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Collected
Essays

2012

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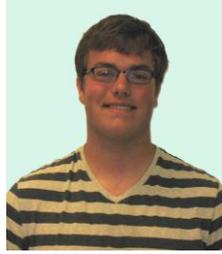
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My Little Lellow Home

Natosha Brown

Growing up, we all have those few words that take us an eternity to learn how to say correctly. For me, yellow was lellow for the longest time. My little lellow home was the house that I lived in from the age of 2 to 5. Over the course of my life, I have lived in four different homes. The last two homes are the ones that I remember the most. At the age of 5, we moved from the yellow house into a trailer that we had moved onto the back of our land. For 6 years after I no longer lived there, the house remained. Many renters came and went in those years; two of the children, twin girls the same age as me, lived there for several years and became some of my childhood best friends. Then, when I was in Middle School, my parents decided to tear the house down. It was decrepit and falling apart. I understood that it was time to say good bye, it still made me sad though.

I have so many memories from the three years that I lived in that house, memories of my own and stories that have been told to me time and time again. Those stories, that house, contributed to who I am today. That peeling yellow paint, blue carpet, and faded linoleum may not seem important to most people, but it is important to me. That yellow paint was the paint I looked at when I climbed up in the tree that hung over the roof above the kitchen. That blue carpet is the carpet that I laid on and played with our orange tabby. That faded linoleum is the linoleum that I remember sitting on and refusing to eat green beans. The house may no longer exist, but my memories do.

I remember doing a somersault off of my mom's bed, while I was supposed to be taking a nap, resulting in cracking my head open, my third birthday party where my Nana Jo dressed up like a clown and I was terrified, hearing Santa's sleigh bells while laying in the living room, and biting my father. I associate that house with the stories that have been told to me as well. I once smeared lipstick in the carpet in my parent's bedroom, painted my bedroom walls with peanut butter, fed my aunt poop from my diaper, and saw Mommy and Daddy "wrestling" and told several strangers about it the next day. Of course, my memories didn't stop once we moved out of that house or once it was torn down. The fact that I can no longer walk through and envision those small land marks in my life, make them all the more precious.

There is a cliché that states: "You don't know what you have until it's gone." I didn't truly realize how much I treasured that ancient house until years later when I was more mature and able to look back at the years I spent growing up in it. I miss that house and all it symbolizes. When I was living in it, it was the part of childhood where I was solely dependent on my parents. Now, here I am in college, living two hours away. It represents my family before I was aware that it was broken. In some sort of way, that falling down house was what embodied my bliss of childhood, before the trials of life started to tear me down as well.

Once we moved out of the house, I was only five but old enough to realize that life isn't always warm and fuzzy like the color of the house that was only a couple

hundred of feet from my new front door. I hung onto that feeling, to those memories. I still do. I know that the carefree years of childhood never return, but I cling to the memories and feelings that I associate with those years. I believe we all do. We all have the Peter Pan Syndrome to some extent. We leave parts of ourselves in the past that don't want to grow up.

Many times, I believe that we associate times in our lives when we were happy with a place or object. When that object begins to disappear, we panic, believing that we will no longer be able to recall those feelings again. Although this isn't true, I sometimes still have those thoughts. I go home and am afraid that something will have changed in my room, or in the lives of my friends and family, that I will have missed something while being away at college. One part of me loves being at college, knowing that it is where I am supposed to be. Arkansas Tech is the perfect place for me to learn and grow as an individual. Another part of me screams that I should be back home. Late at night, my inner self shouts that I should be home while my Aunt is pregnant, spending time with my elderly grandparents before they are gone, and cherishing the moments with my parents while they are still active. It all ties back in to that yellow house.

Our childhood homes hold a special place in our hearts. Even if we eventually move away, the house is torn down, or our family still lives there, early memories, although distant, impact us greatly. My memories from my little yellow house make me smile and when I reflect on them, get me through the day because I know that all things have to come to an end. That house is something that no longer exists, just like my time as a High School student living under my parent's roof has ended. Just like with the story of my little yellow house, just because the time has passed for something, doesn't mean it disappears. That house may be gone, but the memories associated with it will live on forever. My time as a teenager in my parent's home may be over, that doesn't mean that I am not a vital part of their life. Moving to college means change, yes, it doesn't mean the end though. It is only the beginning.

A Change in Perspective

Zach Brown

Things change, and when change happens, it happens quickly. With every change, there is one instant where you realize what has actually happened and the effect that this change will have on your life. Following the realization is a moment of panic where you question your decision that brought about this change. You think of why you would want things to change, and analyze every possible negative outcome. In my experience, change is similar to grief. It has many distinct stages before acceptance, some of which are not necessarily easy to get past. Change happens often: nearly every day something in your routine goes awry. However, sometimes changes are much larger than deciding to eat before a certain class or changing the day you do laundry because of rain. Sometimes changes in yourself alter how you plan out your own life. A very serious change has occurred since coming to school. This experience has altered how I perceive myself: who I am and what I want to do is entirely different compared to two months ago. Finally I have decided what I want to be when I grow up.

I am currently a math major, and a few weeks ago a completely foreign thought came to my mind. What's going to happen after I graduate and don't have time to play trumpet? What's going to happen, when I am finally thrust into the real world with no daily opportunity to play? The answer to this question hit a lot harder than I ever thought it would. I simply wouldn't have time. I would not have the opportunity to practice one of the few things that has kept me sane during the hardest times in my life. Something that had been an integral part of my life for eight years (twelve by the time I graduated) would suddenly be gone when I got a 'real' job. What would that feel like? The longest period of time I have gone without playing since sixth grade beginning band is a mere two weeks. Eventually, it would be as if I had never even played an instrument. Truly the worst part is that I wouldn't even be able to brag about my ability because my inevitable lack of practice would mean I couldn't back up what I say, even though bragging is one of the most important parts of being a trumpet player. How could I possibly stand not practicing a new difficult piece of music? How could I manage not complaining about said difficult piece to my friends? Suddenly, I had what seems like an obvious epiphany. Why not major in the subject that you don't want to give up? It makes perfect sense. Why not major in music, so that you can have your stress reliever as an occupation?

With this realization came the obligatory questioning of my own sanity. You've already started your first semester, why change to a degree that takes longer than four years? Why change your major that requires two years of graduate school (I plan to get a Master's in Brass Pedagogy so I can teach trumpet at a university) after completing your Bachelor's degree, when you have already started a degree towards a job with twice the national average salary for a college professor? Why would I take the risk of stepping away from a field that is steadily growing (in both pay and job opportunity) to one that is shrinking (in the same categories)? The reason is simple. There is no equivalent to the feeling that a person gets after an amazing performance. The reason an audience is on their feet is you. Truly there is no equal to realizing that you caused the excitement and applause, and that you get to do it again the next night. The reaction

(good or bad) generated is directly proportional (trust me I'm a math major) to how well you performed. It's easy to lean toward a profession that tends to showcase your talent and have people cheer for you when your alternative is a stereotypically lonely desk job.

However, I was still trying to convince myself to take the significant salary boost into mind. Of course, twice the national average salary for what I want to do would be fantastic, but then again, why does that have to be the most important thing? I know people that got the jobs that pay the most, yet they are unhappy. They regret that they didn't pursue their passion when they were younger. With this in mind, I realized that I would rather truly enjoy what I do and get paid less, than do something else and get paid more.

For two weeks I have decided to be a music major, and the realization that that is what I want to do has had a profound effect on my way of thinking about school. Previously, I was obscenely stressed about everything, because I hadn't yet realized that math is not what I want to do with my life. I would agonize over my calculus homework because I didn't want to do it as I did in high school. However, as of finally knowing what I want to do as a gainfully employed adult, that stress is gone. I realize that the difficulties of calculus two shall be over in a short two months. Don't get me wrong, I love math, but my short time in college has helped me realize that potential income should not be the deciding factor when picking my major. Hopefully I will be able to impart that knowledge (and hopefully my enthusiasm for trumpet) on future students (although most trumpet students are music majors, so they probably realize that already).

It's truly interesting how much college has changed me in the short time I have been here. I now know what I will be doing as a career, and it is completely different compared to even three weeks ago. I can't wait to see how I further change before I leave

Born to be like Dolan

Brent Curry

Eighteen years of life is a relatively short period of time, but it can be full of memories. There are so many people and events that shaped me into the person I am. As it is with many people, I wish I could change some of the past, but overall I am happy with the person I have become. Looking back, my life could have been very different.

No one had a greater influence on my life than my parents. My dad worked nights when I was first born, but he did everything he could to be there for me. Eventually, he was able to switch to normal hours, and that was possibly one of the happiest moments of my life. Finally getting to play baseball, watch T.V., and just hang out with my dad had a major impact on my life. Because my dad worked nights for the majority of my childhood, I spent a lot of time with my mom. You could say I grew up a “Momma’s Boy,” but don’t tell my dad that. I love both of my parents, and I know how fortunate I am to have them both in my life.

I have only one sibling, a brother named Dustin. Growing up, we were virtually connected by the hip. We fought like brothers are supposed to, but we always knew we would be there for each other. As we grew up, we also started to grow apart. He got into drama and enjoyed acting. I became the athlete of the family. One of my biggest regrets now that he is gone to college is that I never told him that I love him as often as I should have.

I grew up with all of my grandparents, plus a great-grandfather. I don’t remember much about my great-grandfather, but from stories I heard, he sounded like an amazing man. My middle name, Dolan, was chosen from his first name. I’ve always wanted to live up to the name that was given to me even though I know it is a nearly impossible task. Thinking about him makes me strive to be a better person and to treat people in a positive manner. My grandparents were the same way. They demanded respect from my brother and I. That was exactly what we gave them. These five people were not in my life day-by-day, but they had a tremendous impact on my life.

Everybody needs a best friend to be able to survive. I found mine when I was in pre-school. Calder and I went to the same pre-school and were immediately trouble when we were together. From sneaking off during recess to always making a mess during crafts time, we were a teacher’s worst nightmare. We would hang out every day for at least 10 hours. He was my second brother and I was his. Nothing would ever come between us. Well until he found out that girls are pretty attractive. We often fought over girls, but we never let that ruin our friendship. He was and still is my best friend.

One thing that I could always count on to be there for me was the game of baseball. When my grandfather was in the hospital, he calmed me down by playing we would play catch when he got home. That was the last thing I remember him ever saying to me before he died. I told myself I would play baseball until someone told me I couldn’t anymore. It was a driving force to always keep me going. Anytime I was down

and not feeling good, I could just watch or play baseball and I would feel so much better. Even with my grandfather gone, I still feel so close to him when I am playing baseball.

I was a student of baseball, but the proper teacher had never shown up in my life until my freshman year in high school. As a member of the high school baseball team, I got to learn from one of the greatest coaches in the state. Most people think that coaches and players have a strained relationship where the coach is always ordering team, he didn't have to worry about discipline. He could probably be called in all truthfulness my second best friend. Every day we would try to trick the other with baseball trivia. I would always lose. He motivated me to learn the game in the deepest way possible. I found an even greater love for the game then.

Growing up in the river valley was a very beneficial thing in my life. Nothing bad ever happened in the Arkansas River valley. The only corruption I learned about was the bad things that happened on television, and none of that seemed real to me until I got older. Truthfully, as a young child, I wished that I could have lived somewhere more exciting; however, I received an amazing childhood by living in the river valley. Because of how good life was when I was a kid, it made my college choice a whole lot easier.

Arkansas Tech University was home to me. I grew up at Tech because my mom works at the library, and has since before I was born. Many summer days were spent in the library. I could always be found if someone just listened for the two children (my brother and I) crying and begging to finally go home. There was nowhere else in the world I would have rather started this next stage in my life than at Arkansas Tech.

The road that life took me down was not always easy. It was never completely straight, smooth, or easily seen. Because of every twist, bump, and leap of faith, I became the person I am today. There are so many people who made an impact on my life. Family and friends helped shape me. It is virtually impossible to know what is going to happen next in my life, but I know that I will always have the support of others around me to help me on the journey.

A World of Difference

Leslie Dunmire

When I was in the eighth grade, there was nothing I wanted more than independence. I thought I was ready to head out on my own and be my own person. I wanted to feel freedom and independence from my overbearing family. I even went as far as applying to ASMSA in Hot Springs my sophomore year. When I got in, I was excited because I thought living on my own would be nothing but fun with friends and freedom to do what I wanted without having to answer a million questions first. Thank goodness, before I accepted I realized I was not ready for the challenges that accompany living on my own.

I honestly do not think I was ready this past August, either. Though I was not completely lost when it came to doing things for myself, I still had a lot to learn. I had washed my own dishes for four years and bought and cleaned all my own clothes for even longer. However, I did not realize what was needed to move into a dorm. I had thought of a few things such as a printer, some storage containers, a hole punch, and a stapler. However, there were so many materials I never had to think of buying because my mom made sure we never ran out. For instance, I may have thought to buy that stapler but I completely forgot about the actual staples.

When graduation rolled around I was beyond ecstatic. The moment of freedom I had longed for was finally here. I was ready to buy everything for my new home and for my first year of college. How exciting! I thought I had virtually nothing to worry about because I had so much money to my name I had no idea what to do with it all. I did not think I would put even a good dent in that money when I stocked up on my dorm supplies. Little did I know, books were going to upwards of \$600, and the school and dorm supplies \$500, without any big purchases such as a refrigerator, microwave, or a TV. My first major college challenge was parting ways with what I now call my high school wealth.

I had never thought I needed to worry about money, but even more so, I never thought I would have a problem with the size of my room. I was not naive enough to think it would be particularly spacious, and I knew before I moved into my dorm that it would be small. I did not know any reason why that would be a problem, but once my belongings were moved in, I could truly see the problem. My room at home was certainly not large, but it was also not meant to hold everything I owned and used on a daily basis. I was able to house some of my possessions in other rooms of the house in order to save space in my own room. For example, we had a kitchen where we kept the microwave, refrigerator, and coffee maker, and a study for the computer, printer, pencil sharpener, desk, and books. The problem I faced upon coming to college was finding where I was going to put all of these things in such a confined space with no area designated or even available for the overflow.

Once classes began, I also had to take on the huge task of organizing my study and homework time. In high school I had it so easy. I never really had to study for

anything big and certainly not on an everyday basis. However, after my first day of classes it was easy to see the coming four years would be drastically different in that aspect. I would have to do homework and study for almost every class, every day. This brought on a huge task of organizing my time efficiently instead of simply doing my homework right before hanging out with friends or whenever else I felt like it. Learning to schedule regular hours of study time for multiple classes was overwhelming.

At home, my friends all lived at least five minutes away by car, and most were fifteen minutes or more away. Though this was annoying at the time, it was ultimately helpful when it came to getting my school work done. It was much easier to stay at home, get my homework done, and hang out afterwards. However, my best friends here on campus are literally two flights of stairs away, and it takes me only seconds to get to their room. This tends to hinder my productivity. If I get bored at doing my homework, I can simply walk upstairs and knock on the door, and there they are. Learning to strengthen my willpower when it comes to choosing between homework and friends has been quite the challenge.

Homework versus friends is nothing original. If anyone were to approach any college student and ask if their friends are a distraction from homework, they would be hard-pressed to find someone that could say "Absolutely not!" What is unusual for me is being away from one of my best friends, my mom. Most college students are so happy to finally be rid of their parents, even if only for a little while. My mom and I have quite a different relationship. We can have some of the best conversations and the worst of fights. We are practically sisters and have much less a mother-daughter relationship than one would expect. She took me to every gymnastic practice I had for ten years, we watch TV together three times a week, and we go to the movies at least every other weekend. Many of our favorite shows had their premiers last week, and we were not able to watch them together. Even though many people would think that missing watching a TV show with my mom is simply trivial, for me it is quite hard. These are the times my mom and I would become closer and have the most fun, but because of college, those days are practically gone.

One great thing about my mom being practically my sister is she that trusts me. She trusts me to do the right thing and to get my homework done without her prodding and threatening my freedom every minute. She did this because she realized early on that I was quite the overachiever, and nothing she did was going to push me harder than I push myself. What she did not realize is that I did it to please her, and so when she was not yet home from work or was gone for longer periods of time, I would procrastinate on my homework. Now that she is never around, I have had a hard time finding the motivation within myself to get my homework done. I love to be praised by my proud mother when she hears I have been hard at work all day. Now that she is not around to do this on a daily basis, I tend to procrastinate, which presents other challenges. On top of that, I never was any good at long-term goals. I always looked from day to day, but college is more about the whole picture. Transitioning to accommodate this was challenging in the first few weeks and continues to be a challenge now, because I never had to plan in that way.

Why Me?

Emily Epperson

I could not wait to get home. The drive that usually takes twenty minutes felt like it lasted for hours. The silence was booming throughout the truck: Even the smallest noise would produce a most stentorian sound. Chase tried to make small talk. I pretended to listen while looking out the window, hoping for some way out of this situation. Seeing that I was not interested in his hundredth hunting story of the evening, Chase trailed off and looked back at the road. His sigh of irritation almost sent me over the edge. Some people might think that Chase and I had just ended a very heated argument. Others might think that we had just received horrible news. Nobody would guess that Chase was taking me home from the worst date that I had ever been on.

It all started earlier that day. Just like every other Sunday morning, I was getting ready for church, making sure to look extra nice for the date with Chase after the service. After trying on my entire closet, I finally picked out my outfit: my favorite V-neck along with my new skinny jeans and riding boots. I quickly grabbed my favorite scarf since it was cooling off outside. I tried to dress sensibly since I had no earthly idea where we were going or what we were doing. I told Chase that I disliked surprises, but he refused to listen. He told me not to worry.

After touching up on my hair and make-up, I walked into the living room where my parents were sitting. For the thousandth time my father asked where Chase and I were planning on going after church. When I told him I had no clue, he did not seem happy with me. After a long talk with my father, my mother told us it was time to leave; we gathered our things and loaded up the car. For the entire ride to church, all I could think about was the mystery date. I tried to seem calm on the outside, but my stomach was tossing and turning with anxiety and worry.

We had just taken our seats when Chase walked in, his usual charming self, conversing with the elders of the church and cracking jokes with the little kids. When he spotted me, he walked over and sat next to me and my family. Everyone was starting to take their seats, and the service was starting, so I was able to push the worry and anxiety away and focus.

After the service, I left with Chase for our mystery date. I figured out quickly we were headed to Searcy. He told me we were going to eat lunch somewhere, so I started thinking about eating at Chili's, McAlister's, or Fuji's. Chase knew that I loved these places. The ride to Searcy went very well. He was cracking jokes and playing a Dave Matthews Band CD, which is my favorite band. Through the laughing and chatting, I had not realized we were parked at the restaurant until he killed the ignition and said, "Welcome to Italiano's!" Strike one Chase. While getting out of the truck, I tried my hardest to act pleased to this surprise. Italian food is my least favorite food. Chase could tell that I was not pleased, but I tried convincing him that I was just surprised. This was just the beginning.

After looking at the menu for what seemed like days, I finally found something that I thought I might enjoy. I tried to eat every bite of the food so Chase would think I enjoyed the meal. Once we left the restaurant, he took me to the next surprise of the evening: We were seeing a movie at Searcy Cinema 8. I was genuinely excited about the movie until he told the lady at the counter he wanted two tickets to see Apollo 18. Strike two Chase. No matter how hard I tried, I could not hide the disappointment and disgust I was feeling. I despised this movie and did not want to see it. Once again, Chase could tell that I was not happy.

Finally, after pretending to enjoy my meal and acting like I enjoyed watching the worst movie of all time, we could go home. We walk out of the theater and head back to the truck. Once inside, I buckle my seatbelt and rush him so he can take me home. That is what I thought was going to happen, anyway. When we got on the freeway, we were heading in the wrong direction. When I asked where we were going, he told me this was the last surprise of the evening. By this point, I just wanted to go home. I was already having an awful time. Another surprise was the last thing I wanted. To avoid having an unpleasant ride in silence, I turned on some music to ease the tension. Neither one of us were talking. Finally, Chase informed me that he wanted to run by Bald Knob and check out the place where he goes hunting. Strike three Chase. I turned to face the road, and I did not say another word. He already knew I did not like it when he talked about all of his deer camp stories. Why would I want to go see where they happened? The entire time he was talking about which land was sanctuary and where he shot his first deer, I stared out of the window, daydreaming of all the places I would rather be. While all I wanted was to be back home. I would have even preferred being at a funeral over this awful date. At least I would be away from deer camp.

When we got back to the house, he offered to walk me to the door. I told him I could make it and thanked him for taking me out, though under my breath, I was wishing he would just quit talking and let me leave. When my mom asked me how it went, without hesitating, I answered, "Let's just say I'll never be going back out with Chase again."

Dating 101

Lindsey Glover

As I reflect upon my grade school days, I can't help but think of all the questionable decisions I have made in the past. Watching *Twilight*, a movie that not only wasted 122 minutes of my life, but also cost the four hours I stood patiently in line to get my ticket to the midnight premiere. A trivial matter, really, but in the heart of a fourteen-year-old girl with star-struck eyes for Robert Pattinson, it was a big disappointment. I also regret joining in the senior parade to school for homecoming, only to have my first car hit by some maniacal school-spirited classmate. Honestly though, these things paled in comparison to my love life, which, up to my sixteenth birthday, was nonexistent, thanks to my lovely father.

My hometown high school was full of attractive athletic males, along with the semi-attractive pubescent males, along with the grotesque males who showered maybe once a week. For some peculiar reason, the only category of males that took profound interest in me was the last one. In my high school, especially, there was this one boy who had taken an interest in me; he was love-stricken and repulsive, and he just so happens to be the child of my parents' best friends. He was head over heels in love with me. I, on the other hand, was avoiding him at all costs, ducking behind cars when he walked by, feigning a call from my mom when he came up to talk to me, and literally running around corners because one of my friends had spotted him behind us. Other than his physical appearance, he really wasn't that bad a guy, despite being dumber than a rock. Bob was just not my type, and I seemed to be right up his alley.

Because of my parents, I couldn't tell Bob that I almost threw up every time he mentioned the possibility of an "us." Forced to be gracious and respectful, I had to keep him at a safe distance. Bob would send me countless text messages trying to light up a conversation and, hopefully, a relationship. He professed his love to me at least three times in one of his excessively chatty phases and proceeded to tell me that he had found his one and only in me and would never get married to anyone else. I seriously considered blocking his number from my phone, but then my parents would scold me for being cruel to their friends' son.

Now, Bob really was a nice guy, and I felt guilty constantly ignoring him. Bob's parents knew that he liked me, and my parents were starting to worry that they might get offended if I didn't like Bob. So the inevitable happened. Bob and I had to go on a date. Knowing that it would be the highlight of his year, I asked Bob to go see a movie with me. At this time we were both old enough to drive, yet Bob told me he would meet me at the theater fifteen minutes before the movie started. Okay now, I was a little bit offended by this. He had been asking me out for years but wouldn't even come pick me up for the date he had been waiting for? That was strike one.

Upon arriving at the movies, I bought my own ticket, opened all the doors for myself, and stood aside unannounced and forgotten while Bob talked to some of his friends that he had happened to run into. That was strike two. I don't need to be pampered by a guy; as a matter of fact, it annoys me when a male tries to do everything for me, but Bob had been begging me to go out with him, and he didn't even have the courtesy to buy my movie ticket.

After Bob's lengthy chat, we awkwardly walked into the movie which was just finishing the previews, my favorite part. He led the way to our seats, and I noticed we were two of four people in the movie. Bob talked the entire time. I wouldn't have cared so much if he hadn't eaten french onion chips right before he came. That was strike three, and I was out of there. I bided my time, and toward the end of the movie, which I had already seen four times, I secretly sent my dad a text to come pick me up, because he had suggested that I ride back with Bob. I had done my duty, and I was out of that theater the second the credits started rolling. Bob could tell that I hadn't had a good time, and he asked if it was something he had done. Of course I told him no, I just wasn't feeling well, but inside I was mentally berating him. My dad pulled in just as I exited the building. I said goodnight to Bob and tried to hide my joy at getting into the car.

The date seemed to have soothed the tides between our parents, but to Bob it only fueled his fiery passion. I was so tired of having to be polite to him, especially after the date, that I let loose on him. I told Bob the truth. I would not go on another date with him, and I did not want to talk to him twenty-four hours a day. Bob was heartbroken, but I didn't care, I was so relieved to get that weight off my shoulders. Bob and I stopped talking--until I had to sit near him in a class. Bob perceived the proximity as a sign that I had changed my mind, and so the texts began again with frequency. All I could do was shake my head and laugh. This boy would never learn, and I guess it's not that bad to be wanted. Bob and I are friends now; he still has an undying love for me, but has learned to keep his flowing affection contained to one or two text messages a month. I, being a dutiful child, graciously decline his love and maintain a healthy distance.

Something That I Used to Know

Rachel Hampton

There's something about a child's imagination that can leave even the brightest professors baffled. They see the world in a completely different light than they do once they grow up. Their visions of reality and fantasy collide and blend in such a way as to come up with the most extravagant adventures. The sidewalk cracks could be bridge planks over the deepest chasm. Dodgeballs could be fireballs hurled by an evil demon and so much more. The world is many worlds in one and all at the same time.

I can remember as a child, my two best friends and I would go on an adventure every day. We could travel from a land of ice and fire, to dragons and beasts, and even to a special operations mission. All of these fantasies were brought to life by our minds, but one thing always remained the same: the great world tree. To the casual onlooker, there was nothing particularly special about this tree. It had leaves, it had branches, it changed colors with seasons, and the leaves died in the winter. This tree, however, was so much more than it appeared. This was the perfect tree. The branches grew at just the right height and girth to be climbed with ease and hold our weight. This tree was always the center of whatever world we were visiting that day. It was our paradise.

Though tranquil and idyllic, there was something terrible just waiting in the distance. It was sometime in the 1400s in Venice, Italy. My companion and I had just disembarked from our raft and were making our way toward the Piazza San Marco. The waters were unusually low for the time of day, but we made no significant note and carried on. It was a partly cloudy day, but we had to see what was going on in the Piazza. There was a bigger crowd than usual, and we happened upon a public execution. But just as the executioner was about to drop the platform, a booming crack of thunder reverberated throughout the square. As soon it faded away, we were ordered inside.

The world around us disappeared as if it were a dream. Old Venice drifted off into the abyss and in its place appeared my living room. The storm had frightened my mother, who made us come inside for protection. Though it wasn't Venice, we could still explore the vast depths of our abode in search of a new adventure. The couches were our forts, the carpet was our lava, and the ceiling fan was painful experience if you happened to jump too high. We had a grand adventure, but the looming dullness of the outside world lurked over our heads all the while. The pitter-patter of the rain against the huge windows and the sporadic flashes of light that engulfed the sky in a bright light could only create an ominous mood. For a while, the fun was ongoing and enjoyable, but eventually the storm's mood changed ours, and the adventure came to an end. The rain outside began to let up, and my friends ran home in a brief break in the downpour. I was left to myself in my own world again with the constant patter of the rain on the windows.

In my dream that night, the strangest things happened. Walking through a small town, I notice all the locals running in the opposite direction as me. Confused, I turned

round and round to find the source of their panic. Off in the distance was a small black cloud that hovered just over the horizon. At first I had no concern for it, but as I got closer to the top of the hill, I finally realized the gravity of the situation. The small black cloud was attached to a huge funnel whirling everything away from its path. This was a relentless tornado. I turned, running as fast as I could, as far I could get, when my world faded to darkness, and I heard the sound of my mother's voice, "hurry get up!" I couldn't quite understand until I realized that the screams in my dream were actually the tornado sirens from the high school behind our house. We gathered inside the bathroom with our dog and tried to remain calm.

The time crept by minute by minute, second by second. It felt like an eternity that we were in that cramped little bathroom. When the rain sounded like it finally subsided, just as we were about to open the door, we heard a roaring crash on the roof. Startled, we all froze for at least 20 seconds without moving. When my father built up the courage to venture outside the bathroom, we were relieved to find the house intact. No rooms were missing, no holes in the walls, no windows blown out. Upon further examination of the outside, however, it was a different story. The loud crash that scared the breath out of us turned out to be that same tree crashing down on the corner of our house. That tree, that icon, that idyllic figure that had served me and my friends for years in our adventures and missions, was torn down like a piece of paper ripped in half.

That next day, my parents called for the wood cutters to come and get rid of the decapitated stump that lay in our front yard. As I watched, tears filled my eyes. That tree had served us so much more than just pretty scenery in our yard. It was a monument that my friends and I saw as our sanctum. If one of us had one of those days, we could just sit up there, and we'd work it out somehow. Without it, my yard is empty. As time passed, the grass grew yellow and brown. Shriveled and decrepit, the yard resembled what we felt, as well. It was like part of me was gone. Though it was just a tree in a yard, it had a major impact on my childhood and those of my neighborhood friends.

Boxes upon Boxes of Cards

Connor Harris

It is amazing how the simplest things can bring the greatest satisfaction in life. When one gazes on his or her collection of thousands of trading cards, they might start to reflect on all of the other things they could have bought with the several hundred dollars that they sank into Magic the Gathering or the Pokemon Trading Card Game. However, while the mountains of cards may seem so terribly insignificant to the average human, they have played a huge role in developing the relationship I have today with my brother, Cody.

For as long as I can remember, my brother and I have found a mutual addiction to a variety of trading card games. When I was younger, the draw was all about making Cody proud of my ability to learn these games from his instruction. I can remember many nights when Cody would bring home a completely new game that would be “so much better” than the last. We would take out the cards, sit on the pink carpet of our small house in Paso Robles, California, and proceed to learn the new sets of rules and tricks. The look of satisfaction on his face was always rewarding when I would finally be able to beat him at our games, (he being, by the way, seven years older than me). I think he loved having a brother that he could teach. Perhaps deep down this was a motivation for his decision to pursue a degree in education? Many afternoons after school we would walk around the local creek bed with his school friends, and he would flaunt my knowledge of various jazz musicians and movies that I had gained from listening to his banter. To this day I believe that my ability to learn quickly and multi-task has a lot to attribute to my hours of play with Cody.

As I grew into my early teens, it became more about the competition. Maybe I should blame it on the hormones? There were several nights where we went to bed in a rage-induced silence from the evening’s rounds of gaming. One of us was furious that he was “so unlucky” and the other angry that the other is “only happy when he wins!” This was the period when I really learned what would tick Cody off. Sometimes I could see it coming for miles, and other times I would simply make myself ignore it for the sake of my own enjoyment of the game. But after our spats, eventually one of us would cave in and ask the other if he wanted to play again, as if the whole fight had been erased from both of our memories. It is a lot easier to forgive your brother when you want him to play a game with you.

It had not been until these past few years when I really began to appreciate the time I get to spend with him. Cody began to work more regularly, and I had my own stack of work every day in high school. Our time together was limited. But what always seemed to bring us together was some game or another. It has become the vehicle for our nerdy outbursts and sharing of music and internet memes. Even today, now that both of us are technically “adults,” we still spend a lot of our time together around a coffee table or kitchen counter, promising our mom that we will clean off the table for lunch as soon as we are finished discussing the latest review for the newest *Green*

Lantern comic book or another terrible SyFy movie that we made each other suffer through. The difference is that now we could care less what we are playing or watching because we find more enjoyment from simply spending time with each other. There is more enjoyment in the brotherly bond we share. I can clearly remember several instances in high school when I told my friends that I could not go play Frisbee or some other sport with them because I was going to hang out with my brother, something I did not really expect them to understand.

Now, it should be clear why it sometimes offends me when people will talk down at the “nerdy” habits and “stupid” games that I have. This “insignificant” hobby of ours has created most of my fondest memories with Cody. Even when we become a little irritated with one another, the two of us have such a history with each other that it is easier for us to move past those bumps. And this relationship has proved contagious. We have even managed to drag many of our close friends into our interests, creating a network of friends that I know I will always be able to depend on. When I am having a stressful week I look forward to playing cards with my friends, and with more people there are even more songs spontaneously sung and movies quoted. It is an escape from the daily struggles we face. I hate to think of the day that I will not be able to play my card games with Cody.

The importance of my trading cards is profound. What Cody and I have now is a kinship that seems so uncommon in society today, and it is all because we were able to communicate with each other through our geeky escapades. It kills me to hear about people that cannot stand their brothers, because I know they are missing out on a relationship that will truly change their lives. Talking and sharing ideas with him has shaped me into the person I am, which is in many ways his clone. He is not only my brother but my best friend, as well. Now, whenever I look at my cards (or pink carpet for that matter) I think of waking up on those cozy Saturday mornings and sharing quality moments with my incredible brother, Cody.

Knife and Fork

Mitchell Hook

From the time I was thirteen years old, I knew was going to attend a college in another city in Arkansas. It had always been talked about by my family as the perfect place to attend school and prepare for my future. The majority of my immediate family felt as if any other university was inferior. I initially trusted everyone's assumptions and I thought it as a good idea to know where I would be attending school in the future early on.

Then one autumn afternoon, I helped my sister move into her dorm at what was to be my future campus. After all of her possessions were moved in, we took a short tour of the campus and I felt as if I could spend four to six years of my life here and that I would enjoy it. Over lunch, I asked my dad how much the final cost to attend school would be, and it ended up being well over fifteen thousand dollars. This was when I started to doubt my decision to try and pursue an academic career at that college, but I was assured that I could earn enough scholarships to not worry about the costs.

Throughout the next year and half, there were numerous times that I visited my sister, and I always noticed that the campus never had people outside enjoying the campus grounds. I assumed that they were in their dorms or the library studying or doing homework. Apparently, however, many of the student on campus smoked marijuana and drank. In fact, at a parent-only seminar that my dad attended, they said that your young college student will experiment with drugs and many will experience their first sexual encounter. This bothered me, since their university officials automatically assumed that I would be like most of the other students attending the school. Just because I was a young college student, that didn't automatically mean that I was destined to experiment with drugs and alcohol, but I still felt as if this was the best option for a successful future.

As my senior of high school started, I knew that it was time that I began to seriously look at colleges and tour their campuses, and of course, the first one I decided to tour was the one I had planned to attend. I arrived at this senior visit day expecting to meet people much like me and possibly have an enjoyable time around campus. When the time came to eat lunch, provided by the college, I sat down with other seniors aspiring to be enrolled at this university. As we began eating, I looked around this table of five or six other teenagers and noticed two things that struck me as odd. They all seemed to be dressed in almost business-like attire, and they were all eating chicken strips as if it were a five-star meal at a top-notch restaurant. I began to think to myself that I was nothing like any of these students and in no way would fit in at this college. The conversations that occurred over our forks and knives, napkins tucked into collars, worthy chicken strips and mac n cheese would only solidify my initial thoughts. They mostly spoke about how they came from prestigious private schools or enormous high schools, where, of course, they were ranked number one academically. One girl looked at me and asked, "So how many seniors will you have graduating this year?" When I responded with a figure in the low eighties the entire table seemed to be shocked, and I

received a few “what did he just say” looks before the conversation quickly moved forward. After this awkward lunch, I had to decide how to break it to my parents that I was completely wrong about my college choice.

My dad was easy to convince, as he was the one who cosigned a ten thousand dollar loan to allow my sister to continue attending her college. He completely supported my ideas to pursue other options. My mom, on the other hand, still had her heart set on me attending the college she graduated from. I soon realized that the college didn't even offer a degree program that interested me, which helped me convince her that it was okay to go somewhere else. I began looking into Arkansas Tech's website and list of majors and knew that I wished to go into electrical engineering. Soon after becoming interested in ATU, “Time out for Tech” had rolled around, and I got to experience my first look at the campus. I immediately felt much more at ease at this campus. Every person I encountered seemed congenial and more down to earth than the people at the other university. After this day, I began looking at scholarship options and finally applied and was accepted into the University Honors Program.

So in the end, I was completely wrong about a very key life decision all the way through high school, but I finally moved into a school full of old friends and people that I could imagine being around and becoming friends with. Even though some my family had gone to the other college, I knew that it wasn't the school for me. Arkansas Tech had all of the aspects of a university that I sought after: friendly people, a degree program that interested me, and scholarships that assured that I wouldn't have to worry about financial debt. This process of realizing how wrong I really was about college made me understand that sometimes even my family doesn't know exactly what is best for me, and in the end, only I knew which university was going to be right the choice. If I had not made my own decision, it would have been just as wrong as eating chicken strips with a knife and fork.

Paintbrush Suckers and Blue Tongues

Cassandra King

"Ok now everybody stick your tongue out for the goofy picture!" I heard this every year growing up as a kid. Every July my family goes to the Miller Family Reunion for my dad's side of the family. Every year we go up to Missouri, stay with my dad's cousin Duane for a night, go to the reunion the next day, spend another night at Duane's, then go home. Every year we arrive at the park, eat some snacks, take pictures, eat lunch, then either play softball or rent a paddleboat. And every year, ever since I can remember, somebody brings a bucket full of candy for the younger kids, even though the adults enjoy the abundance of candy just as much, if not more, than the children. This bucket of candy always shows up, every year, full of sugar and laughter and excitement for the kids, and a headache for their parents. However, throughout the years, something has gone missing from this bucket: paintbrush suckers.

In case you don't know what a paintbrush sucker is, it is a wonderful mass of sugar shaped like a paintbrush that will stain your tongue, teeth, lips, and anything else it might come into contact with, usually to the color of blueberries. When I was younger, that was the first thing we kids would look for when we got to the park. We would all find a sucker and suck it down before the pictures so our mouths would be painstakingly blue in our pictures. The best picture to take is the "generations" picture, where everybody from each generation takes a picture together. Some of the generations have a wide variety of ages, but there was always the youngest generation that had a whole bunch of snotty little kids that like to run around, get dirty, get sweaty, and mess things up. This became a tradition. All of the younger generation kids would eat a bright blue paintbrush sucker before we took the pictures, so that we could take that one goofy picture where we all stuck our tongues out and showed our rebellion of the boring, formal pictures we always hated taking.

Somewhere along the line, though, this tradition was broken. My generation started to outgrow the excitement of the blue sucker tongue picture. At least that was what I thought the problem was. I mean sure, some of my generation still eat bright colored suckers and turn their mouths different colors before the pictures, but they're the "immature" ones, right? They might be, but they're keeping with the tradition. However, the tradition that we started cannot be carried out in the way that it was intended. Why? Because true paintbrush suckers do not exist anymore.

I'm not sure when it happened, if it was a gradual fade, or if it was a sudden decision of the market, but sometime since my childhood they stopped selling the paintbrush suckers. It was a sad day in my life when I realized that part of my childhood had been erased, simply because something went out of business. The business did not realize, and never will, how much their product had affected children's lives, and how much it would affect them when they stopped production. How dare they force my family to settle for Tootsie Pops when all we wanted was a bucket full of paintbrush suckers! Tootsie Pops just don't quite dye your mouth the way paintbrush suckers did. Many of my cousins have tried to continue the tradition with Tootsie Pops or Dum-Dums

or even some off-brand suckers, but it's just not the same. Those paintbrush suckers were the stuff, and now we don't have them anymore.

I've tried looking for the suckers, but to no avail. My dad has been looking in candy aisles for years, going to strange stores that sell old candy, searching all over for a trace of the tradition that used to be. One time, I had even thought I found it. It was a store that sold old sodas in glass bottles, old toys that have long left the common market, bags of taffy and other old candies, and an eclectic collection of antique items. I was looking through the candy section, hoping to find some old candy that I had forgotten about that would bring me back to the days of my childhood. Suddenly, a box caught my eye. I saw plastic paintbrush handles sticking out of plastic, and I almost had a heart attack. I thought I had found it! Unfortunately, it was a different kind of paintbrush sucker. Granted, this was actually shaped like a paintbrush, and had a "paint can" full of flavored sugar that you could dip the brush in. The candy by itself is not a terrible thing. In fact, I'm sure it is delicious, and it may even have a legacy of its own to some family or kid out there. But it wasn't *our* paintbrush sucker. It will never be ours, like Tootsie Pops and Dum Dums will never be ours. Our sucker is the paintbrush sucker.

I never would have guessed that something so small would mean so much, but now that it doesn't exist anymore, I wish I had it back. I guess it's like they say: you don't know what you have until it's gone. I miss those suckers. I miss sticking my royal blue tongue out at my dad, our "official" photographer. I look back at those pictures now, and I wish I could do it again, just for memory's sake. But I'll never be able to go back, to duplicate those moments. I'll never have another paintbrush sucker.

That's What Friends Are For

Samantha Lewis

I have met a myriad of people in my lifetime. I have friends across the state, across the country, and across the world. Each of them means something different to me. They stand like a lighthouse in my past, reminding me of the situations that brought us together, and the memories we made. Each one is amazing in his or her own way. All of them have left some mark on me, but none so much as one unsuspecting Biology teacher. Neither of us could have predicted where the last four years took us. I do not think that either of us was really prepared. But that was half the fun.

I first met Hursty (a name given to her later in our relationship) in a Bible study the summer before I began high school. She had applied for a teaching job at the school. I remember clearly when she sent my mother a message informing us that I would be in her class. I simply sent back "Victory!" We had a grand time in her classroom. Quiet and stoic, she listened as we slowly drew closer to her. Hursty is unable to turn any hurting soul away, making her the ideal candidate for listening to drama, as many of us discovered. Because of our previous relationship, I became particularly forthcoming with information. Hursty seemed entertained by my anecdotes, which only egged me on. Slowly, she became one that I went to when it seemed as though no one else cared. She knew when major, seemingly earthshattering, events happened. Hursty was conveniently around when some serious stressful stuff transpired, giving me further reason to trust her. She proved herself time and time again, causing me to draw closer to her. Little did I know that she was also closing the teacher-student gap, becoming a friend and companion.

There is one distinct moment that defined our relationship, causing her to be forever ingrained in my history (and, I suspect, I was also filed into her memory). I had been working on a story for ages. It was a line straight into my soul, caused by the departure of other equally important people in my life. No one knew about it. They had no real reason to. It was personal and I kept it close. When I realized to what high esteem I held Hursty, I began to debate showing her this piece of my heart. I printed a copy, and proceeded to carry it around for days. Every time I went into her room (once an hour, if I could help it), I nearly pulled it out. One day, I handed it to her with shaky hands and left. She gave me a look and that was basically her only reaction. I fretted for hours, waiting on her to call me, or storm my house, anything. I expected her to come unglued on me, demanding an explanation. Instead, she praised me. Much to my chagrin, she enjoyed this piece of me that I had so feared giving her in the first place. With that message, she had traversed the last barriers into my inner circle. She was forever in the folds of my heart.

I have learned so much from Hursty. She is the best teacher, both in the classroom and out. I learned more in her class than I did my entire sophomore year. But she is so much more than just a Biology teacher. Hursty is one of the reasons I want to be a teacher. She has helped to shape me into the person I am, and I can only hope to mean half that much to a student someday. Hursty has been like a mirror, showing me

both my strengths and weaknesses, as well as how to use both to their fullest. Hursty is a solid foundation in my life. She can calm my frantic mind with one well worded statement. She is cool and level when I cannot stand. No matter the issue, she seems to know the right words. Hursty accepts me regardless of the situation. I have never had to explain myself, and that speaks volumes to me. She encourages me to follow my dreams, and continues to fuel those desires through her support.

I have done my best to show Hursty how much she means to me. I chose her as my Esteemed Educator for Governor's School and for our top-ranking banquet my senior year of high school. I wrote her a piece for our program. It was the least that I could do to express my gratitude towards her. Using the only thing I could, I attempted to explain our relationship without writing a novel, or at least a three-page paper. Unknown to me, the teachers were able to write something to us in the front cover of the book, *Oh, the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss. I knew that Hursty and I were friends and that she cared about me. But it was not until that moment, when I read what she had written to me, that I was made aware of the depth of our relationship.

I have never met anyone like Dusti Hurst. I do not imagine that I ever will. Our relationship has seen every emotion (mostly on my part) possible, and overcome many obstacles (again, mostly of my doing). She is the standard that I hold others to. She continues to be a guiding force in my life. She is my mentor, my teacher, my editor, my role model, but mostly she is my friend. There is an author that we both enjoy who sums it up perfectly. "I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity.... You gave me forever within the numbered days, and I'm grateful" (John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*).

Three Necessities for Life on a Desert Island

Austin Miller

The three things that I would have to have with me if I was stranded on a desert island would be a fishing pole, an axe, and my Nebraska Cornhuskers hat that I wear every day. Each of these things is not only beneficial, but they also have sentimental value.

The fishing pole is probably the second most important one out of all of them. The fishing pole would be my tool for getting food. I would wake up every morning, find some bait from worms or locusts or any type of bug. I would go find the perfect banking fishing spot around the island, and then start casting out for a few hours until I had two or three fish. Then I would go back to where I was camped and start a fire. I have learned how to do that, so that isn't a problem for me unless all of the wood is wet. As long as there was a good supply of fish in the water, then I would be able to eat. The sentimental value behind it is quite simple.

When I was a little kid, every time my grandpa would visit he would take my brothers and me fishing. Those are probably the favorite childhood memories I possess. Fishing on the island, I would be reminded of the two-week fishing trip to Canada on which my grandpa and uncles took my brothers and me. The first night there, I caught the first fish of the trip: a six-and-a-half-pound walleye. For the rest of the trip we fished for walleye, lake trout, perch, and northern pike. While the northern pike aren't that good eating, the trout, walleye, and perch are delicious. If I was really lucky, I would be able to catch the same kind of fish on this island. Without salt or a cooler of ice, I would only catch what I could eat in one sitting.

The next thing I would have with me would be the axe. I wouldn't be able to do a whole lot if I didn't have a way to cut. An axe is good for cutting down trees, splitting open coconuts, and cutting off the bark of little trees with which to make rope. Also, if I was careful and took my time, that would also be a way that I could filet the fish for cooking. Splitting the wood would be helpful during fire-making because you can't build a fire with huge logs to start out with. The sentimental value behind an axe is also simple. When I was a kid, my brother and I would go out to my dad's pile of scrap wood while he was at work, and we would chop all of the extra-long wood. My dad had a lawn-care business that kept him busy weekdays until dark and some Saturdays. When he was at home, part of his process was burning all of the wood that he picked up from the lawns that he visited throughout the week. He didn't have a lot of time to worry about the wood being too big for the burn pit. So my brother and I took it upon ourselves to make sure it was cut up smaller so my dad could easily burn it.

Every time I picked up that axe on the desert island, I would be reminded of the amount of time my brother and I spent cutting limbs for my dad. I would also be reminded of all the time my dad had to sacrifice to keep our family above water financially. The axe is really just a symbol, not unlike the fishing pole, but it isn't as important to me as the fishing pole is, and definitely not as important as the next item

that I would have. The final and most important item that I would have with me would be my Nebraska Cornhusker hat. This hat would be great for keeping the sun off of my face, for collecting nuts and berries, and for being awesome. I really only want the hat for its sentimental value.

Ever since I was a little kid, it has been instilled in me that I was meant to be a Nebraska football fan. That comes with being a part of the Miller family. I love Nebraska and everything that comes with it. I need something on the island that will remind me of it. The hat, for me, signifies a way to get away from all of my stress every Saturday. The Cornhuskers give me something to be a part of that is bigger than me. The day I got it was the last memory I will have of my parents living in Arkansas. I went home for the weekend from school, and we all went to Lincoln, Nebraska, for the football game. It was a great game. Nebraska won 35-10. We spent the rest of the day walking around town and going through stores. I saw the hat, and I loved it. So I bought it. I wear it every day now so I can remember spending that time with my mom, dad, and sister one more time for a long time. I have so many good memories of Nebraska. If I was stranded on a desert island, then I don't know how much I would be able to remember if I was worried every day about how I was going to survive. I need that hat to make sure I remember. It keeps me happy, as silly as that may sound.

All of these things are what I would need if I were going to have to be stranded on a desert island. While there are many great and smart choices of other items out there in the world, I picked these three for what I think are very good reasons. Each one has a valid purpose, as well as having a special meaning and memory behind it. I hope I will not ever have to worry about being stranded on a desert island. However, if I am, then I feel that I will be more than capable of survival with the items that I have chosen.

The Maine Event

Garrett Oates

In the summer of 2009, my paternal aunt and uncle planned a trip for their family to New England, focusing on the state of Maine. My aunt is a huge fan of the horror writer Stephen King, and Maine is where he was born and where most of his novels take place. Knowing that I didn't have any big summer plans that year, my cousins asked if I would want to accompany them on this trip, because they have a gargantuan van that seats twelve people comfortably. I enthusiastically agreed only because of my selfish desire to travel, not because of any real want to spend time with this part of my family. My uncle is the pastor of the church that I occasionally attend in my little hometown, and he and his family used to come off to me as extremely conservative and religious. I am a Presbyterian, but I am not overly religious. Instead of having a torturous traveling experience, however, I really had fun with them, and came to like their company.

It was to be a month-long excursion, beginning with us heading east and snaking our way up the East Coast. My cousins and their family have many connections all over the country, so every time we needed somewhere to sleep, my uncle or aunt would just call up one of their pals. That took the cost of lodging out of the equation. My parents helped me out on the meal money and donated four hundred dollars to my cause. I have always been a fan of hoarding money, so I had ample funds for my spending-money fund.

We set off one morning at dawn, my uncle, aunt, my nine cousins, and me, all packed into the van with our luggage. One of my favorite features of their van was the DVD player. It had a screen hanging from the ceiling and could play both DVDs and music CDs. My five-year-old cousin's favorite movie that year was Disney's *The Lion King*. That is one of my favorite films, too. We watched the film sixteen times during the month we spent traveling.

We made our way east, through Tennessee, stopping at the occasional Civil War battlefield, finally arriving in North Carolina. One of my favorite stops in the trip was in Asheville, North Carolina, when we went to the Biltmore Estate, the châteauesque mansion home of the wealthy Vanderbilt family. Built in the 1890s, it has 250 beautiful rooms with stained glass windows, marble floors, and stone staircases covering over 175,000 square feet. It is an outstanding example of Gilded Age architecture.

During the long drives in the van, we all played games and told stories. My uncle has traveled to Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Russia, and he has dozens of stories of often-hilarious adventures from his trips. His stories made us all laugh till our sides hurt, and we had a wonderful time. The entire family was very accommodating and did not venture anywhere near the topics of religion or political, social, or ethical issues. That really made me feel a lot more comfortable on the trip. In fact, the only time religion was mentioned was when we attended whatever church we could find on Sunday mornings.

My favorite place, by far, was New York City. It's such an important city and a cultural epicenter of the country. We went to all of the major attractions, like Times Square, Broadway, the 9/11 Memorial and Freedom Tower, and Central Park. One thing that I really like to do is to watch people, just observing them carrying on with their daily lives, guessing what those lives might be like. New York provided me with endless opportunities to watch thousands of people. New York City is also the setting of my favorite television show *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, and it was a lot of fun just to walk down the streets imagining myself as a NYC detective. *Nothing to fear, Detective Garrett Oates is on the case!*

We finally made it to Maine. Portland, the birthplace of Stephen King and Maine's largest city, was our first stop. We then traveled up the coast towards Canada, taking in the breathtaking seascapes and dining at seafood restaurants, eating the freshest lobster and clams. We stopped at a small family-owned restaurant right on the coast, with a deck overlooking the sea. We feasted on crab legs, lobster, clams, corn-on-the-cob, soups, and potatoes, getting to enjoy the delicious fresh seafood right at the edge of the ocean, with the constant sound of waves crashing against the rocks, and the sun setting in the west. After our main courses, the server brought us all a pie concoction he called "ice cream pie." The pie was covered with regular ice cream and was extraordinarily delicious, with flavors of vanilla, crème, a hint of lemon, and a dash of liqueur combining perfectly to form one of the best desserts I have ever had.

After visiting a few more Stephen King stops and going to the U.S./Canadian border, we then began our long journey back home. We retraced our steps for the most part, except that we did take a more direct route through Appalachia to get to Tennessee and then on to Arkansas. My aunt, uncle, and cousins were very kind, and that trip was one of the most fun and memorable experiences of my life.

Ready for 13th Grade?

Zach Schwartz

College, as made immediately apparent, is more than an escape from home or a pardon from parental authority. College is an incubator of intellect, an advocate for self-advancement, and a transition between high school and the real world. Most college graduates insist that the best years of one's life are those spent in college. From the short time I have spent in college, I can testify as to the truth of that observation. However, I can also form an observation of my own: college is everything but 13th grade

In my childhood, as my mother delightfully informs me, I had my sights set on my future. When inquired as to my future occupation, I replied that I wished to be an instruction worker (meaning construction worker—rest assured that I took speech lessons from then on out). Even now, as a young adult, I understand why I delivered that response. I have always had a fascination with infrastructure. Of course, several years passed before I realized that instead of physically laboring on buildings, I could design them. In high school, I began to work with architectural software, designing bridges, homes, and schools. My future career as an engineer or an architect seemed certain.

However, progression through school changed my career interests. In the same way, progression into college changed my outlook on education. In high school, all students pursue, essentially, the same piece of paper—a high school diploma. Sharing this goal, high school students are largely the same, with factors such as ACT score and graduation status (valedictorian or salutatorian) acting to provide the most significant differentiation. This uniformity, however, is not at the fault of the students. Strict mandates in required classes and lack of class diversity promote this uniformity. College exists to combat this standardization, and it presents a fierce battle.

In college, more options are presented to students than ever before. To graduate from a university is more complicated than graduation from a high school. Instead of working toward a uniform goal, students have the choice of an Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degree, among other options, and they have numerous majors to choose from. Instead of having a clear path to graduation, myriad paths are presented. Along with these fundamental differences, college also differs from high school in how education is dealt with. Through state-regulated examinations, high school teachers seem burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that students learn. In contrast, college places the responsibility onto the shoulders of the students who are now paying for an education. Because of this shift in responsibility, classes get exponentially more difficult. In high school, widespread proclamation of educational struggle could derail class; however, college classes move as steady as a locomotive, slowing for no expression of distress in students.

Adapting academically to collegiate life is only one facet of the overall change demanded of students. To adapt to new living conditions is also critical. Instead of

having the power to alter my environment, a power that I frequently (and enthusiastically) exercised, I quickly learned that such a luxury is no more. I recall an early instance of modifying my living conditions—finally realizing that the architects responsible for the design of my house equipped it with another bedroom, I determined that my brother should immediately inhabit this newly-discovered space. Giving him an eviction notice of one week, I decided that I would acquire a television in his absence (which seemed a perfectly fair trade). Such an act of change, however, is not possible in college; I cannot simply ask my roommate to leave. Adaptation is necessary. I must now share a 180-square-foot space with another person. Moreover, this room of teal tiles and beige block walls must function as a bedroom, kitchen, closet, and office. To share a multifunctional space with another person is unavoidable.

Along with changing the way one learns and lives, college demands that students learn to deal with freedom. Going from a high school whose campus rules resembled those of a penitentiary to a college whose campus is completely unrestricted was astounding to me. A simple trip to Quiznos for lunch was an amazing experience—no longer am I limited to cafeteria food. However, students may misconstrue this freedom as an opportunity to place social demands above educational demands, a mistake that can have a detrimental effect on academics. Being forced to study into the small hours of the morning has taught me to wield freedom wisely.

Within a few short days of beginning college, one notion became shockingly clear to me: college is not 13th grade. While career options have been revealed to me throughout my life, the ultimate crossroads of occupations exists in college. Here, I am faced with more decisions than ever before. What do I really want to study, and what kind of degree do I wish to hold for the rest of my life? From a strenuous learning environment to cramped living quarters, adapting to collegiate life presents adversity at every corner. But as high school fades into the past and exciting opportunities are revealed, I know that I am in the process of constructing a life of significance and fulfillment.

The S.S. *Climax*

Melody Tabor

For most people, the yearbooks of past decades are uninteresting, dusty piles of papers. For the average high school journalism student, yearbooks exceeding the past five years are unhelpful; filled with past styles and fads unusable in the modern day. Only the dedicated journalist or yearbook enthusiast would care for books created decades before even their parents were born. I count myself in both of these categories.

As a junior on the yearbook staff and third year journalism student, I volunteered for the job of archiving the many yearbooks of my high school. This was done for the 100th edition of *The Climax* yearbook. We planned on using photographs from these many yearbooks throughout our pages to reveal how far yearbooks have come and to further keep record of the memories preserved in these books. At the time, however, either the records had been lost or no one in recent years had kept record of how many yearbooks there were, what years we had, or even attempted to organize them by year.

I spent days going through the closet where the books were kept and documenting and organizing them. I soon discovered that there was a huge gap between 1931 and 1951. No books between those twenty years could be found, but the 1951 edition continued with the numbering as if the books had never stopped publication. It still remains a mystery to me why the yearbooks stop at 1931. At first I believed the books to simply have stopped publication because of the Great Depression and World War II, but why then did they not continue into the late 40s, and why did the numbering of the books continue as if there were editions of them throughout those missing years? It is possible some sort of accident caused this set of books to be damaged beyond repair, and no one bothered to replace them. Previous teachers did not know what happened to the missing books, so it might forever be a mystery to me.

After this discovery, I then had to go back and look through their pages to find useable, interesting pictures to feature in the one hundredth edition. I found the task fascinating to see the different hair styles and people within the weathered pages of the older books from the 1920s-1930s. These books were extremely well-preserved compared to books made in the 1950s and 60s. Of these older yearbooks, my favorite edition would be 1931; this book contained a wide array of hair styles and unusual names; the pictures within and simple texture of the pages drew me to it.

As I continued into my senior year as co-editor of the yearbook, we were moved into a remodeled art room. Once moved, I organized *The Climax* yearbooks and random other books from various schools. I had not spent much time with the books from other schools, and I found a few editions of *The Climax* mixed within these.

It wasn't until my last week of high school that I discovered a book made similarly to my favorite 1931 edition. At first I disregarded the book and began to move it into the older section of the miscellaneous yearbooks, because while it was made similarly, the book had a ship embossed on the cover. Russellville High School's mascot is the

Cyclones, so it came as a surprise when, upon further inspection of the book, I discovered this was a 1929 edition of *The Climax* not previously known to me. This was the first edition of a Russellville High yearbook to use a prevalent theme throughout the book. The sheer detail of the front cover and end sheets was breathtaking. The end sheets were a treasure map with pirates, ships, and sea monsters. It reminded me of Peter Pan. The extravagance of just this opening of the book was unlike anything I had seen in yearbooks around the same period. Even for modern yearbooks, the level of detail and time it must have taken to design is unheard of. It was more than likely hand-drawn and then copied into the book, which is something foreign to contemporary yearbook students who design their whole yearbooks on a computer screen.

Throughout the newly-discovered book are drawings of ships and pirates for the beginning of sections. It is truly remarkable how this book went unnoticed. I am sure that, had it been discovered the year before, this book would have been reused more than any other in the 100th edition of *The Climax*. After discovering this book I eagerly showed it to my friends on the staff, who were also amazed by the detail. I even spent my time as a teacher's aide reading this yearbook.

This yearbook and others like it, while of no consequence to most people, sincerely fascinate me. Looking through the past generations, one can discover strange names once popular yet now forgotten. One can discover the strange past hairdos of present teachers. One can discover how certain events or fads affected people who once went to the same high school. One can see how another student from a different time can pour so much devotion and passion into their yearbook, detailing the events long past for others to see.

Dogs or Diamonds?

Emily Walters

I've heard it said that diamonds are a girl's best friend. Fellow females: we need to rethink this association. Diamonds are certainly good things to have on your side, but do you think it's really a give-and-take relationship? If a diamond could speak, what do you think it would say? "How can I show you how much I care?" "What do I need to do to make your day brighter?" No. It would say, "you're not cleaning me often enough," or maybe "don't take too much attention away from me, because I'm what it's all about."

Well that's not my kind of best friend. Ladies, let's change the status quo! Prove to others (men) that we care most about those who care about us-- dogs.

I have had a dog for as long as I can remember. It started with Beau, then Duchess followed, succeeded by Duke, leading to the two friends I cherish most today-- Rags and Buster. Rags was a gift to my brother for his fifteenth birthday. What better gift than one that keeps on giving? This girl is the best. We adopted her from the local animal shelter for \$20 (which is much more reasonable than any diamond, Ladies!). She was around three years old, already spayed and house-trained. Any dog owner who has brought one up from a pup knows how valuable these characteristics are in a new-found friend. All of my family fell in love, save one. My sister, Audra, wasn't sold on living alongside our new furry friend, because Rags was the first dog we ever kept in the house. However, slowly but surely, Rags won Audra's heart. It wasn't easy, but with patience and hard work it happened. When we returned to our home, everyone knew Rags would be full of eager affection, waiting to "fill up our loving cups," as my mom likes to say. It was this persistent and never-failing adoration that converted my sister to a dog lover. But if I want to convey the difficulty of Rags's task, I shouldn't go any farther without bringing to light the smallest member of our family.

Buster was a gift to Rags. We figured she needed the company of another K-9. This little boy was a more rambunctious than the mature Rags but not any less lovable. We got him as a pup, so from the beginning we knew that we would have to use different types of parenting for this furry little ball of a friend. On top of being an adolescent, Buster is a Pomeranian-Yorkie mix. These breeds are like the bouncy balls of the toy collection. He is one little rascal, that's for sure. His and Audra's personalities didn't mix well in the beginning, but what kind of value is there in a relationship if it never takes any work, right? Sure, it's easier to sit and gawk at the size of a shiny rock, but it will never return the favor. Buster, however, will sit and stare at you like you're the most beautiful creature. Beauty probably isn't the reason for this gaze because he usually does this when he's out of food or water, but the look is not any less precious.

Buster and Rags make quite a team. Rags is the more masculine, with red hair and a mustache, while Buster is blonde with a curling, long tail. Their appearances seem reverse of their genders, but I think that is part of their charm. Many times we catch them napping in the same bed, twisted and heads hanging out, but asleep like babies because each loves the nearness of the other. This is what makes them so

personable. My dogs need things like food and water, the same as me, but they also need companionship and affection. Rags and Buster are never happier than when they have my undivided attention and love, returning it ten-fold. This is what makes them my best friends.

I've got one story in particular about these two that always makes me smile. One evening, I had gone to bed and could hear my parents having a hushed discussion. It was about whether or not they were going to let us go with friends to a concert the following weekend. Of course, it was obvious to me that I should go, but they had a harder time deciding what was best for me than I did. Well, like a typical emotional teenage girl, I started crying. It was pitiful. In retrospect I can see how ridiculous it was that I was lying in bed with tears coming down my cheeks because my parents were talking about my plans for the weekend, but in the moment I felt that my emotion was completely justified. Being the wonderful companions that they are, my dogs sensed my sadness and came to comfort me. Rags came and sat in the doorway, her silhouette illuminated by the light in the hallway, shining like my guardian angel. Buster hopped into my bed, knowing from other experiences that his touch is comforting to me. As he came closer to cuddle under my chin, he belched. I don't know if you have ever heard a dog belch, but it's one of the funniest things I have ever heard in my life. Of course this immediately put a smile on my face and cheered me up. As strange as this may seem, I think Buster knew exactly what he was doing. This belch was intentional, meant to make me smile. It is moments like this that validate my love for these four-legged friends.

Since moving to school, I have missed my dogs the most. Their companionship, affection, and comfort are precious things that I hope to never take for granted. My memories with Rags and Buster are as valuable to me as diamonds. So ladies, instead of putting pressure on your beloved to buy a sizable diamond, put pressure on him to act more like a dog. After all, they are the best companions.

My First (and Worst) Date

Lindsay Walters

I am going to tell you straight up--I am a fan of being single. Romantic relationships have never been very appealing to me. You spend way too much time trying to please someone else, and oftentimes you end up not even liking that person after all. Especially in high school, dating is overrated. I had friends who dated, and when they had relationship issues I listened dutifully and tried to act like I cared, but in reality I was just thinking how stupid they were for putting themselves through such unnecessary misery. I don't want this to make it sound like I've never hung around guys; some of the best friends I had in high school were of the opposite sex. But the thought having a romantic relationship with any of them made me want to throw up in my mouth. I had this acquaintance who, for a very short period of my life, appeared mildly attractive and fun. He, for a short and fleeting moment in my life, persuaded me to get to know him in a "more than friends" sort of way. I really had a bad feeling about it from the beginning, but I simply wasn't strong enough to resist that pleading look in his wonderfully blue eyes. In order to protect him from his own identity, I will call him "Harry."

So one day at lunch Harry approached me in that awkward "I'm your friend but would like to be your boyfriend" way and asked if I would go with him to see a movie. He didn't realize that I had already decided a movie date was the worst waste of time known to mankind. How smart is it to go to a smelly movie theatre (our only option in Harrison) and buy unreasonably overpriced tickets to sit silently and watch a large television screen in a room overcrowded with annoying people who should avoid public appearances? But, overlooking my feelings of disgust, I accepted.

Oh, how naïve I was! I agreed to meet Harry at 5:00 PM in the high school parking lot so I could ride with him to the restaurant where we would fill our stomachs before the movie (since popcorn and a drink would have cost me half my kingdom). So, being my typical punctual self, I arrived ten minutes early. I didn't expect Harry to be waiting for me, but I did expect him before 5:30. He left me sitting in the high school parking lot for thirty minutes, wondering if I had been rejected (even though it was his idea in the first place). Finally, he drove up in his father's Camaro. For everyday purposes, Harry drove a silver Chevy pickup that had nothing wrong with it whatsoever, but I guess it was his failed attempt at impressing me or making me feel special.

What made it worse was that he didn't even apologize for being half an hour late. He drove up with this vain look on his face like he was doing me a great favor by letting me ride with him. I think that was the most infuriating thing. When he parked and got out of the car I had to force myself not to ask him what he had gotten stuck up his hoo-ha. He literally repulsed me the way he walked over in his Polo shirt like he was the hottest thing I had ever seen. At this moment I had sincerely regretted ever agreeing to this date. For a fleeting instant I considered coming up with a pitiful lie in order to get out of it, but then I thought I might as well get a free meal out of him while I had the chance. So then we were off.

He turned out to be an okay driver but was a terrible conversationalist. The drive to the restaurant was full of awkward silence and me attempting to hide the sounds of my hungry stomach yelling at me. We arrived to the restaurant at 5:50 and got seated in ten minutes. I was pleased with his choice of eateries. He chose a moderately priced Italian restaurant that serves the best rolls in our town. The meal went pretty smoothly, aside from the part where I clumsily spilled sweet tea all the way down the front of my new second-hand dress that I had bought the day before at the exciting price of \$6.73 (which is about a tenth of what he spent on that gross pink shirt he was wearing). He did pay for my meal, which was a consolation until I walked up to the movie ticket window, handed over a ten-dollar bill and only received a ticket and two quarters in return. That was depressing.

To give Harry some credit, the movie was decent. I couldn't tell you what it was, but I remember not hating it. It was still a waste of time and money, though, since over a span of two hours we spoke two words to each other: "which row?" We sat silently during the entire movie, never even acknowledging each other's presence. I think he could sense my feelings of annoyance and frustration because after the movie he apologized for arriving late to pick me up. It was nice of him to apologize, but he was just a few hours too late. After the movie he drove me back to the parking lot and dropped me off at my car. I could tell he was disappointed. It made me feel bad because I felt responsible for the negative aura that had surrounded us all evening. The unfortunate reality is, however, that our date never should have happened. That encounter ruined a potentially functional friendship. My instincts had proven me right-- dating is something that does not come to me naturally, and perhaps never will. I guess my parents will have to arrange a marriage for me someday, or better yet I could end up an old maid, alone and perfectly satisfied with myself as a companion.

From the North to the South

Sarah Zulfer

A major change that has occurred in my life was my move from the Chicago suburbs to rural Arkansas. This was in the middle of my junior year in high school, and I couldn't wait to start my new life in Arkansas. My friends and teachers made jokes about me moving down to South, joking that I should be careful of the Confederate flags and all the "bigots." I laughed and brushed them aside. I wouldn't let them damper my excitement.

In October, before my move was official, I came down to Arkansas to make sure I wanted to live down here. I took a tour of Pottsville High School and quickly found out that I was ahead as a junior and was even enrolled in classes that Pottsville didn't have, like advanced Spanish and math. I didn't let this get in my way; I needed an easier workload anyway. After the tour of the high school I decided to look at the local college. I already knew that I wanted to be a pharmacist and that Arkansas Tech University had the classes that I would need for grad school, but my counselor at Crystal Lake told me that touring a college is the only way to know if you will really like it.

Pulling onto campus, I immediately knew that I would love it here. The campus was beautiful. There were huge trees everywhere and pretty brick buildings. The campus had students walking around, but it wasn't too crowded. The only other campus I had been on was Illinois State University, which was all concrete and looked like it was falling apart. I knew I couldn't be happy in a place like that. My tour of Arkansas Tech made me more and more excited at the thought of moving down here. I loved the dorm rooms and found out that there would soon be a Starbucks on campus. It seemed like the perfect place for me to be.

In December the move finally happened. I started my first day of school in January and immediately found out that the rules were different in school. At Crystal Lake there was a very loose dress code that wasn't enforced; in Pottsville there are no tank tops, no shorts above the knees, and no facial piercings. I was used to walking around in the hallways and seeing girls with pink and purple hair (sometimes guys went crazy with the hair dye, too), and piercings in strange places. I was used to people showing too much skin and hearing swearing in the hallway. Students would make out in front of anyone who happened to walk by, but at Pottsville, even linking arms with an opposite-sex friend would get you snapped at. Cell phones and anything electronic were forbidden with threats of in-school suspension, while back home students could have phones out at lunch and in the hallways when class wasn't in session. This new rules were strange for me to adjust to.

In Arkansas, religion is prominent. I had never seen a Pentecostal before; I didn't even know what that was. Now I see them everywhere with their long skirts and long hair. Even in school there was CSU (Christian Students United). I hadn't thought that was allowed in schools. At the end-of-year honors, one of the teachers wouldn't let

anyone eat until she blessed the food and said a prayer. Nothing like that had ever happened while at my old school.

I started doing things for fun that I had never done before. For the first time I started watching school sports. I became a huge fan of the Lady Apaches and watched almost all of their games. In Chicago, I only went to games that my stepsister was playing in, and that was because I was forced. I had never been hiking before and found out that it is something I really enjoy. It took me awhile, but I even walked around Walmart with my friends for “fun.” I still don’t understand how walking around a busy store could be fun, but it seemed like every time we didn’t have something to do, someone would call out “Hey! Let’s just go to Walmart!” It still makes no sense to me.

There was new slang that I had to learn. When someone asked me to go “mudding” with them I was more confused than ever. What is mudding? When I found out, I was even more confused. Who would want to get their car dirty? Certainly not me. Another word that was new to me was “talking.” I knew the real definition of talking but apparently in Arkansas it means flirting. People would “talk” and then a week or two later they would be in a relationship.

People always commented on my accent being strange, but I assume that went away because now friends back home laugh about my accent. They were confused at the new bag I had and the shoes that I was wearing; apparently those weren’t fads in Chicago. When I went home to visit my dad in Chicago, everything was different to me. I hardly saw any trucks on the road. My dad even joked around asking me if I installed a gun rack on the back of my car and if I met any guys named “Bubba” or “Darrell.”

There were a lot of changes that I had to adjust to, but overall I have loved living in Arkansas and would make the decision to move here over and over again, if I had to. Arkansas and Arkansas Tech have also been the perfect places for me.