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Spring 2007

115 Vernon: The Writing Associates' Journal

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115 Vernon:
The Writing Associates'
Journal



Spring 2007

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From the Editor...

The theme for this year's edition of *115 Vernon* is "inside looking out." The following collection of poems and short stories illustrate how we as writers relate to the world around us.

This year's journal is dedicated to the late Hugh Ogden. As such, five poems (denoted by asterisks) were written by students in Hugh's first year seminar.

Thank you to everyone in the Trinity community who helped make this year's edition a success. In particular, I'd like to recognize Irene Papoulis for her guidance, as well as Professor Wall, Caitlin Schiller, and Jorge Amaral for their help throughout the year. Finally, to KJ Park, I greatly appreciate your expertise in publishing the journal.

Thanks,
Mike Kelleher
Co-Head Tutor, 2006-2007

The Writing Center

115 Vernon St.

Trinity College

Hours:

Monday-Thursday
1-4 pm & 6:30-9:30 pm

Late Night Hours:

Sunday and Wednesday
10pm-midnight in the Fred

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Kiyoshi and Genevieve in Tokyo
-Genevieve Gadenne-

*this is what he said—
let's film it where the lights never die.
within the procession of neon ghosts
like the trains with no readable destination:
a nighttime express to confusion.*

*tradition and tatami mats are far away from
the broken narrative of downtown, where
homeless women watch us apply makeup
and adjust our gucci glasses.*

*his breath smells like sake and cigarettes.
a hundred brown eyes watch us swing circles
around shrines and love hotels and a few lonely trees.*

*Kiyoshi's camera sheens and is quiet.
he films it where the perpetual lights glow,
where we mingle languages and bodies.*

Savoir Vivre, Avoir Peur
-Sarah Jenkins-

*It was surprisingly easy to see,
As they slumped down couches in drug-induced
Pockets of clarity, all except me.
It started with skin-deep wounds, but it produced*

*A rippling image of blue friendship tracks.
Rings expanding outward caught between ribs,
Choking on similarities when lax
Mouths share too often the same stupid fits.*

*What can I put between "they" and myself
To distance us? Do you see far above
Great Napoleon perched on that high shelf.
I don't know how he got there, but I'd love*

*To discover, to sever ear-to-ear
The chains that link us together, of Fear.*

Dear Angel
-Mike Kelleher-

A little boy sits in the cool grass beneath a mammoth oak tree. It is the beginning of spring, and everything is alive and new. The trees are budding with lush, green leaves. A warm, gentle breeze blows on the boy. He thinks of nothing but happy thoughts. The boy can still taste the decadent ice cream sundae that he had last night. His mouth melts at the thought of the gooey chocolate fudge and the creamy vanilla ice cream. Remembering back to last night's t-ball game, he can still hear the crack of his baseball bat as he smacked a line drive over the third baseman's head to win the game. "Yesterday was perfect," he thought.

This particular spring had started out incredibly. Looking up into the sky the boy saw nothing but endless expanses of sapphire blue. It seemed to him as if it hadn't rained in years. A warm feeling rushed up within his chest as the boy remembered that all of his friends would be coming over today. He couldn't wait to go swimming and play "capture the flag" with them. A second sensation came over him at that moment. A loud grumbling noise could be heard from his peritoneal cavity. The boy realized just how hungry he was and ran inside.

Walking into his house, he felt like a king in a palace. Toys were scattered all over the house, making it seem more like a Toys R Us than a home. His little brothers were playing with their trucks. They had such big smiles on their faces that it seemed as if nothing could diminish their joy. Looking out the window, the boy saw his dad mowing the lawn. After staring at him with loving admiration for a few minutes, the boy got up and ran into the kitchen. Almost as if his mom could read his mind, a turkey sandwich with sour cream and onion chips was waiting for him. He quickly gave his mom a big hug, and thought to himself that she was the best mom in the whole wide world. After finishing his sandwich and chips, he went back outside to sit under his tree.

As soon as the boy sat down, a bee started to buzz in his ear. He swatted at the winged creature, yet, to no avail, it wouldn't go away. In a peculiar fashion, the bee kept hovering near the boy's ear lobe. A strange thought came over the young child. "Is this bee trying to tell me something?" An ominous feeling came over the boy as the bee finally flew away. A harsh wind blew across the boy's face, causing him to shiver.

A few hours later, the boy's friends came over. They were all so excited to play "capture the flag" in his back yard, for a vast forest lay behind his home. After picking teams, the boy and some of his friends sprinted off across the grass and into the woods.

The boy was on the red team whose base was located in the woods. After a short deliberation, it was decided that the boy would stay in the woods to guard the flag. This was typical for him because he loved these woods. The tall oak trees formed a sort of canopy that blocked most of the light from getting in. It was a peaceful place. Gigantic rocks littered the forest floor; rocks that were perfect for climbing on. These twenty foot boulders seemed like mountains to the young child. As his team scattered from the woods, the boy darted over to the biggest boulder to hide within a small recess that had been hidden by a baby oak tree. Climbing into the miniature cave, a surge of adrenaline rushed through the boy's body. He knew that when the blue team came to steal his flag, he would be ready.

To the boy, it seemed as if he had been hiding in the boulder for hours. "Why hasn't anyone come looking for our flag?" he wondered. Something didn't seem right to him. As he listened for the sound of approaching footsteps, he was startled by the clap of thunder. Although shaken, he remained in his hiding place. Seconds later a deluge of rain came rushing through the tree tops and down upon the forest floor. Looking out onto the soil, the boy could see hundreds of little earthworms scurrying to the surface. The boy had never seen it rain so hard, and the forest floor soon flooded.

After waiting a few more minutes, the boy decided that something must have happened. Looking out at the forest floor, the boy was shocked at just how much rain had fallen. The forest floor was completely flooded. Creeping out of his little cave, the boy bent down and stuck his arm into the water. The boy's heart began to race as he jumped back into the cave. "The forest floor isn't just flooded... it's a pond," thought the boy. His heart was racing and goose bumps appeared on his arm. The boy was utterly petrified by the fact that his arm never touched the forest floor. Not knowing what to do, the boy took a few steps back into the cave and sat down. "How will I get home? Where are my friends? What will I do?" the boy thought frantically. "You will come with me," screeched an otherworldly creature. At that moment, sharp talons dug into the soft flesh of the boy's back as he was lifted upwards and

taken away. The last thing that he could remember was the powerful beating of the creature's wings. Soon after, he lost consciousness.

The boy awoke in a strange world, unlike anything he had ever known before. It was dark and cold. The hair on the boy's arm stood up on end as he shivered uncontrollably. Thoughts buzzed through the boy's mind. "Where is my family?" "Where am I?" "Why have I been taken away from them?" As the boy exhaled, he could see his breath in front of him. The boy knew one thing. It was no longer spring.

As the boy stood up, he noticed a dense fog that had enveloped this world. He couldn't make out anything more than five feet in front of him. The boy took only a few steps before he fell flat on his back. Touching the ground, he realized why he fell. He was sitting upon a frozen lake.

The boy wandered aimlessly through the dark, cold world for what seemed to be days. He was completely lost and cold with nothing to shroud him but an icy cloak. After days he was surprised to stumble upon a nine month old baby boy. It was his brother. Scooping up the baby, a tear fell from the eldest's face. Looking into the eyes of the babe, it was clear to him that the love that once beamed within the baby's soul was gone. What was left was angry rage, a hatred for the winged creature that brought them to this place. The boy took off his shirt and wrapped the precious infant with it. Although the cold was now unbearable, the boy did everything in his power to keep the baby, his baby brother, from suffering.

After wandering for days, the two boys finally stumbled upon their other brother. He was resting up against a tree, shivering to such an extent that it seemed as if he was seizing. The eldest looked into his brother's blue eyes, and sadly saw what he expected to find. The joy that once radiated from his pupils was now gone; all that was left was a blank, numb stare. As if a dagger had been plunged into the oldest child's heart, he fell to his knees in excruciating pain. After a few minutes, the oldest boy wrapped his arms around his baby brothers, giving them all of the love and strength that he had left.

Wandering alone in the frozen desert, the oldest boy did everything in his power to keep the other two alive. The joy that was in his heart just yesterday had been taken away. He

was no longer a child. On that pond, he became a man. He gave all that was within him to keep the other two whole.

The boys wandered for days on end, searching for mere morsels of food. After a week of searching, they stumbled upon two boxes of steaming hot cheese pizza. The heat was so intense that the ice began to melt slightly. A shrieking noise was heard from above, and the winged creature landed before the sustenance. Within an instant, she snatched the pizza into her mouth, sending it down into her already distended belly. As she flew away, the excruciating pain stabbed through each of the children's hearts. The pain was unbearable, yet the oldest knew that they had to overcome the winged beast.

Wandering through the fog, the boys finally saw a glow of light. It was their mother. She was tied to the small oak tree; the hiding spot of the eldest during his game of capture the flag. Running up to her, a feeling of warmth surged through each of their bodies. They were rejuvenated. On the brink of death, she rescued them from the abyss. As happy as they all were, the ecstasy soon faded. They remembered what had happened to them. Looking around they noticed their surroundings. The family was in the clearing where the boys once played capture the flag. The boulders remained, yet the trees were very different. The leaves were gone; as was the warmth of spring. Remembering the winged beast, the eldest quickly led his mother and brothers out of the woods and back to their home.

Upon entering the house, the boy realized that something was not right. His dad was missing, and he quickly understood that this was all the work of the winged beast. She took his Dad. Walking outside to his front lawn, the boy looked up at the sky. Sapphire blue had been replaced by pencil gray. A light drizzle was falling, dulling the once sharp landscape. Walking back inside, the boy saw his little brothers playing with their trucks, but it wasn't normal. Their grins had been replaced with frowns, and their laughter had been replaced with sobs. Although the boy survived, he knew that nothing would ever be the same.

Mat Ball Morning
-Jorge Amaral-

It's fucking cold and snowy and shit is blowing into my face so I wrap my coat tighter around me and look down at my feet and cut straight across the parking lot to the school entrance. Molly was supposed to drop me off today but then she left without me because she's a douche, but of course Mom likes her best so she won't say anything about it and I end up having to walk to school. It's Tuesday and I hate Tuesdays because it has all the crappy disadvantages of a Monday but it's not Wednesday, so you can't even say you're half way through the week yet or anything. The other reason I hate Tuesdays is because I have gym class first period, which I think is the stupidest thing in the world, and I don't know who thought it would be a good idea to do jumping jacks and run laps at 8:30 in the morning, especially when you've just gotten out of bed and showered and gotten dressed.

The locker room smells like a giant cheese platter and every Tuesday morning I'm surprised that the entrance isn't cordoned off and that it hasn't been declared a biomedical health hazard. I get my gym clothes from my locker and stuff them underneath my coat and head to one of the stalls in the bathroom in the back like I always do because I don't like changing out in the open where everyone can see me. Whenever I pass someone on my way to the stall and they ask me where I'm going I tell them I have to take a dump, so after a while all the guys started calling me Dumpy, even though I think they know I actually go in there to change.

"Hey Dumpy! Going to take a massive dump?!" It's Steven Williams. He's a douche bag. I don't say anything and keep walking. I get to the stall and lock the door and take off my jacket, then my sweater, my undershirt, and jeans until I'm down only to my flannel boxers and my watch, which I leave on so I can keep track of the minutes in class. It's cold and my socks feel dirty against the grimy floor and the stall smells like shit and my stomach feels hollow and I'd rather be getting back into bed, not getting changed for some fucking gym class. I poke my scrawny legs through my gym shorts and wrestle my chicken bone shoulder blades safely under the wrinkled cover of my plain white gym T-shirt. I try to do a half-tuck kind of thing so my shirt doesn't just hang off my bony shoulders. I hate being short so I grab

some Odor Eaters out of my backpack and stuff them into my sneakers hoping they'll give me a little more height.

In the gym the guys stand in small groups talking and smacking each other on the back. Our school has separate gym classes for girls and guys, and it's probably better that way because I wouldn't really want any of the girls seeing me in my gym clothes anyway. I'm not really friends with anyone in the class so I mostly stand around by myself trying to look busy. I crouch down and tie, untie, and re-tie my sneaker about five times and then I check my watch. It's bad enough I have to be here and I wonder why we can't just get this shit over with instead of having to wait there like an asshole staring at my watch.

I look up and Chris Marcozzi is coming out of the locker room. He's wearing Nike shorts and sneakers and an Abercrombie t-shirt, like most everyone else in the class.

"Hey, man. How you doing?" he says casually.

"All right," I answer. "How did that quiz go the other day?"

"Oh, piece of cake."

Chris is one of my kind of, sort of friends at school. We grew up on the same street until his family moved to a new house on the other side of town. Sometimes he hangs out with the other guys who are douche bags. I know because sometimes he tells me about skiing trips over winter break and summers at the golf club swimming pool, but we still have classes together sometimes and he always says "hi" when I see him in the halls.

"Oh, there's Kyle—I have to go tell him about yesterday's game! I'll talk to you later," Chris says.

"Yeah, okay," I call after him.

Mr. Pfeffer finally comes out of his office with his clipboard in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. He's kind of a stocky guy. I always figured he was a jock when he was in high school. He wears gym shorts and a t-shirt everyday but you can tell he probably has a potbelly from the way his shirt stretches a little over his stomach. I always thought it would be funny to call him Pfeffer the Heifer, but no one else ever seemed to think of it so I just keep my mouth shut. These jocks and former jock types are probably all in a secret society and they might break into my house and kick my ass in the middle of the night if I say something

against their kind. Besides, they would probably just call me Dumpy, or say, "Shut up, Dumpy" and walk away.

Today we're playing mat ball, which is particularly stupid because it's not even a real sport or even a real game, but probably something Pfeffer the Heifer came up with, and I imagine him at a national gym teacher conference with other gym teachers and they're all sitting around a table or something trying to think of new gym activities and Pfeffer probably came up with mat ball. It's kind of like a cross between baseball and dodge ball that you play inside the gym, where you're pitched a big ball and you kick it instead of hitting it with a bat and then you try to run the bases without getting the snot beat out of you with that ball. I figure it's one thing to suck at a real sport like football or soccer, which I do, but to suck at a fake sport like mat ball just feels even more embarrassing. Not that everyone doesn't already know I suck at all sports and games—basically anything with a physical component.

Pfeffer makes Mark Billings and Ryan Crawford team captains, again, and they start choosing their teams. Mark and Ryan are both douche bags. They're the type of guys that always seem to get what they want and I hate them both. Plus they're both about seven feet tall. Well, not really, but still.

I'm the second to last person to be chosen, just ahead of the kid that eats his own snot and who we think is legitimately retarded because he only spends half the day at school and is then bussed over to some other place for the rest of the day. I'm on Mark's team and we're up to kick first. I hide myself at the end of the line like I always do and I let as many people cut me in line as many times as they want because I suck at this game and I know it and they know it and I don't want to embarrass myself and they just want to win, so it's a nice unspoken arrangement. Jeremy Myers is out in "the field" covering first base and Ryan the douche bag is creeping up behind him. Besides being a douche bag Ryan also thinks he's really funny, so when Jeremy isn't paying attention Ryan tries to pants him, tugging at the ends of Jeremy's gym shorts to expose his underwear, but Jeremy notices in time and grabs at his waistband, and since he and Ryan are friends he just laughs it off and calls him a prick. After nine minutes it's our turn to be "in the field." I try to hide between third base and home plate but I get hit by the ball three times, then catch it once but drop it. When it's our turn to be up

to kick again I do my usual routine and hide in the back of the line, except this time Pheffer the Heifer, whose goal it must be to ensure my life is a living hell, says,

"Come on, I want to see everyone having a turn at kicking! Who hasn't kicked yet? Grenel, come on, you're up!"

Grenel is my last name and I hate it because ever since third grade kids have teased me about it and called me Gremlin or something stupid like that, and I wonder why all gym teachers refer to people by their last names. I hesitantly walk to the front of the line and Kevin Miller yells out, "Woo-hoo! Come oonnnnn, Dumpy!" Everyone laughs. He's a douche bag and I wish someone would sock him in the mouth.

The first pitch I miss the ball completely and kick the air as the ball rolls by two inches to my right. The second time the ball ends up rolling under my foot somehow as I try to kick it. The third time I make a lame hit and it's a "fly ball" so it doesn't count for shit anyway.

"Nice try, Dumpy," Kevin says smugly. Douche bag.

After a few more minutes it's our turn to play the "field" again and I stake myself out a good place in no-man's land between first and second base where barely anyone ever kicks the ball. Alex Schwartz is up and he kicks the ball all the way into the corner of the gym on his first try and runs to second base before Eddie Sanchez gets a chance to tag him. Ryan is up next and he kicks the living shit out of the ball and he makes loud whooping noises. The ball arcs high and screams over our heads, getting stuck in the trusses and support beams that cross the gym ceiling.

"Wa-hoo! Looks like a home run for me, laaadies!" Ryan shouts, and starts running towards first base in slow motion, pumping his arms out way in front of him like he's in some movie. Pheffer the Heifer puts down his clipboard and turns to go into his office to grab an old broom and step ladder to get the ball down like he always does when something like this happens.

"Don't worry, boys, I'll get it down in a jiff," he says, disappearing behind the corner. It always takes Pheffer about 5 minutes to get the broom and ladder out and another 10 angling to get the ball free. I always wonder why he doesn't keep another ball on hand, or just tell Ryan to stop kicking it so damn hard. Still, it's not like I really mind—a 15-minute break

in gym is 15 less minutes I have to embarrass myself. Suddenly my thighs feel cold, and when I stop staring into space the first thing I see is Ryan the douche still mock-running by me with an asshole smile on his face. I realize that the only reason he is looking at me, much less smiling, must be because he has just done something douche bag-like. I look down and see that not only my gym shorts but my flannel boxers, too, are around my knees and then I realize Ryan must have pants-ed me.

"Haha, hey, look at Dumpy's shriveled dick!" I hear a voice say off somewhere in the distance, but I don't even look up. I claw at the fabric and pull it up all in a clump. I want to fucking beat the shit out of Ryan's stupid ass face. He's laughing so hard he's all red as he tries to apologize.

"Hahaha, hey dude, totally sorry, didn't mean to do th—"he says before breaking out in another fit of laughter. I want to cram my fist down his throat and I lunge at him but he has about five inches on me and my chin crashes into his chest and it hurts.

"Hey! What the hell is going on here?" I hear Pheffer's voice say before a pair of hands pulls me off Ryan until I'm stumbling back on something doughy and I realize it's Pheffer's gut. "Come on, stop that! To the principal's office, both of you!"

Pheffer walks us down the hall and I can feel his hand at my back pushing me forward slightly. Somehow I don't feel like myself and it's like I'm gliding down the hall. I try to remember exactly what just happened in the past five minutes but when I get to the part where I lunge at Crawford everything gets pretty fuzzy and all I know is that Pheffer is now walking us down the hall to the principal's office. I can still feel Pheffer's hand on my back and I wonder what he is thinking right now, about me and this entire situation. I figure that the first thing Pheffer saw when he walked back into the gym was me and Crawford in a mad jumble. I wonder if Pheffer thinks that I started the fight, except he probably doesn't because I've never really been in trouble before with a teacher, not even a gym teacher, and Crawford is the big athletic jock so Pheffer probably thinks he started beating up on me. Even though I suck at sports I never really thought that Pheffer disliked me, but now I start wondering what he does think of me. I start imagining that maybe he thinks I'm a pathetic, helpless loser.

Maybe he hates me. Maybe he figures that of course Crawford would beat up on me. Maybe if he were back in high school it'd be him picking on me right there next to Crawford.

My jaw hurts and as Pheffer's footsteps fade away all I can think about is how the hallway outside Mr. Berger's office smells only slightly better than the gym and I'm not sure how things could be much worse until I remember that Ryan is sitting about two feet away. He sits hunched over with his elbows on his knees, staring down at the floor and the wall across from us. He must sense I'm watching him because he looks over at me before looking away again.

"Why the fuck did you have to go and do that? Now look what you've done," he says.

"Me? You're the one who started it!" I say before even realizing I'm saying it.

"I told you, it was an accident. All I was trying to do was have a little fun," he says in a low, almost whining tone.

"Yeah, some fun," I mutter under my breath. I can see him roll his eyes.

"It was just a joke. Why can't you just take a joke?"

I'm silent for a moment.

"Because it wasn't funny. Jokes are supposed to be funny. For everyone, not just for a few people... having fun isn't the same thing as making fun of someone." I hear myself saying the words. I can hear each word and the strain in my voice and it's like I'm hearing it from a tape recorder or watching myself say it on TV, and as soon as I finish there's a silence in the air and I feel stupid and cheesy and I think Ryan will probably laugh in my face, but he just looks over at me and doesn't say anything.

"Mr. Berger will see both of you now," the secretary comes out and says a little too cheerily. She's probably the type that has lots of quick-kyacks and little inspirational sayings posted all around her desk. She leads us into Mr. Berger's office and leaves, closing the door behind her. Ryan and I sit in the two chairs positioned in front of Mr. Berger's desk.

"Well, well, Mr. Grenel, not too accustomed to seeing you in here. Mr. Crawford," Berger says with a slight nod, "we're a little better acquainted." Berger is the assistant principal and he deals with most of the disciplinary stuff. He's probably in his late 30s, but he's already bald. There's a strip of hair about two inches wide that runs around his head, but

the top is completely bare. He's pretty tall and skinny, so with the bald head and all he looks like a giant, walking lollipop sometimes.

"Coach Pheffer says he caught the two of you fighting. What's the story?" Berger says.

I sit there, hot and uncomfortable and wishing I could get up and leave. I notice I'm still in my gym clothes and that just makes me feel even stupider. I want to tell Berger that Crawford and all his friends are real assholes and should probably be locked up in juvenile detention centers far from civilized people, but I don't say anything because I don't want to tell him the whole story of what happened. Most of all, I hope Crawford doesn't say anything because sitting there listening to Crawford tell Berger what happened would be the only thing worse than having to tell him myself. I stare down at the floor, not wanting to make eye contact with anyone, but luckily I don't hear Crawford saying anything either.

"Well? Come on, let's hear it." Berger says. "Fighting on school property is a serious offense and I will not take it lightly or allow it to just slide by... Mr. Crawford, do you have anything to say?"

I look over at Crawford and it looks like he's wondering whether he should say something or not. For a second it seems like he is going to, but then he just sits there.

"How about you, Mr. Grenel? Would you like to tell me what happened?" Berger says, shifting his attention to me.

My stomach is hollow and sick and I feel like I need to go to the bathroom. I'm still hot and it feels like all the heat is rising to my head. I start to wonder what Berger is thinking. He probably thinks Crawford started the fight and he's just waiting for me to squeal on him. He must see this stuff all the time. Maybe I'm just another faceless loser to him.

"Mr. Grenel?"

"I did it," I hear myself say.

"Excuse me?" Berger responds.

"I said I did it. It was me. I started the fight."

"You started the fight, Mr. Grenel?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure, Mr. Grenel?"

"I did it," I respond forcefully.

"I see... and was there any provocation?"

"I don't like him."

"You don't like Mr. Crawford?"

"No, sir. I never have."

"I see. So you decided to physically assault him... today, today of all days you randomly decided to physically express your dislike of Mr. Crawford?"

"It was gym class. I thought maybe I could get away with it," I answer.

"Well... Mr. Crawford, is that what happened?"

I look over and Crawford looks even stupider than usual. He nods his head dumbly.

"Yes, sir," he finally manages to say.

"Okay, well in light of Mr. Grenel's confession, this is what is going to happen. Mr. Grenel, I hope you understand the seriousness of this offense. School is not a place for violence or physical assaults, no matter how much we may not like someone else." However, since this is your first offense, Mr. Grenel, I am giving you an in-school suspension for two days."

I try to picture what all the other kids and teachers will say and think when they find out I've been suspended.

"Mr. Crawford, although Mr. Grenel has claimed responsibility for this act, this is not the first time you've been in my office for something of this nature. You have a disturbing pattern here, young man, one you better wake up to and turn around. I'm giving you a one-day out of school suspension. I suggest you take the time to figure out how you can stay out of trouble, and out of this office. I'm warning you, Mr. Crawford, the next time you're in here, you will face expulsion."

I'm glad to finally be out of Berger's office and as I walk down the hall I've never been more motivated to get to the locker room so that I can change out of my stupid gym clothes. Crawford is walking a few steps behind me, feet scuffing loudly on the floor, and we're just about to the gym.

"Hey, Grenel." I turn and look at him. "Berger could have really nailed me to the wall back there. My parents would have flipped if he'd kicked me out. I think they're really on the

verge of just losing it. They were talking boarding school or something like that... so, just, thanks for taking the rap."

I stare back at him, eyes sober, arms awkwardly at his sides. I don't think I've ever seen him like this before.

"I didn't do it for you," I say.

"Hey, I'm just trying to be nice, man."

"Yeah? And how long will that last, until we get back to class and you see your friends again?"

"Hey, calm down. Like I said, I was just trying to do the right thing."

"You just don't get it."

"Why? Am I too stupid to understand?" He pauses, staring at me under furrowed eyebrows like he's waiting for an answer.

Part of me wants to tell him about how my father doesn't come around much anymore, and how my mother got laid off from her job as a secretary, and how my sister is trying to support us until Mom can find another job, but I don't say anything. Ryan turns around and starts to walk away. For a second I wonder if there's anything he keeps hidden.

First period is just about over and as we stand in front of the entrance to the gym locker room people are beginning to file out. We wait there awkwardly and when the guys walk out they stare at us and you can tell they want to ask what happened or make some kind of comment, but Pfeffer is standing nearby and everyone knows better. Chris Marozzi walks by and looks at both of us, giving a small nod with his head before shuffling along. Ryan and I stand there for just another moment longer. We glance over at each other, and together we head into the stale, putrid air of the locker room.

Dear Britt
-Vincent Hugh Bish, Jr.-

*I am sorry I didn't pick up the phone
and make that collect call to Calgary
to find out how the pregnancy was going.
In the last pew of the church,
I remember how I was the first one you told,
lifting up the bottom of your hoodie
to reveal your already hardening womb.
We talked about how you feigned
taking the 'day after pill' when your mom
found out you had been intimate.
How we painfully joked,
'First time's the charm,'
to break the solemn silence.
You told me before you told your mother.
You told me before you told the baby's father
and I couldn't pick up the phone
to tell you to keep your spirits up
after you sold your car,
postponed your matriculation to Manhattan School of Music,
and moved out of your house
because I was so absorbed in my own life.
I hope to God the baby came to full term
and that you're still with Michale
and that you can still forgive me for
all the calls I should have made.*

Angels on the Water
-Jessie Scordamaglia-

*He lies in a brown, wooden duck boat
in the middle of the gray-green bay,
surrounded by the sound of seagulls' flapping wings
and covered in the orange glow of the setting sun.
There is a strong smell of salt
and a gentle, caressing wind.*

*The way the wind
blows slowly rocks the duck boat
and carries off some of its encrusted salt
formed by the spray of the misty bay.
The loose, unshackled salt catches and throws reflections of the sun
as it flies over the glinting, glass water like tiny, white wings.*

*They look like angel wings
belonging to the angels that are flying in the wind
and playing under the sun.
Perhaps they have come for the man in the efflorescent boat
to play with him in the middle of the bay.
But it's not fit for angels to be in a place that is sticky with salt.*

*The humid air reeks with the salt
and it would make their wings
cling and they would fall into the bay,
their tiny, fragile bodies too weak to withstand the wind.
They would fly right off the boat!
Of course, angels only fly where the only thing in the sky is the
pure, fluorescent sun.*

*The perpetual sun
is shining like silver upon the salt
of the boat.
In its gleaming and glistening radiance I imagine the man sprouting wings
and fluttering away in the wind
across the sparkling bay*

*and leaving the lonely bay,
dark in the absence of the sun,
which was blown under the water by the wind.
His hair white with salt
to match his eloquent wings,
he stands at the edge of his little duck boat.*

*Before parting from the bay of bitter salt,
he shakes his wings in the wind
and then he flies to the heavenly boat in the divine and sacred sun.*

Speechless
-Emily Klein-

I am standing in a fluorescent-lit room similar in size to a prison cell. The speech pathologist, whose name I can't remember but whose over-dyed Clairol red hair I would recognize anywhere, beams with a cheerleader's spunk as she instructs me on my latest exercise. I am to point my finger out the window at the dry cleaners across the street, "guiding" my voice to that distant point. My shoulders are back, posture contorted into unnatural perfection, as I issue a weird guttural hum like I'm supposed to. The perky therapist assures me that this is real progress. I am in occupational therapy learning how to speak.

I spent the summer before my junior year in college doing this and other humiliating speech exercises in attempt to correct my vocal cord nodules, which developed like calluses on guitar players' hands. There is no ostensible explanation for my condition. I am not a singer and never have been; not even in the confines of my own car do I indulge my inner Mariah Carey. I am not in a profession like teaching or preaching where excessive talking would be an occupational hazard. Freshman year, my voice shriveled up from time to time. I would wake up from a night of screaming over loud music and secondhand smoke and find I emitted a grating hoarseness when I tried to speak. My words strained and cracked, sometimes peaking in an unfamiliar growl. My voice would evaporate like this for a few days but generally resurfaced like my Trinity ID card tends to do in the back pocket of my jeans. Gradually, my voice gathered gravel like rocks in shoes. It has settled into a low grumble, and on particularly bad days my roommates translate for me, having become fluent in my language. On good days, when I've had enough sleep and forfeit the coffee I crave for mint tea (caffeine dries out the vocal cords), people compliment me on my voice. They tell me it's unique, or worse, sexy. Those well-meaning people who assure me my voice gives me character are not there for the moments when I strain to scrape out a sandwich order or schedule a haircut. "I'm sorry, dear, I don't understand," the person behind the counter says. People who say they admire voices like mine have never had to wake up worrying whether or not their own voices will betray them just in time for a job interview or a presentation.

I am called whiskey voiced, which conjures not a sultry siren but a Courtney Love falling off her chair. A very drunk German man at a pub once told me I looked and sounded like Pat Benatar-- "Love is a Battlefield, you know?", and someone else suggested Joan Jett. I am not nearly bad-ass enough to pull off either. Most of the time my voice makes me feel weak and defeated, not a feisty 80's pop star wearing way too much eyeliner and leather pants.

I learned through my summer in speech therapy that my condition is behavioral, which means I can correct it. I put undue stress on my own body. I slouch, scrunch myself up cross-legged into my seat and clench my pen tightly, all of which put strain on the muscles in my neck and shoulders. As a result, I have damaged my vocal cords. When the clown-haired speech therapist positioned me in my chair like a mannequin, I felt uncomfortably posed and quickly reverted each time. How can I have to rehearse sitting, breathing, and producing sound, behaviors I thought I had learned from birth? As much as I wanted to get better, to sound "normal" and be able to both talk to my grandma and order a beer in a loud bar, I resented the amount of effort those things required.

I used to wish my condition were harsh enough to merit surgery, so I could just get it over with, spend a few weeks on an all-ice cream diet and never think about my relationship with my vocal cords again. Deanna, a girl I studied abroad with, had vocal cords so damaged she qualified for the surgery that I once coveted. She was told to give up her dreams of becoming a litigator because the risky surgical process might leave her speechless, her vocal cords paralyzed. In addition to that terrifying possible consequence, surgical patients still require vocal therapy, as the nodes might re-develop at any point. Despite her grim prognosis, Deanna is one of the perkier people I know. (Her catchphrase throughout the semester was "I'm excited!!!!" with all four exclamation points.) A mile-a-minute motor mouth, Deanna could have had a promising career at the front of a tour bus, clipboard in hand, were it not for her voice. Even as a person who cringes at enthusiasm, I can't help but admire Deanna for simply not accepting her voice as her fate.

I stopped seeing the speech therapist, but I find some of the stretches she showed me actually help. I still sit like a pretzel and refuse to cater to my voice's delicate needs: No coffee, no alcohol, no spicy food and a good night's sleep? I'm not a grandma yet. Rebellious

against my own voice with coffee and green curry chicken does not give me entry into Pat Benatar and Joan Jett's bad girls club, but like Deanna, I am not going to let my vocal cords decide for me.

What Are We Doing Here?

(Dedicated to Tom Lisk)

-Fatimah Finney-

I sometimes don't know what I'm doing either.
How did I even get here?
I remember being told
to go to school and color inside the lines
and go to college and eat my vegetables
and get a good job and be nice
and find a good husband and —
but there was never any explanation
except:
'it's what you're supposed to do.'
Since then my life has been on a tedious spin cycle
reading page after page of hard-covered text books,
writing poem after essay after lab report,
playing piano, basketball, and softball
until body becomes numb and consciousness gone.

I look at myself:
face pressed against open textbook,
drool splattered over problem set number 25.24.
Exhaustion.

Why do I allow myself to remain colored in the lines of society's expectations?

This poem attempts to break free.

Las Olas
-Chris Woodrum-

Waves, you derive from undulation.
Restlessness blows across the top of the sea,
created by undying wind.
To weave,
move to and fro,
back and forth, cyclical.
You are everything in rhythmic
motion, eternal.
Whether you
are light or
sound,
transverse or
longitudinal, you are
the derivation. You are the beginning,
the heartbeat of the earth, birth
of everything.
Dawn, Mother
herself,
once sliding over
glistening sand bars, leaving,
ebbing to unknown waters in your retreat and then
returning, flowing, weaving
throughout all.
Immortal.
You recede, retreat, return, repeat.
The tide breathes too, you know.

I Believe in a Thing Called Love
(But I Spent 21 Years Pretending I Didn't)
-Caitlin Schiller-

Everyone close to me, all of the people who've known me best and loved me longest, would tell you that I am a realist, a cynic, an intellectual who tightly reins in her emotions and doesn't believe in the Disney-driven treacle that little girls grow up idolizing and wishing on stars to find in their own lives. My best friend would tell you that I'm hilariously pessimistic; my parents would tell you that I'm too hard on myself; my coaches and my college

friends would say that I'm sensible, realistic, have my head firmly on my shoulders, that I don't take to flights of fancy. They don't think I daydream. I myself will lie to you and tell you that I don't like romantic comedies and that sentimental novels are utterly puerile drivel. I've feigned indifference to Valentine's day for 21 years now and the phrase "all men are assholes," has rolled from my lips more times than I can count. I listen to Ani DiFranco. I wear feminist tee shirts. I have joked that I will live alone with 46 cats in a refrigerator box somewhere on a wintry city street as cold as my icy lump of a heart.

But do you want to know the truth? I'll tell you. Here are all of my secrets:

I own a copy of *Love Actually* that's now in danger of being worn to translucence. I am prone to daydreams of daisy fields and kisses. I live for the happy resolution of heroine in hero's arms at the end of trashy books and, hard as I've tried, I don't believe that all men are assholes. I am not a Scroogetastic hardass, though until recently I'd done everything in my power to project that I was. For me, it has never been about not believing in love—I was just afraid of showing it because then I'd be subject to the ridicule of Scroogetastic hardasses like myself who would call me naïve and roll their eyes. As an educated person, I reasoned, I should know better, be better. Samuel Johnson, Jane Austen, Jonathan Swift have all told me that "better" translates to "disinterested." For 21 years I've made myself buy into their detachment, rationale, and value for empirically verifiable truths, unquestioningly believing that living the edicts of their Enlightenment made me closer to my own. But did you know that "disinterested" is only a few Webster's entries away from "distressed?" There's a reason for that.

My cynicism towards men, and by extension love and affection, didn't start with Johnson or Jane or any Swiftian theory—no toddler learns from the edicts of eighteenth century minds—it started with my dad. He is a Boy Scout, a stoic, a man of honor who lives a "rich inner life," (just ask him—he'll tell you). He thinks about things—thinks about them so much, in fact, that he rarely ever acts upon them and more often than not, chases them into circles inside his head that don't lead to anywhere but back onto the wrong presumptions. It is from him that I've inherited my propensity for over analysis—it was he who insecurely convinced himself that my infantile crying meant I hated him. I was only days old when my

mother placed me into his arms and I, like any infant might, responded with suspiciously mandrake-like shrieks. How, he wondered, could something that didn't even know him hate him? He got no answers but squalling and pumping fists so, skittish young man, decided he'd reject what rejected him, whether or not it broke his heart. He shut down, shut off, and spent the next eighteen or so years systematically breaking me down, breaking my heart. He learned very early on to stay away and to resent his child's apparent rejection of him. I learned very early on never to go to him crying; I'd be received with annoyance, distaste, impatience, revulsion. If my mother wasn't around to salve my elementary school woes, I'd sob alone under the bridal wreath in the front yard quickly, quietly; no time and no place for childish whims like crying to a parent or throwing tantrums.

Thus began my hyper-maturity, my independence from men.

Dan never met my father, but the work that Dad began, the blue-eyed wonder boy finished; brains, beauty, romantic gestures and a tongue that could alternately tie me up in knots and unravel all of my misgivings to limp husks: he was not a real boy. He was something slightly more divine, slightly more ghastly. He would come to visit from the frigid North where the mullet is still the height of fashionable coiffure. He brought me mix CDs and books, told me humans needed to think far less, feel far more.

"Is that so?" I'd ask, part amused, part enraptured.

"Yes, Cait. Love should only be acted upon spontaneously. It can't be premeditated."

Unwilling to offend his philosophy, I never asked him if he loved me. I would need to let him show me whether or not he did—it had to be simple, I thought, even though his idea of spontaneity and action contingent upon feeling, not thinking, never left me settled and certain of anything. He'd cheated on his ex-girlfriend whom he'd claimed to love; he was a loud, vehement vegetarian who ate meat when the veggie choices weren't appetizing; he said he cared, that I should believe him. I didn't want to live in the shadow of my father's bad example—I didn't want to be that bitter, angry, scarred girl. For Dan, and out of fear of matching up with the hardness I felt becoming my own self-image, I suspended my disbelief.

"You're brilliant, Cait," he'd say, "you're the most amazing woman I've ever met. How did I ever function without you?" He would look earnest in those moments, staring into me

and tipping me up to suck me dry of all of that adoration. I would believe him, because he was the smartest man I'd ever known and he had to be right, right? He had to be telling the truth. Believing in someone you're half certain to be lying is not what a pessimist does, is it? It isn't what a negative, fatalistic, burnt out and beaten down woman does, right? I didn't want to be naïve, but I wanted even less hands and heart of old leather and stone. Frustrated by years of putting up the impenetrable act, I wanted to show my heart. I wanted to be open to the idea of love. It was very simple: I wanted to believe in him—I premeditated it, even, which should have tipped me off right away—and so I did.

I never realized then that so-called spontaneous feelers should not spend so much time rationalizing their acts.

Dan would disappear, find other women—he'd hove away and come back—never apologize, but always justify; his words were the only part of him I could ever hold onto. Missing for months, he would crop back up with a phone call when he needed someone to talk him down from the intellectual hysterics of the genius-caliber. The wax walls I'd molded up around my heart softened under the flames of his narcissism; I melted into his Echo. It was my choice. I faded away as he faded out of my life.

It was then that I nearly lost myself, the tender-hearted, emotional, excruciatingly sappy self who writes cards that make her friends happy-cry and bakes cookies for the garbage men every winter. The rough gray cynic suit I'd always donned over my secret party clothes in order to keep from being seen as childish and defenseless became my uniform—no brightly colored dresses or pastel underthings—just gray, just hard. I kept my own emotions at gunpoint and threatened loudly (but privately) to blow their heads off if they dared speak.

Hard-bitten.

Cynical.

I no longer needed my friends to create the cover for me. I started to believe those adjectives to be me. And so, it seemed, I was.

For nearly two years my consolation and my only triumph came from not looking like a fool. Thank God, I thought, nobody thinks I actually believed in him. Thank God I could sit back and stoop over my aching belly and smirk at my own misfortune, tell a room, "I knew it all

along—that he'd never be really good for me," and pretend to be all right. Outside I laughed at the cruel ironies. Inside I cried not only for losing him, but for losing—rather, feeling obligated to lose—the small, hopeful part of myself I'd grown around and secretly treasured for years.

The worst part was that, despite everything, that part was still alive.

I'm not sure what kept it from perishing. It certainly wasn't rosy stories from the women around me; no one that I knew was in a supportive, happy, loving relationship. Most of my friends were and always had been as single, independent, and man-shy as I. And yet that silly little ember still glowed despite the fact that I did my best to snuff it out. After all, I reasoned, wouldn't it be more comfortable not to burn at all instead of struggling to suck in any kind breeze that might slide past? Rationally, that made perfect sense—Samuel Johnson and Jonathan Swift would have been awfully proud. I tried to starve that ember out but, ultimately, couldn't make it die. Killing it would hurt more than letting it live even though I was growing to hate my own naiveté and hopefulness.

Naturally, my solution was segregation. I compartmentalized that hope and came to terms with the idea that yes, it would be there, hurting, every now and then surprising me with a hot little flare that would end in nothing but ashes. I would stow it in an undignified cardboard box of a space inside my heart 'til I died, alone, on that cold city street with my 46 cats, never having been truly appreciated, truly loved, touched or even noticed.

Thank heavens I'm not dramatic at all.

I was so angry with myself for having been every bit as childish and naïve as I'd spent 21 years training myself not to be that I'm surprised I even met the man responsible for pulling the box out and delving inside.

I'd known Greg only as the quiet, eccentric freshman with the brilliant writerly flair who'd sat two seats away in an introductory creative writing class. I was always intrigued—always dumbfounded by his understated eloquence, fresh and pithy descriptions, and incongruously loud laugh that I still think I've heard only a handful of times. When we met again a full two years later, he still sat two seats away, still laughed loudly, kept his eyes cast down. I'd never shared a familiar conversation with him—we'd never been friends. Truth is,

he was more of a stranger to me than the woman who makes my dining hall omelets every morning. That I did not surprise myself in the least by greeting him with a cocky, "So we meet again, Mr. Gavelis," when I walked into advanced creative writing was reason for surprise in itself. I walked by and claimed my station two seats away.

"Indeed we do," he'd said.

For the rest of the semester we made what, in retrospect, must have been embarrassingly public literary love to one another's fictional creations during workshops and writing conferences. He was shy and normally, I was, too, but there was a force—one I still can't name or understand—that governed my decisions surrounding him. Time and again I was presented with the option to get closer or not, to know more or stay a stranger. I always wanted to get closer and always wanted to know more, but never once did I actively decide to believe in him as I had in the past. To be closer and to know more were never actually choices I had to make for myself. It was as though they'd been made for me, as if there were no other way. I never consciously decided to believe in him, there was no premeditation—Greg simply deserved it, and so I did.

When we walked to the movies it was snowing and slippery. He knew about my two bad hips so when I slipped once, gasped, giggled at his look of grave concern, he took my arm and tucked it into the crook of his elbow, saying only "Get over here," as though it were the most ordinary, right thing in the world. Like a secluded island undiscovered by hands more tender, more giving than those of idle plunderers passing by on a quest for booty, I was surprised by my new traveler; the tectonics rumbled—I wondered why I wasn't considering earthquaking him off of shore. It was unsettling, not feeling unsettled, so my knee jerk reaction was to shove a leg back inside my cynic suit.

"So I'll pull you down with me if I fall?" I asked, incredulous, moving to take my arm back and blushing. I was thankful it was dark.

He did not withdraw his hold, continued on our course toward the parking lot.

"Yeah," he'd said. "And that's just how it should be."

I think it was then that I discovered my gray cynic suit no longer fit. What's more, I realized I didn't care.

He holds doors for me and takes me on dates. He says he'll call and does it. He stops by with ice cream and throat lozenges when I'm sick and holds my hand when we walk down the street. He is not afraid to show me that he cares and so, miraculously, neither am I. Greg knows about the men who have come before him, my father and the blue-eyed wonder boy, and he has heard my stance on relationships, on heartache, on cardboard boxes and cats. He does not tell me I am silly or hysterical or wrong; he only says, "You deserve better. You'll see."

Do you want to know the truth? Here are all my secrets: it was never that I completely disbelieved in love. All I ever needed to acknowledge the sappy, maudlin, candy-heart and kisses side of me was a reason. He's seen my copy of *Love Actually*, and he just smiled.

I have no secrets anymore.

Defined
-Sarah Jenkins-

Some numbers make you doubt your being in
The world. I have been in prison for eight.
Am I still of the earth? Yes, you still sin
Say the religious. You write, propagate

Your ideas; a humanist. My short works
Hardly qualify. New people are marched
In, only odd ones society shirks.
Maybe a couple of clothes freshly starched

Separate that man over there from me.
Even if I can move about, decide what
To eat, I would hardly call myself free.
Across the globe someone lives in a hut;

That is a man. However small his cries,
He is more a man, you mourn when he dies.

Watching a Japanese Couple at Night
-Genevieve Gadenne-

The opposite sidewalk is empty
save for the bicyclist and his passenger—
Wheels eat the ground beneath them,
and her flat shoes are balanced on the pegs that
protrude from the frame,
her lithe form made stable by the steady column of his back.

She smiles,
more radiant than a thousand
of the phosphorescent lights around them;
neon colors pale beside her happiness.

For a moment, I am the laughter in her ears.
I am the shoe that is the wheel that is the moment
when her lips are like a cricket's chirp
(barely pressed)
against his cheek.

Vipers
-Sarah Jenkins-

The floor creaks 'neath our feet, weighed down by guilt.
These walls do talk and say what we want kept
Silent. I hear the vipers, worlds they tilt
When the slow burning drops of poison leapt

And coursed like tears down to the floor; fangs drip.
We lost our wings, fast fall from blinding
Heights after modern Eve's deceptive lip
Let's pool venom on the floor. Unminding

She, she, lustful she, sinful she. Had she
Left her tongue wrapped tight round the knowledge folly
Gained or kept all teenage girls' currency:
Gossip springs from apple's seed and holly;

We kiss coyly. Oh, these deceits press
Belly to ground but I'll never confess.

Particles of Life
-Lindsay Melloh-

Her midnights were spent in search of
making pure sense of this world of tragedy and love.
There, in her white wicker chair she sits —
her maroon reading glasses on the tip of her freckled nose
and suddenly, as if for the first time,
she realizes its simplicity.

The world is not so complicated, she thinks.
Atoms and molecules of matter
made up of particles
is nothing but
something so elementary.

Life, she realizes
is a massive composite of these tiny, little specks of bodies
whose spatial extent and internal motion
are irrelevant in the specific problems of this world.
And what is more important than language, she thinks.
After all, it is the mind that creates letters and words and speech,
and it is the learned that uses these functions,
once again assuming the composite of these particles,
once again assuming the composite of these bodies.
Suddenly she stands and touches her hand to her face,
this, she thinks, is reality.

Sanity
-Mike Kelleher-

My heart was pounding in my chest as sweat dripped down my brow. Epinephrine
was pumping through my veins, and endorphins were being pumped from my mind. It was the
last day of school, and I couldn't have been more ecstatic. It was unbearably hot in Room 1,
Mrs. Tomasetti's first grade class, but I didn't care. Tomorrow, I would get to go down to my
grandparents' house at the beach...one of my favorite places in the whole world. "This summer
will be so cool," I thought to myself. "I'll get to stay up as late as I want, I won't have to
wake up early, and I won't have to spend so much time doing homework after school." Sitting
here today, I can't believe that I complained about fifteen minutes of homework each day. I

was naïve then, for the last time in my life. That summer was not cool at all. In fact, it was the beginning of many years of pain.

As we loaded our Volvo station wagon, I grew more and more impatient. My dad wasn't home yet, and I didn't know where he was. He always came down to the beach with us. I couldn't wait to play catch on the beach with him, go swimming in the water, try to catch crabs with him in the marsh, and have cookouts on the beach like we always did. When I asked my mom where he was, she didn't seem to want to answer my question. She kept saying things to distract me from my real concern: where is my dad?

After about an hour and after having avoided "zillions" of questions, my three brothers and I got in the car. The quiet humming of the car's engine and the warm air blowing on my face had a soporific effect on me, and I began to sleep.

A foul smell rushed through my olfactory system, and I woke up with a start. For some strange reason, a sense of joy came over me. It was the smell of low tide, and, despite the foul odor, it gave me so much joy to know that I was at the beach. The marsh appeared as if it expanded indefinitely out on the horizon. I could see the tall marsh grass waving to and fro as the calm wind blew in and around each blade of grass. Small crabs scurried across the bottom of the marsh, schools of tiny fish danced in the water, and birds soared through the sky in search of these tiny creatures. Everything was at it should be. Nature was in perfect harmony... the day was so perfect and calm. Yet as the saying goes, there is always a calm before the storm.

Despite the apparent serenity of the day, there was an epic battle going on within my mind. Part of me wanted to ignore my dad's absence and have a good time, yet the other part of me couldn't stop thinking about him. Further, I still couldn't understand why my dad wasn't with us. After ten straight minutes of endless questioning, my mom told me that my dad was not coming down to the beach for the summer. She wouldn't tell me why, but I knew that something was wrong. It really wasn't difficult for me to come to this conclusion, for after she told me the news, she wrapped her arms around me and started to weep.

After my mom had finally let go of me, I couldn't really imagine myself having any fun this summer. Who was going to do all of the things that my dad did? While pondering this

question, I gave my grandpa and grandma a hug and went inside their house. Within minutes of sitting down, my grandpa went to the freezer and gave me a Dairy Queen Dilly bar. It was our tradition, and the creamy blend of vanilla and chocolate tasted so good.

A few hours later, I was beginning to get restless. I wanted to go to the beach, but my mom told me that I had to wait until after dinner. My feelings of frustration were quickly converted to feelings of excitement, when I heard the crunch of gravel outside in the driveway. I ran outside to see who it was and was happy to find that it was my Uncle Phil. He was 18 years old and was still a kid. He was about 5'9" and had jet-black hair. Of course, you would never know that because he always wore his black Philadelphia Flyers hat. He probably slept with it on based on all the rips it had in it. I rushed back inside and told everyone that Uncle Phil was here. A feeling of joy surged back into my heart as I thought that maybe Uncle Phil could do the things with me that my dad did. I declared this sentiment to my mom, and she told me that he probably wouldn't be around that much.

Looking back on that day, I realize that her statement was simply honest. Phil was an 18-year-old kid then. Why would he want to spend time with a seven year old? 18-year-old guys want to hang out at the beach with their friends and meet girls. Right? After I heard these words from my mom, I sank back into the same fog that I had been in the minute before.

Those first few weeks were really a blur for me. I felt as if I were a zombie, going through the motions. It was almost as if I was walking around unconscious. Even though I was at the place where I had spent every summer of my life, it seemed as if I was in a strange place. It had a "first day of school feeling" to it.

That first night, we all went out to Marty's, our favorite seafood restaurant. Pulling into the parking spot, I could smell that wonderful odor of fried food. After entering the restaurant, my brothers and I rushed towards the live seafood tank to check out the lobsters and crabs. These creatures were so different from the ones that I had seen earlier that day. I couldn't understand why their claws had to be clasped shut with rubber bands. "This isn't right," I boldly declared to the waitress. It just wasn't natural. Looking into the eyes of one lobster, I thought that I actually perceived sadness. The crabs were so happy playing in the marsh, yet here they were devastated. These living souls had been separated from their loved

ones and enslaved. Unable to play in this tank like they could in the marsh, they were confused and alone. They were prisoners to the memory of yesterday.

Going to the beach is tied to many traditions, yet none are greater than the hot dogs at Marty's. I ordered two and covered them with relish and ketchup. The warm, buttery hot dog bun melted in my mouth, and my taste buds were inundated with extraordinary sensory input. The dinner was great as my Uncle Phil made endless jokes to keep us laughing. It wasn't like him to be this funny. I wonder if he realized just how much I was missing my dad.

After some time sitting around the table talking, we all got up and went across the street to Dairy Queen. My mom explained that, "It's the first day of summer, so it's ok to splurge." I didn't know what "splurge" meant, but I was just happy to have ice cream twice in one day. As usual, I had a vanilla cone dipped in cherry topping. Receiving the cone, I thought that nothing could be more perfect. Yet, as fragile as perfection is, so was this cone. In the contraction of an ocular muscle, the ice cream began to melt. Drops of ice cream began to slide down my hand and fall all over the ground. At that moment, I understood the fragility of happiness and life. The cone was just like my life up until that day, perfect. Yet, within an instant, the perfect cone melted into a sloppy mess.

That night we all sat down to watch "Curly Sue." I don't really remember it because my mom kept covering my eyes. It was just like my day; I saw most things, but not everything. It's hard to understand something if you can't see it in its entirety. "Curly Sue" was one of many movies we watched that summer. I can remember watching "Cape Fear," but when I say watching, I really mean looking at my mom's palm. Watching "Cape Fear" was like the situation with my dad: I was in the dark. I still didn't know why he wasn't around. Why didn't he want to see us?

What I remember most from these movies was the fact that my Uncle Phil was always there to watch with us. In fact, he was with us all the time. I remember one day when he taught us to play stair ball. In this game, you throw a tennis ball at the staircase, and the other person must catch the ball. We used to play that game for hours and hours upon end. That was the great thing about Uncle Phil: he always kept my mind off my Dad.

Every day, Phil used to take us down to the local candy shop. At the time, I called it "Hubbins," but I now know that the store's name was Hubbards. Walking down each day, we always tried to go as fast as we could so that we wouldn't burn our feet. Inevitably, we would always burn our feet and get small cuts from the rocks. However, the pain was always worth the delicious candy that awaited us at "Hubbins." As great as the candy was, one of the best things about Hubbards was the video games. Phil and I would always try to get the highest score on the pinball machine. The funny thing is, though, that he always let me go first... and I always won. I guess he really knew just how sad I was. At the same time, he really knew how to make me happy.

Towards the middle of the summer, Phil and I spent a lot of time at the beach. In particular, we always tried to catch crabs off the jetty. Stuck to the jetty were a lot of mussels, and Phil showed me how to crack them open and tie them to string to use them as bait. Once we had everything set up, I dropped my line into the water and waited patiently. Looking down into the water, I could see many crabs scurrying along the bottom. Some scavenged for food, others moved rocks, and, all in all, it seemed as if they were all looking for something. Despite my best efforts, I could never catch them. I wondered what they were thinking. Why didn't they want the mussels? Did they not like them, or did they somehow perceive that they would be captured if they attempted to eat the peaceful invertebrate? To be honest, I didn't mind the fact that I didn't catch any of them. They were happy and free... just as it should be.

Sometimes I wonder what my Dad was doing and thinking during that summer. Did he miss me? Did he want to come down? At the same time, it really hurts me that he wasn't there. As an adult, I realize that sometimes situations get really bad, and that it is difficult for two adults to get along. Maybe that was why my mom and dad couldn't be together that summer. The only thought that comes to my mind now is: what the hell were they thinking? They really could have screwed us up. You can't do that to little kids. I don't care how bad a marital relationship is. If you have young kids, you need to stay together. Opponents of my ideas may say parents shouldn't stay together if the home environment is rough. But, it wasn't. I was perfectly happy and oblivious to what was going on. My dad is so private that he would never yell or talk about things with my mom in front of us. In reality, my mom was

the same way. They should not have separated us as they did. If they had problems, which they obviously did, they should have seen a therapist.

We went home the first week of August. My mom said that maybe my dad would come down to the beach with us. Every night that week my mom told me to take my brothers into my room and play with them while she went into her room with my dad. I never listened to her. I always went to her door and listened. My dad's voice was audible through the door, and it sounded to me as if they were having a loud discussion. Night after night they would have these conversations. "What are they talking about?" I could never make out what they were saying.

On Friday of that week, my dad was supposed to come down to the beach with us. As I carried my suitcase down the stairs, I heard my mom say something to my dad. The words were not discernible to me, yet a look of rage shot out of my dad's retinas. He slammed his hand down on the table, and globs of hemoglobin fled from his body. After cleaning up the blood, my dad went outside. I followed him, and we sat down on the swings. My amygdala began to work overtime as emotions flooded through my brain. I thought that everything was going to be better. I was hopeful. It seemed as if my dad would come down to the beach now and everything would be normal. All these hopes were crushed like the fragile bones of my dad's hand. He was not coming to the beach, and not a thing was about to change.

I was devastated. There was nothing more for me to do than run to my room and drain my tear ducts. After about an hour, I lifted my face from my pillow. It felt as if it had been doused with a glass of water. When I went downstairs, my dad was gone. But, sitting in the driveway, was my Uncle Phil. He took me down to McDonald's for a happy meal. As we sat and ate, I could feel the excitation of my taste buds as the luscious cheese, pickles, and meat overwhelmed my mouth. After lunch, Phil took me back to my house where we played baseball. We had so much fun, and Phil made me laugh the entire time. He rescued me from the crab tank.

Looking back, I was at an impressionable age. Point blank; if it weren't for Phil, I wouldn't be the way that I am today. I wouldn't be able to write this today. I wouldn't be able to have

normal relationships, love, and care for people. He saved me. He kept me whole, and I thank him so much for that.

This past summer, I visited my Uncle Phil at his house in Massachusetts. He is married now and has a little girl named Grace. When I first arrived at his house, he was having a tea party with Grace, and the entire time Grace's mouth was lit up with an unbreakable smile. It doesn't surprise me that she is such a happy, fun-loving little girl. She loves people, rarely gets angry with others, and is usually perfectly content. For all of the wonderful things that Phil did for me, it makes perfect sense that Grace is the way she is. Whenever we go to family parties, everyone says what a great dad Phil is to Grace. They can't believe that she is his first child. Well, they're wrong. She is his fourth, for when he was 18 years old, he raised my brothers and me.

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