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Spring 2010

115 Vernon Street: The Writing Associates' Journal, "Between Heaven and Hell"

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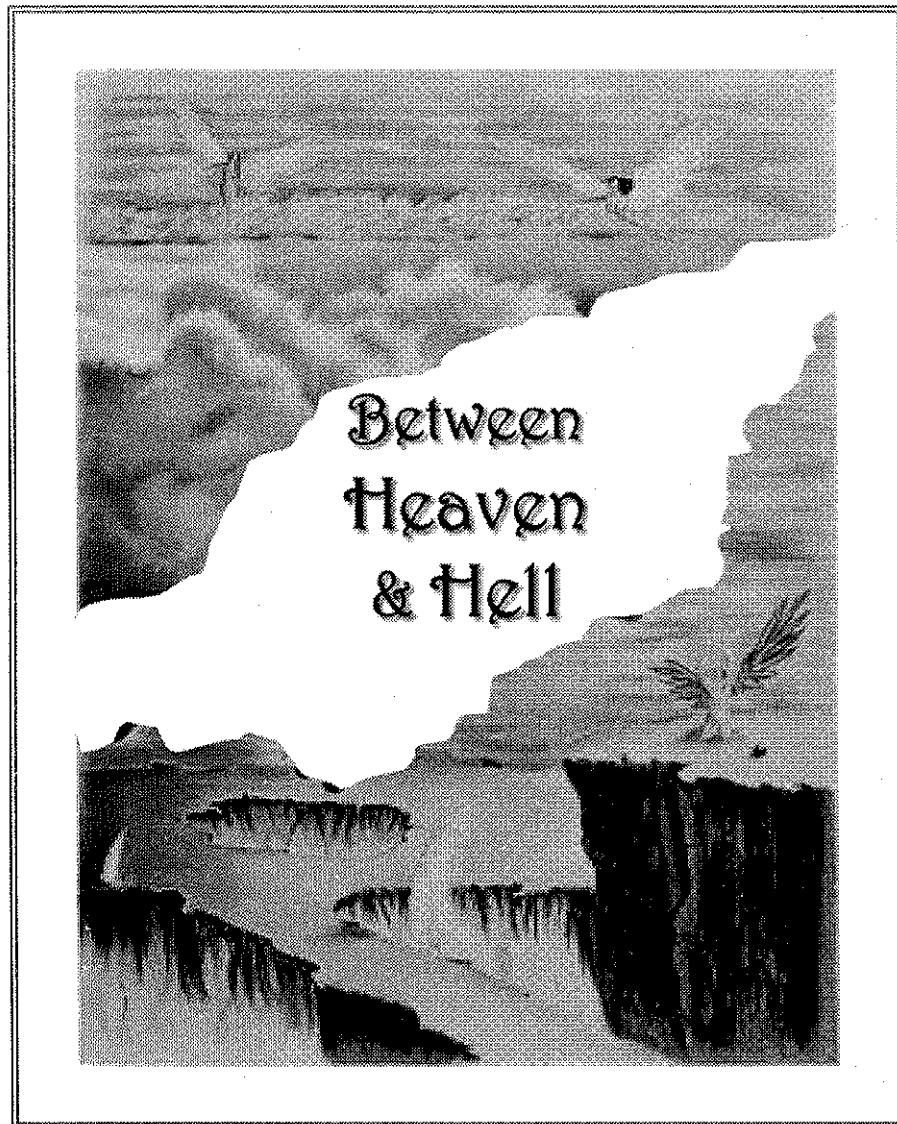
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115 Vernon Street
The Writing Associates' Journal

Spring 2010



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Editorial note

As depicted by the cover of this year's edition of *115 Vernon Street*, the notion of heaven and hell has been traditionally associated with the contrast between angels and the devil. Although religion is indisputably the origin of these words, heaven and hell do not always have to refer to afterlife. We can find the contrast between evil and good, positive and negative, hurtful and pleasing in almost any situation, place, or person. The journal takes us on a tour to explore a broad spectrum of heavens and hells in everyday life. As we transfer from the theme of religion and belief, we explore the ups and downs of a family relationship and death. Then we move on to discover the heaven and hell contrasts in places we live in and the inner struggles we face when we interact with others. The last three pieces portray several ethical and moral issues of our society that reveal a battle of evil vs. good and fairness vs. injustice. In addition to describing between-heaven-and-hell states, all contributions in the journal have another aspect in common: the authors always strive to find their heaven.

The Spring 2010 edition of *115 Vernon Street* would hardly exist without the help of Professor Irene Papoulis. I would also like to thank a Writing Associate, Alex Champoux, and the Head Tutors of the Writing Center--Betsy Perez, Deniz Vatansever, and Stephen English--who played an essential role in putting the journal together.

Yours truly,

Julia Svedova'11
Editor

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Photographs: Eli Cassel and Kristen Droesch

*Writing Associates

Godhead
Mary Ellen Molski'IDP

God writes in the sky with a finger cleaving blue,
pink slices of nuance through dusk. God walks
in the cosmos, spinning cloudy whorls into
cognizance and plans. God is the essence of air,
arctic spears and African sighs;
God is the mote in my eye.
My heart is too small to be holy, filled with
small thoughts, small feelings, and lies.
Occasions that call for magnanimous graces
escape me. I bend, but in defeat.
There is no God-matter in me, and I,
I should think, am not much a matter for God.
But if that one speck exists, one much-maligned
mote, I might take it on, challenge the status
and walk through those heavens, stir up those
stars. God walks quickly through the streets of my town,
touches a hand upon rooftop and gable. I wait inside.



Mary Therese (Eli Cassel'13)

The Confession
Kirsten Kubiak'10

You're in a dark wooden booth with holes in the door that shine beams of light in from the outside; it makes you feel claustrophobic like an animal stuck in a homemade box that someone punched air holes into so it could breathe. The chair is also wooden; it seems awkward and lonely there sitting by itself. And now that you're sitting down, you realize it is an uncomfortable chair. You're really not surprised because you noticed earlier that the chair looked awkward and when a chair looks awkward it's likely that it will feel awkward too. So now you're sitting in the dark, uncomfortably in an awkward-looking and awkward-feeling chair like a rat, staring at the holes, waiting.

Now that you're listening, you hear a swish swish swish. They are legs brushing up against a long robe. You hear the click of a door shutting next to you and now it's time.

It's hard to find someone who will really listen to you like a priest does during confession. He sits there without rolling his eyes, or pointing figures, or threatening you with reprimands and he stays as steady as a rock, patient without judgment. You

imagine him being an old, tired man with deep wrinkles in his spotty skin; it's the skin of a man who takes in other peoples sins for a living. You imagine he has lots of hair growing out of his ears from listening so hard; his eyes would only be half open. But his hands would be soft and warm like a child's but even gentler; they are hands meant for healing. But it's the listening part that makes you really trust him. People are desperate to just be listened to. They'd take anybody, even a perfect stranger.

"Hello, Mr. Priest," you say, "I'm ready."

You never really believed in God you tell him, even though you thought you did for a good portion of your life. Now you just sit around, wishing you believed in something. Because believing in something is important. Maybe, you don't believe in God because you never paid attention in Church. When you were younger, you and your sister used to play games like hangman and tic-tac toe. You'd massage each other's hands and whisper secrets. But you'd have to be quiet or your mom would grit her teeth as she was stuck praying to Jesus that the eighty year old pastor would stop saying abortion and damnation in the same sentence. In reality, none of you really wanted to be there. It was more like an obligation. You would have all rather been home doing something else with your Sunday because let's face it, no one was being saved. By the time you were fourteen, you had stopped going to church.

You pause.

"If you could go anywhere in the world, father, where would you go?"

No response.

"I'd go to space."

You close your eyes and jump off the ground towards the sky. A swirling cyclone of stars beckons you and you fly towards the center, away from the houses and highways and backyard pools. As you pass through the clouds, a chill runs through your body but it soon passes. The air suddenly becomes warm and everywhere, there are glowing balls of fire. Diving through the flaming stars, you go untouched. They are brighter and more beautiful than anything you've ever seen, so you keep your eyes open. There is a large green orb ahead; it is a planet. As you get closer, you begin hearing soft static and a cascade of chimes ringing through your ears. It is the sound frequencies from the neon

spheres whizzing past you. You reach out your hands, heading straight for the black swirling mass.

You open your eyes, and you're still in the dark box. Still feeling slightly anxious, you look up towards the top of the box. The light shining through the holes in the door reminds you of the way the sun would slip through the cracks between the draped bed sheets of the forts you'd build with your sister.

You'd start by pulling the sheets off all the beds in the house. Then, with a mountain of cushions and blankets, you'd make a secret haven in the corner of your room. Tucking the corners into drawers and under books, the only way to get underneath the flaps was to shimmy across the rug. Once inside, you'd be very careful not to go near the sides; only the slightest tug, could bring the perfect sanctuary tumbling down. Sticking to the center, you'd snuggle up close and tell each other stories about faraway places. And sitting on a heap of soft feather cushions, with the air conditioning blowing the white linen sheets, you'd imagine that that was what heaven looked like.

But you don't believe in heaven and hell anymore you tell the priest. Because it's too black and white. It's like if you're good, you can get into heaven, but if you sin, watch out. You'd think God would be a little more flexible. If people didn't have to live in constant fear of burning in hell every time they lied to their parents or forgot to go to mass, then maybe they'd be more religious. In fact you can remember the day that you turned your back on the Catholic faith.

You had been in the car with your dad and your sister. It was Christmas night and foggy out. The streets back to grandma's house were narrow and windy. Suddenly, Katie let out a scream from the backseat. The car came to a screeching halt and when you looked back at your sister, her face was stark white and she was hyperventilating. She had seen a face in the road. She gasped for air. It had been an old man's face, white and large, there in the center of the asphalt. "Breathe," you instructed her taking a big breath with her. Neither you nor your father had seen the face. Once she had calmed down, she realized why she had seen the face. "God is punishing me," she told you, "he's punishing me for not going to church." She said it over and over again. "No one is punishing you," you assured her, confidently, "nothing bad is going to happen."

When you open your eyes again, you realize that you're breathing deep, long breaths. The box no longer feels as constricting as it had before. It is now just a box, and you happen to be inside of it. It is not containing you or pressing in on you. It's just sitting there, like you.

It was at that point that you knew you didn't believe anymore. You felt bad for her; You felt bad that she was letting this idea dictate her thoughts to the point where she was becoming physically ill. Because that's what religion is. It's a set of ideas that you can choose to believe in or not. It's just like any other "truth." It's either real or made up. You're the only one who can decide. It's like when kids are little and they believe in Santa Clause. Their excitement builds up on Christmas Eve and they get into their pajamas and brush their teeth hours earlier than they usually concede to and they hop into bed, waiting for the fat man with the big bag of presents to come down the chimney and eat the cookies that they left out for him. And as a kid, you believe so hard in Santa. That is until that one kid finds out that he doesn't exist and tells everyone at school. And once you have the idea in your head, that he's not real, you decide to believe it or not. And once you've decided that you don't believe in jolly ol' Saint Nick anymore, once you've got the slightest doubt in your mind, it doesn't matter whether your dad dresses up as Santa Clause every year and eats the cookies and leaves soot in the fireplace, you will never go back to believing again. No matter what you tell yourself or how bad you want to believe, you will never have that excitement again of actually truly believing. And while it's sad at first to have that kind of realization about someone else's story, you figured out a long time ago, that you can get that same feeling of excitement by making up your own stories. At least then, you can be assured its true.

When you open your eyes, you realize that the box has changed. You are at the center of a forest full of towering gum trees that go higher than you can see. The wind blows and the forest is suddenly full of movement and sound, making everything seem alive. The trees look down with their long, thick trunks and heavy bark and they are strong and proud where they stand. You should be scared there in the dark; the forest could swallow you whole. But when you look up, you can see cracks of light through the branches, glittering down, making speckles on the ground. You know that there is sunlight beyond the darkness. It is the same sunlight that feeds the trees. Suddenly, you too feel strong.

When you were younger, you spent a lot of time outside playing with animals. Wondering around your backyard, catching frogs and bugs, playing with your turtle and bunny rabbi; you'd spend hours just talking to them and staring at them wondering what they were thinking about staring back at you. They seemed so real, so alive, almost more alive than people. That's when you started thinking about life and death and how

everything must cycle around and you discovered reincarnation. You must have been a fish or a dolphin or a leatherback sea turtle, you thought to yourself. Diving through the cool ocean water, swimming anywhere in the world, a fish has more freedom than anything else. And what is really the difference between a fish and a human? Both are born to this world, live for some time and then eventually die. The way you see it, you are all working in the same web, cycling through, relinquishing control, letting Mother Nature do what she does best.

When you open your eyes, you are no longer in a box. You're lying in bed in your dorm room. The lights are off and a little bit of light shines in through the tapestry you have hanging over the window. Your roommate lies across the room from you in her bed. She is staring at you

"Well," she says, sounding a little frustrated, "what *do* you believe in then?"

"I'm not really sure," you confess, "I guess I just believe in nature."

"Okay," she says annoyed, "so basically you don't believe in anything. That's what I was saying all along. You're an atheist, like me." Satisfied she turned over in her bed, leaving you to gather your thoughts alone in the dark room.

The Question

Hayne Kim'10

Heaven or hell
You ask this like a stewardess asks
Chicken or fish
But the fish already tastes like chicken, I say
And we're already in hell
Of our souls entangled and embroiled
So much so that I don't know where one ends and one begins
Sometimes yours digs into mine like the sharp stiletto sting
Of a heel sinking its teeth in the soft flesh of earth
And after eternity, pulls its icicle self out with a gouge imprinted

A self, distinctive enough to preserve all sense of sanity in this hell
To recognize how far we've come from the days in which
We were I enough to think we were living our lives
When instead we live our prolonged deaths,
how we wake up more dead each morning,
a heel imprint closer to death.
And the crazy madness is that I think this is heaven because
At least I've got you to look forward to
My heaven may taste just like chicken but... I'm not looking, for any more fish.

Helen DeKalb
Laura Komarek'11

I've only seen her cry twice. The first time was at her husband's funeral, I was seven. I remember sitting to her right in that cramped wooden pew at our church. We didn't sit in the first row, we were in the fourth or fifth. I never understood why we were sitting back that far. But that was the first time I saw my Nana cry. I remember staring at her face more during that hour than I did looking at the priest. Behind her gold-rimmed glasses, I could see the pain in her deep blue eyes. The lines on her face pulled up around the creases of her forehead. Her mouth was pressed down into a tight line, as she let out silent sobs that seemed to radiate throughout her entire body. She didn't sob or weep uncontrollably, but there were tears and there was mourning. She never looked over at me, keeping her eyes staring straight ahead or wandering over her wrinkled hands resting softly on her thighs, maybe staring at her wedding band still sitting on her left hand.

The youngest of eight children, Nana was born in 1921 in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Although Nana hasn't lived on the East Coast since her twenties, she's maintained that thick New-England accent all her life. She pronounces my name Lahhhhhra instead of Laura. Horse sounds like haase, drawer sounds like drawww, and any word that ends in the letter *a* she pronounces like an *er*... Emma becoming Emmer.

Nana went into nurses training straight out of high school and quickly moved up the ranks at Mass General, where she worked as a private scrub-nurse in the operating room. After working in Massachusetts for a few years Nana packed up and moved to Los Angeles. She wasn't there five months when she got word that her father had a stroke.

She immediately left for home and took care of her father for the next two years, up until the day he died, when his heart finally gave out. "It was a family obligation," Nana explained, "I was of a generation where you took care of your family . . . You know, you support each other. Basically that's all you can say. The family, we kept each other going."

Nana uprooted herself from her life in Massachusetts in 1951 to move to Montevideo, Uruguay with my Grampy, whose job had taken him to South America. In Uruguay my Nana gave birth to two children, a son and a daughter; my mother. After eight-years in Uruguay Nana and her family moved back to the States, living in a small town in Georgia until 1971 when my Grampy's job took him to Minnesota. My mother got married a year out of law school and settled into a house only a neighboring town away from her parents, who had continued to live in the same home they first purchased when they moved to Minnesota years ago. In 1995, my Grampy died of lung cancer. Nana lived alone for five years before she took my parents up on their offer and decided to move into the basement level of our house.

For the first few years of my life my Nana took care of me full time. She was the one who accidentally taught me my first curse word when I was four. Whenever things didn't go her way, Nana would use "Damn!" as a way of expressing her frustration. One afternoon we were doing a puzzle at her house, our bodies huddled around the small wooden table in the den, bright orange shag carpet covering the floor. With my puzzle piece in hand, I was diligently inspecting the table trying to find the spot where my piece fit. After several unsuccessful attempts "Ah, Damn!" slipped from my mouth, like it

was the most natural thing in the world. Nana said this small remark threw her into rumbling laughter, and really cleaned up her mouth after that.

Ironically, Nana was also the person who first taught me how to pray. She showed me how to kneel beside my bed, my hands clasped neatly together, and talk to God. Each night she would begin by reciting to me, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. For if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Until I finally learned the words myself. Nana would let me take turns saying who I wanted to pray for, which when Nana was babysitting was usually for God to bring my Mom and Dad home safely that night. Nana always ended our night-time prayer with, "God bless the poor, the sick and the dying... Amen." "What about the old?" I asked Nana one night. I was four; Nana was old and I loved her. "I think we should pray for them too," I explained. After that night it has always been, "God bless the poor, the sick, the old and the dying."

When I was younger Nana's house meant ice cream after church at 11 a.m. on Sundays. It meant I had my own make-up drawer with foam-green eye shadow that I thought looked best smeared thick across my eyelids. Sleepovers with her meant facials in our pajamas at the white and gold speckled counter in her bathroom. I loved the way Nana's fingers would gently trace across the contours of my face, as she would smear white facial cream across my skin, her wrinkled hands creating a white castor around my lips and eyes. Once the cream hardened, she would take a warm washcloth and wipe away the cracked mask that had formed to my face. "Feel how soft your face is," Nana would say as we marveled in the mirror over the smoothness of our skin.

As I've grown older Nana has been one of my biggest fans, and sometimes harshest critics. Judge Judy being one of Nana's favorite shows, I constantly hear about Nana's qualms with "young people these days." Whenever I try and leave the house, Nana summons me over to the family room where she's sitting to inspect my outfit. "Oh brother!" she'll tell me if she thinks my top is too low, "Your breasts look like a babies bottom!" It's a running joke in our family that even if you're wearing a long-sleeved turtleneck Nana is still going to tell you it's too provocative. Since I was twelve-years-old, I've heard "Suck in your gut!" on pretty much a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis. "You're a beautiful girl, but you need to do something about your stomach... Don't you know any good ab exercises you can do?" I'm a two-sport athlete in college, of course I do ab exercises. "I'm working on it Nana." I always say.

I can't even count how many times I've gotten into screaming matches with her, which often leave me fuming and in tears. Nobody can upset me or make me cry like Nana can. Even if you're right, you never win. Nana never gives in, and she never apologizes. Even if she started the fight, if I want Nana to forgive me or start talking to me again, I have to be the one to swallow my pride. And I do, time after time; usually because I want to, seldom because I have to.

But Nana was a woman of her generation. As one author describes it, women of the 1920's "were determined to get what they wanted... They were very independent women... living life to the full." Like so many other women of her time, Nana came to age during the Great Depression. A time when women were strenuously working to be taken seriously in the work force and so many families were just struggling to make ends meet. These "daughters of the Great Depression" were taught to suffer silently; to

endure. Things could always be worse for women and there was much to be thankful for. Flappers, the women who came to age during the roaring twenties, paved the way the way for the women of my Nana's generation. These flappers were fearless, and refused to play by anyone else's rules. "This group of independent women started a trend, that even more respectable women followed in following years, but in a less out there manner. Flappers started a new era for women everywhere."

* * *

Two summers ago was the first time I came close to realizing what losing my Nana would be like. In July of 2006, my Nana was rushed into emergency surgery to remove the aortic aneurism inside her chest. The surgeons told us Nana only had around a five-percent chance of dying on the operating table, which would happen if when they clamped her aorta to remove the tumor, her heart couldn't handle the extra work and would then begin to fail. Five percent doesn't seem like a lot but when one of your Grandfather's had a similar five-percent chance of dying and went into cardiac arrest, dying on the operating table during a femur-operation, five-percent feels a whole lot more real. Those hours spent in the waiting room while Nana was in surgery, well it's one of those feelings you don't forget. The knots tight, deep within your stomach. A tremor that consumes your whole body, waiting to swallow you whole at any moment. The kind of fear that can't be answered by tears, but tries to know away at your insides.

The surgeons told us it would be a five-hour surgery and we wouldn't be paged until the surgery was completed or something had gone wrong. The operation began around six p.m. so when we were paged at ten, panic shot through my veins. My heart a racing frenzy trapped inside my chest. But everything had gone well, the surgeons told

us, and it would be a few hours before Nana would wake up. My mom and uncle were the only two people who were allowed to be there when Nana regained consciousness around midnight. As my mother describes it, Nana, still half-groggy from the anesthesia, peered through foggy eyes smiling at her teary-eyed children and shouted, "I'M ALIVE!" laughing through all the pain.

The months that followed were rough ones, for both Nana and my family. Nana spent the majority of her time napping in her favorite recliner in our family room, not having enough energy for her usual routines like the daily crosswords, or making herself a cup of Folgers instant decaf coffee. She would just sleep. Nana's abdomen had been sliced completely open, leaving a thin purple scar stretching from in between her breasts to top of her pelvic area. "They put my belly-button in the wrong place!" she joked, as the surgeons had put her belly-button awkwardly on the left side of her body, so they didn't have to cut directly through it when they made the incision. The incision that left Nana with sixty-plus staples in her stomach. Even once the staples were gone, sitting up was difficult, but lying down was even harder. Getting Nana into bed every night was a huge task, and my Dad and I would have to be there to support her weight as she would lie down.

Showers were tough too. Thankfully her basement shower was large enough for a stool and someone to stand in there with her if need be. My mom often slept on a blow-up mattress in the basement to make sure Nana could safely get to and from the bathroom each night. Showering and dressing Nana became mostly my mother's duty, all while still working as an attorney downtown nine to five everyday. Although my

mother was of a different generation, she had been taught well by her mother... You take care of your family.

Although Nana had weathered meningitis, Lyme disease and years of crippling back pain, she had never complained or voiced any kind of weakness. But each night as we put Nana into bed, I saw the vulnerable side of her that had kept hidden all her life. As we would slowly lower her torso onto the blue and white paisley pillows of her bed, she would yelp out in pain. Not a scream, but the kind of pain that slips out of your lips unwillingly. Pain that escapes you no matter how hard you try and hold it back. I constantly found myself in tears outside of Nana's room, my stomach tied tightly into knots.

* * *

This past summer was the second time I've ever seen my Nana cry. It happened when we were sitting in church. We were seated in one of the last pews; the people bring Nana communion back there so she doesn't have to leave her seat. Nana has had a bad back and a track record of passing out in church, only in church, so Nana sits through mass while the rest of us stand. Standing up next to her, I glanced down at her face and noticed tears sliding down the contours of her cheeks, sadness clearly visible on her wrinkled face. I looked at my mother who was staring blankly ahead. My eyes flicked back to Nana and there were still tears bubbling over the brim of her eyes. Her face had that same pained expression I remember seeing years ago at my Grampy's funeral. Immediately, a rush of tears began streaming down my face, like they were some reflex reaction. Without thinking, I sat down beside her and began rubbing my hand across the width of her back, as a mother would do to sooth a small child. Like so

many years ago, my eyes were again locked on Nana's face. But this time I was crying too.

Soon I was nearly sobbing, although Nana's tears had stopped after only a few minutes. Any traces of sadness gone from her face. "Why were you crying Nana?" I asked her, perplexed. She was all but laughing at me now. "I don't know ... it just moved me." She said, amused. I wanted to laugh too, but I couldn't. My face and neck were now painted with red blotches. My eyes bloodshot, black mascara stained down the length of my wet sticky cheek. My whole life Nana has been the one taking care of me. She has shown me that no matter what happens, you look after you family. Even if it means dropping everything to take care of your father after his stroke, or giving up all your free time to baby-sit your granddaughter everyday because her parents went back to work. Whether it's sleeping on a blow-up mattress in the basement of your own home to make sure your mother makes it through each and every night, or rubbing your Nana's back as some last ditch effort to stop her tears, you take care of your family. It's just what you do.

Remembering a Great
Leslie Ahlstrand'12

Staticky and hesitant, the old record sputtered.
Waterfalls trickled in between
the notes, making them fall, old
and dusty, on my ears. Dad sat,
and his index finger met his thumb
but made no sound, a whispery ghost
of a snap falling against denim,
the corner of his nail catching
on the frayed seam.
"That's the shit." My breath caught
like fingertips on too-cold ice
and the word burned red and
sharp on the curves of my ears.

That day, a great had died
and so *I Me Mine* fell through
the tar-black grooves of the vinyl
and the guitar wept. I gently
tapped the side of my shoe against the leg
of the chair, trying to find
what my father was following.

He brought out a pack of smokes
and said, they would kill him one day.
The plastic crinkled, the ribbon
of gilded foil falling to the floor
with petals of tobacco following.

An Errand
Jessica Ross'10

It was warming up enough to leave the farm.
The ice filling between pebbles on the gravel road
melted, turning to slush and
moisturizing the frozen earth.

The ruts of the truck's tires leave thick piles
of mud, like melted mahogany crayon.
Tracks, lines traced from a bamboo pen,
on a pure white canvas of immense acreage.

Wiper blades cut away flakes stuck to the windshield.
Blinded by the radiance of crystals in sunlight,
he doubts his navigation but then the red roof
simmers through the line of the horizon.

Aroused by the symbol of home,
he neglects to decelerate his final turn.
His calloused hands grip the steering,
fighting its usurpation.

While he reclaims his grip on the wheel,
the wheels lose their grip on the road.
Brown treads become brown streaks
he streams down the ditch to the field.

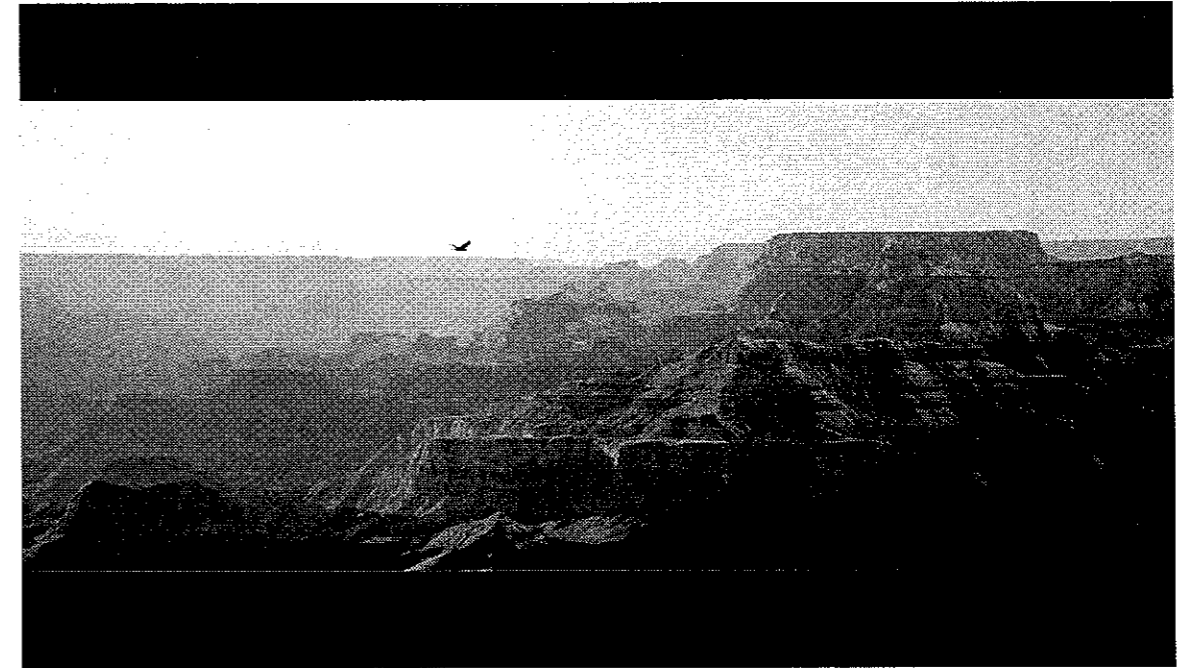
Wheels that had divided the ground
now upturned, resembling windmills.
White truck, white snow, white milk.
The purity outweighs the problem.

Stasis

Lorenzo Sewanan'12

The sun down under strikes me cruelly,
Each golden spear from the heavenly sphere
Pierces dark skin and white bone,
Like Longivas. Fill me with fear
As I burn, more black than brown.
The sound of hope rumbles closer.
Cloudy blue waving back and forth:
Drawing and dragging color,
Mixing and making sand and stone,
Breaking and making reflections.
I exhale.

Warm breath mixes
With warmer air; its place uncertain.
The sweet calm exudes the cool
Touch of salvation. Deceptive.
The shaded depths swallow whole.
I will not float, but lose,
Misplace and waste myself in the turnings and twisting
Unseen below the surface.
But to taste the moist kiss upon my skin!
The violet surge splashes horror on my face.
Stasis. Stillness. Stagnant. Stop.
I inhale
My unbidden choice.
Tempt terror for a taste.
Warm, I drift,
Lost in its supremacy.



Grand Canyon (Eli Cassel'12)



Kristen Droesch'12

The Body
Kristen Droesch '12

Lying in bed, I try to slow my breaths, make them deep and smooth. Suddenly my chest has become the island of Manhattan. I don't know why, but it is, and the last coherent thought I have as I slip away, as I marvel about how far back my sternum can reach towards my spine is, 'you shouldn't shake the island like that.' I see Manhattan cracking and shifting with every expansion and contraction of my lungs. How did I become so powerful? Boats are torn from their moorings as I breathe in and people fall into the ocean after them. Breathing out, children, parents, taxis, horses, garbage cans, are all tossed into Central Park, in the valley between my breasts. In, and books fall to the floor in every library on the island. Out, and thousands of wine bottles slip from racks to shatter against cold cellar floors.

The two sides are getting closer and closer. East meets west, Chelsea and Stuyvesant, Hell's Kitchen and Murray Hill; they fly closer to each other with ever increasing speed. All of Midtown crunches together with a most awful noise.

My legs belong to Brazil. Capoeira gives the muscles strength and Samba pumps the blood. Toes flare wide to catch me. Sambistas march in procession up one leg and down the other, led across the mountains of my hips by dancers in colorful sequined skirts and bright white blouses.

They decorate my legs with vines blooming with orchids. They make music upon my bones. They take berumba to the tibia and stir the heart. My toe nails become drums and my ankles are strung with bells. They pull the skin tight like the head of a conga and play all night.

In the bath, water pours off the hills of my body and pools in the valleys. I turn slowly. On my side, now my stomach. I haven't done this in years. Twisting like an eel in a trap, I press my face into the water until the liquid nearly touches my eyes, but not quite. I marvel at what I see.

Thick hair floating in clusters like swaths of seaweed in the Sargasso Sea. Baby Loggerhead Sea Turtles hide between the strands for protection. Their beautiful spotted flesh winks back at me in the glittering shafts of sun slipping through the water. When ready, they will flee safety and live on for centuries, long after I am gone.

I inhale carefully and bring tiny fish into my lungs and heart. They swim through the chambers of my heart, tickling and teasing. They share my blood. They swim happily through my veins. Converging on my brain, they fill my consciousness in swirling patterns perfectly executed with millions of years of instinct. They form the double helix across my back. They twist and turn into an entirely new zodiac, until all of the stars are emblazoned upon my skin. Pisces rises up inside me. It takes control of my eyes and splits. One fish for each green orb, swimming in endless circles. Tiny, scaled bodies slip down my spine and fill my hips to the brim. I am bursting with life.

My body has become something bigger and finer than ever it was before. Like Shiva, I spin the world with my feet. I balance between the Lasya and the Tandava. Slip the blue poison down my throat; I will swallow it happily for you, my darling, my husband, my sweet unborn children, my ducks. I carry the land on my chest, and the seas in my hair. Those seeking protection will always find it beneath my skin.

Infested with Bumps
Courtney Cregan '10

The lights above the table are luminescent and rectangular and the sharp, biting pain that is completely unlocatable other than to say it is on the right side of my head is shooting from the nape of my neck where sweat has begun to gather to the top of my temple. Is my right eye popping out of my head? I feel as though it is moving on its own, independent of the will of my left. The hand on the clock that looks like it belongs in my middle school cafeteria is beginning to move more slowly. The air is getting thinner and colder at the same time that it becomes warmer. The clock is turning 180 degrees. Not the arms, but the entire cyclical, bland black and white object has turned. Where the 12 once was, now is a six.

There are six men holding me down. They are strong, but I know that I am stronger. I have to fight back. I grab the white headphones from my ears and wrap them around one of their necks. I cannot pull it tight. He must be fighting back. I try to run, but slump to the ground. A man picks me up and places me into a leather chair. My shirt wet with the sweat of my back sticks to the chair. My mouth feels hot and dry.

I reach for a cigarette in my purse. I could smoke one hundred cigarettes and it would not be enough right now. The yellow light bounces off of the white wall creating a golden halo. I stare at it, wanting to touch it, but worrying if I move, the euphoria will render itself invisible. I get up to touch the surface of the plaster. It is

infested with an infinite number of bumps growing out horizontally so that it feels like one mass of smooth surface.

I sit back into the leather chair. My shirt is wet with the sweat of my back and sticks to the chair. An itch runs up my calf. I scratch so hard that flakes of skin fall down my left leg onto the maroon and navy carpet, and yet the itch remains. I wonder if it's one of those tricks like when there is no longer anything in your eye but your eye hurts all the same. Or when there is a piece of hair tickling your upper arm and no matter how you toss and turn you cannot find it. Or the cough in the back of your throat which you know you have made up because when you hold the cough back, you no longer have to cough.

The light from the ceiling has created a golden halo on the wall in front of me. I stand up to touch it.

His Name Means 'God'

Mary Therese Sullivan'13

I love your imperfect swallow as you sleep,
Your yellow shirt on the bedroom floor, the glow
Of moonlight on your face. I try not to weep
At the thought of your back when you go.

Your closed eyes upon mine; warm air escapes
Your nose. Through shaken breaths our
Lungs rhyme. My hand reaches to touch fallen curls on your face,
but shrinks at the beauty of hidden grey hairs.

Your chest rises and falls like daybreak;
Mine collapses. Three weeks since I tasted smoke and,
The last pack, still in my dresser, seeks
My tongue. I defy its' call only by reaching your hand.

Few words speak my trembling lips, then lost in the night.
Sacred, you hear them not come morning's light.

New Rochelle

Deniz Vatansever'10

Recognized you from a distance, please
don't ask me why. When I
stared at the empty seat beside you, you
nodded to my plight.
In a dark, empty train;
it's just you and me,
and an uncomfortable seat
with coffee stains now.

A few minutes passed by.
The train slowly crawled. While I
burned by the need of attention, you
answered the conductor with a soothing voice.
"New Rochelle"
Is that where you had your first kiss? Silence.
The time you cried for the first time? Silence.
Did you hear me? Silence.
Can you at least try?

From the corner of my eyes, I
tried to get a glimpse of your smile. But you
stared out the window. While I
couldn't see beyond the reflection on the glass, you
watched the trees blurring by. I
tried to guess
what was crawling through your head now. You
probably wandered what I was writing
on a scrambled piece of napkin. While I
did everything to have a word,
to spark up a conversation,
to get to know you better. You
just moved your fingers
to the rhythm of the telephone poles
passing by.

Suddenly, I
felt your leg brush mine,
by mistake of course.
The train was moving so fast. But you
didn't seem to mind.
It was the heat of your skin underneath
that took me off to a different world. I
meant to apologize. But you
were gone
in just the blink of an eye.

Faculty Interviews

By Alessandra Siraco'11, Elizabeth Cianciola'10, Julia Svedova'11, and Shana Conroy'10

Q: Is teaching at Trinity more of a heaven or hell or is it something between?

Prof. Haberlandt (Psychology): Teaching certainly isn't like hell. If it were I'd have gotten out of this profession a long time ago. So is it like heaven? I wouldn't say that either. It depends, of course, on what we mean by 'heaven' I'd characterize teaching as in between hell and heaven, but closer to heaven. Its mixture of challenges and rewards certainly make it worthwhile.

Prof. Brenneman (Public Policy and Law): Teaching for me has been pure heaven for many years now. I am a terrible teacher and yet Trinity lets me keep on trying. Adjuncts have the best of all worlds. They get to spend all the time they want to just thinking about teaching and their subject without all the nonsense that full-time faculty have to deal with. If, like me, they teach only one class they are not distracted with too many subjects or too many students. Because of what I teach the students in the class are a pretty much self-selected compatible group to start with. Before I started at Trinity, at Professor Gold's invitation, I taught at UConn law school and I like teaching undergraduates much more. I am very lazy so I dislike all the preparation time but I have found that the more time I put into it the more effort students are willing to expend on their end. I love the process of trying to figure out what the best way to present my subject is; it has to be fun for students and make sense for me. After years and years of teaching I am never sure what is best. My affection for my students is boundless!

Prof. Dunlap (Biology): For me, teaching at Trinity is a great job. I almost always get to teach about subjects I love. Many of the students are open to becoming interested, particularly those in the major. Almost all the students are polite (though too many of them miss appointments). It is also a very good blend of teaching and research... with neither excluding the other.

Prof. Brown (Mathematics): Mostly purgatory with some time spent in hell, and an occasional glimpse of heaven.

Prof. Papoulis (English): It's heaven, of course!

Q: What was the worst (or the best) moment you have experienced at Trinity?

Prof. Dunlap (Biology): The worst moments have been catching students plagiarizing. In one particular case, I worked very closely with a student on an independent project... only to find at the end that she copied almost all of her final paper from the internet. Some of the best times have been in small classes when I see the students all engaged with the material and each other. My research students have also been very rewarding, interesting and fun to work with.

Prof. Papoulis (English): Hmm. I can't remember the worst, though it might have occurred in my early days of teaching here, fourteen years ago, when I was unfamiliar

with the mentality of Trinity students. I'd taught before at large state universities, and in a summer program for entering Bard College students, and thus I was used to outspoken students who hung around after class and told teachers what they thought about how the class had gone. Also, they tended to feel very free to disagree with the teacher, and tell her so. So the worst moments that come to mind for me here were those moments at the end of class in my early years here, when no one said a thing once the class ended. Students would just quietly get up and leave, with no goodbye and no "that was good" or "I didn't like that," just a quiet leaving. It made me feel that I'd done something wrong, or that they hated me for some reason I could not discern. Only after teaching here a while did I realize that it was just part of the Trinity ethos.

Prof. Haberlandt (Psychology): Honestly, I can't answer this question. I find it difficult to view teaching in terms of moments. Someone else might see this differently and come up with really good responses.

Prof. Brown (Mathematics): The best moment was seeing my son walk up to the podium to receive his degree in 2000. The second best was seeing my two math advisees with big smiles on their faces, trotting down the aisle in the chapel on Honors Day to receive their math prizes.

Prof. Brenneman (Public Policy and Law): This is an odd story. As you may remember, I live in Westport, which is a 1.5 hour drive up to Trinity each way, and after class it is at night. Last year about half way through the semester I had a few episodes of faintness while I was driving home. I didn't think much about it until toward the end when I had a fairly serious episode on the highway near home. I was at risk of losing consciousness and crashing my car. Nothing happened but I began to think I really shouldn't do this until I find out what is wrong. But I was afraid they would tell me not to drive and I was determined to finish the semester. In the last class of the semester many of students turned in their term papers. My wife said why bother to go up but I had told the students I would be in the classroom to accept their papers. As they came in the classroom they handed me their papers but instead of splitting they hung around and we had a really nice, relaxed time together. They were through and I was through so we could relax with one another. It was a wonderful evening. The point of the story is that when I went out the back door of McCook that evening looking off to the east there was the biggest complete rainbow you have ever seen. I was stunned. It was like a gift. I had kept my commitments, even at some risk! That was a nice Trinity moment. I got home safely and saw a cardiologist and after a bit got a pacemaker, so that sort of nonsense will not happen again. But I won't forget that evening...

Q: How would you imagine heavenly teaching?

Prof. Brenneman (Public Policy and Law): Heavenly teaching would be if I did not have to give any grades. I hate the idea of evaluating students and comparing them with one another. I expect everybody to do the best they can just as they expect me to do the best I can. Students are very young. I can certainly differentiate among those who put real effort into the class, as you and many of your classmates did, and others who did less,

for whatever reason. I suppose there should be some system to differentiate among students, but I still dislike grades.

Prof. Brown (Mathematics): *Heaven: Everyone cares. Hell: Nobody cares.*

Prof. Dunlap (Biology): *Where you could teach with the confidence that students would learn through self motivation rather than through "accountability"... exams, taking attendance, etc.*

Prof. Papoulis (English): *Teaching students who are very excited about the material, and deeply engaged personally in their own writing, students who love to challenge the teacher, and are themselves excited about being challenged. What else would make it heavenly? We'd all be sitting on comfortable cloud-pillows, writing together about interesting subjects, reading our writing to each other, and having long conversations into the night.*

Prof. Haberlandt (Psychology): *The ideal is when the teacher and the students are in sync. In a lecture this occurs when the ideas I present make it across to the students' minds and I get to see that spark of understanding. In a seminar this occurs when the students are well prepared for an engaged in the day's topic.*

Snoop Dogg's Youth Football-izzle League

Shana Conroy'10

Mr. Calvin Brodus, more affectionately called "Snoop Dogg" by his fans, has recently become known for more than his catch phrase of adding "izzle" to the end of every word. He wants to change his image and inform the world about the power of education and athletics. He is starting with South Central, Los Angeles where he grew up.

South Central is an inner-city neighborhood where most people are afraid to venture. The streets are *not* lined with white picket fences and perfectly manicured lawns like the streets of Beverly Hills, fifteen minutes away. In many of South Central's school districts, approximately 40% of students drop out of high school and 70% receive free or reduced lunches. The neighborhoods where students grow up are rough, housing street gangs such as the Crips and the Bloods. Students are forced to overcome many obstacles to go to college or move into a more affluent neighborhood.

Even given all the obstacles, Snoop Dogg is trying to impact the lives of the kids growing up in the tough and gritty South Central neighborhoods. He acknowledges that the injustices kids face are unfair. Although it is impossible to tackle all of these kids' problems, Snoop Dogg believes that a Pop Warner football league that he calls the Snoop Youth Football League can help.

In 2005, Snoop Dogg launched the Snoop Youth Football League for kids aged 5-13 with \$1 million of his own money. Since then, he has invested an additional \$30,000. But, Snoop Dogg has invested more than just money in the program. By donating his time and coaching abilities, he has become an influence in the students' lives. There are 2,500 kids enrolled in the program and the majority of the players will continue playing throughout

high school. Snoop Dogg hopes that this football league will send messages to the South Central inner-city youth that they, like their wealthy suburban neighbors, can also succeed both in sports and academics. They do not need to get involved in the world of gangs and drugs, like Snoop Dogg did as a kid growing up in South Central. Since it is easy for 8-13 year-olds to get involved with "the wrong crowd," Snoop Dogg reaches out to these kids at an early age. He hopes that by influencing them, they will continue to stay focused on academics and sports throughout high school.

The 2009-2010 school year marks the first year that graduates of the Snoop Youth Football League have entered high school. A majority of these students are now playing for the Crenshaw High School team. Even though they are now too old to play for the Snoop Football League, Robert Garrett, the head coach at Crenshaw High School, has seen the lasting positive effects that the Snoop Dogg Football League has had on his players and his team. Snoop Dogg visits the players that used to play for the Snoop Football League as kids. He is a frequent visitor to Crenshaw High School and lectures players on the football team about the power of education and not getting involved in gangs. For example, Garrett says: "[He] sees it as his job as much as taking a troubled team member home for food or clothing as much as it is about football. He lectures about keeping up grades and has imposed a rule requiring neckties, dress shirts and trousers on Friday to get players out of the 'hood culture'."

The players also admit that Snoop Dogg has been a positive influence and has played a "father" role. Crenshaw junior running back De Anthony Thomas, a graduate from the Snoop Football League, talks highly about his relationship with Snoop Dogg both on and off the field. He says, "We have a special bond." He has Snoop Dogg's cell phone number and boasts that Snoop Dogg is "like a dad [to me]."

The Snoop Dogg Football League has also helped the schools in the area bring football back into schools where the program was either unsuccessful or completely diminished. The biggest success has been Crenshaw High School. Before Snoop Dogg, Crenshaw High School did not have a football league. Crenshaw's focus was solely on basketball and baseball. Featured in movies such as *Love and Basketball*, cases overflowed with first place trophies showing Crenshaw's years of basketball and baseball success. Unfortunately, this athletic success could not be seen on the football field. Since they were never introduced to football as kids, Crenshaw's students did not play football. Today, Crenshaw High School is an undefeated football team and ranks in the top 10 football programs in all of California - including its wealthy suburban neighbors.

Since many of the students have been playing together since eight years old through the Snoop Dogg Football League, a natural sense of camaraderie has formed among the players, which Garrett attributes to their success on the field. This sense of togetherness has never been seen at Crenshaw High School. Parents, coaches and students have begun to notice the change in the way that the kids act towards one another. The players get along much better now than they have in years past. For example, Garrett says, "They call each other bro - that's unusual."

Even Garrett will admit that his team - once a losing team - was turned into a success story. Crenshaw High School is an inspiration for other inner-city schools. A "feel-good" story. Yet, Garrett cares more about the positive impact that playing football has on his players more than a winning record. Garrett says, "I celebrate what [Snoop Dogg] is doing - he's probably saved thousands of kids - and he doesn't have to do that. [...] He's putting his money where is mouth is."

While the players may still be star-struck and starry-eyed as they watch Snoop Dogg walk around the football field while rap music blares over the speakers, the players have responded well to the Snoop Youth Football League. They are beginning to take academics more seriously. Football has helped students to stay focused in school and stay out of street gangs. Snoop Dogg is on track to reach his goal of helping the students in the football league to realize how hard work and determination can help to achieve success. "It keeps me out of trouble, from places I shouldn't be," says Geno Hall, a senior at Crenshaw High School. "It has helped me to grow mentally."

The students of South Central have definitely learned lessons outside of how to tackle or scream "1-2-Hut." The graduates of the Snoop Dogg Football League see a future for themselves that does not involve narcotics and violence but instead, an education.

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Heaven within Hell *Julia Svedova'11*

An angel fell down from heaven. His crystal wings shattered into millions of tiny pieces, covering the hospital floor like glimmering beads of a broken pearl necklace. He stood up, swiped down the dust from his heavy coat and then walked into one of the inpatient rooms.

Last year I took a seminar class about ethical issues and humanism in medicine. One of the most popular topics in the class discussions was the issue of genetic testing of the fetus to detect possible disabilities before birth. The benefit of such procedure would be to give the parents an option of terminating the pregnancy in case the child has a prognosis of permanent mental and physical disabilities. As a pre-medical student observing a pediatric neurologist for many months, I felt quite familiar with the lifestyle of severely disabled children and their families. Although the patients were completely different from one another, their daily routines, complaints, and occasional joys were surprisingly similar. Here is a typical example of a follow-up visit.

A mother of a seven-year-old boy with a neurodevelopmental genetic disorder enters the examination room. I immediately notice her pale skin and dark circles under the eyes. Her hair is tied in a strange manner as if she didn't have time to look in the mirror. As soon as she sits down, she starts describing the changes in her son's health over the past 6 months. The boy has been having more seizures lately and he cannot sleep that well in the night. The mother is concerned. In addition, nobody is willing to help her and she cannot bear it anymore. And I completely believe her.

During my visits to the neurology unit, I witnessed many cases of disabled children like the seven-year-old boy I just described. They usually come for a regular appointment with their caring but exhausted parents. Sometimes the parents cannot stop complaining about the innumerable difficulties they have to encounter. Other times they sit tightly on their chairs answering doctor's questions monotonously, looking resigned and sort of emotionless. Occasionally, they keep talking about tiny improvements they have noticed, hoping that the doctor interprets them as a sign of their child's miraculous recovery. It is no wonder that I sometimes imagined how the parents' lives would change if their offspring did not survive the treatment at Neonatal Intensive Care Unit or if they were never born. Maybe they would have another healthy child, maybe they would be able to go on vacation every year, or maybe they would simply have less sleepless nights. In other words, their lives would be liberated from all-day-long supervision, doctors' appointments, financial burdens, and constant worries.

Perhaps genetic testing during pregnancy would represent the most appropriate option. The parents could make the decision of whether they are willing to adjust their lives to the constant need for care of their newborn child or whether they would rather keep their current lifestyle unaltered. However, if they decided the latter, they would deny themselves an opportunity to meet with a real angel.

Some time ago, I met a 19-year-old female patient with a genetic disorder poetically called the Angelman syndrome. Caused by a mutation on chromosome 15, this disorder manifests with developmental delay, lack of speech, walking difficulties, and constant smiling. Although smiling is considered a symptom, it is unknown whether these children actually feel happy. When the doctor and I entered the room, the patient immediately looked at us, giving us a humongous smile. As the doctor patted her on her back, she smiled

again and made a couple of nonverbal sounds. From her relaxed expression and gestures, it was obvious that she remembered the doctor very well. I sat down right next to her. When she noticed my presence, she stared at me with curiosity for a couple of minutes. As soon as I returned her irresistible smile, she lifted her hand toward me and grabbed mine. When she squeezed it hard, I felt a strange urge to hug her. I suddenly knew that this girl is not just a mechanically smiling puppet controlled by the disorder. Although she was severely disabled, the condition paradoxically enabled her to stay always happy, a happy angel.

Although the example of the Angelman syndrome may seem extreme, the smiles and internal purity of disabled children are quite striking. Under the scruples of mental and physical disabilities are hiding the most beautiful beings on earth. Although some may suffer from occasional outbursts of anger or frustration, they never fail to reciprocate the given care. They perceive the world through filters that cleanse them from all malevolence and cruelty. Consequently, they are capable of appreciating every moment of their lives. Self-evidently, these children require laborious care and daily dose of love but the smile of an angel is definitely worth it.

It is often argued that terminating a pregnancy with a disabled child is only a way of preventing the child from suffering and that the individual would have no quality of life. However, the term quality of life is very relative and unpredictable. It is true that living with disabilities may be painful and difficult but we cannot make assumptions about how the child would feel. In addition, a prognosis of a certain type of life is not a definite diagnosis. In other words, predicting the severity of symptoms does not have to coincide with reality. In fact, it is possible that the genetic test is a false positive and the child may be born healthy. In a particular example, a prenatal genetic test indicated that a child would be born with Down's syndrome. However, after birth it was discovered that the baby boy was

relatively healthy and the test was inaccurate. Consequently, we may base our decision about the child's life or death on a piece of DNA while we may lack the necessary information to fully justify it.

Angels exist. If you don't believe me, just take a look into one of the hospital rooms belonging to the neurology unit. You would be surprised how many there are out there. Some are watching TV and playing, others are curled under their blankets, dreaming about secret magical worlds. I believe that although the possibility of genetic testing during pregnancy can be useful, it should not be abused for making life-and-death decisions about unborn children. Living with disabilities is tragic not only for the individual but also for the family. However, if we give the child a unique chance to live and we try to pick up the pieces of their broken wings, we may eventually discover a gateway to a little piece of heaven on earth.

**Proceeding with Caution:
The Role of Enhancement in our Society**
Stephen English '10

In today's business world, competition drives decision-making, and rewards are usually based on productivity and efficiency. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that pharmaceutical companies are salivating over the opportunity to provide our generation of college students and young professionals with a competitive edge in pill form. Stimulant drugs like amphetamine (Adderall) and methylphenidate (Ritalin) are replacing, or perhaps merely supplementing, the standard cup of coffee previous generations turned to for their daily pick-me-up. Unfortunately, these medications are far from miracle drugs, as they come with an extensive list of side effects. They are currently approved only for ADHD and narcolepsy patients; however, as stimulant prescriptions continue to grow at an alarming rate, so does the illicit availability of these drugs on college campuses and high-pressure work environments throughout the country.

I recently sat down with a young woman, a senior at Trinity College, to discuss her experiences with these medications. Jane (her name will be withheld in this article for privacy purposes) was diagnosed with ADHD during middle school, and has been prescribed various forms of the drug ever since. While she was nervous about the interview, Jane's willingness to participate stemmed from the theme of this year's Journal, *Between Heaven and Hell*. You see, despite Jane's continued use of these drugs over the years, she has mixed feelings about the overall efficacy of a stimulant regiment and foresees great dangers in expanding the acceptable use of these ADHD medications.

As a double major in English and Art History, Jane has shown tremendous maturity in balancing an ever-demanding schedule. While her GPA and law-school aspirations paint the picture of an intelligent, motivated student, she is the first to cite the Adderall

prescription as a contributing factor to her success. Each semester, Jane's daunting classes keep her locked in a library cubicle for extended periods, juggling hundreds of pages of Shakespeare and lengthy research papers on nineteenth-century architecture. "Without taking a pill before I go to the library," she admits, "I cannot focus on anything once I sit down, assuming I can even motivate myself to make it there." Her problems with the medicine, however, are not the direct effects of the drug, but rather their "after-effects." She goes on to explain, "I can make it through my work just fine, but as the effects wear off, I feel miserable, and at times I think my general lack of enthusiasm annoys my friends." Firsthand reports like Jane's are not uncommon; as researchers continue to unravel the complex nature of ADHD and stimulant drug action, her comments become even more poignant.

The human brain is a vastly complex system, having undergone millions of years of evolutionary fine-tuning to yield the consciousness we experience today. Delicately woven cells, called neurons, connect areas of the brain responsible for specific cognitive functions, and communication between neurons occurs through the release of tiny chemical messengers, called neurotransmitters. The structure of a typical neuron resembles a tree; when chemicals are released from a given neuron, they act on the roots (i.e. dendrites) of a nearby neuron to evoke an electrical signal (i.e. action potential) to travel up the trunk (i.e. axon), which in turn signals for the release of more chemicals from its branches (i.e. presynaptic terminal). It is through this way that different brain regions communicate with each other, and research has shown that stimulant drugs act by increasing and prolonging the release of a select group of critical neurotransmitters—the monoamines.

But how do these drugs actually work in the brain? Imagine for a moment identical twin brothers. One brother has a test in Physics but never goes to class, but the other got an A+ in the class last semester. In fear of failing, the brothers decide to switch places for the test. The professor, despite rigorous precautions against cheating, is unable to distinguish

the twins and never realizes the false identity of the student. In a similar manner, the brain's defensive barrier mistakes two popular stimulant drugs, amphetamine and methylphenidate, from monoamine neurotransmitters, particularly dopamine and norepinephrine. Due to key structural similarities, these drugs can freely cross the brain's protective layer and act on dopamine and norepinephrine neurons. Once in the brain, the drugs are once again falsely identified by transporters that shuttle excess neurotransmitter safely back into the neuron. The drugs block these transporters, thereby increasing the amount of dopamine and norepinephrine free to produce their effects on nearby neurons.

Unfortunately, while these neurotransmitters are critical in maintaining attention and promoting wakefulness, they also play a role in other cognitive functions. Of particular interest is dopamine because the brain's reward system relies on a pathway of dopamine neurons. Our reward system releases dopamine in the presence of natural rewards, such as food and sex; the brain can misinterpret the increase in free dopamine caused by stimulant drugs as a form of reward. This is why cocaine is so addictive. Cocaine also closely resembles dopamine, and when cocaine is administered through the nose, it rapidly increases the amount of dopamine in the reward pathway. Since firing of our reward pathway occurs in pleasurable situations, drugs that work on the reward pathway are extremely addictive because they cause a feeling of intense pleasure. Fortunately, oral doses of stimulant medications produce a steady, gradual rise in dopamine concentrations, drastically limiting their potential for abuse. However, college students have found that these pills can be crushed and administered through the nasal cavity to replicate the intense rush of dopamine that makes cocaine so addictive.

Research in this area has shown that it is not necessarily the rapid increase in dopamine that leads to addiction, but rather the subsequent drop in dopamine after the drug wears off. It is here that Jane's words resonate most powerfully. Following such high

levels of dopamine in the reward pathway, the opposite effects can lead to the 'crashing' feeling Jane describes in her interview. Her state of depression after the drug runs its course reflects the stark differences in her dopamine levels within such a small time period. She no longer experiences the elevated activation of her reward pathway, and as she returns to baseline levels, she feels overwhelmingly unfulfilled. What she describes as the "glass half empty feeling" is exceptionally common in people who take these stimulant medications, and over time the brain can counterbalance the frequent amphetamine use by producing less dopamine. These long-term changes lead to fewer dopamine molecules within reward neurons, and users can experience depression or other psychological abnormalities like obsessive-compulsive disorder due to this shifting dopamine balance.

Unlike Jane, who endured rigorous testing for a prescription and displays clear symptoms of ADHD, other young people are finding new shortcuts. Countless students report selling or giving their prescriptions to others, and surveys have demonstrated an extensive underground market. Furthermore, some physicians are prescribing these drugs 'off-label' to people who seek cognitive enhancement rather than ADHD therapy. Even Jane sees this problem, citing times that people have offered up to \$20 per pill, especially during exam week. But Jane's concerns extend past intermittent student use to the adverse health effects of these drugs. She notes that Adderall makes her want to smoke cigarettes incessantly, but she explains that when she has not taken the drug, "I practically never have the urge to smoke." Despite conflicting research on whether stimulants are a 'gateway drug', many believe Jane's observations have an underlying biological explanation, and it has become clear that nicotine can intensify the pleasurable feelings associated with stimulants, which in turn can strengthen future drug cravings.

While the role of stimulants in the future of cognitive enhancement is still under debate, the widespread use of these drugs raises other serious health concerns. Stimulants

also target the sympathetic nervous system through norepinephrine neurons, which activates the "fight-or-flight" response. Some of these responses, like dilated pupils and increased respiration, are generally harmless, but long-term sympathetic activation can cause serious damage to the cardiovascular system. Elevated blood pressure, irregular heart rates, and even heart attacks have been reported, and without physician supervision, college students and young working professionals may not know there is a problem until it is too late. Moreover, these drugs have a complex interaction with the hormones that control our internal clock and appetite, and if abused can lead to malnutrition and serious sleep disorders.

Pharmaceutical companies have been quick to recognize the tremendous financial potential of designing a drug that promotes attention and wakefulness without the addictive properties and unwanted side effects. The obvious demand for drugs that can improve memory, learning, and cognitive function has fueled extensive research in these fields with promising results. Even today, we see new formulas that have drastically limited the ability for abuse. Drugs like modafinil and atomoxetine have limited the role of dopamine in drug action, and newer 'pro-drugs' like lisdexamphetamine do not transform to the active ingredient until after ingestion through the intestine. Recently, these tremendous strides have opened discussions regarding the limited availability of these drugs; college students and young professionals alike are questioning why they cannot legally obtain such 'safe' forms of these drugs, especially when they can partake in arguably more dangerous practices like smoking cigarettes.

But if 'normal' people begin medicating themselves, where does that leave those with ADHD? The competitive advantage they desperately need disappears if everyone has the same access. Likewise, children with disadvantaged backgrounds may face further educational challenges if they are unable to afford these medications. And if stimulant use

becomes commonplace on college campuses and corporate offices, then non-medicated individuals may be coerced into taking these drugs in order to stay competitive, or even just to stay employed. In preparation for what many experts foresee as an inevitable rise in pharmaceutical brain enhancement, we must be more cautious than ever in how we incorporate these drugs into our society.

Illicit amphetamine use has been widely reported since it was introduced in an inhaler during the 1930s. While it may be impossible to control the underground market, we cannot overlook the tremendous benefits of these medications for students like Jane. She readily admits that her Trinity career, let alone her law school plans, may not have been possible without her pharmaceutical boost. However, she often regrets taking her daily dose because the medicine seemingly "takes all the fun out of pretty much everything." There is little doubt that the pharmaceutical industry will continue to make advances in this field during our lifetime, but we must be careful when we throw around terms like 'miracle drug.' As the dawn of cognitive enhancement approaches, we must practice extensive, long-term testing to confirm safety and efficacy of future drugs, and encourage the formation of ethical committees to manage risk and encourage equality for all members of society.

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