nervously I approach the door, knowing that it is going to be bad, and I am reluctant to even look. I arrive to find a chubby little brunette boy covered hip to toe in poop. There was poop everywhere! I never thought so much could come from such a little person. It was on the inside of both of his legs, all the way down the front of the toilet, across the top of the seat, and his shorts were filled to the top. As I begin to decide where to start cleaning, the fire alarm begins to blare. If you have ever been around a toddler when a sudden frightening sound goes off, you can

guess what happens next.

Instantly, almost the entire class began to scream and cry while holding their ears. Locking eyes once again with Brianna, we were trying to quickly decide what to do next. I shifted my path to grab all our attendance paperwork and round up the class. On my way there, I saw a tiny blonde girl, her big blue eyes just overflowing with tears, standing frozen in fear. I quickly picked her up and comforted her as I continued to gather the rest of the class. Over the constant ringing of the alarm and panicked cries of twenty kids, I could barely hear Brianna asking me something.

"What should we do about him? Should I change his pants," she asked quickly.

"We don't have time! If it is a real fire, not just a drill, we have to go now. Just wipe off what you can," I replied while trying to corral the class into a line (which they are still learning how to do).

With paperwork in one arm and a terrified little girl in the other, I scrambled to line up the last few kids. Bri was working quickly to wipe off our messy friend the best she could.

Within a few seconds out waddles a confused little boy in wet shorts and smears still visible down both legs. And behind him appeared a slightly distressed Bri to help wrangle the back of the line. As the alarm continued to ring through the air, we prepared to make our way outside.

Now, it was time to embark on our evacuation adventure downstairs and onto the parking lot. This group of kids had only been with us for a week, so we were still learning to walk in a line and down the stairs. I was imagining different scenarios in my head of how this was about to play out; they could all run out of the class at once, start pushing each other, someone could fall down the stairs, or maybe it will go perfectly. Swinging the door open, I began filing the kids out one by one into our upstairs corridor. This area is a large hallway for our four older classrooms with a common area in it, plenty of space for kids to wander off. Because of this,

I made sure to count everyone as they left the class before moving forward to the stairwell. As each child went into the stairwell, we counted them again to ensure everyone was off the top floor.

Reaching the top of our winding stairs caused a fleet of confusion amongst the class. None of them have ever had to walk down the stairs during a drill before. A traffic jam began when they were unable to figure out how to hold their ears and the handrails at the same time.

"You have to take your hands off of your ears so we can walk do the stairs safely," I tried to explain loudly over the alarm. But none of them could hear me with their hands over their ears and the alarm drowning out my voice. I scurried to the front of the line so the whole class could see me. Knowing that they still couldn't hear me I began to loudly say, "it's not safe to walk like this, you need to grab the handrails." But this time as I explained, I put my hands on my ears and removed them to show what I was saying. They at last understood what to do and we were back on track. Finally arriving at the bottom of the stairs we had almost reached our evacuation point.

At the front door we did a final head count to make sure our whole class was out of the building and to safety. Appearing from around the corner was our director Jennifer with a calm smile on her face, which made it clear this was just a drill. Out of the building everyone began to relax and the ongoing attempts to out scream the alarm came to a stop. We reached our safety point in the parking lot and waited patiently to reenter the building, Bri and I had a moment to take a breath finally, and both just let out a little laugh as we shook our heads. Next thing to do was tackle the clean up inside, the mess standing next to us, and finish our center time. Which is all just another day with three-year olds.

No one ever said being a preschool teacher was supposed to be a clean job by any means. But none of us could have even imagined the events that played out. This

will definitely be a day we remember for an exceptionally long time. Still to this day, every time that little boy goes into the bathroom, he always cautiously looks up at the fire alarm. But he hasn't pooped in his pants since that day, so I guess even a shit show can end with a positive.

Irene Ruiz Gonzales

Have a Good Trip...

August 19, 2022, the day my life changed. It was 6:30 in the morning when I had to wake up and head to the Madrid airport. I had everything packed and all prepared for this new experience. At first everything was excitement and happiness until my mom, my sister and I got to the airport, and, after that, the nerves started showing up. Finally, the time came, and we had to say bye to our families. Tears started coming out, but the best year of my life was about to start after an 8-hour flight ahead of us.

"No hablo inglés," that is all I could say once I arrived at Washington Airport.

I was so scared and nervous about this opportunity I was given. Going to a whole new country, to study and play soccer at the same time, being able to live by my own and be independent... This experience was so exciting for me and was all I wanted, but, in that moment, there were so many questions. Those mixed feelings were going around in my head: *Is this what I really want? Is this actually going to help me? Yeah, this really what I need in my life right now, so I'll take advantage of it, or no it is not going to be how I'm expecting it.* I felt so out of place but knew if I pushed forward, I would love the life that was given to me.

Coming to the United States of America was one of the best experiences I have gone through. Yes, it was so hard for me at the beginning because I could not speak the language well, but every day I learned more and more and began to gain motivation. Once I landed in Washington DC, that is where my new life started. I was so excited and scared at the same time. Located in Roanoke, Virginia, right below the valley, there it was: North Cross School, the school that I was going to be attending and that was going to be my home for the next ten months. It was a really nice place; it was small and with few students, but the campus

was incredible--lots of green spaces and five different buildings: lower, middle, and upper school, arts building and the sports center. We also had four different fields for each sport, all-natural grass, one for football, another for baseball, lacrosse, and my favorite one, soccer. That's all I knew about that place, and it seemed incredible.

It wasn't all laughs and smiles for me though because it first started off with a four-hour bus ride from the Washington airport to Roanoke, and I did not expect it to be that long. I was so tired and clueless about where I was going. I had a stranger driving me to an area I had only seen pictures of. He was a big man, very tall, with brown hair and beard, tiny nose, and blue eyes. He looked scary, that's all I can remember from the first time I saw him walking towards me inside of the airport. The bright side of that situation was having three other girls with me, all from Spain. Rocio, India, and Claudia were their names. Rocio, my best friend--we knew each other since we were ten. She was brunette and with the same color for her eyes, not too tall but not too short, average height. India was short, about five feet tall; she had black hair and honey-colored eyes. That contrast looked good on her. Finally, Claudia. She was blonde with green eyes; she was also short but not as much as India, and her skin reflected the sun for how white she was. They all had the same thoughts and feelings as me... scared. *Who was this man driving us? Where are we going? Who is everyone in this bus?* So many questions I had to answer as the night went on.

We arrived at the school at 10:00 at night after the long bus ride that at the end took us five hours instead of four. They sent us off to the dorms, the place where we were going to live. 416 South Jefferson Street, the main street downtown, and our new house. It was a big building with the main door and this one surrounded with windows that occupied the entire wall. Above those windows, three flags were hanging, the first one of The United States of America, the second one of the State of Virginia, and the last one

North Cross School. To go to our rooms, we first had to walk through the common space. We walked in and there were some couches and tv's, games a ping-pong desk and some more things, but there were barely lights on and no food for us, and the only thing we could hear was the machines running inside of the kitchen. No one was there but the four of us and Mr. Kier, the man who drove us from the airport, who turned to be our tutor. Claudia said in Spanish, with a joking tone, what we were all thinking: "Are they gonna give us food or what, because I'm dying."

Mr. Kier, with the same teasing tone, said: "Stop shit talking in Spanish, since now you are not allowed to." All of us laughed. We started to like him then.

At seventeen years old in a whole different country, I just thought about my family and how much I missed them. The only thing I ate that day was Chick-fil-a and let me tell you, it was the best fast food I had ever had in my entire life. There were not too many options I could eat because everything had gluten. I have celiac disease and I always must avoid all the foods that can make me feel sick. In Spain, I had no issues with that but here in America it was so hard for me to find gluten-free options. It felt like I had so many barriers because of the gluten but also with language in the way that I needed to learn how to jump over.

We were ready for the day to be over and for bedtime to come. During the bus ride, we had to stop in a huge store to buy some blankets for the first couple of nights. You know the feeling when your eyes are closing, and you go to your bed and see that there are no sheets on? That was us but after more than eighteen hours travelling, and the jetlag on top of it. Almost falling asleep, but without the bed done, the worst feeling ever. I thought once I laid down everything was going to come back to normal and be calm, but my eyes were closed, and I couldn't sleep. It was just me, the weird noises of the cars and people walking in the streets, and the air conditioning with that

sound that gets into your head and it's impossible to get out. My head was running so fast with all the different thoughts, and everything was confusion. I tried to close my eyes and not think about anything and after a while I succeeded. The day was finally over.

Eventually, I learned and overcame it. I gained strength by understanding that I am more capable than I expected to be. As the days went on, I kept realizing that this is not how each day was going to be. Those strangers began turning into my friends and the people helping me turned into my mentors. I gained more knowledge in the language, and I gained more items in my dorm. Every day was a new step forward and I never looked back on what I felt the first night I came to America. The fear had gone away and by morning I saw the bright sun that I saw in Spain also. The experience I was given turned into one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Melaina Hickerson

The Cliff

I have always been the adventurous type for as long as I can remember, outdoor adventure at least. That's why I immediately said yes to cliff-jumping back in July of 2021, with my brother Parker on our family vacation. This year's lucky destination: Traverse City, Michigan.

Parker is your typical nineteen-year-old boy. He's very tall and slender. He's got brown eyes and short dark brown curly hair to go with it (he can thank our mother for that one). Parker has never been a huge athlete or anything, but he would never turn down the chance for an adventure. After all, he loved the outdoors; we all did.

Parker and I definitely get our wild spirit from our mother. I mean Parker is practically her "mini-me" minus a few minor details. She's got beautiful caramel-brown curls that sit just below her shoulders. Unlike the rest of the family, her eyes are marbled blue with tiny hints of gray, quietly resembling a lake covered in fog. She is shorter than my brother but what she lacks in height she makes up for in attitude. She is one of the strongest women I know and without her none of this would even be possible.

We had just pulled into the parking lot of what was supposed to be our destination but this couldn't be right. Where was the huge cliff our mother had promised us? Where were the enormous waves we saw in the pictures, crashing into the sides of the cliff? Why did the GPS bring us here? The water was ahead of us, sure, but there was no cliff. No place to jump from. The area around us was half-rock and half-grass. The trees were tall and bending, just lining the water's edge. Tourists were filling the area; a few locals sprinkled in here and there, but for what? The "beach" was surrounded by sharp slippery rocks and half-cracked beer bottles. There was a long brick building with changing rooms and spider-filled stalls that barely locked.

With the breeze came a strong smell of mildew. I couldn't stand it. My mother could tell by the look on my face I was ready to go.

My mom has always loved going on family vacations. Growing up she didn't have the opportunity to go on vacations with her family, they simply couldn't afford to. She wanted to give us the childhood she never had. So she spends months of her time and efforts planning on what to see, what to do, and even what foods to eat. She researches everything from the weather to the most popular donut shop! It's safe to say that she definitely gets excited about it. Her main goal, however, is that everyone always has a good time and gets to do things they enjoy while on vacation, and this was mine. She knew it was important to my brother and I and she was determined to find it.

"Maybe you typed it in wrong?" my brother quietly suggested. "Like the wrong numbers, or maybe you just misspelled it?"

She typed it back in.

"This is where we are supposed to be," she pointed to the ground.

"How about we ask someone," I chimed in. So Parker did. He stopped two people walking by and asked if they knew where we were headed and to our surprise they did.

"It's this way," Parker said. He took off straight ahead and told us to follow along. He explained that they were visiting the area too and had just come from the cliff. It was a good minute away, he said, but we would find it if we just kept following the road pathway. The road had a bit of an incline to it but the cool breeze and beautiful scenery made it worth going. It was quite beautiful walking down this road, peaceful even. The road was long and mostly straight, lined with tall trees. The leaves were still orange and red colors which made it feel so much more inviting.

As we walked further along the road I couldn't help but think what it was going to be like. How high is the cliff actually going to be? One thing you typically learn visiting

any new location is that it doesn't look anything like the picture. There have been countless times when my mother has shown my brother and I images of places we are going to visit on vacation and six times out of ten they look the exact opposite of the picture. I was hoping this time would be a little different. I wanted to feel the adrenaline that you always heard about in the movies. I needed to.

We went on walking for what felt like hours when all of a sudden Parker took off running. He had found it. The place we had spent all evening trying to find and it was finally right in front of my eyes. The cliff was huge--even bigger than I thought it was going to be, and higher up too. I was afraid of heights. I always have been, but there was just something so compelling about the view. The water was dark and the waves were fierce. The wind had picked up significantly since we began our walk causing the waves to crash greatly over the edge of the cliff. This left the uneven rocky surface more slick and even more intimidating. My fears were quickly shut down, however, when two boys launched themselves right over the edge. They made it look so easy. I mean they didn't even hesitate, and in front of a lot of people at that. I was so overtaken by the beauty of the cliff that I had not stopped and realized just how many people were there. There were people everywhere; teens jumping off the cliff, parents and smaller children sitting on the rock formations on the top of the cliff, and children swimming in the water below. I felt so anxious at the thought of all those people with their eyes on ME, watching ME. It sent a nervous chill down my spine. "You'll be fine," I told myself, "just jump, don't think." I stood back and watched as the other people jumped. Some people counted down while others just stepped off. It must be nice to be able to step off unfazed. That will never be me.

The "line" of people was getting shorter and shorter and eventually, it was Parker's turn. He looked back at me and asked me to jump with him. I walked up to the edge and looked over. We were just so high up. Nobody told me it was

going to be this high. I can't do it. "Ok," I said. "I'll do it".

He started counting. "On the count of three. One, two, three."

I heard a loud splashing noise. I opened my eyes and saw Parker emerging from the water. He jumped! He jumped and I did not. I felt a wave of heat fall over my face. I was embarrassed. I had just watched multiple people my age and younger, do what I came here to do, and they just watched me fail. That's not how this was supposed to go. I should be down there with him. I step back from the crowd of people and watch as a couple of boys jump. So easy again and yet nothing from me. A girl jumps this time and after her another boy. There is no one in line now and the other guys are still swimming back. Now is my chance, I thought. I looked around at the people surrounding me, most of them were just parents waiting for their kids to come back and jump off again. I could see them getting closer now, Parker amongst them. I take a few steps back and count silently in my head. One, two... as I was saying the word three I could see my legs running over the rock and jumping into mid-air. It was too late now. I'm falling! I could feel my heart sink vastly into my chest. JUST BREATHE BEFORE you hit the water!!

I inhaled what little oxygen I could before quickly embracing the water. Immediately I open my eyes. The water is FREEZING. I needed to get above the water ASAP! When I made it to the top I gasped for air. Never in my life have I ever been this cold. I felt something warm burning my face. It was tears. My body was starting to tense up and I was getting a very bad feeling. Overhead, I could hear Parker yelling something at me. I tried responding but I couldn't even speak, my lips were chattering so hard. My main focus was getting to land. The waves were growing more and more fierce by the second and I could feel the energy draining from my body. I heard a noise behind me but I couldn't turn around--I wouldn't make it back if I did. Not a second goes by and Parker swims right up next to me. He is saying something but I can't make it out. I can't feel my arms or my legs anymore and the waves

are getting too strong. There is no way that Parker can swim us both back. My body is lifeless at this point, and I'm ready to accept the fact that this will be the last time I will ever see the water again.

Up and down I could feel my body bobbing underwater. With every new wave came a deeper burning sensation. "This is it," I thought to myself. "I'm going to die here." At least it was beautiful. My eyes were getting heavier by the second and my face was completely numb. I was ready to give in. I felt myself sink back under the water again but this time I couldn't swim back up. Cold water began to fill my mouth. There was nothing I could do; nothing around me to hold onto. I was falling into pure darkness, sinking...

There is a sharp stabbing pain in my chest and within seconds I am breathless. This can't be happening! I'm really dying! A bright light flashes my eyes pulling me back to the surface. It was Parker. He had grabbed hold of my arm somehow and was managing to keep us both afloat. He was struggling though, I could tell. His face was beaming bright red and he couldn't keep us both above the water at the same time. I needed to swim but I couldn't.

"Just breathe," he said. That's all I could make out from him. His voice was muffled. The waves were so loud drowning out what could've been our last conversation. I was instantly taken back to swimming lessons.

"Just breathe," my instructor would always say. "If you ever get too tired to swim just turn on your back and float. It'll all be okay."

I mustered up all the strength I had left in me and turned to float on my back. Parker swam next to me arm-in-arm the entire time making sure I stayed afloat. He never left my side. The waves forced us back to the rocky shore. I didn't believe what had just happened. Parker had saved my life. I couldn't help but think that if it wasn't for Parker, I would have become this thing that I was in such awe of, I would have become... the cliff.

Stetson Isringhausen

Working at Bayer

I was forced by my father to have a summer job at Bayer this past summer. I knew I was not going to enjoy it because all we were going to do was hoe weeds out of fields and plant seeds with our bare hands. This job was absolutely terrible because of my bipolar boss, constantly doing busy work, and the amount of drama that went on between some coworkers. I dreaded waking up every morning at 6 a.m, never looking forward to my drive to Bayer.

To start, it seems that my boss, Shon, exhibited signs of unpredictable behavior, which many of us suspected might be indicative of bipolar disorder, although it was never officially diagnosed to the best of my knowledge. Although it wasn't diagnosed, or I don't believe it was, she would be in the best mood in the world, then five minutes later, she was mad at all of us. For what? None of us ever figured that part out. Out of anger, she would just start yelling at all of us for not working hard enough. I vividly remember one day when Shon and I were having a seemingly normal conversation in the field, and then, out of the blue, she shouted at Ethan, a fellow coworker, demanding that he work harder if we ever wanted to finish our tasks. This abrupt outburst left all of us bewildered, and because I happened to be standing next to Shon and was friends with Ethan, I had to stifle a laugh, fearing it might escalate the situation further. Working outside this past summer caused some very challenging problems for all of us. Some days, the temperature felt like over 110 outside, and we were still out in the muggy fields, carrying a hoe, in a long sleeve shirt and blue jeans, with heavy-duty steel-toed boots on. While our boss's superior had wisely advised us to stay indoors when the mercury climbed past 105 degrees, Shon decided to ignore this advice. I don't

even know if this is legal to do or not because there was another group of workers with another boss and they were always inside when it was even close to 105 degrees.

In addition to all of this, our workdays were not only long but also lacked adequate breaks. We were required to put in nearly nine-hour shifts, five days a week, which often left us feeling exhausted. During those nine hours, we had a meager 30-minute lunch break, and the only other respite was a brief 15-minute break at 10 a.m. As a result of this, it made us feel exhausted and never had a chance to sit down and recharge. When we do have time to sit down for maybe 20-30 minutes, Shon makes us either pick weeds around the buildings or sweep inside. A few days out of the three months I worked here, after we were done in the fields, we picked weeds for around three hours. The amount of pain you get from bending over and squatting for that amount of time is unbearable, and the scrapes I got on my hands and knees from the concrete made matters much worse. Some particularly difficult days, she'd make us clean all of the work cars and trucks, which would take nearly all day or morning because there were at least 10 vehicles we had to clean. One particular day stands out vividly in my memory when our supervisor, Shon, became incredibly picky about the cleaning tasks assigned to us. It was a baffling sight to see her driving a 2019 white Ford Explorer in the midst of our fieldwork. This sleek SUV was hardly suited for the rugged demands of our job, and its tires gathered an astonishing amount of mud during our workdays. I had to deep clean all of the seats, which does not sound terrible, but the amount of times I had to redo all five seats because they weren't up to Shon's standards was crazy. Some of my friends had to clean the outside of the car, which was probably the hardest job out of the lot. When they were done, we all thought it looked spotless. Shon, however, crawled underneath the car and said "Look at all the mud under my car! Why even bother to clean it if you are not going to do it right?!" Needless to say, her

reaction left us all exasperated and frustrated with her unrealistic expectations. They were so mad at Shon. We all talked afterwards and I brought up the point that it doesn't even matter anyway because it'll just get muddy again.

The part at work that bothered me the most was the unnecessary amount of drama. The amount of drama was almost unbearable that went on at work on a daily basis. It felt like I was a spectator of a reality TV show. Shon's daughter, Alyssa, and another coworker named Sara, were the three main stars of the show. These three were always getting into arguments, but the majority of the time the bickering between the three was behind each other's backs. The amount of times we had to travel to a different site to clean the field of weeds, I would hear all of their useless drama about each other when one or two of them were not sharing the same vehicle I was in. On multiple different occasions, the entire work day would be ruined because the three of them did not share the same opinion. One particular day, after we were all out of the tall, humid corn on a 100+ degree day, Alyssa did not walk out of the field. Nobody really thought much of it, because she may have found some beans and those have to be removed from the corn field. Shon, however, thought her daughter was in serious danger, thinking she fainted because of the heat. I'd be worried too if I was a mother, but Shon, instead of sending us to go look for her, decided to get mad at Sara because she was the closest coworker to her. Now, I by no means have an agenda for either Shon or Sara, but this was completely unfair to Sara for two reasons. The first reason being Alyssa had another coworker within equal distance of what Sara was to her. The second reason being that it is impossible to hear or see the person next to you, as you cannot see through ten rows of corn. You could hear them scream maybe, but obviously in this case Alyssa did not scream. Alyssa eventually walked out of the corn field about twenty minutes after the rest of us, and having no clue what happened behind the scenes. Shon and Alyssa

often seemed to be on the same page, forming an alliance against Sara. This not only intensified the conflicts but also created an uncomfortable atmosphere for the rest of us. Witnessing these arguments in person was similar to being stuck in an awkward, cringe-worthy moment from a sitcom. There were moments when I struggled to keep a nervous laugh inside of me, as I've never been particularly skilled at concealing my discomfort in these extremely awkward situations.

I currently do not plan on returning to Bayer this summer, unless Shon gets fired and we have a different boss. I just can't imagine spending all of my summer there again doing useless tasks in the blazing sun, the drama again, and working with Shon. I've never been happier to be back in school again, just so I don't have to work at Bayer.

Chance Lehman

Duck Hunting

The first time I went duck hunting was an experience I will never forget. I had heard many stories of my grandpa duck hunting with his friends and watched a couple videos on YouTube and always thought that I would like it. But this day would be different in many ways and spark a passion in the world of waterfowl I never thought was possible. It was a late October afternoon and the sun was making its way down. It was chilly enough to need a warm hoodie to stay comfortable. I was sitting in the duck blind with my grandpa.

My grandpa stands about 6'2" and he was tucked into his Carhartt bibs that he has had since who knows when and an old camouflage coat that has been with him on more duck hunts than anyone would care to count. He had his handy thermos filled with coffee that would fog his glasses halfway up everytime he took a sip. He was an avid waterfowler in his younger days and had always talked about taking me on a hunt and today was finally the day. I would always listen to his stories throughout the years and wonder why would anyone do things that crazy? But after today I knew I would be doing those crazy things myself.

The hunt started like I had imagined. We drove the ranger back to the duck blind, unloaded our guns and blind bags then went to park the ranger in the tree line tucked away by tree branches and shrubs. As I made my way back to the duck blind, I went out into the decoys and set up the "mojo's". A magical piece of machinery that gave the illusion of ducks landing into the decoys that attracts ducks closer to the decoys and in turn hunters as well. After the mojo's were set and in place with their wings spinning. It was time to wait, me and Big G or grandpa in the duck blind just taking in nature's beauty and the good weather. The duck blind we were in was an old boat with plywood walls and roof,

equipped with mesh coverings and cattails and tall grasses to keep us hidden from the weary eyes of ducks. The boat blind was placed on the northern edge of Big G's cornfield. The tall grass and wooden walls kept the wind off of us and kept us warm as the decoys in front of us were swaying with the wind and the mojos were flickering to life.

"Did you learn anything at school today?" No was the usual answer to that question. Grandpa then scoffed and quietly muttered something under his breath. After about 20 more minutes of conversation and a few swigs of coffee, birds were starting to make their way up into the sky looking for a field to feed in. The ducks and geese wouldn't have to travel far to find me and grandpa since we were in the third field directly to the north of their roost. Geese started going out first, making all sorts of noise and providing all sorts of scenery as they made their way out flying over the corn fields. Next to leave the roost were the ducks. There are many species of ducks that are in season including pintails, gadwall, widgeon and mallards. Grandpa and I were after mallards also referred to as "green heads" for the males bright green head.

That's when it happened.

30 mallards at least. Buzzing right over the south side tree line and headed towards our decoys. I urged Big G to get on his duck call. As he was calling he would mix in feed chuckles and long quacks drawing the ducks closer. Before we knew it we had mallards flying right over our heads. Anticipation was growing and I wanted to try and knock one down worse than ever but grandpa told me to stay patient and stay still, which is hard to do when you want to see where the ducks are at all times. They would fly over us behind us but always coming just to the edge of our decoys. You could hear the beats of the wings and the air flowing between their feathers as they soared overhead and would get flashes of the brightest prettiest green and blue colors from their heads and wings. You could hear quacks and whistles as if they were in the blind with us. The birds were

getting lower and lower and finally started to commit. First they swung out to the left of the decoys, then turned right and flew over them out past the outer edge quacking and fluttering the whole time. As if they were making a big figure 8 around the decoys before landing.

Finally, they made their final turn and squared up the decoys with locked wings and feet extended they began to descend into the decoys. I can still see it in my head. 30 mallards hanging in mid air, as if they were suspended on a string from something far above. That's when Big G gave me the green light. "Do your thing," he told me.

At this point, I was as excited and nervous as ever. I could hear my heartbeat ringing in my ears. I clutched my old Remington shotgun and in one motion stood up and pointed my gun through the tall grass and at the lowest hanging drake I could find. BOOM. The shot felt good, I thought it had connected. I didn't watch the bird after because I was already racking another shell in and looking for a new target. BOOM. BOOM. I fired twice more. I stood there in awe for a moment after it happened and as the ducks flew away. Taking everything in. That's when I saw the look on Big G's face, as if something awesome didn't just happen. "I didn't see one fall," he said. Now I was worried. I rushed out of the blind door and ran out into the field. I couldn't find anything either, I was starting to get discouraged. Then I found it, in the corn stalks, my very first duck. It was beautiful. I felt an overwhelming sense of pride and joy unlike anything else I had in the outdoor world.

This all took place over four years ago. And now I find myself counting down the days until I can sit in the middle of nowhere with good friends and family in the freezing cold. It is one of my favorite passions. Big G still tells me crazy stories, only now I have a few of my own to tell him. And some days we still get to go back to that old boat blind and make more memories.

Keaten Mansfield

Village Morning

The thick morning fog began to lift over the drowsy town of Stamford, like a spell cast by the sorcerers of the old Saxon legends. With the rising of the night air came the same from all those who dwelt in the county of Lincolnshire. Every morn', without fail, the laboring men would rise from their deep slumber to tend to the new day's task. In very short order, the work horses donned their yolk. With each snort, the warm breath of the Shires became increasingly faint. The smell of burning coal wandered throughout the town as blacksmiths brought their roaring forge to life. The faint "dings" of steel against steel echoed through the narrow streets. Finally, the morning bells from All Saints' Church sprung to life, the first mallet splitting the morning sky like the crack of a cannon. With each chime, the bells warmed, turning the clash of brass into the beautiful crescendo of the morning sonata. Young seminarians, hurrying across the courtyard, made breathless conversation as they realized their tardiness for morning prayers. Children, running about on the cobbled streets, reenacting the epic battles of their forefathers, giggled and screamed as the clash of play-warfare ensued. Mothers and daughters bustled to their stands, offering warm bread and fresh vegetables to anyone who happens by. Traders, passing through town with trails of dust bringing up the rear of their caravans, cry out their exotic wares as their convoys meander to the next town.

Truly, Stamford was an honorable town, if not underwhelming. The village was blessed with a sheriff of integrity, Sir William Browne. Though his mother a Baroness, this peerage of low nobility would not be passed to the good sheriff. Owing to rather dull limitations on the heredity of his mother's position, Browne was denied this honor, though perhaps unjustly. Several years ago, many of Stamford's young men of both high and low birth departed with their

beloved King Richard to assist in the Third Crusade. Sir William's eldest son had expressed a deep desire to take the crusade vow, but the Bishop of Lincolnshire, after a great deal of prodding from William, convinced the young heir to remain home. With the passing of each day, the subjects of Stamford tended to their vocation. A culture of virtuous naivete was deeply engrained in this community. This is not to suggest the subjects of Stamford were without squabble or sin, quite the opposite, in fact. Despite the disagreements inevitable in social existence, the seeds of revolution remained foreign to this settlement. Serfs worked the land, not because of a deep love for the science of agriculture, but because it would be insanity incarnate should he (or his sons) pursue any other role. Blacksmiths labored over the forge because they were blacksmiths, and to abandon their ironwork would be to abandon their own existence. On occasion, a rootless merchant would find himself overstaying his welcome, disturbing the peace in a drunken tirade from the tavern green. Babbling on about the oppressive thumb of the nobility or some such matter. Generally, the good Bailiff, Sir William, could herd these rabble-rousers stumbling off and out of town, but on occasion, his message of disapproval had to be delivered through the bludgeon of a mace to particularly belligerent cosmopolitans.

As the yearly harvest drew ever closer, Sir William had to prepare himself, as he did annually, to carry out judgment with prudence and wisdom. He was tasked with the vital, yet often unpopular job of collecting tallage. The Norman lords demanded 1/10th of a serf's harvest, and it was the responsibility of William, and William alone to ensure this tax was rendered to his superiors. Setting off with the rising of the early autumn sun, William made his way to the parsonage attached to All Saints. The cobbled streets, built by the Roman occupiers of Brittainia so very many years ago, clicked against the impact of his well-cobbled boots. Occasionally occurring a puddle, William gingerly avoided

the pools of water, but the cuff of his olive hose growing damp was an inevitability this time of year.

Block by block, the imposing steeple grew. William began to trample gravel underfoot, finally reaching the edge of the cathedral courtyard. William was met with the warm wall that defined the perimeter of the church. The stone wall barely reached his hip as he pushed open the wrought iron gate, staining his hand slightly orange. Father Henry, the resident priest for the parish, caught sight of William and worked his way to the Bailiff as quickly as one might expect. Fr. Henry was a pleasant man, more round than tall, with a telltale red hue to his face. Henry's father had been a respectable alderman in the neighboring town, more than capable of financing an education for his children. Henry, being the youngest of 3 sons, had no expectation of inheritance, and not wanting to enter the lord's retinue, decided to put his learned upbringing to use. Finishing his priestly training in Rome, Henry grew to be an effective and beloved pastor for his flock.

"William!" chirped Henry, "to what do I owe the honor?" The bailiff turned to his left to see his friend lumbering towards him, trying not to trip over the lengthy cloth of his cassock. William took a deep breath and allowed a grin to sneak across his lips. He knew this was the beginning of an uncomfortable conversation, despite the annual ritual, the ordeal never seemed to be easier with age. Regardless, William was pleased to see his friend.

"Good morn', Father."

The old priest stopped, only a few feet separating the two men. The look of pleasant surprise was replaced by a furrowed brow, but in an instance, disappeared. The warm but intense expression that all priests seemed to have mastered resumed its roost on Fr. Henry's face.

"That time of year already?" mumbled Henry. "I don't suppose you've come to tell me Stamford has been exempt from tallage?"

"I'm afraid not, Father. A man would think these things

become easier the more he does it, and yet, here I am."

Fr. Henry stared intently at William, ignoring the light mist that descended on the courtyard. His eyes shifted back and forth, searching the Bailiff's face like a crow for mice in a freshly plowed field. William's naturally stoic nature collapsed before Henry, who read his emotions as if they were a book of common prayers.

"This isn't about collecting taxes, is it," coo'd Henry, "no, it's far deeper. You've heard something, haven't you?"

With a jolt, William tried to regroup his expression, but it was for naught. "There have been whispers, Father, of a treasonous nature." As the words escaped his mouth, the bells of the tower crashed to life. The limestone creaked and ached as the massive bells swung to-and-fro. "My men caught a merchant trying to smuggle swords through the county only 2 days ago. It would appear our good King's brother is planning sedition."

A spark of horror filled Henry's eyes. "But—well—William come now! Surely not. Strained as their relation may be..." Henry trailed off, "there has been a murmur in the monasteries that Phillip abandoned his vow and is returning to France. You don't think...?"

William gave a slight nod, confirming the fears that had been growing among the clergy. As he took a sharp breath and began to respond, a group of seminarians hurried over, kicking mud against their own white robes with each step.

"Forgive me, Sir, Father," turning and bowing their head to both respectively, "but we are nearing an hour past Sext and prayers have not been said." The seminarian's voice quivering sheepishly, hoping he did not anger his superior.

"You must excuse me, William, I have midday duties to attend, and this is not the place to discuss such matters regardless. Go to the parsonage and wait for me there." With that, the old priest turned and followed his students through the massive oak doors that guarded the entrance of the cathedral. The heels of William's riding boots made a pleasant click, like that of hoof against cobblestone, as

he crossed the sea of polished marble that underwrote the massive church walls. The faces of Christendom's greatest saints looked upon him from their perch as he crossed the nave. Reaching the entrance to Henry's office, William pushed the great oak door open and slipped inside. He was greeted by only the dying embers of the fireplace and the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows. The ornate carving dragged William's emotions up from the pits of his heart. The face of the Blessed Virgin was not wrought with anguish, as one might expect from a grieving mother. Instead, only solemn sorrow could be found, a single tear rolling down her cheek. It was in this instant, which came and went before William even knew what he was feeling, that a steady peace filled his soul. The anxiety of the unknown that came with every harvest evaporated like the morning dew, and in its place appeared fortitude. Crossing himself, William knew that this year, like all those that had come before, would eventually pass, and England would find peace once again.

Louis W. Miller

America Is Behind

I have heard from many friends that they do not enjoy History or Social Studies classes. In fact, most people I have talked to say these classes are unimportant. However, I have learned this sentiment is very flawed. History is something to be learned from. Social studies courses also help us understand our world today. If my generation only regards these things as trivial then we are doomed to repeat past mistakes. Many say we have moved past most of the horrors of our past and do not need to waste time on additional social studies courses that could be devoted to Science, Math, English, or trades. I have taken additional social studies courses, these being Law Enforcement, International Politics, Modern European History, and AFJROTC. Taking these courses helped me realize just how little I was being taught in traditional History classes. I learned about political events; I could engage with local officials; most importantly, I could learn about my rights and established laws and how many other nations differ from ours. These concepts are prudent to understand, so I believe we should have more social studies courses in every educational institution.

There are many events in the modern day very few Americans of my generation have never heard of. This is due to our schools' lack of education on many of these topics. However, many of them directly involve our country's intervention. One glaring example of this is the current war in Ukraine. Hardly anyone knows just how involved our government has been in providing support for Ukraine, and many are only just learning about the country. At the end of the 20th century, a similar major conflict happened in the Balkans, the Yugoslav Wars. Many Americans of my generation have never even heard of former Yugoslavia and have no clue what the Balkans are. During this time, the United States military played a crucial role in that region

ensuring peace and the rise of democratic nations by way of implementing no-fly-zones. Another example would be the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. If you were to ask someone today how and why these wars in Afghanistan and Iraq started you would be hard-pressed to get an answer. Many of these events and wars are only just seeing their end in the modern era with many of these countries finally stabilizing in the 21st century. Many of these countries are only doing so because of the United States. So, what is there to say of a generation who has already forgotten what their country has done in the past and does not understand what it is doing today?

Being involved in one's community is often regarded as a crucial duty of a citizen. Schools should have more of an impact on making us productive members of society and our communities. Personally, after taking a class on Law Enforcement I was able to meet local police officials, state prosecutors, and K-9 handlers, all of which help our community and society run smoother. The most impactful moments of this class were when we held discussions with these officials. There was a day we spent an entire class period discussing with the Alton Police Chief how we thought we could make our schools a safer place. Some of the changes we discussed in that class have already been implemented and considering recent events at Alton High School I can see those were needed changes. Being able to discuss solutions with figures of authority in our community is important. Social Studies classes help us do that. Many require students to get involved in some way in their communities. Being involved in one's community is a meaningful experience. Schools should facilitate these experiences more often as it encourages students to be productive and engaged members of their communities and society.

Knowing our rights is crucial to maintaining our republic and keeping it free. According to Illinois State Curriculum standards it is required that students take the Illinois State

Constitution Test and Federal Government Constitution Test as part of an American Government Class. These are both crucial to understanding our government and how it works, but one American Government or American History class is not enough. In the past, when I took these tests, little was devoted to laws and rights; instead, most of the material covered was dedicated to government branches. These concepts are important, but I am more concerned with my individual rights than what is needed to hold political office. When I took a Law Enforcement class, we were able to dive deeper into some of the less recognizable rights like the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th, and 13th amendments. Many of these amendments go undiscussed in traditional Government classes but are more relevant to the average American. Another topic we discussed in Law Enforcement was knowledge of the law and the consequences of breaking it. All law in the United States is variable, depending on what laws you break you can be held in state, federal, or circuit courts, which have different consequences. Most states have varying consequences in charges. For example, in Missouri depending on the level of crime you commit you can find yourself facing capital punishment while in Illinois we cannot legally exercise capital punishment. There also are varying levels of consequences and levels of criminal activity. We know these as misdemeanors and felonies. However, it is largely unknown that within misdemeanors and felonies, there are additional sub-levels within these crimes and each state classifies them differently. To keep things simple in Illinois the lowest felonies are Class 4 felonies, these involve crimes such as identity theft or unauthorized use of someone's credit or debit card. Whereas a Class X felony, the highest level, is reserved for felony charges that are far more serious like murder. Staying educated on our laws and rights is crucial to maintaining a free, just, and stable society.

The most important lesson I learned in school was how fortunate I am to be a citizen of the United States. In taking

Modern European History, International Politics class, and AFJROTC, a United States Air Force military education class I learned about world events and how many other nations do not have the same standard of living as in this country, nor are they as free. Much of Modern European history class centered around colonialism and how it has affected the world and still is affecting it. The class also referenced European conflicts including many that involved the United States. Many of the dots from colonial Europe can be traced to modern conflicts today in regions of the world affected by colonialism. Piracy off the Ivory Coast and Gold Coast regions of Africa are an example of this. Without taking International Politics I would not have learned about the Yugoslav Wars, The Cuban Missile Crisis, or conflicts in the Middle East like the Yom Kippur War and Iranian Hostage Crisis. All of which are major turning points in the history of the United States. AFJROTC taught me about the Space Race, the Cold War era, and modern events like piracy. In both International Politics and AFJROTC we discussed modern political events such as the current War in Ukraine, the life and death of Queen Elizabeth II, Central and South American Cartels, and the interests of other global powers. All these events impact the interests of the United States, which many do not realize may be impacting their lives indirectly.

My generation in America has a lot of catching up to do on the world and our own country. One solution would be to mandate students to take more history and social studies classes. An amazing example of solutions today would be citizenship tests that require a solid basis of knowledge of America to become a citizen. Many pieces of knowledge that are required to study to pass citizenship tests most Americans do not even know. A solution could be requiring students in schools to take a citizenship test to gauge their knowledge and find where our schools are failing. We have numerous resources online that can help us understand the past and modern events. There is also always the traditional

approach of taking a class trip to a museum or historical site. There are many more solutions to this problem. But it is up to us to act, produce solutions, and pioneer a better education for future generations so they do not make the same mistakes that have been made before.

Rachel Piazza

Over Coffee

"Would you like to go out for coffee sometime?"

I reattach the slide to the top of my Glock and tuck the pistol in the holster at the small of my back. I'm supposed to avoid carrying a gun in my line of work, but it doesn't matter anymore. Not after I likely just blew my cover.

They say that every CIA operations officer gets at least one 'James Bond moment' in their career. Mine started yesterday, when a woman in a sheer headscarf asked me that question, her blue eyes glittering hopefully. I should have answered her quickly, but instead spent several seconds in hesitant confusion.

Spies don't date, and they certainly don't date other spies. The woman, a high-ranking SVR officer, should know better than to ask out a stranger. It wasn't until her smile faded that I realized the question wasn't genuine.

It was a test I'd just failed.

Despite my mistake, I agreed to the meeting. I didn't have much of a choice—if I can't clear her suspicion, my career is over. I must do everything I can to keep my cover alive, even if it means walking straight into a trap.

I sigh, stepping gingerly over the Barbies and Legos littering my living room floor. Yesterday I yelled at my daughter for not cleaning them up. Today I sent her to school wondering if I'd ever see her again.

Ever since my wife lost her battle with cancer, it's been up to me to support our little girl. It's the reason I took this job under non-official cover, even though I lack the necessary experience.

It's the reason I can't afford to mess up again.

I step out into the freezing Moscow air and shove my hands into my coat pocket, thankful the coffee shop is just down the street and I won't have to walk far to be either absolved of suspicion or captured.

The Agency is under no obligation to protect me— if my cover is indeed blown, I'm likely to be disavowed. There's always a chance that the Russian government will be merciful and let me go home with the promise to not return.

But they're just as likely to execute me for espionage.

I suck in a deep breath and push the door open to the coffee shop. I spot the woman sitting at a table, her back to the wall. She's positioned in a way that allows her a clear view of every entrance and exit— just the way a spy likes it.

The other chair at the table is across from her so that I'll face the wall with my back to the entire room. She wants to see if it'll make me uncomfortable: another test.

I confidently take the seat across from her and smile. "Dobroye utrah."

"Hello," she responds in accented English. "Nice to see you again, Mr. Whittaker."

A sly smile plays on her lips as I inhale sharply.

She knows my real name.

It's over.

Rachel Piazza

Betrayal

Betrayal is the one thing
That hurts more than death
For I not only lost who you are
But I lost who you used to be
There are no happy stories
No fun memories to share
In black, in front of a crowd
In the land where laughter
And tears come together

I wear black alone in the night
To remember what never was
In the grief that never evolves
Past aching anger and pain
So now I sit alone at sunset
And cry to have you back
But I can't, and I never will.
Because my version of you...
It never existed to begin with

Rachel Piazza

Reina

Every time I look out the window, I'm reminded of my insignificance.

And I'd have it no other way.

The concrete stretches out endlessly below me, from the city's cracked sidewalks to the winding stretches of interstate. Just barely above the building in front of me, I can see the bridges crossing over the Mississippi, jammed with commuter traffic.

These people may be trapped on a metal platform under a cloudy sky and above a dirty river, but at least they have a purpose in being there. Every single person out and about this morning has a mission. A destination. A task. An objective.

But I wonder if any of them have a dream.

I collapse back into bed only moments after standing and trace the letter on the cover of my journal. The name "Reina" stares back up at me, the gold holographic letters glimmering in the light pouring in from my window as the sun momentarily peeks out from behind the grey clouds. A tiny pink crown dots the "i", further emphasizing the name that I'll never be able to live up to.

Despite my name, I've never felt like a queen.

When I open my journal, one page spills with blocks of color: pink, purple, and green— the color of my mood. The other with dots of yellow, blue, and gray— the color of the weather. I draw a gray circle for today, resembling the gloomy, overcast weather. According to the weather and my tracker, I'm in for another day that's as gloomy as the weather.

A light flashes beside me and I roll over, eyeing my computer which has finally turned on after trying to update for the umpteenth time. I grab it and log into my email, ignoring the angry hum of the overheating machine as I

scan the list of senders for a letter from the Butler University admissions office.

I wish I could say I'm surprised they haven't responded yet, but at this point, I'm not sure if I'll hear back at all. It's been weeks.

I reach the end of my inbox and slam my laptop shut. I wish I could hear back from them sooner, but at the same time, I'm almost glad they haven't responded yet. I'm not ready to tell Papa I applied to a college four hours away.

I head over to my closet and pull it open, only to be met with an array of empty hangers. On the floor lies a full bag of soiled clothing. I pull down my one remaining sweater from its hanger and toss it on my bed with a sigh.

Once I'm dressed in the last of my clean clothing, I slip out my bedroom door and into the kitchen.

Papa sits at the table, sipping a cup of milk-with-a-side-of-coffee and flipping through a calendar. He's already in his bright green t-shirt and dusty white slacks, ready for the workday.

He glances up with a warm smile. "Good morning, my Reina."

"Morning, Papa." I greet him with a small kiss on top of his head, then head into the kitchen to fill my favorite mug with black coffee. I return to the table and slide into the seat across from Papa.

No sooner than I sit down, Papa glances up at me. "Oh, can you grab me more creamer?"

I eye his coffee mug. How can he possibly want more creamer? At this point, he'd be better off skipping the coffee and drinking creamer straight from the bottle.

"Are you having any coffee with that cream?" I quirk an eyebrow at him and he simply shrugs in response.

I bite the inside of my cheek, struggling to mask my frustration. Papa is perfectly capable of getting up himself, but I stand anyway, heading to the fridge.

As I rest my hand on the fridge handle, I pause and take a deep breath. It's not a big deal. There's no need to make this

a big deal. "Calm down," I whisper to myself as I pull the door open and grab the creamer.

A few seconds later, I slide it across the table and plop back into my seat, immediately taking my mug in both hands.

"Thank you, mi reina." He snatches the creamer, flashing me one of his signature smiles.

Immediately my tension fades. I take a small sip of the hot, bitter liquid and hum with appreciation. Little interactions like this are what make me okay with my insignificance in the world. I may not have much, but I have him and he has me. That's enough for me. I'm happy with my inconsequential existence.

"The company got a lot of calls overnight," Papa mumbles. "It seems there was a power surge in one of the suburbs that knocked several houses' circuits out of commission."

"I see." I wish he didn't have to be so busy all the time. But then again, if he didn't work so much, we'd likely be homeless. "I need to do laundry today."

Papa grins at me, his stressed eyes brightening. "Oh, is that why you're dressed for a snowstorm in May?" he laughs.

I chuckle lightly. "That would be why, yes."

"Alright. There should be some quarters in the drawer."

"Perfect!" I down the rest of my coffee and head back to my room, grabbing a small packet of cereal and a handful of quarters on the way.

I snatch up my laundry bag from the closet floor. Lying next to it is a pair of worn-out children's ballet shoes. They seem to stare up at me, taunting me.

"I'll bring it up eventually," I mumble to myself. "Eventually. Just not today."

I close the door and exit my room, leaving the retired shoes on the floor.

As I step outside, I realize that maybe wearing a sweater wasn't such a bad idea after all. Although the standing air is comfortable, wicked winds barrel down the street, sending shivers down my spine.

A strong gust shoves me forward and I stumble a little.

"Watch it" a voice yells.

I turn my head, initially not seeing anything. A hand waves at the bottom of my vision and I follow it down to a girl seated on the edge of the sidewalk, her back pressed against a brick wall.

"Sorry..." I didn't feel myself bump her, but I must have. Otherwise, why would she have yelled?

"Don't apologize, just get off my pencils." She points at my feet.

"Oh!" I exclaim, leaping backwards off the pencils. "I'm sorry."

The girl leans forward and scoops them up, her black and neon-green curls falling over her face as she does. "Good grief, you could've broken them," she mutters.

"I said I'm sorry," I respond crossly. "What more do you want?"

She flips her hair over her head, making her face visible. It's a pretty face, although it has a few scratches and smudges across it. She has soft features, but eyes that are cold and focused. "Sorry, you didn't know. These are just expensive."

Why would a girl who sits on a street corner not spend her money to wash her face or have somewhere else to sit? Why instead spend her money on pencils and neon hair and-- is that a sketchpad? I peer over at her paper and gasp.

"Is that--is that me?"

"Oh, this?" The girl holds up the incredibly detailed sketch of my profile, capturing everything from my slightly misshapen left ear to the freckles on my cheeks--all drawn with perfect precision. "No, it's just another girl who looks exactly like you." She rolls her eyes.

Anger bubbles in my stomach as I glare down at her. "What--when did I give you permission to draw me? And--" I blink. "How did you even do that?"

She waves her hand. "You come down this street at least twice a week. I worked on this a little bit at a time. I draw

a lot of people like this. It's fun, and sometimes when I'm done, I can sell the portraits. Speaking of..." She tugs her lips up in a smile, but it doesn't suit her well. There is something off about it. "Would you be interested in purchasing this piece?"

I subconsciously reach my hand into my pocket and jingle the quarters inside. "No thanks, I don't have any money to spare."

The girl's quiet for a moment. "But you're a dancer. Dancing is expensive."

I pause. How does she know that? I take a couple steps away from her. "I used to be a dancer," I correct. "And thank you, but no thank you. Please stop drawing me. It's rather creepy." I turn and resume my route to the laundromat. That is without a doubt one of the strangest conversations I've ever had.

I hope I never have to see that girl again.

Matthew Price

Meltwater Winter

Like a slush-filled crevasse
 Meltwater seeping through gaps
 The traces of my form
 Slowly flow into darkness
 A bent tree hangs precariously
 It's trunk hunched in the frost
 Roots grasping for air beneath
 Through the precipice of stone
 The tree seeks water, and yet
 The water flows far below
 Where the tree did not grow
 Whimpers of verdant green
 Distant memories from summer
 Little does it know
 That eternity is not here
 The warmth will soon return
 Rains of relief will fall
 Perching birds shall nest
 Adornments of blue-yellow
 Will encircle the home
 In a hide of emerald plating

Michael Sullivan

Genuinely, the Greatest Show on Earth

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS, CHILDREN OF ALL AGES! HUBRIS IS A TALE AS OLD AS TIME, BUT IT NEVER GETS OLD WATCHING IT PLAY OUT.

Israel Rosales was (and probably still is) an over-privileged, undereducated circus main event miscreant. He had a long history of carelessness leading to gruesome consequences. His cavalier approach to work made him hard to be around, to say the least, especially when your daily life involved erecting and tearing back down great steel structures. On many occasions, arguments erupted between Israel and other crew members. Constant refrains of, "Watch my damn thumb!" and "Do not let go of the rigging!" would permeate the air during Israel's tenure on the show. Personal hygiene was difficult when everyone lived in trailers, parked in armory parking lots or state fairgrounds. That being said, Israel had a unique musk. His smell could only be accurately described as "fuerte." This was compounded by the fact that other than his stage costumes; Israel only wore the same three FC Barcelona jerseys. Israel was about 5'4, and pudgy. His bad attitude never ended up getting him into trouble, because he carried a Taurus .45 with him whenever he wasn't performing, and everybody knew it. It was supposedly a product of P.T.S.D from growing up in Pablo Escobar's Medellin. One might ask why we would bring such a man on, and the answer was his last name, Rosales. He was the product of four generations of Human Cannonballs, Globe of Death riders, and any arial act that you can think of. All the skill, charisma, and good looks of the Rosales family, however, skipped just one generation.

I had come to Fantasia Circus under much different circumstances. I was a drifter before the show found me. To make a long story short, it was late spring of 2012, and I

was busted flat in Hot Springs, Arkansas, looking for work. I just needed enough cash to get a bus ticket to California or Colorado. Anywhere where I could participate in a guerilla marijuana grow operation. I was a young, drunk misanthrope. I was tall, lean, and full of bile. I never stayed in one town for too long, and never got attached to people. I read a lot of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and the Bible.

The circus strongman picked me up in front of a grocery store, where I was offering to work for food. As my luck would have it, they needed an extra hand. When I was brought back to the show, I was treated like a son. I was given new clean clothes and fed warm meals three times a day. I was given my own space in the back of the concession trailer, with a cot and a cabinet for my things. I got a regular wage, and bonuses for bigger houses. The effect that these simple dignities had left an indelible mark, and the memories of the relief and security that I felt then bring tears to my eyes now. As the time passed, I kicked the bottle, and learned to love my new adopted family.

In the fall of 2014, Israel was our Globe of Death rider. He would wear Fox branded dirtbike gear, usually orange or red, and custom armor that had led lights around the perimeter of every piece. He rode a two stroke dirtbike, with a tuned power band, so that the bike would put out the maximum amount of power in the small takeoff space. The bike itself was decked out in chrome, and more led lights. When they got going, the led lights would blur due to the speed of the rider and change to pretty tracers inside the ball.

The two brothers who usually did the act, Jonathan and Ignacio, were taking a break from the routine for their health. Jonathan and Ignacio were about four years apart in age, with Ignacio being my age at the time (about 28). They had been performing as a duo for as long as either of them could remember. They had also been fiercely competitive with each other for just as long. When Ignacio saved up and bought a pony, Jonathan bought a dirtbike. When

Jonathan bought a Dior belt, Ignacio bought a pair of Bruno Magli's. Ignacio was 6'3 and slender, while Jonathan was maybe 5'8 and stocky. Both brothers' appearance very much reflected their Brazilian and Mexican heritage, with jet black hair, but olive skin. Both brothers would be dressed the same at showtime, tailored black slacks, and our circus branded polo. We all wore that uniform when we weren't in costume. Not that it matters for the story, but like I said, I was 28 at the time, and looked a lot like Ignacio and J.J. I have olive skin as well, due to being Italian. In the summer, I would tan darker than the Brazilians, and everyone else and I would tease them for being the only white people on a Latin circus. For clarity, I was the only white guy on the show. Everyone on the show was their countries equivalent of a redneck, however, so we were all the same on the inside.

The roster for the fateful show was as follows: I was the prop boss, Jonathan juggled, did a trampoline act with Ignacio, and assisted me with prop changes and stage management, while Ignacio ran the soundboard, and performed with his brother, as I mentioned. We also had an amazing clown named J.J. He was a larger-than-life character, and a font of circus knowledge. J.J. could do any act that our circus ever put on. I have no idea how many generations of his family had dedicated their lives to the circus, but we had proof of his great grandfather performing for European royalty in the nineteenth century. He very closely resembled Ignacio, but with darker skin, as he was Colombian. He would always be wearing his unique whiteface paint job, even when tearing the set down at the end. He wore oversized, shiny red overalls, huge fancy clown shoes, and a yellow shirt. He didn't need anything but his basic costume, a whistle to blow with inflection, and his homemade props. J.J. only performed as a clown because nobody could compete with his signature elephant act. He was asked to come and perform that act on multiple morning news shows across the Tampa Bay area, but that is

a story for another time.

For a little bit of context, in case you aren't aware, the Globe of Death is a large steel ball, made of diamond shaped lattice so an audience can see inside. It is constructed from about sixteen curved, pizza slice shaped pieces that fasten together with a top and bottom plate to form the ball. The bottom pizza slice, closest to the curtain could be opened, and would become a ramp for the star to ride his motorcycle into the ball. Once the rider was inside, the ramp was closed, and heavy pins would be inserted to keep the ramp in place. The point of the act was to use speed and centrifugal force to ride around and upside down inside the globe. It sounds simple in theory, but that is what drives fascination in an act with the crowd. You want the "marks" in the audience to turn to their wives and say, "I bet I could totally do that". With our characters introduced, and our scene set, settle in and prepare to be amazed by the story of how the circus finally parted ways with Israel.

Fantasia Circus was set up. The PA speakers were blaring the latest hits from Katy Perry and Taylor Swift. The crowd was either purchasing popcorn and soda, shuffling around between the face panting stand and the balloon animal booth, or anxiously awaiting the second act from their seats. Everything went the way it always did. Suddenly, the lights were cut off, and the music was replaced by the voice of Ignacio, who told the stragglers among the crowd to take their seats. The gears whirred, the pistons clanked, and the machine that was the big top lurched forward. This had happened the same way for hundreds of shows, in hundreds of towns, up and down the Chitterling Circuit, and across the Cotton Curtain. Beautiful ladies, clad in sequins and feathers spun in the air, and dogs jumped through hoops. The machine had hit its stride and was nearing the finish line. The main event was next, and it was up to our villain, Israel, to take us home. Gone were the lighthearted pop songs, as the sinister sounds of Rage Against the Machine boomed from the sound system. The jovial, multicolored stage

lights changed to red and orange, and were directed at the Globe of Death. The mood in the crowd changed, as a hush fell upon them. Ignacio, backstage, took the microphone and told the crowd how dangerous the following act would be, "Many brave and talented men have met their end with this act. That is how it got its name, The Globe of Death!" With that, Israel revved his bike, and came flying through the curtains, and into the ring. He took a few laps around his prop, so he could waive at the crowd. Next, Jonathan and I opened the bottom pizza slice, and Israel rode in. The ball itself was held in place by four sets of legs. Jonathan and I would hide in opposite sets to be ready to open the door again after the act. This time, however, things would be different. Israel tugged at his throttle a little, so he could rock back and forth on the globe floor to get his balance. Next, he twisted it to full throttle, and with a puff of smoke, and a loud roar, he and his bike made their way up the inside wall of the globe. He made one rotation, and then a second. On his way down, but before his third rotation, his engine started to sputter. It was already too late for anyone to save him. What came next was Gods-will. He made it all the way up the wall and got completely upside down before his bike fell out of the sky like Icarus, 12 feet down, and on top of him. That's not all it covered; it held him tight against the locked door. He was blocking his only escape! That's when the circus, like the machine it was, shifted gears. Ignacio sounded the alarm to all backstage cast by playing John Phillip Susa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever", and everyone fell into place to play their part. J.J. the clown was out in front of the ring in a flash, pulling out a gigantic pair of red panties to use as a flag, getting the children's attention onto him. Jonathan grabbed an impact wrench from backstage and climbed the lattice of the globe. He used his teeth to clamp onto the bit in the impact, like a pirate would hold a knife. When he reached the top, he made quick work of the bolts that held the top plate in place. In no time, he had jumped into the globe, and rolled Israel and his bike off of

the ramp. I pulled the pins, dropped the ramp, and pulled out our main eventer by his shirt.

After we got rid of the crowd, and Israel was being treated, the guys investigated the scene. The culprit for Israel's fall was a pinched fuel line, due to a dirty fuel filter. Israel had never changed it, or even thought to check. With a traumatized house, and a bent up motorcycle, it didn't take much thought before the circus sent ol' Israel packing. The motorcycle was repaired, and the brothers, Jonathan and Ignacio, picked up the act in the next town. As for me, I went on to begin to train and perform different routines with the circus. I never aspired to get on a motorcycle inside the globe. I did, however, go on to stand in the globe and hand props back and forth between the brothers, as they rode around me. Every rotation, with its whiplash pace and ear-splitting engine scream, was like a buzzsaw, and I was inside it! I would always strain my ears to hear an engine sputter, though I would have nowhere to run if things went south again. The circus, though, ran like the well-oiled machine back in the skilled and careful hands of the regular crew, and we moved on to the next town.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE WILDEST, LOUDEST, MOST ACTION-PACKED STORY THIS SIDE OF THE RIO GRANDE HAS NOW COME TO AN END, BUT DO NOT FRET. THE CIRCUS WILL BE BACK IN YOUR TOWN THIS FALL! ONE MORE ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR ALL OF THE PERFORMERS!

Kelsy Wittman

The Perfect Vacation Destination

Imagine getting away from the monotony of your everyday life. A perfect vacation spot for that would be Branson, Missouri. It is a beautiful destination that will distance you from the noise and will bring you closer to the charming world. Some of the appealing nature that Branson offers includes rolling hills, verdant landscapes, and pristine lakes. It is an attractive place with thousands of tourists from around the world every day. This vacation spot is perfect for a family or a solo trip, and has several incredible things to offer for every age group. Branson Missouri is the best vacation spot for its unbelievable shows, superb shopping places, and astonishing attractions.

First and foremost, Branson Missouri has incredible shows because they are known as the "Live Entertainment Capital of the World". The first show that I love is the Showboat Branson Belle. This is where you will set sail on Table Rock Lake with live music, comedy, dancing, magic, and a meal. My family always upgrades to the cabin dinner because then we can get steak instead of chicken for our meal. The steak has great flavor and is seasoned very nicely. I also always get the cheesecake for my dessert, which is outstanding. Additionally, the Showboat has a great show they put on. First, they start off with singing and tap dancing. Then, they will have a "magician" pick an audience member to come up on stage and help him do magic. Every time my family goes on the showboat the audience part is always hysterical and several people in the boat laugh. Finally, when the boat has docked, the performers will sing "God Bless America" for a tribute for the veterans. The Branson Belle is an awesome show that every person would love. Furthermore, another show that I will love is The Haygoods. They are located in a building called Clay Cooper Theater. The building is huge and has a staggered roof in the front

of the structure, which catches everyone's attention. When I walk in, I'm greeted with the ticket buying stands. After I'm done buying my tickets, there are concessions where anyone can get popcorn, candy, soda, slushies, and many more things. Finally, after you buy concessions, the theater will open and everyone can go and find their seats. The show consists of five brothers and one sister that all sing and perform tap dances together. During the show, they play over 20 instruments, sing, and have special effects. They also have a teddy bear launcher but the launcher has so much power that bears are just stuffing when they come out of the machine. All of the siblings have a good voice and are extremely entertaining. They will talk to the audience about their background, how their dad got them into music, who is all married, and many more. I like how they interact with their crowd and not ignore you. The Haygoods is an overall good show that everyone would like, and the best shows will be found in Branson.

Secondly, Branson has superb shopping areas. One place my family always goes shopping at is Tanger Outlet mall. It is an outside shopping center that has 80 plus stores. Some of the stores are: Lululemon, Crocs, Aerie, Polo, Vera Bradley, and many more great stores. I will always find incredible deals there because it is an outlet mall. Whenever I go into Vera Bradley, they always have 70 percent off everything there, which I really like. Also, when I go to the American Eagle store you can find everything for under 30 dollars. If you know American Eagle prices the outlet mall is a steal. At the HeyDude store, anyone can buy two shoes and get one free. That is a good deal because HeyDude's usually never have sales. After shopping all day long, somebody in your group will build up an appetite. At the mall, there is an A&W restaurant. You can get their made-to-order burgers, French fries, onion rings, and their famous A&W root beer float served in a frosty mug. Furthermore, another great shopping area is the Branson Landing. This is a waterfront shopping center that is 1.5 miles long. The

Landing has over 100 stores, which is insane. Some of the stores are: Bass Pro Shops, H&M, Lake Life Outfitters, Rack Room Shoes, and many more extraordinary stores. I really enjoy walking into the Branson Bass Pro Shop because it looks just like the Cabela's that we have around us in Illinois. Both stores have a big waterfall with animals all around the store. The buildings both have wood coordinated into the store's designs and have a nature feel to them. In addition, another store that I like is Rack Room Shoes. That store always has a bogo sale on shoes, where I can buy one and get the other one half off. That is a good deal because shoes are so expensive these days. Some of the brands that they have are Nike, Adidas, Birkenstocks, etc. After shopping all day, someone in your group will be hungry. One place that I really like is Joe's Crab Shack; it is a waterfront restaurant overlooking Lake Taneycomo. Their food there is amazing. I always order the pasta alfredo because I don't like seafood. It is really entertaining to watch people on their jet skis in the water while you are eating. At night, there is a water foundation at a cost of \$7.5 million, which goes to music. Every night at nine pm, the water goes to the songs that are playing. For example, half of the water will be on for some of the beats to the song and the other beats the other half of the water foundation will turn on. The best part is that it has fire that will shoot out of it and some people can feel the heat from it. Branson Landing is definitely a breathtaking spot to go to. Without a doubt, Branson has the best shopping areas.

Last but not least, Branson has several amazing attractions that will leave you astonished. The initial attraction that is one of my favorites is Silver Dollar City. It is an amusement park that has a total of 31 attractions in it, including seven roller coasters. On one roller coaster, called Time Traveler, speeds go up to 50 mph while you drop from a 10-story, 90-degree vertical drop that free spins. Time Traveler is my favorite ride at Silver Dollar City. While you are at the theme park, everyone can walk

around into shops there. One of their stores is a Christmas themed store year around. They sell ornaments, snow globes, Santas, stockings, snowmen, and more. The store always puts me in a Christmas mood and makes me wish the holiday would come faster. The amusement park also has a store there called Hazel's Blown Glass, where I watch workers make blown glass. While there, people can watch the builder blow on glass, put in the fire to melt the glass, and can watch whatever the person is making. Every time I go, they are always making pumpkins that you can buy. In addition, my all-time favorite attraction at Branson is Beyond the Lens. I first encountered it when the building was brand new and the outside of the structure got my attention. The entrance is a giant camera with huge fingers holding it. The building is just genuinely fun to look at. When walking through "the lens" there are several games for all ages to play. Some of the machines are Sonic the Hedgehog, Mario Brothers, an electronic version of connect four, Virtual Reality set, etc. There are several photo opportunities throughout the building. A few of the photo options are being an astronaut, sitting at the president of the US desk, meeting Bigfoot, being a Barbie in a Barbie box, and many more. My favorite thing there is the FlyRide. The FlyRide is a virtual flying experience that has a screen that is 4-stories high. The seats that 40 people can sit in are full motion where you dip, turn, and soar. There are effects when the FlyRide is going on such as: wind, scents, and sometimes even water. I went to Branson in July and during that month Beyond the Lens had Christmas in July, so I got to "ride" The Polar Express. That movie is very nostalgic to me because I would watch it every year around Christmas time when I was a kid. During the ride experience, I first hear the bell jingle and then everybody goes into the FlyRide. Next, your seats move out to where every person is over the screen. Then, when it was the hot chocolate scene, everybody could smell the scent of chocolate, which I really like. Finally, you will see

the Christmas tree at the end of the ride where everyone meets back up with each other. When the riders see the Christmas tree, they will smell a pine tree scent. Beyond the Lens is a great experience that every age range would like. Hence, Branson has the best attractions that will leaving an lasting impression on you.

Branson, Missouri is the perfect vacation destination for unbelievable shows, superb shopping places, and astonishing attractions. You will discover awesome shows such as The Haygoods, that would make some keep coming back for more. Similarly, the Showboat Branson Belle has stunning shows that will make you return to see each seasonal performance. This is why Branson is known as "Live Entertainment Capital of the World". They put on very good shows that will leave many people astonished. In addition, you will find stores that probably many people have never heard at the landing or Tanger outlet mall. Some of the stores are: Earthbound Trading Co and Direct Tools. Further, anyone will find astonishing attractions that will leave them mind-blown like Beyond the Lens and Silver Dollar City. This vacation destination is known for their attractions. Thus, Branson Missouri has everything for an ideal trip that everyone will love and remember for the rest of their lives.

Elle Woodman

Dealing with Rude People

Working at Panera usually means hard, but satisfactory work. It is good pay for a high school student and keeps me busy as a bee. I like to please others, but not everyone will always consider my job done well. Food will be made and bagged and occasionally a utensil will be left out, or worse yet food. These things are usually easily fixed, and the customers are sent on their way as happy as clams. My work has been done, and I enjoy it thoroughly. But that is not always the case, and little things can be done to diffuse angry people who walk through those glass doors.

Any shift starts by walking through those glass double doors. Occasional posters displaying the newest items on the menu cross my vision. Sights of juicy ham layered with smooth gouda and tart mustard all on a fresh homemade baguette is our newest addition to the consistently changing menu. Cool grays and greens are freshly painted and plastered on the open-concept homey dining room where the school chess team likes to practice during its free time. The building always seems to smell like sourdough fresh from the large bakery ovens we have at the back of the store. Sounds of happy guests, ovens, and clattering dishes greet my ears.

I make my way in my ink black t-shirt and flared denim jeans to the cashier screen to clock in for the nightly shift. As usual, the screen becomes sensitive, and I must be careful to put in my numbers correctly so I will be paid for my time. Promptly I walk to the back of the store to collect the fresh grass green aprons I am required to wear for my shift. Strolling past the dishwasher's silver station, I am careful to tread lightly amidst water covering the tile floors, so I do not slip like I've stepped on a banana peel. The Panera corporation has managed to repaint and renovate the restaurant but can't seem to get rid of or even deep

clean those dull red tiles-figures. I grab my apron and a smooth faux leather strap goes around my neck as I neatly tie the apron around my waist. Silver buzzing ovens and bars holding a variety of fresh meat, produce and dairy greet me past the swinging door leading to my station. Instantly, I see Greg and smile inwardly, pleased he is helping me for the night.

Greg has been at Panera longer than I have. He has a nice combination of looks, tall figure, and is well built with broad shoulders because of the competitive hockey he plays.

Usually, his dark brown curly hair isn't seen from under the Panera issued employee hats, but without it reveals a mop of hair that always seems to lay slightly over his forehead. He is one of my favorite coworkers, and his attitude is always kind and respectful, but not without a hint of fun that makes the shift more enjoyable. He seems like the kind of guy that can get along with almost everyone.

So, yes, this shift seemed to become like my normal routine night of work. Bursts of large orders that need to be made flash across our small TV above the production station. The rush of completing sandwiches and ladling soups into our white plastic cups exhausts me along with the constant heat rushing out of the ovens, but I enjoy it. I call out customer's names as the smell of fresh flatbreads and the occasional burnt smell of cheese remnants stuck in the back of oven wafts to my nose. Incredibly hot mac and cheese burns my hands as I frantically pour it into the correct containers. I hear the crackling of paper bags as orders are finished and sent to their correct owners. Today is a busy one, and I make sure to be quick and efficient for all the customers sitting on the wood toned dining room chairs that are waiting for their order. Let's just say, today wasn't going to be like my normal shift like I originally thought.

About two or three hours later, I continue to bag orders and prep soups as Greg makes a grain bowl for a customer. A grain bowl is a warm bowl of rice, quinoa, and a variety of

veggies with hummus and Greek yogurt, usually. But our customers like to change the ingredients in the menu—switch items out or have sauce on the side. That was how this grain bowl was today. It was a mishmash of items all combined into the shallow brown to go bowls we typically use. This is a normal part of the night so Greg quickly makes the food and I put it into the brown paper bag with the Panera logo and slogans all over it saying things such as “Let’s break bread.” I’ve always thought they were cringey. Anyway, we are busy tonight, so I place orders on the wooden counter that is about the height of my chest and immediately throw myself into plating the next order.

“To go order at the counter!” I exclaim. Every once in a while, I have to call out an order more than once because the people waiting aren’t listening, and I impatiently think, *Come on, do they want their food or not?* But no matter how annoyed I can be, I put on my sweetest smile, thank them and tell them to enjoy their food because that’s what I’m supposed to do. Usually my politeness wards off any mean vibes that could come my way.

The next woman that comes up is here for the grain bowl order. She appeared almost distracted with her large smartphone stuck up to her ear and dark brown locks that were pulled into a high messy bun. The customer’s equally dark complexion was like smooth melted chocolate, but her attitude was anything but sweet. She doesn’t even bother to give me a proper and respectful thank you or hello, but instead her once distracted expression quickly focuses on me as she opens a crinkled brown paper bag that contains her food.

“This food is pathetic,” she says very unceremoniously and mercilessly. “I want a refund.”

I stand there for a few heartbeats, momentarily confused at the abrupt behavior she was displaying. I was alone in the front because Greg had stepped into the back a minute or two before the woman had come up. Instead of standing there like a deer caught in headlights, my training kicks in

and I decide to attempt to smooth over the situation.

“How about you tell me what is wrong with the order, and we can get it remade for you?”

I propose in a professional manner. *And how about you stop treating me like I’ve committed a great crime?* I also think under my breath. It was simply an order that could easily be fixed, even though the order was made exactly as it was specified already, I even checked the receipt.

“Nope I just want a refund--this is ridiculous!” she hissed. She drops her food on the counter in frustration while her phone is still stuck to her ear.

Now I feel stuck. This woman could not be consoled.

“Umm...okay,” I say hesitantly, “Let me go get my manager to help you.” I quickly push open the swinging door into the back of the restaurant, leaving the agitated lady behind. The stress was getting to me, and I would not be surprised if my coworkers could see it like it was written on my face in black marker. My flustered state allowed my legs to pace and hands to run through my hair before I remembered what I had gone into the back to do. I walk to the back of the store where the drive through is held. The drive through looks exactly like my station just more compact with a small drive through window at the end of the narrow room.

“Sam! I need your help!” I call.

“Okay, I’ll be there in a few,” she says in between helping drive thru with salads.

“Okay, but it’s a customer so I need help as soon as possible,” I explain. “And she is not happy.”

Sam was a new manager at the Godfrey Panera. She had newly dyed short brown hair complementing her round face and moderate apple shaped figure. Looking at her you can tell she has a bubbly but forward personality—can’t say I like her much as a manager though. When busy, she tends to turn condescending and talks to us all like we are five. Its beyond frustrating especially since I’ve worked here longer than her. I leave drive thru and stand next to the dishwasher sink to wait, not quite ready to face the issue ahead of me.

Suddenly Greg comes up to me with brows scrunched in a questioning gaze, so I proceed to quickly fill him in on what the rude woman said.

"This is no one's fault. I made the bowl exactly how she wanted," he states.

"I know," I answer. "I don't understand people."

After not a long enough time, Greg and I follow Sam up to the front. I keep my outward appearance calm, but I let Sam do most of the talking because I feel as if my mental pot would boil over just listening to the rude woman blabber on and on about how terrible we are.

Eventually I tune her out. A few minutes later Sam is ushering the woman to the cashier screen, preparing to give her a refund. And that was it. She got what she wanted, yet the woman left in a cloud of agitation. I felt a little agitated myself amidst the scene disturbing our restaurant.

"You guys handled that well; I am proud of you all," Sam gushes. I am not in much of a good mood anymore, but I appreciate the recognition anyway.

Later that night, we seem to find out that that woman practically played us after all. As Sam reported the woman and her deed, we found out that she had done the same thing at Panera in several different locations, complaining and demanding a refund even though there was nothing legitimate to be angry about. She was one to keep an eye on.

I still enjoy my job at Panera even though things have changed. I know how to handle those types of situations now, and it gave me a new perspective on how those conflicts can be solved. Unfortunately, both Greg and Sam have left. I can be happy for them though. Greg is finally moving up in his dream and moving out of state for junior hockey and Sam took a new position as manager at a new restaurant so she could better provide for her family. I may not have liked Sam all that much, but she grew on me like a weed. They and the rest of Panera are always supportive of me, and I can use this experience to help others that are involved in workplace conflict.

Elle Woodman

Learning from the Sport of Horses

I have ridden horses for many seasons now. I started when I was about ten years old and rode throughout the years, while also taking breaks in the winter. At first most people think, "What's the big deal? You are just sitting in a horse!" but there is so much more work that goes into the strenuous activity that comes with those one-ton animals. People that aren't involved in the sport have not had the full experience of riding revealed to them. As an equestrian, it can be frustrating for others to not understand all the work that is put into the horse and rider relationship. Though horseback riding can be a really difficult or even a dangerous sport, it is also one of the most rewarding because of the creation of personal relationships with the horse, the development of trust, and the deep growth of mental and physical strength involved.

One of the most rewarding things about riding is getting to know and understand each horse I get to learn with. Horses have personalities just like any dog! I take lessons at Beverly Farms equestrian center, which is one of the local barns in the Godfrey, Illinois, area. Beverly Farms has a variety of horses underneath their care, either boarders or permanent residents. Not one of these horses are alike! These different personalities can translate into the way each horse rides. Scout, a painted horse with cream and beige colored fur, is one of our older horses. He has a calm and chill personality, which is definitely shown in the way he rides. One day when I was a beginning rider I was told to grab Scout out of his stall. I love Scout, but man isn't he slow! Not only did it take me five minutes to walk about 20 feet to the crossties, but once I had him saddled up and in the arena, I was passed by my fellow riders a dozen times throughout the session. Scout does not seem to get excited by anything. Annie, on the other hand, is the

complete opposite. When I go into the wide green pastures to put her on her lead, I see her running to the red gate that I am standing next to with her mane flapping in the wind. Her bright blue eyes were brimming with the excitement of work. But these characteristics of hers are not always a good thing for riding. The first time I ever rode her, I was expecting an easy horse because of her eagerness to ride, but she was always a little too excited. That day I started out by walking her around the arena, but as soon as I asked her to trot or lope, I struggled to keep her calm the rest of the lesson. Thinking she was anticipating my commands, Annie was constantly trying to speed up instead of keeping at a constant pace. I could only get her under control by the end of my hour-long lesson. Nevertheless, she is one of my favorite horses now that I've understood how to work with her personality and is one of the best behaved. Not only have I forged relationships with the horses I ride, but also the ones that I would take care of during my volunteering hours. Around five or six pm is the normal time that we would feed grain to all of the horses under Beverly Farm's care. That is when I walk past the stalls to the large black containers that are filled to the brim with grain. The whole time the horses are snorting and neighing in anticipation, understanding that I am the one that feeds them. Armed with buckets of grain, I also head outside to the pastures where some of the other horses are held. I meet Jolene, who is a white horse with a lot of attitude, and it shows when she is pushing to get to the food first. When I spend time with the horses, it makes it easier to read them and understand how they will act in certain situations, and it's very rewarding to forge those relationships with them.

There are countless times where I (and even the horse I rode) had to put our trust to the test. This is an important step to riding so that we are better able to advance in riding technique and also keep both the human and the animal safe. This was shown when I had horseback riding lessons a couple of years ago. I was riding Razor, a black and white

horse with a personality like an old friend, and he and I were always a good pair. To me it seemed like any normal weekly lesson we would have. Trotting and loping through the corners of the arena and walking over poles, so it was fun, but Razor did not think so. As we jog along the long side of the arena, all of a sudden, Razor leaps away from the side wall in fear. Surprised, I grip the horn of the saddle quickly, so I am not thrown to the ground. My instructor rushed to grab the horse so she could aid me in calming Razor down. A few minutes later, he relaxed, so we go back around the arena, only for him to have another freak out in the same spot by the gate! Obviously, my instructor and I have realized by now that something has indeed spooked Razor. Amanda, my instructor, inspects the area behind the gate and finds that he is simply afraid of the bags of grain sitting in the middle of the aisle, since that wasn't a normal large item to be set there. Now that we knew there was nothing for Razor to be afraid of, we had to continuously walk him next the bags of grain so he would be desensitized to them and calm down. This required Razor to trust me in knowing that nothing was going to hurt him, and I had to trust that he wasn't going to throw me off his back. For some people this interaction might scare them away from riding, but it was a rewarding experience because it allowed me to learn from this type of interaction and be able to react accordingly while also bringing back trust from my horse. If my horse does not trust me, then there wouldn't be any growth. The same can be said for me likewise. If I don't trust my horse, then it will be a constant push of control and apprehension. A horse is in tune with their rider's emotions, and if their rider is feeling anxious or upset, then the animal is going to respond, either negatively or positively, to a variety of feelings in by their actions. When I first learned to lope, which is the next speed after trotting, I was nervous of how quickly we would be moving. This led me to not give full trust to my horse and therefore confuse them when I would give the command. My lack of trust made the transition

between trotting and loping very rough because of the disconnection we had mentally. But once I learned to trust, the results were beautiful. The smooth transition to loping makes me feel like I'm flying, and it was well worth the wait and choice to trust.

Lastly, horseback riding can be one of the most rewarding sports because of the mental the physical strength involved. On the surface, it may not seem like that much work when sitting in the saddle, but there is a lot of core and leg strength. I learned that quickly after my first couple months of riding when I would have incredibly sore legs the next day. But without constant practice and sore legs, I wouldn't have the balance and control when I'm riding like I do today. I remember when I first started trotting, and it wasn't fun. The constant bounce hurt my butt and I struggled to center myself as the horse would go around the corners. It felt like I was being pushed out of my seat. But only once I learned to post, which allowed me to control the amount of bouncing in the saddle, was when I was able to fully enjoy the experience. I felt more stable with my core working to maintain a controlled up and down movement, and now I can't trot without habitually posting to have equilibrium. But physical strength is not the only kind needed. Mentally I need a lot of power and persistence to make quick decisions and be able to execute them. Normally I am an easygoing person and very indecisive, but horseback riding has challenged me to work out of my comfort zone. One day in the spring I was riding in the outside arena because it was the perfect weather. My instructor was having me ride around the corners while loping on Razor. Normally I can handle loping, but that day I had to be extra careful to give enough room for the horse to run past the corner so he would not have to make a sharp turn. But that day I was mentally torn on when to ask for the left turn when we were moving so quickly. So, in haste, I tugged to the left, much to my mistake. I pulled to quickly once I realized we were too close to the wall, and

I'm left practically hanging off the right side of Razor. The poor horse was trying to follow my command, but the turn was too sharp, and it threw both him and I off kilter. If I had not hesitantly waited until the last minute, then the incident would not have happened. But not only does riding help me make quick decisions, it also brings confidence to anyone who rides. I was able to see this when I volunteered for the down syndrome equestrian camp one summer. Many kids and adults come in with down syndrome, and when we pair them up with calm horses it's obvious the confidence they are given. I remember bringing them in to ride, and usually they come in nervous on the first day. But close to the end of the week all the campers are excited and ready to ride. They seem to feel empowered by being able to ride on top of a large animal. We would ride around campus while I helped lead Duncan, a peppery colored horse, and the girl I aided in riding could not wait to groom him and get on top of the horse. She was given the mental strength to feel like she could do great things, and I found joy being able to be a part of that. It's beautifully rewarding not only to be able to gain mental and physical strength from horseback riding but also being able to see that develop in others.

Riding these one-ton animals is no easy feat, but there are many rewarding features to it that make it so worthwhile. Those who may want to start horseback riding should know that it would be very difficult, but if you are persistent, it is worth the struggle. Nothing that is worth doing is going to be easy. Horseback riding will always be therapeutic to me, and I cannot wait to continue my journey to advance my skills.

Contributors

Alexis Bell is 18 years old and has lived in Grafton most of her life. She is currently a CNA, but is working on getting an associates in arts to go into teaching. Alexis loves books and art of any kind.

Alyssa Bonner is a first year student at Lewis and Clark. She graduated from Brussels High School in 2023. She shot trap for five years and has now decided to coach it.

Logan Buis graduated from Jerseyville Community High School and has now completed the first part of his higher education with an associate in arts degree from LCCC. His favorite genre is dark fantasy; however, his favorite series is definitely Star Wars.

Elaina Epperson is a student at LCCC.

Irene Ruiz Gonzales is a student at LCCC.

Melaina Hickerson is a student at LCCC.

Stetson Isringhausen is a student at LCCC.

Chance Lehman is a student at LCCC.

Keaten Mansfield is a first-year student at Lewis and Clark. He is undecided on his major, but plans to enter Philosophy, Investment Finance, or Law. Keaten is interested in all things Classical, from literature, art, and music. Keaten is an applicate for the Royal Stuart Society. He played in the Alton Symphony Orchestra for 2 years and the St. Charles Youth Orchestra for 3 as a violinist. He currently works in an accounting office in-between classes and enjoys writing and studying Medieval history and theology in his free time.

Louis Miller is majoring in Architecture here at LCCC and plans on transferring to SIUC to get a Bachelor's in Architecture. He has stated, "A little bit about me is I am interested in all things Architecture, History, and Nerd. I have always had an affinity for bringing up hard topics and things people don't know much about. Whenever I see a glaring issue, I try to bring it up in a respectful manner, so people have insight on issues around them. Many our age don't know the real struggles or History behind them, so I felt pressed to encourage readers to expose themselves to these issues. I hope you enjoy mine and other entries to the magazine! Wherever you are have a great day today!"

Geo Adira (also known as Rachel Piazza) is a lifelong storyteller with a passion for tales of perseverance. She began writing seriously in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, and her craft has only grown since. Today, she's a fiction student at the Author Conservatory and is in the process of drafting her third novel. In addition to writing, Geo is a web design student at LCCC who enjoys playing violin, martial arts, computer programming, learning languages, and (most importantly) drinking boba tea. "Reina" is an excerpt of a novel in progress.

Matthew Price is a nineteen-year-old amateur creative writer from Godfrey, Illinois. He is currently working towards his AA at LCCC, and has written over ninety poems. An honors student throughout grade school, Matt has always sought to put the utmost effort and cadence into his work through use of metaphor, dark themes, and other poetic devices. Through study and continued, regular writing, he hopes to become a great poet some day.

Michael Sullivan was born in a tin roof shack, in the town of Marquand, Missouri. Between 1986 (the year of his birth) and 1990, Michael lived in either a mustard yellow Caprice Classic, or roach motels from Fresno to Fargo. The rest of

his young childhood was spent in a particularly dangerous neighborhood in South Saint Louis during the height of the crack epidemic. He moved to Edwardsville, where he would eventually drop out of high school to tramp across the country. The following years of living on the road, all the different jobs that Michael held down (circus clown, deep sea salvage crewman, political campaign team member, etc.), and all the people who showed him kindness (Captain Scott Rodgers, Miss Genie Ybarra, the Lampman twins, and so, so many more) shaped the voice that he would use in his storytelling. Michael has used his experiences, successes and failures, to craft a series of stories that he amuses his wife and three children with. He now lives with his loving family in Staunton, Illinois and regularly attends Net Community Church. Though Michael did not always walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, he now sees service to his family and his church as his *raison d'être*.

Kelsy Wittman is 19 years old and lives in Godfrey, Illinois. She has stated, "At L&C I am going to get my associate degree majoring in Criminal Justice. Then, I hope to transfer to SIUE to finish my bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice."

Elle Woodman is a student at LCCC.



"King Zachy"
by Zach Miller