

VOICES

from the

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Writing Center
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Creativity

Sierra Caldwell, San Diego, California

poetry

Creativity makes up half of the human,
half of the personality
and half of the universe.
It is the drive that makes one hack
for nothing,
the cat dipping its paw into a glass
for a drink when it can't reach
with its tongue.
It is the logical fallacy
in a math problem that somehow
turns out correctly,
the way out of a traffic jam
using left turns and exits.
It is the muscles telling a hand
to make blank into beauty.
Creativity is the nerves
in a brain telling you what to do,
the prompt to an essay
that makes you really think.
It is the spark in the air
in an electric storm,
the sarcasm to write 'mut' on a toilet
and make it famous.

Creativity's a black finger nail
next to all the green ones,
and all the pillars of Rome.
It is the blue feather in the crows nest,
and the set of keys
you will never find in the couch.
Creativity is the wrong answer
to the how question,
but the right answer to all others.
It's what cameras capture
and religion shadows.
Creativity is conformity
in a nonconformist world.

Race and Identity

Chan Hyeok Lee, Ulsan, Korea

nonfiction

Four years ago, my beloved friend, Moon, caught me while I was rushing to class and asked, "Hey, Chan, is it true that you are going to America next summer?" I confess, I felt superior and responded, "Yes, I am going there just to get a chance to meet GreenDay. I am quite excited." I was only fourteen years old back then, and indeed, I did not know anything about the U.S. culture. Worse, I had no clue how being of a different culture affects one's identity. I thought I knew everything about the U.S.A. by watching

many Hollywood films, listening to American songs, and talking with my white English teacher in school. All I did to prepare for my trip abroad was study the English language. I soon learned that indeed, I had lived in a small well, looking up at a small fraction of the vast sky.

When I arrived in Southaven, Mississippi on August 2004-- about twenty minutes from Memphis, Tennessee, where Martin Luther King was unfortunately assassinated, all of my expectations about the U.S.A. soon vaporized into the air leaving me with serious disappointments. Nothing seemed to be like Hollywood or New York City. Instead, what I observed were ordinary people with tedious styles of t-shirts and jeans, and hunters with guns: I thought the activity of hunting existed only in Africa before I arrived in America, so many trees defied my expectation that the U.S. is mostly urbanized, and various races of people. Although I was quite disappointed by the different aspects of the U.S., I convinced myself to be satisfied with experiencing such a different culture. Unfortunately, my disappointment was not all I had to face. A big fat monster—labeled as racism—had been lurking, ready to swallow the soul of this poor Asian boy. Unlike my other Korean friends who lived in the other states of the U.S., I had to overcome not only the difficulty of the language but also all the hardships related with

racism. Even worse, during that year, I also went through adolescence, so the beginning of my foreign studying also actually meant the start of forming my identity.

I learned in the world history class that segregation among whites and blacks was over after the 1970s in the U.S. However, de facto of the segregation, indeed it still existed while I stayed in Mississippi. For instance, various churches existed for the different races and different formations of peer groups were dependent on each race. Demographically, Southaven has many blacks, whites, and Latinos, but few Asians. Whenever I had walked down the street, or hung out with my friends in downtown Memphis, I felt awkward stares from whites and blacks. Some of them were just curious, but some were truly hostile against my skin color. In school, it was even worse. My school had a group of so-called skin heads, most of them participating either in the school football or rugby team. On May 19, 2007, I was eating my hamburger for lunch so lonely because I did not have friends to chat with. The only thing I could concentrate on was the hamburger that looked at me sympathetically. Feeling mad at a hamburger looking down on me, I ate her up without any hesitation, finished my milk with hurrying for no reason, and then mumbled, "I did not come to here to be alone." Right after my mumbling, I felt a cold, but sharp, piece of

hamburger hitting the back of my head. I looked back at who threw this gruesome piece of hamburger, and I found a skin-head hulk mocking me, “Here, Confederate for whites, yo da Asian!” After that, these skin heads often mocked me by throwing food remnants during the lunch or bumping into me while walking in the hallway. I wanted to explain my situation to my school counselor, but because of my poor English, I did not have enough courage to effectively persuade the counselor to place me in a different state. Therefore, the first three months of my year abroad were quite desperate. However, racism was not a factor all the time. It eventually shaped my identity. Confronted with the racism, I had to find the ways to survive from that quagmire, so I obsessively followed the standards of coolness that MTV presents to make a bunch of friends, although I had an introverted personality. I started working out in the gym to be in good shape, because I was obsessed with fashion, played the electric guitar, went to parties whenever available, and studied hard to make straight A’s. I suffered side effects, such as my morality drifting away, but I became quite famous in the school, known as a rad Asian, loving to party all the time while maintaining a decent G.P.A. Unlike the painful situation at the beginning, I ended up finding an entirely new aspect of myself, and I loved that I could

overcome obstacles. Without the racism, I could never have thought about the new start, so I began to broaden my perspective.

My experience with the racism was not over though. After the first year, I moved to McBain, Michigan, where the environment was just opposite to that of Mississippi: The town comprised of whites and Amish community. My skin color was once again distinguishing, but the peoples’ reactions were different. The community recognized me as special, and, unlike Mississippi, whatever I did—even the unpleasant things—was permissible because of my different background. In McBain, my pursuits of MTV standards were meaningless; instead, people valued Christian morality the most. Whereas I expected that people would be cautious of my different race, the community tried their best to make a positive relationship with me. They wanted to demonstrate the harmony of all the different races bound within the Christian love; the differences of races means only different outlook to them. Without doubt, my identity once again changed; I abandoned those MTV standards but learned to practice the Christian values. If I were not to be an Asian, but a white, the community would not have tried to stack the blocks of the warm relationship as hard as they did to me during the second year.

Now I am in the University of Iowa which contains both liberal and conservative ideals. Moreover, there are more options of races available. The range of Asian here comprises of not only Koreans, but also Chinese, Thais, Taiwanese, Indonesians, Indians, Japanese, etc. As the time goes by, I recognize that racism here is natural; different races form the different groups, but no hostility exists. My identity is once again in the process of change; I do not follow someone else's personality or standards, but I follow where my mind is willing to go. For example, I study hard, not to impress others, but to satisfy my scholastic interests; I go to church, not only to make a relationship with the local people, but also to keep my faith; I go to the gym not just to make friends but to keep my health; I play guitar not to show off, but to fill up my insatiable desire on music; and I hang out with my friends, not to make allies but to build true friendship.

I feel that I currently live in the vast ocean, no longer a small well, as I ended up perceiving the racism in the wide range of its values. Coming to the U.S.A. has been special to me, as it sculpted my identity, and I am satisfied with my decision to come here four years ago. If I had not come to the U.S., my life would have gone differently; I would not have discovered my hidden ability to survive in a new environment or diversified my perspective towards the

world. I am now comfortable with any kind of cultures without any prejudice. As an old proverb says, "No pains, no gains."

February

Meg Tisinger, Davenport, Iowa
poetry

Towards the end he sailed into an extraordinary mildness.
There had been good days and bad days, pictures of us asleep.
Later we found what we thought was 50 years, was more like 46.
Someone else baby inside her, while he crawled on his stomach
through a frozen island, thinking of the wife and daughter waiting
his return.

I was going away for the weekend when the phone rang.
There had been good days and bad days, heavy eyelids
and labored breathing, pictures of us asleep.

Things that go Bump in the Night

Devin VanDyke, Iowa City, Iowa

fiction

The Calculus teacher droned on into the night. By the end of class the students were all so bored, tired or intimidated by the material that they habitually started to put their books back into their backpacks. Their bodies moved toward the door en masse knowing they could now leave. The wind howled against the plate glass window that oversaw the wildlife habitat by the river. A deer walked around just outside the window and noticed his reflection. He stamped his feet anticipating a challenge from the three-hundred pound buck before him.

The teacher drifted back to a time in her childhood when her father had gone outside on a Sunday morning to retrieve the paper. She remembered because her mom was hysterical as he came back inside with blood running down his side from having been gored by the deer as he tried to pick up the paper. The teacher recalled how her dad had seen the deer stamp his feet on

the lawn and paw at the ground while the deer raised and lowered his head. “Next thing I know I got the paper in my hand and a deer antler in my side—so I hit the animal with the paper and he ran off.”

The large buck with eighteen-point antlers in the window stamped his feet and pawed the ground in perfect rhythm. The teacher jolted back to the here and now as she realized what was unfolding. The class started to walk out the door and startled the deer. He charged the window. In the teacher’s mind it all happened in slow motion: a star shaped crack appeared in the window and an antler followed by a moist black nose emerged. The head was momentarily held up by the shattering glass which slit the deer’s throat and slowed the body’s entrance into the classroom. It paused as the hind legs reached the threshold of the window pane as if it wanted to reconsider its headlong charge into its own reflection in the window. It dropped to the floor with a dull thud. Its head was turned toward the blackboard like a student taking notes. Blood spewed forth from its partially severed neck and onto the wall before forming a puddle. An antler slid across the student’s feet and crashed into the back of the door leading to the hallway. Undaunted, the students, apathetic from the math, hangovers,

stress, or all three, continued filing into the hallway barely noticing the shattered window carpeting the floor.

A small group of students stayed behind mesmerized by the actions of the local wildlife. A long haired un-shaven student said, "Its Kill Bill, live!"

A petite, blond, honors student bent over and pulled the eyes closed and said quietly, "poor thing."

The teacher was left with her mouth open unable even to scream. The wind blew straight into the classroom as she thanked god it wasn't raining. She walked over to the phone as nonchalantly as she could and called Campus Security wishfully thinking they would be able to help.

"State your emergency."

"A deer just crashed through my classroom window and is bleeding all over the floor!"

"Ma'am, please. I know Halloween is just around the corner, but we're here for emergencies, not pranks."

"This isn't a prank, he just ran through the window..."

"OK. What's your student ID number?"

"I'm not a student, I'm a math professor. Can't you call someone to come over and clean up this mess?"

"This is Campus security ma'am, not Facilities Management, but we're here to help. Would you like me to transfer you to facilities management?"

"I don't know; it's pretty late. Are you sure they're open?"

"That's not my department ma'am."

"I know. You're Campus security. Go ahead and transfer me."

The teacher heard a lot of clicks on the line before she heard: "If you'd like to make a call, please hang up and try again."

In her mind, the teacher remembered watching as her mother soaked up the blood from her father's side with a dish towel. Her dad had called 911 and was rationalizing to the dispatcher how he had been gored. The paramedics arrived in a jovial mood and reassured him that it was only a flesh wound despite the massive blood loss and the wounds location on the left side of his body. They jabbed cotton swabs at it like they were skewering meat at a barbecue.

She looked in the phone book for Facilities Management and dialed.

"We do the floors, not the buildings."

"Uh, a deer crashed through the window of my classroom."

“If you got a toilet overflowing, I’d transfer you to maintenance, but as it is, it isn’t my department. You could try Campus security.”

“I have. Goodbye.”

She drifted back to her childhood and saw her mom and dad discussing why the paramedics had not called an ambulance. They had believed it was only a flesh wound and had joked about how the wound had really been made. They asked my father over and over if he had really been gored by a deer while retrieving the newspaper. Her mom talked her dad into going to the hospital because she didn’t believe that it was only a flesh wound...there was too much blood loss.

The window’s victim had finished thrashing on the floor and was now lying perfectly still. The teacher exhaled loudly as a cold gust of air blew bits and pieces of glass onto her sandaled feet. The phone book was still open to the University directory. A fresh gust of wind hit the book and it fell open to the city services page. An idea dawned in the math teacher’s mind. “Maybe I could try animal control.”

“Road maintenance, Animal Control division.”

“Hi, I work for the University and I have a problem. A huge deer just committed suicide by flying through the window of my classroom.”

“Well that’s really interesting and I’d love to help you, but we only scrape stuff up that’s actually on a city street. No county roads or state highways—so I’m afraid it ain’t us you need ma’am. Have you tried Campus security?”

She could feel beads of perspiration beginning though the room was cold from all the air circulating through it. She forced herself to hang up the phone, afraid of what she might say to the suggestion she call “security” again. The gears in her head started to generate a simple plan to take care of the problem. She asked the group of students remaining in the classroom if they would help her move the deer. They laughed nervously and said they would. She packed her bag, brought it out to her car, and parked closer to the building. The idea was now fully formed in her head as she chuckled at her solution.

The janitor was upstairs at this time of night—the coast was clear. In the classroom, the deer was getting stiff as rigor mortis set in. It needed to be moved soon or it would be too big and stiff to fit in her trunk. She grabbed it by the only un-bloodied part, its right

front foot and gave her winter gloves to two of the students so they could help transport it to her car. The petite blond did her part as best she could by holding the tail. As they arrived, at the car a couple of students paused to watch. Speaking in the most authoritative voice she could, she told them, "I teach forensic pathology and this was tonight's prop." The two students shrugged and continued walking while she and her group heaved the dead, organic mass into the trunk.

The wheels of the car screeched as she pulled away from the curb. She put on some soothing classical music to help her get psyched-up for the next step in her bizarre evening. A Campus security vehicle passed her going the opposite direction as the light turned green. She carefully accelerated, not wanting to attract attention to the deer hooves hanging flopping around outside of her trunk. The deer's final resting place was visible now, off in the distance.

She pulled into the parking lot and chose a spot carefully. She lined her car up and backed into a Disabled only spot. The bumper came to rest against the pole for the sign.

The car door opened silently as she donned a pair of surgical gloves she kept in the glove box in case she had to change a

tire. Walking silently on the paved lot she heard the trunk squeak ominously as she raised the lid. The deer's hooves retracted as the trunk lid stopped restraining them. She jumped back, ruminating to herself it couldn't possibly be alive.

There was a role of duct tape in the corner of the trunk for emergencies. Its end was folded back onto itself making a ready-to-use tab. She grabbed the deer's ankles and sandwiched the pole between pairs of them. A car door slammed in the distance as she reached for the duct tape. She taped the ankles together so that the deer was attached to the pole, but still in her trunk.

Back in the driver's seat, she put the car in gear and slowly pulled out of her spot. Looking in the rear-view mirror, she could see the "Disabled only" sign superimposed over the "Campus security" sign behind it, on their building. The deer was slowly pried free from the trunk as she pulled away. When it hit the ground she heard a sound like the one you hear when you hit a deer. She reached the street and happily recalled that her dad was only in the hospital for a week getting his spleen stitched up.

Dream Sequence #6

Eric Bennett, Lisbon, Iowa

poetry

A murder of crows composed of white wire frames,
pale spindle claws wrapped 'round black crystal tree branch,
leaves floating down as flawlessly formed shards of stained glass,
glittering dust on the earthen concrete below that stretches in all
directions,
miniscule holes burnt into the gritty gray by the litter of humanized
sand,
gridded vortexes opening up in the gaps releasing
a geyser of electric energy,
fried crows smoking desolately on the pavement,
this barren parking lot of sorts occupying here and the horizons,
ivory mountains to the fictional west
and a blood red sun spiraling out of sight to the south,
some dull thud of distant impact,
and a soft undulation shaking the smoking lattices an inch or two to
the side,

a temporary lull in awareness,
an aimless slideshow:
guitars with suspended rust for strings
cold headache hardwood floors
three stillborn children floating in a tub of water
head full of phlegm
lost human limbs fed into an incinerator
chipped teeth with frayed nerves leaking out,
agony, agony,
nothingness...

the yellowed 7 A.M. hue of my tiled ceiling two feet away
my lead curtain eyelids
roiling stomach acids
and slowly numbing limbs:
nothingness...

heartflutter love and reciprocation
torrential rainfalls
sweet sandstone landscapes
the intoxicating company of
friends long missing
gardens bursting with omnivorous butterflies and sentient
sunflowers
mountain streams lined with psychedelic
dandelions
scrambled eggs and lingering embraces
melting treelines
rocket propulsion swingsets and lost
childhood
tractor tires on their sides full of sand
dead grandpa cracking a joke about horsemilk (then
drinking it)
an idealized town fair and funnelcakes,
sweet nothingness...

the pristine 11 A.M. hue of my tiled ceiling two feet away
a fervent energy crackling through my limbs
a warm contentedness in my chest
another dream sequence concluded and
a life lived for the next one.

Selenite: Into that Sky of Stars

Rochelle Liu, hometown?

fiction

I cannot possibly understand. I cannot even begin to comprehend the pain, the agony, the absolute suffering he is going through. How can I? I am living a blissful life; I am not struggling to survive—I am a hypocrite and he is sick of me.

He tells me this over and over again. He asks me why I'm still here. Why won't I understand that he doesn't want me here? Why won't I just leave him alone to die in peace? He has no patience for my sympathy! He doesn't want me here—he wants me to go away.

But I can't.

I've watched him since he was an innocent little boy, filled with sweet toothless smiles and ignorance. And from that little boy, I watched him as he slowly, but surely, transformed into a stunning and intelligent man. I watched him take his first steps, say his first words, receive his first kiss, fall in love for the first time...I was there for everything, so how could I possibly leave him at a time where I am needed most?

"Go away," he croaks through his parched lips, eyebrows furrowing in frustration at my obstinacy.

My heart aches at his pain and I reach down to touch his perspiring forehead.

"DON'T TOUCH ME!"

My hand retreats quickly before I settle myself in the seat next to his bed, stoically registering my objection to his demand. He is alone in the world. His family had been brutally murdered by the opposing soldiers at the outbreak of the war, his comrades are dying left and right of him...and he has no one. He sees hundreds of men suffer by day and hears their cries of death every night. He touches the clammy hands of his fellow friends at the brink of their death and tastes the bitterness of loss when they are freed of their humanly constraints. He feels fear—immense fear—of having to leave a world he is so accustomed to for a world that he does not understand.

I did not understand. I cannot even begin to grasp the pain that he is suffering. He is telling me this again. He doesn't want me here. He doesn't want to see me. It's too early for that. He doesn't want me. Please, can't I understand his bitterness? Please, can't I leave him in peace because I am only a hindrance to his sanity?

I smile at him like I do every time he gives this speech and shake my head. What would he do without me? What would happen to him at night as he suffers nightmare after nightmare? Who would calm his agonized screams that rip through the silence of the night?

He has given up for the time being and proceeds to close his dull eyes in exhaustion. Five of his fellow comrades passed on today—each young, talented, and died a magnificently tragic death. Two of them were close friends of his. One lost his hand in an explosion; the wound festered with maggots and disease that quickly ate him away. The other lost his sight and hearing as well as a leg; the heavy handicap drove him to insanity and to his eventual death. Both deaths affected him greatly and now he lies there, suffering from a war that cannot be won.

He is at his ultimate low and I sit there, waiting for sleep to overtake him so that I may comfort him when he is plagued by demons that haunt him in his dreams.

“Julia...” he mumbles as he slowly drifts off to a place where nothing can touch him.

I place a hand at his cheek. I can feel the temperature rise but I can do nothing to help his current state of deliria.

Julia, his late wife, was a gorgeous woman. She was constantly filled with laughter and kindness, an easy woman to fall in love with. He spent years trying to win her heart and when he did, I can vividly remember the absolute happiness in his very being. They were deeply in love and, soon after the blessed wedding, produced two beautiful twin girls named Emily and Molly, who could brighten any room with their presence. They were just as dazzling and as charming as their parents, and they painted a picture of pure Eden. There could not have been a happier family living in the world.

It was such a heartbreaking moment for him when he found his house lying in ruins, burnt to the ground, signaling the end of his marvelously constructed world and the beginning of a hellish nightmare, from which he cannot escape. He fell to his knees in despair at the sight of his daughters’ little fingers detached from their bodies next to their mother’s mangled and burnt body lying in the ruins—the sorrow was so overwhelming that he could not cry a single tear or utter a single sound. The wife he cherished and the daughters who did not receive the chance of a beautiful and fulfilling life were gone, burnt with the house in ashy memories, never to be seen again.

“Julia...”

I look over at him, my golden eyebrows crease lightly as I take in his feverish state. He suppresses his sobs, eyes shut tightly so that tears cannot escape from their confinements. I allow myself to let out a sigh as I dip a cloth into the cool water of the bowl sitting next to his deathbed.

“Julia.”

He is trembling with anguished ferocity and he grips the sheets until his knuckles turn white. I gently place the chilly rag on his forehead in attempt to lower his temperature.

“Julia, Julia, Julia...”

He is crying now, his face twists in evident pain as his mind begins to fill with the faces of those he killed, those he saw die while begging for mercy, and those who are suffering in their jails as they starve and pine for freedom to see their families one last time. He is being dragged down under waves of guilt as those faces grasp at his very soul, wanting to drag him down with them and oh! How he wishes he could suffer to atone for all of the sins he had committed! How he wishes that Justice and Divinity would kill him off and send him to Hell where he belongs!

“Julia!”

He sits up, eyes wide and unfocused, sweating and breathing heavily as he tries to shake off the nightmare.

“You are still here,” he comments after he calms himself. His eyes turn towards me. “Why are you still here?”

I do not answer and this angers him.

“TELL ME!”

And still, I do not answer. I only smile lightly at him, pick up the rag that has fallen from his forehead and proceed to help him lie down. He throws suspicious glares at me but heeds my hands as they push down gently upon his shoulders. I sense nothing but weakness as he eases down into the lumpy bed, this once strong man that stood in front of his troops gone and replaced by this sad skeleton figure.

I dampen the rag and place it upon his burning forehead again. I seat myself in that chair that can now be proclaimed mine and I place a hand upon his, squeezing only lightly.

“Why are you here?” he asks me again.

And again, I do not answer.

But he is used to my silence now and he only offers me a smile.

“You look familiar.”

I gaze down into his face and see him looking sleepy and for the first time in years, he looks completely peaceful.

“I hated you,” he says groggily as he smiles up at me. His free hand reaches up to touch a few strands of my golden hair. He says quietly, “Because I did not want you to see me like this.”

He laughs quietly at my confused expression, giddy like a little boy.

“You watched me for a long time, didn’t you?”

I nod in response.

“I did not want you to see me so weak.”

The expression on my face must have been incredulous because he laughs out loud this time, incurring a series of deep, heavy coughs from the back of his throat.

I help him up and pat him soothingly on the back, gentle with his rotting injuries. It takes a while for his coughs to disperse and then another minute for his breathing to regulate again.

“I hated you,” he says again, “but now I’m glad you are here.”

My hand stops its rubbing in question.

“Death doesn’t feel so frightening with you here,” he utters as he slowly lowers himself back onto his pillow. “I feel calm and warm.”

I smile and nod, placing my hand on his ever-burning face.

“Are you a figment of my imagination?”

No; I shake my head.

“Good,” he gives me one last mortal smile. “That means I can leave in peace.”

And after a moment of still silence, I see him rising up before me. I give him a bright smile and offer him my hand. He looks at it with only slight hesitation and then he places his hand into mine.

Coming To America

Hsiao-Ying Chang, Taipei, Taiwan

nonfiction

Taipei is a big city on a small island. It is a city that sells merchandise from all over the world. Time goes fast and everyone walks fast there. That is where I came from. I am a Taiwanese girl. I’m not the type of person to make detailed plans when I go somewhere—to me that takes all of the excitement out of it. I’m more impulsive, the type of person who likes to jump right in and I welcome surprises. I don’t usually check whether the place is safe

or not, what is fun or not fun there, or whether my personality will fit in or not. Because of this, I have become a master of adaptation. Therefore, without any specific idea about America, I decided to come here in my senior year of high school.

This is the fifth year of my life in America; however, I can still remember the first day when I first arrived at the airport. It was a summer day in Kansas City. Sunshine reflected off of the windows in the airport; it was so bright that it made my vision black out when I first walked out of the tunnel. It was my first time going to a foreign country, and it was my first time traveling alone. However, I wasn't anxious or feeling homesick, I was too excited. My excitement defeated my exhaustion, even after a twenty-six hour flight, and soon my vision quickly overcame the bright light. My Asian squinty eyes were already searching through the sea of unfamiliar faces to find the familiar forms of my house family, thus far, known to me only through a photograph.

My search was suddenly interrupted by the voice of a woman saying, "Hello! Welcome to America!" I turned and immediately recognized the woman as my house mother, along with my house brother; both wearing big smiles. Although there was much I wanted to say, I couldn't bring myself to respond with

even a simple greeting. Instead, I flashed a nervous smile; the kind of smile that struggles between whether to show teeth or not. I was too agitated to speak with my broken English; it was the first time I had ever had a real, live American talk to me. That was an interesting first day. You may have noticed that I keep incorrectly referring to them as my 'house family'. Well, this is because I didn't know the word 'host' at the time, so when I heard the term 'host family' I heard it as 'house family', which really seemed to make a lot of sense at the time. I continued calling them my house family for an entire year. I think they just attributed the strange pronunciation of 'host' to my accent. Since then my English has improved a lot, at least, I am sure that I can say hi back to you if you greet to me. However, I am still the same Taiwanese girl that is impulsive on where to go. With some brashness I came to Iowa City, except I knew from one of the friends that it has a good school with a good psychology program, and decided to spend the second half of my college life here.

Unlike most international students, I've never really experienced culture shock. I was not shocked by American's straight forward talking attitude, which can feel a little impolite to foreigners, especially Asians. On the contrary, I love the

straightforward attitude I have found here; I don't have to strain my brain in an attempt at guessing whether an American really likes me or they are just being polite. One example that can explain why the kind of attitude wins my favorite is my baking experience. I like to use my oven because people in Taiwan don't usually have an oven at home, for that reason I bake a lot. This is, if I bake something and turn out to be terrible, my American friends will reject my offer politely. Where as my Asian friends will always take it without any comments but good no matter what. Different from many people, I didn't come to Iowa City with any preconceived notions about a small town in the Midwest. Even after living here for almost five years, I still don't find living in a state full of cornfields and cows to be upsetting; besides, there is a lot more to it than that!

I have often heard people say that people in small town are close-minded and small towns are boring. However, this kind of small town impression doesn't seem to fit into Iowa City. When I first arrived to the campus it was a week before school starts. I was so amazed by the outstanding characteristics of this small city. Everywhere I went, I saw signs about volunteer work and was greeted with smiling faces. I thought maybe it is just because of the summer season, but I still see it now that it is almost winter. People

are extremely friendly here, more so than any place I have lived so far. People are so friendly that I sometimes feel as if I have walked into an episode of the Twilight Zone. Everywhere I look people are smiling, and someone is sure to say hi to me as I walk down the street. Because the atmosphere here only contains happiness, sometimes it seems unreal. For a while, I kept expecting that maybe one day after all this is what always happens in the Twilight Zone, I would discover the dark secret of this place, but I never did. It turns out that people are just generally nice here. Because I am very clumsy I have run into people many times, but every time, instead of screaming, I hear a genuine, "Are you okay?"

Iowa City is a very open-minded place. Extreme topics which are usually abandoned in public speech, such as gay marriage, abortion and religious or politics beliefs are very welcome in the city. Human rights and free-speech are not just some rules that are written on the wall to show off, in Iowa City, people put real effort into practicing these types of work. It is nice to see gay people stand up for their rights without being punished. So far I haven't heard any one use any derogatory speech toward gay people, even if those people hold different beliefs. Also, people respect free-

speech in Iowa City. When I am talking about my opinion on abortion, I don't get to stare at or yelled at by people.

There are so many fun things to do that I think I could mention one or two here. Even though Iowa City is located in middle of nowhere, I have had the opportunity to try many things here that I had never tried before. Kayaking on Lake MacBride and bicycling on the trails, which are two of my favorite activities. I am so glad I end up stay here because I would never have imagined that here would be a beach in mid-west and more than five bike trails. Besides, can you believe there is a scuba diving club? Even though the city is small, it has many things to do. Iowa City is not just some small dot in "fly over" country; it is a place that is full of energy and has many ideas to offer.

I have had the luck to experience life at a variety of levels from a big city (Taipei) to a medium sized city in Kansas to a small town in rural Iowa. Though I never thought that I would spend more than one year in America, I am glad I did because now I am able to appreciate aspects of each different place.

WHAT A URINAL!

Eri Kurniawan, Jakarta, Indonesia
nonfiction

Back in Indonesia, I used to talk with my colleagues about issues around us. Sometimes, we talked about political issues, like how intrusive the U.S. is in dealing with other countries. Other times, we simply discussed trivial issues, like how public restrooms are privately exploited for commercial purposes.

At one event, a senior lecturer who had spent a couple of months on a scholarly visit to several American universities commented on how we should have free access to any public facilities, one of which is the restroom. In Indonesia, for instance, we have to pay Rp. 1000, or around 10 cents, per restroom visit in public spaces. To the lecturer, it showed how inept the government is in providing freely accessible facilities for its people. She stressed that such won't be the case in any developed countries like America.

Furthermore, she was dissatisfied with the fact that most restrooms in public spaces are not properly taken care of. She didn't expect them to be modern. Rather, she simply hoped that with the

money paid, we would have more comfortable and cleaner restrooms, with better hygiene, and more proper hand soap. At that time, I fantasized how pleasant it would be to stay in a country where public facilities are freely accessible for all. I didn't have any clear image of what restrooms in developed countries would look like though.

In my departmental office in Indonesia, there is only one decent restroom on the third floor. As a matter of fact, there are two altogether, but the other one is in awful condition. There is a big hole in its roof, the drainage is atrocious and it is also cramped. The so-called "decent" restroom is relatively cleaner and more spacious. But quite frequently there is no water. And there is no such thing as a urinal or sink. It has a quite big cubical water container with a small pail instead. So, we have to go downstairs to the first floor because no restroom is on the second floor. It is a three-story building and, what's more, the building has no elevator. What a building!

On October 23, 2006, I was nominated as a Fulbright grantee, meaning that I would be going to America. At the same time, though, I was accepted by AusAID to pursue my masters in the University of Sydney. I puzzled for quite some time about where to

go, and asked my colleagues and parents for advice. After much careful thought, I decided to go the U.S., a country which I had always dreamed of going to. A colleague of mine told me I would have a wider variety of specialization choices in the U.S. than in Australia. Plus, the knowledge and technology is much more advanced in the U.S.

The moment I reached O'Hare International Airport, I was so passionate about having arrived in America, I felt like telling everyone in my village, "I'm here now in the U.S." Having been checked and questioned, I was held for a while by the NSEERS (the National Security Exit-Entry Registration System) officers, most probably because I happen to be a young Indonesian (Moslem). Needless to say, this country has encountered a heightened trauma after the horrible September 11 attacks, which were allegedly performed by 'Islamic' terrorists. I would have been personally eager to ask them, had they been still alive, "Are you a real Moslem?" This Islamic terrorism stereotype has since influenced the U.S. treatment of Moslems throughout the globe. So, given the fact that I'm an Indonesian and Moslem, I may be considered a potential threat against the people here in America. That's why it took hours for me to satisfy NSEERS.

Having been through all these exhaustive procedures, I tried to find a restroom in Terminal 2. I went back and forth amidst many people crowding for the gate. I finally found one near the queue. I went inside and was a bit shocked with what I saw. The urinal was too sophisticated for me. It had an automatic flush mechanism. So, I was confused as to how to get the water out because I usually rinse myself soon after urinating or defecating as it is prescribed in my Islamic traditions. I am supposed to clean off my urinary orifice with water. It is permissible to clean it off with some fabric, though. But I rarely found any toilet paper in most restrooms in my village. So, I'm not used to using it.

I then figured out how the urinal works when I saw someone else using it. Once he left, it started to flush automatically. So, I decided to move aside a bit to hide from the auto detection. Great, it worked. Hurriedly, I moved again and scooped up some water. Anyhow, it didn't feel convenient because I feared that someone might watch me doing this.

While getting used to using the restrooms in the University of Iowa, it came to my attention that there is a little black rubber button right beneath the auto detection on the upper part of the urinal. I once pressed it on, just to have a try. Yes, it flushed. I was

so excited that I didn't need to keep pretending to hide from auto detection simply to wait for the water.

This type of restroom was my first introduction to the state-of-the-art world where everything in America seems sophisticated. I haven't seen such a toilet in my village. I would predict that, with the growing technological advancement in many parts of the world, in the next few decades such a restroom will be commonplace in my village.

Moreover, the restrooms are so clean and dry in the U.S. On the contrary, in my village (I don't want to generalize about Indonesia) they are dirty, messy, slippery and smelly. How can people be comforted using restrooms with such lousy conditions? Best of all, restrooms in the U.S. don't cost me anything. I couldn't imagine how much I would be charged if there were such a restroom in my home country.

When I came to the University of Iowa for the first time and used the restroom, I found a separate place for the handicapped. Extra utilities, such as a hand drier, are also accessible for them. This is amazing. This country highly appreciates everyone's right to accessibility in the public domain. This is something I haven't found in Indonesia. Almost all public facilities are exclusively for abled-

people. The handicapped, for instance, are not considered to have equal rights in regard to the facilities. They don't even have the access to education. This is pathetic.

All of these—irrespective of my urinal experience—have together led me to understand that this country has been developed partly because it continues to appreciate everyone's rights and access to public sphere. The U.S. has integrated technology of all sorts for the people's comfort and convenience. This is what my country must learn to do.

the speakers in a babbling brook are its indigenous tribe

Eric Bennett, Lisbon, Iowa
poetry

To—
-sit absentmindedly on a rock crawling with
subversive garter snakes below and spotty dried moss above—
-toe with the worn rubber on the end of my lifebeaten
shoe a log that was once a tree trunk with boundless hope—
-watch the wood send soft ripples through the roving
waters of the trout stream—

-imagine the effect of the weak water waves on the
primal brainwaves of the rainbow in the muffled murk
of the opposing bank hide—
-suppose that they really don't care—
-hope that they didn't lose their appetite—
-appreciate the maple limbs playing in surface reflection,
strobelighting
the sun with tired gusts of unconscious effort—
-see a cardinal for its contrasting magnificence
in the highest branches surveying the serenity—
-smell the subtle cacophony of the bustling timber
stretching in every direction—
-listen to the ranting of the rapids two bends away,
an infinite/indefinite source feeds the endless conversation—
-jump as a great blue heron takes off about thirty
yards to my left, some great prehistoric leftover—
-realize that everything is so sublimely strange when
looked at in the right way—
-watch waterbugs collide in their populated alcoves
just out of the quicker current, their tiny bodies suspended
in the air as their impossible feet on wiry legs push
divots in the water's surface—
-to simply revel in it all—

-is bliss.

Fantasy

Chan Hyeok Lee, Ulsan, Korea

nonfiction

It was a brightly sunny day of May, and I was lying on the couch with four dogs in my friend's house. My friend, John Paul, suddenly asked me a question, "Do you miss your country, Chan?" As quick as a lightning bolt slicing the sky I replied, "Yes, I miss my country so bad. Only now do I realize how important, how precious my country is for me." I continued, "I miss the food, people, and the language."

"Bowwow!"

One of the four dogs barked at me. Maybe the dog considered my adding, "I want to get out of the U.S." inappropriate. Maybe, the dog was right. I had one week left before the departure to home-sweet-home. If I were to be able to communicate with that dog, I would have said, "I understand you, patriot, but please try to imagine how you would feel if you, patriot, go back to your motherland after a harsh year in a foreign country!" Every night I stayed up late to make calls to my friends in Korea, and discussed what we were going to do once I was home for vacation.

I remember that I cried like a baby when I shouted, "farewell!" to my host family in Memphis airport. I cried because I was too happy going back to Korea, and too sad for leaving my host family.

However, when the airplane started taking off, not a single drop of tear spotted my cheek. Maybe, the traveler next to me could have considered me insane, because soon after I stopped crying, a big smile, from one ear to the other, hung on my face. I was finally flying back to Korea after a solid year in the U.S.A.

"Here I am, Dad!"

I ran to my dad and hugged him until my arms ached from doing this inside the Incheon Airport. That moment of reunion was the happiest moment in my life. My older brother next to us shouted, "Welcome back to Korea, bro!" Exhilarated, I realized I was home.

For the following two months, I had the best summer vacation ever in my life. Everyday, I enjoyed the air, the mountains, the cars, the water, and every single part of Korea. However, I knew that I had to come back to the U.S.A. to walk another journey for the education, so I flew to Michigan after that fantastic vacation in 2006. Although my senior year at Northern Michigan Christian

School was like a crystal of light in my life, still, I always became excited thinking about going back to Korea.

As the earth goes around the sun, the second departure to Korea again knocked my mind. Not as much as the year before, yet I felt the satisfaction and happiness when I came down to Ulsan, my hometown. Coincidentally, the day when I returned to my homeland a second time, the weather was cloudy. I did not know that that weather would foreshadow and shatter my fantasy about Korea. I planned to go back to the U.S. for a bachelor's degree, but I postponed it a year and decided to stay in Korea to work for the experience. During that interval, my Korean friends were seniors in the high school and had to take the National Entrance Exam for the University in December. They also became so realistic: they began to prepare themselves to survive the competitiveness and cruelty in our society, and they did not want to hang out with me so often. Instead, they studied all the time. Moreover, I felt they were jealous of my studying abroad, because from their view, I did not have to deliver the same amount of effort that they did for the exam for university. They considered studying in the U.S.A. easier than that of South Korea: for example, Koreans must take calculus as Juniors in high school. I became frustrated by my friends, that they could not

imagine how much pain I endured to learn English and survive a new foreign culture.

So, until the National Entrance Exam was over, I decided to work instead of meeting my friends. Since I was a middle school student, I always dreamed of becoming a waiter: wearing a sharp and decent suit, delivering elegant comments for the customers, and experiencing how to take orders. I researched only expensive restaurants for their fanciness, and after a month, I got a job at Fasilo buffet.

“Waiter!”

I remember that I could not go to sleep before the first day of my job. The sun rose, and, contrary to my fantasy, I faced my cruel fate. The boss promised me to be a waiter; however, for the first two weeks I was faced with only piles of dishes and bottles. I became outraged and complained to my boss. But he told me, “You do not have any contract except the document showing that you are legally working here. You can leave your job whenever you want to.”

I returned to the piles of dishes.

If I had to face only that kind of disappointment, I could have still maintained my fantasy about Korea. However, I suffered a series of depressions soon after the meeting with my boss.

In the restaurant, I was the youngest worker. We had about twenty waiters and waitresses. After a week, my fellow workers asked me, “Hey, fella, would you like to drink with us after work?”

I recognized that I did not have any choice for that question. Once, my father told me long time ago that if I do not participate in company activities, such as drinking, playing soccer, climbing mountains, and going to picnics, other colleagues would not help me while I worked: I will be ostracized. I accepted to go drinking after work.

“Chan, my cup is empty,” one of my colleagues claimed.

“Yes, sir!” I answered in a hurry.

“Chan, what about here?” the other senior asked, taking advantage of me. “My cup is empty!” he demanded, again.

“Yes, sir, I’ll be there in two seconds!”

This was the scene in the bar for me. I could have resisted serving them drinks, but I then would expect no help from them in future. I chose to survive.

After the drinking was done, we all went to Karaoke. The songs played, and I was forced to be the first to hold the microphone and sing for the seniors. I even gripped the TV monitor that showed the lyrics, and shook my hips. Yes, I danced for them. This was the Korean working culture, I acquiesced to the mighty power of our culture. Honestly, I enjoyed drinking, singing, and dancing with them. However, when I had to acknowledge the fact that I had to go to the restaurant at nine a.m. the next day, I questioned myself, ‘Is this what I expected from my motherland, Korea?’

It is true that this kind of cultural behavior is fading away in Korea, but that does not matter. What I discovered was that cruelty and pain for jobs exists everywhere in the world. I learned this from TV, books, and my parents. However, I never thought that Korea would provide me with survival skills because I am part of the majority there – this was the fantasy that I had about Korea. I thought that in Korea, I would never expect unfriendliness, hatred, cruelty like I had experienced in the U.S. I thought Korea held for me only love, warmness, and a feeling of community. I was an idealist.

Just a month before I came back to the states, I met all my friends again. At that moment, I understood them. I recognized that

I do not need to complain about the lukewarm reception from my mother land, because this is how one lives in society: you take care of what you have to, and take care of setting your mind in the direction you want. I found that I have three best friends who understand me and share the beliefs about the world with me. Except for these three friends, my other friends greeted me not with, “How have you been doing?” but “Are you going back to the states?”

“Yes,” I said.

answered me with this, “Would you help me in the future?” – even though they do not exactly know me.

Coming to America

Sangdon Lee, Korea
nonfiction

Through the small airplane window, tall and majestic buildings appeared against a beautiful sky with fleecy clouds. “At last, we are in America, the leader of modern technology! By the way it is still 11 am,” I said to my wife, who hadn’t slept for 13 hours

because she was taking care of our baby, who was less than 100 days old.

We had flown from Korea to O’Hare International Airport in Chicago. Once we were inside, O’Hare was too big with so many aisles, gates, and signs. “How will we find our way,” I asked myself. We had to transfer to a domestic airline in order to go to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where my friends would be waiting for us. After picking up our baggage, we rested in a corner tucked away from the crowds. There were many people walking back and forth speaking English, which was foreign to us, especially for my wife who had never been to America before.

“Now there is only us. There is nobody to take care of us.” I told myself. “Honey, aren’t you hungry?” I asked my wife. “I will buy some food.”

“No. I am not hungry. Please stay with us,” she told me.

“Don’t be nervous. Everything will be OK. You should eat something. You look so tired. I will be right back.” I left to buy some hamburgers at McDonald’s, which was the only familiar restaurant. After buying two hamburgers and Cokes, I looked at the flight information board by chance. “Oh my God!” I stepped to the board

more closely. It said "3:00 flight: Canceled." Without telling my wife, I went to a gate agent directly with the hamburgers still in hand.

"What's the matter?" I asked the agent.

"Your flight was canceled," she said briefly.

"Why?"

"Mechanical problem."

This was the last answer that I would have expected in America, supposedly the most technologically advanced country. More curiously, no other passengers seemed to be complaining about the flight's cancellation. "What should I do now?" I asked the agent nervously. "I have to arrive in the Cedar Rapids airport on time because my friends are waiting for me."

"You will be put on the waiting list. But I am not sure you can take the next flight because all the flights are full now," she answered.

"What do you mean?" I asked again.

"You may stay one night in Chicago," she said without paying any attention, as if what I was telling her was trivial. I didn't know what to do. It was impossible to stay overnight in Chicago with my wife and baby. I went back to my family.

"Why are you so late? I thought something terrible happened to you," she told me with anger. One hour had already passed and the hamburgers were soggy and cold.

I told her the situation. She was frightened, keeping her eyes only on our baby.

I went back to the agent again. "Where is the nearest airport from Cedar Rapids? Can I take another airline to get there?" I asked desperately.

"Moline," she answered.

"How long it will take to get to Cedar Rapids from Moline?" I asked.

"I have no idea. But it will be closer than here. Do you want to go there?" she asked.

"OK. I will take it." I had no choice.

"But the problem is that there are only 15 minutes until the flight. You should hurry." She explained how to get to the gate, which was at the other end of the airport. I ran to my wife.

"Hurry up!" I shouted to my wife. "There is no time. We should run." I found a baggage cart, but it was not free. "Damn it! I have no change!" I ran with four big bags. My wife followed me, pushing a stroller with small bags and the unopened hamburger. I

was gasping as if I had finished a marathon. When we finally arrived at the gate, there was a long line.

“Wait here. I’ll call my friends in Cedar Rapids.” Luckily there was a telephone booth near the gate. But I realized that I had no coins in my pocket. “Please, lend me one dollar,” I asked the gentleman who was waiting behind me. “I have to call my friend right now.”

He smiled and gave me some coins. After inserting the coins, I pushed the buttons, but they did not work. I heard only a strange voice from the speaker, which I could not understand well. I tried several times, but I only heard the same incomprehensible voice.

“Oh my God! It is a local telephone!” I read the information on the telephone. I realized that a long distance phone call was impossible. I would never have expected this situation because, in Korea, every telephone is linked to any area, even to foreign countries. There was no time to find another telephone. Then I saw a young woman using a cell phone. “Excuse me, M’am. May I use your cell phone?” I asked. “It’s an emergency!” She was surprised at my words at first, but gave her phone to me, nodding her head with hesitation. “Please, could you call this number for me?” I asked

again. She pushed the buttons and gave it to me. After the call, I gave her one dollar and ran back to my wife. I had only one minute left before the flight. The line was not moving at all. “What time will this plane depart?” I asked a gate agent.

“Delayed a little,” she said.

“Oh my God!” I was relieved and frightened at the same time. After 20 minutes, we entered the gate at last. “Everything will be OK.” I consoled my wife.

However, we were frightened once again when we saw the airplane waiting for us. It was like a worn-out paper airplane. I understood why the agent said, “Mechanical problem.”

“Can it fly?” my wife asked nervously.

To make matters worse, our seats were at the end of the airplane beside the restroom. The severe engine noise and repulsive smell gave us headaches. Eventually, the flight took off and our exhaustion took over. We soon fell asleep all together, flying to our new home.

Breaking Point

Bret Coons, Gurnee, Illinois
fiction

Dr. Brown looked over at his colleagues and gave them a nervous smile before he pulled the switch. Everything went dark in the double-football-field-sized lab except the observatory, which was at one end of the open void in the form of a small glass box where the only bit of yellow light could be seen glowing. A group of men in white lab coats looked at each other as their experiment began. In the dark ahead black holes started to form into a perfect hollow sphere that was unknown to the men's eyes but not their instruments. A bright flash rocked the room just before the head of the project, Dr. Brown, pulled back on the switch. The lights warmed up in the dark as the scientists stared into the palely lit distance.

"I can see something!" one of the men shouted with excitement.

The others were silent and staring with awe.

"Is it...is it moving? It is!" the same man said with a puzzled smile.

Dr. Brown and the rest of his team watched with still looks of both awe and fear while the orb object hovered silently, slowly, closer. Its body seemed perfectly flat and its color was an indescribable blue that seemed both extremely dark and extremely light and all other infinite shades in between at once. It continued to approach, accelerating as it came closer to the glass separating the men from the hostile environment where they played with reality, revealing what looked like a face flat on the ball like body with two eyes and a mouth only. The creature's general expression was one of confusion as it neared the men who were twice as tall and out numbered it by four people. The scientists stared in stupidity as the creature's face showed an infinite number of different versions of its own confused face at once in infinite shades of blue. It stopped moving right in front of the glass barrier, hovering in place, staring back at the men. Dr. Brown parted his lips and whispered to his men.

"We must all stay very still and quiet. I have no idea what it is or how it came here but we should not do anything that might be viewed of as hostile."

The sphere creature looked at Brown, squinting sharply then moved closer to him and without seeing the glass between

them it ran hard into the glass, making the observation room explode in sound. The lines of the creature's mouth parted revealing gapless pointed teeth gritting angrily in pain as its eyes sharpened into focus. Its face had many different expressions, all showing a horrid look of anger. The men watched frozen with fear as the sphere rammed hard into the glass, then again, and again, each time harder than the last, making the glass rumble like thunder. Dr. Brown turned and shouted.

"Everyone get out!"

His men had started running to leave before he could finish his order while he turned around for one last glance only to see horrible smiles on the creature's face as it vanished then reappeared about ten feet to the left of where it had been. Its smiles grew sharper and more menacing. It disappeared again and now reappeared behind Brown. Almost immediately after reappearing it left again and Brown felt his gut explode in pain and turning to see the sphere chewing on his own intestines. He felt his torso frantically with his hands but there was no wound, not a drop of blood to be found on him. He then screamed in time with the creature as it pulled his heart out through the known universe into a fourth dimension and back into third again.

Lucid

Katya Cummins, Urbana/Champaign, Illinois
Fiction

Hi. You don't remember me but I know you. And I know something you don't know.

No, the first time I saw you was not the first time we met. The first time I saw you, you were falling in love but you had no idea you had tripped because you're the kind of person who believes that love is just a word and really is just a chemical trick that your body and mind plays on you so you'll reproduce. You knew it was biology speaking even when saw her, but you chose to ignore it. I guess you would say that was part of a trick as well.

Believe me, I know. How? Yes, I was there.

Oh, well, you knew her long before you ever really noticed her. You were cradle buddies with her. You were born an hour apart to separate families that had been decade long friends with that kind of inexplicable bond that only appears once in a Haley's Comet. Don't worry about the stars. Stars are dead so they don't care. The stars have nothing to do with this.

The point is that you two were like two friendship necklaces: You know, those kind that complete a phrase. One is gold and has the word friends, and the other is silver and has the word forever. When you grow older you find out that forever is also a trick but when you are young forever is everything. Yes, even you thought that. You thought that because she always said that forever was in the sky. You guys had collapsed off the swings into the sun-heated sand, barefoot and nocuous with laughter. I forget the joke now, but it was that kind that you had laughed over a billion times, one that you could never get sick of because it was like an archaic secret that only you two knew. But that's when she said it, with her black, black hair full of specs of sand. She pointed into a Van Gogh colored sky and said it:

"Forever is in the sky."

You laughed. "Ana, you are such a..."

Yeah. Her name was Anna but you always just called her Ana. She would only ever let you call her that and it made you feel special but I guess you don't know that anymore. Well, no, you never finished the sentence because she narrowed her large, brown eyes and sat up indigently and punched you in the shoulder.

"You always ruin everything!"

You laugh now but you weren't laughing then. You were scared that you were going to lose her as a friend. She would always do that to you, you know. Get angry, but she would pretend to be angry with you far longer than she ever really was. Sometimes she would give herself away by a small smile that you could always catch, but she would turn her face down and compose herself again before facing you upright with renewed vigor. That's how it usually was, anyways, but not this time.

"Ouch." You said even though it didn't really hurt and then you asked. "How?"

She shrugged. "Dunno," she said. "You just seem so sad all the time."

You sat up then, cross-legged, and stared at her. "But I'm not sad! I have nothing to be sad about!"

"So, don't act like it."

"But I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"How do you know?"

She glanced at you and then held your eye. "I know," she said quietly and forgave you.

You grew up playing the violin together. Her mother, Lisa, taught you. She was much better than you, Anna was. She was somewhat of a prodigy. She could play Bach's Partitas fairly well at the age sixteen. You struggled with it, though. The music, I mean. But Anna was patient with you. She would sit down beside you and teach you how to read the notes, and count out the rhythms, and she taught you the way around the fingerboard. She taught you that it was better to feel the music than to play it perfectly. What? What do you mean what do I mean? I mean that you played with no emotion. She told you this, too.

You lifted your bow off the strings and let the last note of Adagio in G minor stutter in the silence that looked like white. It was raining but you could only see the dots on the window and she was watching these cling and slip down the pane as she listened to the last note melt. Then she settled her eyes on you.

That's when you noticed her. Her complexion was pale but her face was sharp featured and strong. Her hair slipped down her back which was perfectly straight, her shoulder blades positioned so they barely touched the back of the sofa. Her legs were crossed, one over the other, and she held her hands perfectly still on her knees. She blinked.

"What's wrong with it?" you asked.

"Nothing."

"So."

"That's the problem. Nothing is wrong with it. You played it perfectly, only I didn't feel anything."

"So what are you saying?"

"I'm saying take all that emotion that you hide from everyone, from me, and use it. Play from here." She stood up, crossed over to you, and touched your chest where your heart is. "Not from here," and she tapped your head and laughed.

Well, yeah, you liked her laugh. It reminded you of small, silver bells.

"Otherwise," she said, "I think it's wonderful."

You hardly heard what she said, though. For some reason your heartbeat was drowning out her voice. You didn't know what was happening but she felt the shift in you and stepped back.

"What?" she asked. "I'm sorry if I was too harsh. I just know you have it in you to play better than that...what?"

You shook your head. "Nothing," you said and then after a pause. "Of course. You're right."

"Of course I am," she smiled wryly. "Now...let's do something else."

No, I'm not laughing at you. Its just ironic, that's all. Why? Because you loved music. Well liked it, at least, more than her, and you so badly wanted her talent and she would have gladly given it to you if she could because she would have rather become a dancer than a violinist. But music was in her blood and she couldn't get away from it. You didn't know that she envied you but she knew that you hated her as much as you loved her, and maybe later that's why she closed the door.

Anyways, she wanted to get away and I guess that's why she decided to try public school and by this time you had to follow because you didn't know it yet but you were in love with her. Only that's when everything changed.

This is the part that we both know because this is when we met. We met that year that you enrolled into the same public high school, that year that she went off, cut her long, long hair of starry night, and made friends and left you behind.

But she didn't really, did she? She invited you to come along, but you stood rooted the sidewalk and just waved, and in a

way you never left that sidewalk because you made a friend that day that promised to never leave your side.

What do you mean what happened then? You held out for three months. You preoccupied yourself; you found other things to do. You delved into your schoolwork. You passed her in the hallways but in front of your eyes she morphed into a distant friend and then a stranger, yet her gravitational pull still had you in its grasp. So one day, when you were passing her house, you took a sharp turn left up the sidewalk and rang the doorbell.

She was waiting for you. She was watching you out the window. You know this because you saw the curtain flicker like a hummingbird wing. But it was a while before she opened the door. When she did, finally, you two just stared at one another. You wanted to say a million things but your mouth was like sandpaper and she too stood motionless, just waiting.

"I love you," you said.

"I know."

"No, Ana, listen. I love you."

She blinked. "Yes, Sara, I know."

You wanted to be smoke. "And?"

"I don't love you," and she slammed the door.

And you stood there. Remember? Numb. Your words echoing back at you. I love, I love. I love you. It was a long time before you moved. You did not cry, though. You turned after five minutes and walked away and you never forgave her. After that, you became like this. You imitate the smiles you see around you because you've forgotten how to form your own. You float outside your body but you sink like a stone into me because I feel better than the outside world and because I have never left you. You never talk but always think and replay moments of your past in your head. It's been a long time now. She's moved on. She became a dancer for the New York Dance Company. You saw her on television, dancing as Odette in Swan Lake. You almost cried.

But I know something you don't know.

When she closed the door in your face that day, she crumbled to the title floor and sobbed because she never said the words that would have made it okay. "I don't love you that way. I don't swing that way but that doesn't mean that I don't love you. It means I love you more than that."

Anyways, that's the trick that you want to believe in the most.

Now you are thinking about the music you used to love and that violin you destroyed. Now you're thinking about those motionless notes pouring into the blue sky of forever.... Sara. Please say something. Are you still there? Sara? Hello?

Nothing

Sierra Caldwell, San Diego, California

poetry

Why do you try to leave if you have nothing to leave for?

But there is nothing.

In this room, in your mind, there is nothing.

Nothing is here, and it's there.

How do you know it's even there; those iron bars aren't just a figment of your mind imprisoning you into a world of nothing?

You don't have a mind, you have nothing, remember?

Nothing to live for, nothing to die for.

You live in a vast cauldron of emptiness, save air, and even that is nothing.

You cannot toy with something that isn't there, and you yourself can't speak to nothing as you are right now.

I am the darkness in the room, in the cage, i am nothing.

Question is, do you have nothing, or does nothing have you?

I am nothing, though.

It is apparent that nothing has you, not the other way around.

You can't telling nothing to shut up, nothing has a voice.

Nothing has feelings, nothing has emotions, nothing sits and listens to you mope and whine over nothing.

You sit in a room of nothingness, your mind in a state of nothingness.

You try to escape, but to what do you escape to?

Nothing.

Nothing is death following you with a sickle of emptiness and a bag

of nothing to collect nothing in.

Life is there too, do not fear, but life is also nothing, brandishing nothing to protect you.

Another question, which will win?

The nothing of life, or the nothing of death?

Nothing stops, nothing keeps going.

Nothing is your heart, beating for nothing, and finally stopping for nothing.

Which nothing is winning?

Who will collect you in their bag of nothing?

Nothing speaks, you hear nothing, you speak to nothing. nothing hears you.

Nothing is compassionate, nothing is cruel, nothing is that slow creep in your mind whispering nothing to you about what you have: nothing.

Nothing won't go away, nothing will stay.

Nothing will speak, nothing will laugh, nothing will bury you in a grave full of nothing with a head stone with nothing written on it.

Nothing reads, here lies nothing, who had nothing, got nothing, and was taken by the nothing in her chest.

Last question, think quickly, if you have nothing then why do you beg nothing to stop?

You whisper for nothing and nothing hears.

You call for nothing, but nothing comes.

Nothing is fickle and nothing is kind.

Do you truly want nothing, or do you compensate for nothing by trying to have it?

You don't have nothing, nothing has you

Equation of Life

Samrat Dutta, Barpeta Road, India
fiction

Professor Hansley was, as usual, reading reclining in his chair in his secluded office facing the painting of Mayflower in sail-a gift from the Queen herself. In his late sixties, Professor Hansley was like no other among his peers. He hardly talked, had no friends, occasionally shaved and had absolute no facial expression. Of course, he was a bachelor. His only companion in the real world was the night-shift janitor, who gave up arranging the papers in the office almost half a decade ago. You see, he stopped attending social gatherings almost a decade ago after getting himself in trouble for trespassing. Melissa was in her early 20's charming and was the cynosure of the party. Melissa liked attention, especially from the intellectuals. The professor was mesmerized. "Oh! What a sight," he said to himself. He broke his own norms in giving attention to anyone. He hesitated....., yet he gave her attention; I mean a lot of attention, perhaps a little too much even by his standards. He stared at her for full three hours and that was just the beginning. He followed her, furiously taking notes, skipped his lectures, and kept staring at her window from the pavement for a

full three days before the officers dragged him to the cell. The judge called for a psychiatric evaluation after the professor handed out a two page explanation of his conduct - in mathematics. The Dean intervened and the case was quietly buried but it ruined all his hopes to get recognized by the Swedish academy of science but he cared less.

Today was different. He was expecting a visitor after a very long time. Ron, was in his late thirties and looked liked the professor in his better years. He was a former student and was then completely unlike the professor. His father was a senator and businessman. Ron was handsome, blonde, rich and was quite the ladies' man. He landed in the Professors' class after he lost a bet in a pub at the university.

Ron was not impressed; in fact it was a torture for him to sit in the class. He never took calculus, and quantum chemistry looked like Greek to him. It was in the last day of the semester, the professor stopped in the middle of his spiel and looked through French window and said " Class, I have taught you a complete semester about life and I would urge you to understand it." The audience was stupefied, so was Ron. Surely, the professor needed a doctor. All of them dismissed the professor, as lunatic but not Ron. He thought about it almost the entire examination week before his

girlfriend showed up in mini skirts. Ron went back to his old ways but the professors' words were still on his mind. He mellowed after a while, served the Peace Corps, raised a family but he did not forget the professor. Maybe, he thought, one day, I should retake the course and get a grade better than F. But somehow he knew it was not the grades that bothered him. He needed answers. He searched everywhere, asked every pastor he met and even managed to get a smirk from the Dalai Lama. He needed answers, so he read and re-read and got distressed even more. His family was falling apart. His political career was taking a nose-dive but he needed answers. Maybe, he thought, I should see the professor. But, you see, the professor is a hard man to find, not that it is hard for you to locate him but it is impossible to get an audience. Forget about Internet, the professor did not even have a telephone. He disconnected the university issued one a long time back. Ron somehow managed to secure an audience.

“Good day, professor. How are you?”

The professor kept on reading, and without looking replied “what brings you here?”

“Life”, replied Ron. “Why is life strange? Why cannot anyone explain it to me?”

The professor snapped close his book and replied “Son, I think the psychiatrist's office is down the street.” And continued in the same breath, “You were not paying much attention in class, were you?” Ron shook his head. “Well, define you?”

“I can't,” replied Ron.

“Think yourself as a quantum mechanical system, you know the system exists, yet you are uncertain about its qualities. You can only guess and hope that the properties remain consistent. But sometimes they don't. Life is you, the system. You can act but the outcome is probabilistic. How many times have you seen people in absolute horrific crash, walk out untouched. You see, Son, everything is probabilistic. Life is like a labyrinth of equations, with many variables. Your actions dictate what variables influences the course of your life but the outcome is always probabilistic. What motivates your question?” Before Ron could answer, “I believe it is the content of having the knowledge of solution to a question. As the clown would say are you happy that you have achieved what you have desired. But, Son, you forget happiness too is a variable in the set of equations defining life. In the process of achieving happiness, you have unwittingly created shuffle among other variables. It can end in catastrophe. So beware.”

“But” paused Ron, “I have seen and read about individuals, who perfectly project a balanced life and by definition they are happy. In fact, I was told as a child to follow their footsteps.”

“Ah, you mean, great men. Well, they are rather anomalies than natural. I wonder” the professor paused, “whether these men are actually “great” for, if they are, they break the very norm of stability. Following their footstep will be sheer lunacy, as it will lead to instability or “devil” as they say. If the equations of life are balanced, the system will no longer need to interact with other systems as it has achieved its stable state and therefore like any physical system will be inert.”

The professor moved and took a few steps towards the painting. Social etiquettes were not in his list of concerns. “So, professor, what should be the right way to live?”

“Probably none, for if there were one, the entire basis of living would be meaningless. The only time all variables come to a certainty is death, sort of putting the entire set of variables to an entirely new set of equations of state we don’t know. Like in real analysis in mathematics, it can be described as a basis set, the elements of which are fantastically uncertain and can only be solved by higher maestro. God, I suppose? Maybe the truth is nothing actually exists. It is perhaps just the mind that creates probably a

virtual dimension of itself, with defined boundary, conditions within which fantasies are made and dissolved. Mind is just like energy in a system in quantum mechanics, which interacts with other forms of energies and gets reformed in other forms of energy. In a system, we can use instruments to detect the consequences but life is altogether a different ball game. How some wise men can look into the variables and deduce the results is indeed a mystery to me. Maybe, they are lying, I don’t know....?”

Professor Hansely grinned. His cheeks ached for he had not performed that action in a long time. “What is your name?”

“Ron.”

“So, Ron, you know the answer of the question that you asked. All you have to do is define your equations for life and solve it. Each one of us solves it, unknowingly. It unfolds in the dimension of time.”

“Time .”

“Yes, time.”

“How?”

“Time, in this universe, seems to be the only unbiased scepter. Time is inevitability or the future, perhaps is God, perhaps not. It is within the inevitability of time that the human existence revolves.

“I am biased when I talk about life. The very definition varies with each exigency and that what makes it enigmatic. Everyone meanders the same path but unwilling to acknowledge the same common thread that binds the whole disjointed entities together. The persistence of life, the need to procreate in a continuous function creates infinite solutions to the common path which only creates a quagmire of the very cause of existence. Maybe, the whole existence of life is the terminal illness of the universe itself which starts as a benign tumor and spreads to the entire format or maybe a sweetener, invisible but there in the bowl. The need for the universe to create life seems to be self-defeating. It defies the logic that why would a system create something which consumes its resources and even if it does, it would be extremely ludicrous to create intelligent life forms which plunder the resources for purposes other than for survival. Man as we know stands in the acme of this ludicrous design. Man creates his own needs, strives for it and in the process expends vast resources often trespassing or even eliminated lesser life forms. If Man were perfect, the universe surely would have been doomed. For a perfect mankind would have devoured all potential resources with tremendous gusto.”

“Well, it seems rather odd, professor, as far as I know that there is balance in every sinews of the universe.”

“Aha, that’s where the catch lies. Life to humans comes with a price and the payment is the uncertainty of variables that governs his own existence. The variables of each individual are arranged in such combination that it conflicts with some variable of another discrete individual. The variables can be diverse, it can be as surrealistic as ego or as survivalist as cultivable land. Here then lies the jinx of existence; each individual is in conflict with another yet traverses a path of mutual benefit. However, nature compensates the benefit, but creates large uncertainties in other factors. It can create greed and thus create conflict of individuals, which will one day consume mankind. Nature leaves the consequences for the function called time to answer. In these conflicting set of variables, there is one variable that conjoins two sets of individual with discrete variables together, something called love. It is this surreal variable that will probably conflict with the variables, whose sole purpose in the set of equations for life is destruction of the equation itself. But love is unlike any other variable. Love can be as uplifting as Romeo willing to sacrifice for Juliet or as destructive as Menelaus’ revenge on Paris. It’s the different shades of this variable which makes it unique. Love can

interact with other variable like an operator which might create completely new variables both in shades of Hades or Zeus or even chose to self-destruct. Love is like a reaction leaving a deluge of product called emotion. It effects every variable, making the whole set of equations complex and interesting, with properties as varied as the variables. The dynamics of love is strange; it can generate peace or create destruction in unimaginable proportions. Love can inspire or can cause atrophy.”

“Professor, if what you say is true, then love and time should have unfolded the mysteries of life?”

“Aha! Ron, you are catching up. I didn’t say that love is a perfect variable. It has its own intrinsic failures. In a very subtle way, love follows the law of natural selection. The rich and handsome have better probability to carry on their genetic marker and so do the vivacious and beautiful. In logical sense, everybody of same sex have the same common variable with different weighing factors. The machinery of statistical average of the humans, automatically cancels the less fortunate ones by weighing the favorable variables and thus each new generation raises the bar of standard for survival. This brings us to a remarkable question, whether we human beings involved in mundane activities are just equations, which are trying to solve itself by iteration every generation. Maybe

we are? Often the generated solutions do not lead to progress or higher conscience. There are instances where great civilizations, which tried to modify themselves by warfare, knowledge and virtue, went to oblivion. Do you see any Spartans around these days, Ron?”

The professor walked out of the room before Ron could answer. You see, social etiquettes were in bottom of professors list of priorities.

Secret

Rochelle Liu

poetry

I stand at the end of time,
stuck between what we call
the "past" and the "present."
With fallen eyelashes,
missing sunlight,
obscured emotions.

Surrounded by orange flowers,
the rain-scented wind
blinds me for only a moment.
I hear a familiar voice
but I cannot remember.
The rustling green leaves
that symbolized our past
have turned into a present brown.

That dusty sunset,
those whispered words
are forgotten and placed carefully
in my treasured box.
I've buried them,
along with my memories,
in a place where no one can find them.

As I let go of this fine line,
I know deep in these brown eyes,
you will never find this place again.

It is OK to be Different

Ling-Yan Yang, Shantou City, Guangdong Province, China

nonfiction

It was a nice sunny afternoon. I cannot exactly remember what day it was, but I just remember that I wanted to return some CDs that were due to the Iowa Public Library. I like the walk from the Old Capital Mall to the library very much. The path is only for pedestrians. There is a nice playground for children outside the library and I knew I would pass by it. People like to enjoy the late afternoon sunshine, sitting on comfortable benches which are set around there. The relaxed expressions on their faces always make me feel that life for them is really enjoyable. On that day, before I went to the library, I just finished a big assigned project. Since I was glad that I finally survived that pressure, watching a movie for the rest of the time seemed a great reward for hard work.

It was nearly 5 pm; the library was fairly crowded. Maybe people like to visit the library after a day's work or study, just like me. There was a long line waiting in front of the return desk. I preferred not to stand there wasting my time; instead, I walked around, wondering if I might find something attractive. Actually I was thinking maybe I could get some children's books since I had

started my practicum at an elementary school this semester. Reading some popular children's books might help me to know better about the children in American schools: what their favorite foods are, what their hot topics are during recess, what kind of teachers they like best, etc. I looked around the place and moved forward to the children's literature area. It was my third or fourth time to be here, and I had never before been to children's area. The environment looked colorful at the first glance. The bookshelves, books, pictures, and other materials were arranged in a welcome, friendly, and attractive harmony. Sitting around the corner there were some adults reading with their kids. Some older kids were really focused on their books. How could you imagine where their minds were traveling! I watched people and appreciated their serious focuses on reading, as I walked slowly around the bookshelves. All of a sudden, a sentence jumped out at me. It was on the cover of a book; actually it was the title of that book, saying "It is OK to be different"! I didn't know that.

I thought it was a shame to be isolated because of differences with between people around me. It was my first year in Iowa City; it was also my first year in the United States. On March 6th of 2006, I was so excited to receive the good news from my current advisor that I was admitted into the doctoral program in

School Psychology at the University of Iowa. On July 31st of 2006, I arrived in Iowa City. I had never thought about my cultural differences seriously before I came here. It was the first time I lived around so many "foreigners." I was a little worried about my adaptation in the beginning of my first year because I thought I had to obey the underlying rules. But it took forever to learn all of the underlying things. I was afraid to make mistakes, so I seldom opened my mouth during conversations. Usually I just listened and nodded, no matter whether I understood what was going on or not. There was a time when I felt especially embarrassed. The instructor in one of my classes really enjoyed American football games and he joked a lot about the college football team. One day in the class, when he was giving a lecture on a particular statistical problem, he used the football team as an example, once again. I understood he was trying to show us a vivid example and make us laugh. Please forgive me that I can not remember any words he said about the football team, because at that time I did not know what he was talking about. What I only remember were my classmates' strong laughter, and my embarrassment. I sat in the first row in the classroom; I was supposed to hear more clearly what the instructor said and joked. But I didn't show any excited expressions on that

joke. I felt I was so different here, I didn't belong to this joke, and I lowered my head.

People here, in Iowa City, get excited about the American football games. I can feel their passions, especially in the football season. However, I am a soccer fan. I jump, I scream, I cry, I laugh for my favorite soccer team. I enjoyed my passions for soccer with my friends when I was in China. But here, in the United States, I was different. I didn't want to be isolated because of my differences. I tried my best to learn the American football. Every morning the first section I read on the Daily Iowan was the sports news. I worked very hard to learn and understand the playing rules of American football games. I asked my American friends and tried to understand whatever they showed me. I spent time watching football games on TV, and I even Googled the rules on line. I tried to figure out who was the famous football player on the college team and why he was famous. You can imagine how much information I had to process, in addition to the heavy coursework for a first-year international student. That was definitely a burden on me. Sometimes I asked myself why, why I acted like that, to conceal my differences?

I didn't know that "it is ok to be different." I turned over those pages, lovely pictures with an outstanding sentence on each page. "It is ok to be tall. It is ok to be middle. It is ok to be short. ... It

is ok to have blue eyes. It is ok to have black eyes. ..." Wow, I was shocked to learn that children in the United States were taught to recognize and value differences among people from such a young age. They were even encouraged to act differently. I was so excited to make this discovery. I hardly stopped myself from yelling "hooray." I dropped my senseless burden forever. It is OK for everyone to be different. Everyone is welcome to share their differences.

I don't really like to drink coffee. I make Chinese Kung Fu Tea. When I shared my favorite tea leaf with my officemates, my classmates, and my foreign friends, they were greatly impressed by the tea-making equipment and the complicated procedure. When I was making tea for them, I shared the conventional lifestyle in my hometown. I received a lot of appreciation for my sharing. I had never known about Halloween before I came to America, but I was interested to attend a Jack-O-Lantern party, learned to carve a pumpkin, and shared different kinds of pumpkin food with my American friends. I enjoyed the exchanges of traditional cultural activities. I enjoy the exchanges of ideas and information with others.

Recently, I just figured out that increasing diversity had been written down into a strategic plan for the University of Iowa, the Iowa Promise. The following is an excerpt from that plan: “A diverse learning environment helps members of the University community challenge stereotypes and develops complex critical-thinking skills; better prepares them to become active citizens and leaders; and equips them to live as members of an international community in which success and happiness increasingly depend on the ability to appreciate and negotiate difference on a global scale.” As an international student, my educational journey to the University of Iowa has been an enriching experience that goes far beyond my expectations. I am proud to celebrate the potential that I could bring different positive aspects to the community in which I live. And I promise that I will try my best to fulfill the Iowa Promise that “challenges stereotypes and develops complex critical-thinking skills.”

From Boy to a Young Man

Joshua Barnett, Chicago, Illinois
nonfiction

Growing up in the projects was nothing but a struggle and hard times. There were nothing but huge empty areas filled with big housing buildings that over one thousand people lived in. Some people would be sleep in alleys or in the back of stores because they were homeless. There would be gangs everywhere putting everyone’s lives they came across in jeopardy.

I grew up in the Ida B. Wells projects on the low-end of the south side of Chicago. I and my mom were the only ones in my household. My mom went out her way to give me everything I wanted. I admired my mom for her strength to work so many hours to keep clothing on our backs and food on the table. She sometimes gave me more than I ever needed as for toys and things that did not really matter. The only thing my mom wanted was for her Josh to be happy; and I was happy because she gave me all the loving a son could ever want.

Realizing how much of a struggle I and mom went through to keep happy lives determined me to make it so we can have better lives in the future. I was tired of living on the tenth floor in a

housing apartment. We had gangs at the ground floor of the building killing people, smoking, drinking, and causing a lot of trouble. I would be scared every time I and my mom had to catch the elevator to the ground floor. With expectations of them beating me—a little boy—and robbing my mom, I prayed for better days. They never did, I just was alert because other families had been robbed and beaten. I thank god for blessing me and mom and having us not experience such a horror.

In school I got nothing but A's and B's throughout my Head Start, 1st and 2nd grade schools years. I was a great writer and a dedicated student towards his studies. I attended George T. Donohue Elementary. My teachers always said that they saw something in me. They believed that I was destined to succeed. When they told me this and stuck to their beliefs I started gaining confidence more and more each day. My second grade teacher was my last teacher to tell me that I can be successful for me to believe it. It was hard for me to believe that because growing up where I did and being in the environments made it all seem like a lie. One day it finally clicked in my mind that I can be somebody. This is the point in my life when I realized that I can be successful and make it out of my terrible lifestyle one day.

I and my mom moved to a far better place. We decided to move and live with my auntie on the almost suburban part of Chicago. Life here was better for me because the houses were nicer, the people were kind, and the environment was clean. Even though I was in a better place, I missed home in the projects because I had family and friends there. I had no friends in this neighborhood to play with.

It wasn't long before I had friends. My first day of school was fun. I attended Wendell E. Green Elementary. My teachers were also as great as my teachers at my old school. They all saw the same expectations as my other ones. Also I was a great scholar at Wendell E. Green. In addition I won a speech contest, writing essays, and even spelling bees.

As I began to get older I became more popular in Elementary school. I was always with the smart kids and even cooler with the other popular students. I still had the same mindset that I am going to be somebody and no one was going to stop me when I graduated from the 8th Grade. I knew once I got to high school I would be going to an entire new level and I was ready to upgrade my knowledge.

High School was much different from elementary school. I went to Simeon Career Academy located on 81st and Vincennes

Avenue. As I walked off the city bus I had never seen so many kids in one area getting ready for the same school. I was a good student my freshman year in high school. I had A's and B's my freshman year and was on my way to the top.

My sophomore year I had not so fair teachers. My geometry teacher could not teach. He would talk about things that would not be benefiting me at all. On top of that my teacher loved messing with the girls though. I and the boys challenged him to teach the class correctly by letting him know that we are not learning anything. He started to get angry because all the boys in the class boys had received D's for his class. When we tried to get him fired he always came back within the same week. I never got any grade higher than a D and that made me angry. I started to believe that I could not do it because I had never witnessed a D in none of my grades.

I had another horrible teacher my sophomore year as well. He was the same as my geometry teacher he gave all credit to the girls and not the boys. I even found a paper that compared my assignment to a group of girl's assignment. It was proof that the girls received more credibility on their paper than I and some boys did. I addressed this to the assistant principal and he did not help at all. So I did something that would hurt me for my whole semester. I

cursed him out and started a fight with him. I made the challenge and he won the fight. He won the fight by failing me in his course. What I did was not worth it.

When my G.P.A (Grade Point Average) dropped really low, I began losing my confidence that I can be that somebody as I believed when I was a little boy. I lost my power and determination for success. I began gang banging, hanging with people who hurt others, and I began hurting others as well. I figured since school was not fair then life would not be for everyone I came across who was not representing the game I represented. I began drinking and challenging myself to things that I would not have believed I would do. This was a downfall in my life.

It was not until the summer of before my senior year did I change my life around. On August 13, 2006 I was shot. I survived a bullet to the head by only so many inches. I am blessed and I thank God everyday for my survival and a second chance in life. This experience let me know that life is too short; so at that moment I had to make sure that I live everyday like it was my last. My senior year I had expectations of attending somebody's University to better myself. When my friends heard this they told me that I would not make it. This seemed true because everyone in my hood who has tried to succeed has failed. I could not let that get me

down; I was determined to blast off. I either was to believe them or make my own decisions and beliefs. I became stronger from my tragedy and on track for college with all the hard work I began putting in to school. I am glad that I got shot because If I did not I would still be on the corner today.

When I got accepted to The University of Iowa I was so proud. I knew I could be who I wanted now because The University of Iowa was a top 25 public university. That meant that my opportunities were in the top categories. I want to study business so Iowa ranked in the top 25 in the country in business. I realized that college is the key and I can succeed. I give credit to people who were down like I was and had life-changing experiences because it can make you think a lot, and become who you are destined to be. An Example person is Barack Obama because he comes from a similar neighborhood and I am sure he did not always think he would be an important candidate for the run in the 2008 Presidential election.

I am currently still in my first semester at the University of Iowa and I am doing ok. I do not expect to get it all in one semester but college is a process, and I am thankful I am here to grow through it. A lot has changed throughout my life and have no one but God, my family who supports me, and friends to thank for my

now and future success. As long as I will always believe in myself and stick to accomplishing my goals to be determined, one day I will be that successful man I am destined to be.

this tired glow

Eric Bennett, Lisbon, Iowa

poetry

Isn't a strange spectacle how snowfall drifts slower with distance, like time dilation floating with greater ease and less insistence as the foreground fades to back?

And did you notice how it collected so abundantly atop the side of the tree branches that faced the whitewash sky?

Furthermore, were you floored by the deadening of sound, chugging diesel and bicycle tires sidling silently all around?

Were you caught in the tufts of stinging snow blowing from the roofs of buses, dusting the walkways in a method of settling so spectral?

But what of the bronze statues of jazz players, what have they to say when the trumpeter's horn is full to the cusp with that frozen ambiance?

What did you think about the child
catching speed so he could slide
along the slushswept sidewalk, doing so just before Age creeps up
and childes him for it?

At what angle did the heavens fall when
they crossed the deep-cut cornices and
satellite apparatuses protruding from the roofs of buildings?

Did the shovels of shopkeeps ever impede your
progress through this otherworld, or id
the litany of layered footprints remain untouched by nothing but
stumbling progress?

And isn't it a shame how some plodding
pedestrians trudge forth through it with scrunched faces, growing
old like marigolds—red orange and wrought with pain?

Why must they blink away the ice
crystals caught in their eyelashes,
can't they instead let the ash of clouds penetrate their pupils and
into hazy memory?

Why can't they let the frost
freeze their hair and the wind raze
their rosy cheeks, just valuing the transcendent inconveniences of
simply being alive and bearing
witness to
This?

Arris

Sierra Caldwell, San Diego, California

fiction

Taverns were not Arris's favorite place. All of them were seedy places, full of shady travelers and local drunks. She had learned from experience to keep away from both by having to frequent them so often. That night she was there to scrape her father off the filthy, scarred floor where he had passed out after hours of hard gambling and drinking. The inn's owner glowered at her, not offering to help her get her staggering father onto his feet. Arris knew if her father did not buy half the stock of spirits in a night, he and his brawling ways would no longer be welcome.

Arris also knew that if her father did not buy half the stock in spirits every night, her oversized family would eat better. She ground her teeth, supporting her father through the muddy, snowy road to their house. Cows lowed in the field next to her, but she could not see them. Distantly she heard sheep and goats bleat. The snarl of her stomach filled the air, making Arris grind her teeth again. It was too late, too cold and she was far too hungry to be out. If her father had not been leaning on her so heavily, she would have pulled her tattering cloak closer to her. As it was, her hood was

down, the wind was blowing snow harshly in her face and her father had begun to sing loudly.

After an hour walk with her father, who vomited and sang every ballad he could think of on the way, Arris and her inebriated father came to their door. There was no light in the house, but she paid no attention to it. It was, after all, very late in the night, if not morning. The door was pushed open with her hip and she let her father fall on the hard dirt floor with a rather pleasing thud. Locking the door behind her, she walked to the room she shared with her three sisters. After changing her clothes and taking off her men's boots, she lay in the straw stuffed bed under the worn quilts.

She turned onto her stomach, speaking to her twin sister that she shared a bed with. "Adelle," she said tiredly. "I think I'm going to leave soon. I... I can't take that man anymore. I think I'm going to go to the coast and find work there. Send back money for you guys."

She paused and sighed, stretched out comfortably. There was only silence in response. "I know you don't like the idea," she continued, "but you and the rest need more than what that drunken fool is providing. No, I've decided. I'm going to be a dress maker. You know how I love it, and I make all our clothes. Maybe I can apprentice and some Lady will like my wares. Then, maybe, I can take you as an apprentice. Doesn't that sound fun?"

Her twin was silent again, and very still. Too still. Arris sat up and looked at her. "Adelle?"

Eyes staring up blankly, her sister gaped at the ceiling in what looked like a half scream, half yawn. Arris choked and fell out of bed, desperately grasping for a candle and flint. When she found the candle, it was cut in half with the wick pulled out of it. "Gods on high," she moaned, tear beginning to sting her eyes.

Arris stood, her legs trembling, and looked at the bed. It was soaking in blood that wasn't quite dry yet. Pulling back the sheets, Arris stifled a shriek. Her sister's chest had been split open and heart removed. She went to her other sisters, trying to wake them. "Shan! Fenny! Sweet gods of mercy, please wake up!"

She let out a choked sob. Her sisters had suffered the same fate as her twin. They stared blankly at the ceiling in final screams, their chests gaping and empty. She ran into her brothers' room and pulled off the first bed's blankets. "Mikko, Kal!" she shrieked. The quilt was heavy with blood. She went to her other 5 brothers' beds and all had gaping chests. She gripped her hair and screamed, tears and spit hitting her bare feet. "Father!"

Running into the kitchen, she saw a man standing over her father, blood dripping from his hands. In one of his hands was her father's heart. The man turned and looked at Arris. His black eyes and hair blended into the darkness, making his form appear to be a

demon or ghost. Legs giving out, she sank to her knees, making signs to ward off evil on her chest. He threw back his head and laughed when she did. "The gods," he said, his voice cheerful and silky, "will be of no use to you now, love."

The dark man walked to the table and set her father's heart down. The rest of her family's hearts were there as well, making a demonic symbol on the table, blood dripping to the floor. When it hit the dirt, it sizzled and steamed. Tears began to stream uncontrollably down Arris's face as the man walked up in front of her and kneeled. "Arris," he said softly, wiping her tears away with his iron cold fingers. His touch made her begin to shake. "You needn't be scared of me. I'm naught but a servant, out to bring my master out of an unjust incarceration."

Twisting a finger in Arris's maroon hair, he stared at it with a soft smile. "I've been search for you for a long while. Imagine my surprise when I saw that twin of yours. For a moment I thought I had killed the wrong one!" The dark man chuckled and he gripped her hair tightly at its roots. "Shouldn't scare people like that."

Arris let out a soft sob when he gripped her hair, feeling as if the lot of it was about to be pulled out. He smiled. "I told you not to be scared. Oh, but where are my manners. My name is Tryse." He paused, looking over her. "Do you want to kill me? For killing your family, love?"

The question struck Arris. Two strange feelings filled her, ones she had never felt before. "Yes," she whispered.

Tryse nodded slowly, still smiling. "Let me tell you something about killing, love. Once you do it, take a life I mean, you can't ever stop. It gets in your blood and becomes an addiction. Once you kill, you will do it until you're killed back. And what you're feeling is rage and vengeance. Power comes from those feelings, not love, like those idiot romantics say."

Looking back at the hearts, Tryse stood and nodded in approval. He pulled Arris up by the arm and stood her in front of him. He picked up her hand examined it. Tears streaming down her face and rage consuming her, she dumbly stared at him, letting him do what he would. He seemed to find was he was looking for and put her hand on the bloody table. Arris screamed as Tryse slammed a dagger through it, pinning her to the table.

Arris stood frozen in pain, agony and terror gripping her too tightly to move. Tryse put his finger in his blood and drew a symbol around the dagger in her hand. It seared into her skin, making it bubble and sizzle. The smell of blood and now burning flesh was heavy in the air. It made the air nearly too thick to breathe. Chanting filled the air as well as the dark man began to speak something in an unknown language. Arris's body began to burn,

imaged of such unimaginable nightmares going through her head,
she began screaming again, struggling against the knife.

Time slowed to a crawl and her body felt as if it was in flames. Only
her screaming filled her ears and after an eternity she felt the knife
pulled from her hand. It suddenly dawned on her to run, and she
blindly tore out of the house, barefoot and in a night shift into the
developing blizzard. Tryse watched her, grinning. "And so begins a
new era," he said to the man's body at his feet.

Unclosed Left

Devin VanDyke, Iowa City

poetry

I bought this laptop to go to school with
Its not like the machine at home
I tell it to connect to the internet
by pushing buttons
then a light comes on
and one goes out in my head

I like to ride the bus
but as a busy student
I have to use the time
I have questions about what I write

and leave on my desktop
I did some experiments with .doc.

(Un closed), left open, not turned off.
the .doc is closed then reopened.
three minutes go by...
I cheated it don't turn off!
but if I close the open .doc it shall.

Turn off and save the power
the energy if you will
the battery has stored within
thus I can write some more
in every break I have
busy student as I am

So if I listen to music
and leave the media player on
will the computer still play
the song I told it to play
when the lid
is closed?

Then why I do I need to tell
this machine to
stay on so I can hear those
sounds of music I like to hear
in my ear when I close it
to save portable power?

Preacher Phil

Dr. Bruce Brown, Iowa City, Iowa
poetry

I see preacher Phil At church
Dressed in his Best shorts, a tie and tac.
We pray and bow and sing his special way.
He likes the truth to Fall between the pews.
He seems Confused but then adjusts his specs,
Looks Into his gospel,
Assures Each of us here is saved--
And Others not.
Says his word is our call to Arms.

I talk to preacher Phil At his private office.
He says it Best I do exactly as he says.
We pray and bow and sing his special way.
He says this Fall he will be on TV.
He seems Confused but then adjusts his specs,
Looks Into his wallet,
And says Each of his credit cards has a meaning
That Others cannot know.
Says he is saving up to buy special fireArms.

I see preacher Phil At the cemetery.
He does not look his Best.
We pray and bow and sing his special way.
They said he had a Fall in his dressing room.
He seemed Confused but then adjusted his specs,
Looked Into the camera,
And said that Each of us were murderers

That Others should be aware.
They said it was a fall, but I saw the slashes on his Arms.

Create Your Own Flavor of Vegetarianism

Soeun Kim, Cheonan, Korea
nonfiction

Three groups of people who can hardly become vegetarians:
athletes, American cowboys, and Korean company workers. If you
worked in Korea, you would be surprised by how often people who
work together have dinner and drink together. There are many
reasons: to bring people together, to get to know each other, or to
ease stress from work. Most importantly, these company outings,
called “hoishik,” reinforce hierarchy and authority among people in
the same department.

When I decided to become a vegetarian, I worked at
Samsung Corporation. I had a sister who became a vegetarian the
year before. She influenced me a lot, mostly because we lived
together at that time; we cooked or ordered vegetable dishes, and
we talked about vegetarianism. After watching her everyday life as

a vegetarian, I realized that being a vegetarian was not so hard, and also that vegetarians were not so different from others. I underestimated a significant difference, however, between my sister and me. She was a university student and I was a company worker, who needed to attend “hoishik” occasionally. This paragraph from a New York Times article might help you to understand what it looks like:

[C]orporate South Korea has struggled to change the country’s thoroughly male-centered corporate culture, starting with alcohol. An evening out with colleagues here follows a predictable, alcohol-centered pattern: dinner, usually some grilled pork, washed down with soju, Korea’s national vodka-like drink; then a second round at a beer hall; then whiskey and singing at a “noraebang,” a Korean karaoke club. (Onishi pars. 5-6)

What bothered me more than alcohol was that people usually ate meat, especially grilled pork, or samgyeopsal. When I reminded the others that I did not eat meat, I was often faced with my colleagues’ reactions—“I wish you’re not so picky about food,” or “You’re not easy-going.” The most disturbing one was “You need to come anyway,” and that was true. Even when there was no vegetarian dish, and all I could eat was some noodles and lettuce

which people usually put in a wrap with meat, I needed to go anyway. Surrendering to tasteful smell and delicious appearance, sometimes I just picked some pieces of grilled meat in front of me and swallowed them. “Hoishik” at meat-serving restaurants and its social pressure was an obstacle for me in becoming a vegetarian, to which my weak willpower added.

Along with my struggle, people who had known me before the company struggled to accept the new Soeun as a vegetarian. A most dramatic moment was at the dinner table with a friend I had been close to since middle school. When I bravely ordered salad instead of steak at Outback Steakhouse in Seoul around Christmas last year, she was astonished, and stared at me with a cannot-believe-what-happened-to-me look. Until I cleaned my salad plate, she could not stop saying “I cannot believe that you’re a vegetarian.” I was not surprised by her reaction at all because I had been the one who could not eat meals without meat—which gave my mother extra burden for cooking as a child. I did not eat kimchi, an essential side dish without which Koreans cannot eat rice. I ate burgers only with patties and cheese after picking out the lettuce and pickles. So becoming a vegetarian to me was a huge transformation from carnivore into herbivore.

The transformation took a while, it did not happen overnight. I stopped eating beef and pork right away, but it took five more months for me to exclude chicken from my diet. I still eat seafood, dairy, and eggs. So what kind of vegetarian am I? Primarily to ask, how many and what kinds of vegetarians are there? Vegetarians come in more than half a dozen flavors, from sproutarians to pesco-pollo-vegetarians. The most notorious are the vegan vegetarians. The Green Party of the movement, vegans decline to consume, use or wear any animal products. They also avoid honey, since its production demands the oppression of worker bees (Corliss et al. 2).

I can categorize myself as a pesco-pollo-vegetarian at the time when I stopped eating beef and pork, and as a pesco-vegetarian now since I still eat seafood. Strictly speaking though, I am not a vegetarian.

Why do people become vegetarians? Are they concerned about their health? Do they love animals? Is it because they care about animal rights, the planet, or worldwide hunger and famine? According to a Time/CNN poll taken in April 2002, four percent of 10,007 adults considered themselves vegetarians. Among them

seventy-six percent said that they became vegetarians due to the reasons mentioned above (Corliss et al. 7-8).

For me, the answer is yes to all those questions. Moreover, because it was hard for me to become a vegetarian in the company culture I worked in, I had to do it gradually, in three stages. I had grown up with a mother who told me that I should eat healthy, and that I should watch fat and salt intake. Worrying about the fact that I might have inherited hypertension from my father, she simply concluded that I should eat less meat and more vegetables. I became more cautious about my diet, as she wished, because I understood the possibility of high blood pressure—yet I still ate meat.

In addition to my mother's lesson, I found the book *Beyond Beef* on my father's bookshelf. In this book, Jeremy Rifkin argues that the over-consumption of beef was a major cause of human hunger and poverty, deforestation, spreading deserts, water pollution, water scarcity, and global warming (153-230). According to Rifkin, hundreds of millions of cows are being fed about six billion tons of grain, while nearly one billion people are suffering from hunger (153-56); cattle produce nearly one billion tons of organic waste which causes water pollution (221-22); and cattle generate

carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, that are responsible for global warming (224-25). When I read this, I realized that there were many reasons I had not been aware of, and I started seriously considering vegetarianism.

I still needed something to tip the scale. On October 2006, I watched a TV program called Sunday Special which covered mad cow disease and the meat production process. After watching and reading about their brutal living conditions and how the meat on our table is produced, I felt strong sympathy for animals. Pigs are raised in dirty cages—although unlike people’s perception they have a clean nature. A cow is separated from its 15-day-old calf for milk production. Chickens get their beaks cut because they often attack each other in small and over-populated cages. Animals that wake up after being knocked out go through the slaughtering process in great pain. Accompanying encouragement and emotional support from my sister with sympathy, I decided finally to become a vegetarian.

I have recognized that there are many reasons for becoming a vegetarian, and I also have learned that there are several kinds of vegetarians. But I had a chance to read an article, “Should We All Be Vegetarians?”, and it helped me to understand vegetarianism more

completely, especially how complicated it truly is. This article, published on July 15, 2002 in *Time* magazine, explains “the risks of being a vegetarian” while admitting “well-known benefits.” In addition to, the authors devote many pages to showing complications of vegetarianism while reassuring readers with a simple message: becoming a vegetarian is a matter of choice after all (Corliss et al. 6).

The article demonstrates that vegetarianism brings deeper and more significant consequences, such as political divisions for instance between “the ranchers who makes his living with meat” and “the vegetarians whose diet could someday drive all those breeder-slaughterers to bankruptcy.” The authors tell the story of Jody Brown, a cattleman in South Dakota. Jody Brown’s ‘new meat’ mantras, such as “Vegetarians don’t live longer, they just look older,” or “If animals weren’t meant to be eaten, then why are they made out of meat?” (Corliss et al. 1), make me laugh at first. Soon after, as the humorous coating was dissolved, I could taste a serious and complicated core of his story: vegetarianism goes beyond the diet and ideals.

Other than political divisions, vegetarianism also brings the generation gap between parents and “soft-hearted kids” those who

want a “nonviolent diet” after watching films like Babe and Chicken Run, or teenagers who think “salad eaters are more moral, virtuous and considerate than steak eaters” (Corliss et al. 2). A question related to the culture can be raised by some people: “[C]an ‘America’s food’ ever be tofu?” (Corliss et al. 6)

Let’s go back to the very first sentence mentioning three groups of people who can hardly become vegetarians. As you might notice, those people do not share the same reason; rather each group has its own reason such as the diet needs, the cultural reason, or the social pressure. It reflects complexity of vegetarianism as well as dynamic nature of it.

To stop eating meat at the dinner table may be the last thing you want to try. Yet once made your mind, you can have an interesting journey of becoming a vegetarian. You can create your own flavor of vegetarianism, the way you want it.

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Grandfather

Meg Tisinger, Davenport, Iowa
poetry

The boy woke one night after a bad dream,
the sheets wet-clung as he pulled them tighter.
The trains below 5th street sounded as the shore came in,
his grandpa, who slept beside him, was gone.
Lifting his hand, he smoothed out the pillow.
The fabric had cooled. He’d been gone a while.
A silver hair caught between his fingers,
now thinking about, once again, sleeping alone.
A few days before, they’d buried his wife.
Since then, there was only Sunday dinner
and secret swigs of whiskey before bed and
a few days later, a body washed upon the shore,
the trains below 5th street sounding.