

# ACCOLADES

The 2010 Santa Fe Community College

## Student Writing Awards



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## Accolades

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The Santa Fe Community College Student Writing Awards are given out annually. All students enrolled in at least three credits in either the Fall or Spring semesters were eligible to enter their writing. Interested students submitted their work, which was judged by a group of judges selected from the staff at SFCC. The places were then determined on the basis of the judges’ rankings. In addition to being published in *Accolades*, the authors were invited to give a public reading at the SFCC Student Writing Awards Celebration. Winners and Runners-up also received monetary prizes.

The Student Writing Awards exist to celebrate the diverse voices of SFCC students and to recognize the already-present talent of these still-developing writers. This recognition also provides encouragement to the writers to continue their pursuit of original written expression.

The following people were essential to making The SFCC Student Writing Awards and Celebration happen: Shuli Lamden, Colleen Lynch, Justine Carpenter, Kathy Romero, Jean Marquardt, Irene Edwards, Collected Works Bookstore and Dorothy Massey, Lauren Camp, Casey Frank, Meghan McGarrity, Susan Dugan, Tim, Rea, Deni Javas, Todd Lovato, Barbara Woltag, Bethany Carson, Daniel Kilpatric, and all the students who entered but did not receive an award.

# Poetry Winner

*Sarah Velez*

## **Neuroscience is a Memory**

What can be done  
About those unforgivable moments  
When Broca and Weirnicke's area  
Skip like smooth round rocks  
Over glass sky  
And sink into the stomach of clouds?

If the mist around the corpus collusum  
Is too thick for dendrites  
To reach their spindly arms  
And grasp each other  
Should I tilt my ear to the grass  
And let the fog sleepily creep out?

Pressing your eyelids  
Close to your eyes,  
Millions and millions of motor nerves  
Seem to say  
Seeing is a lot like hearing.  
How can you agree  
When there is such thick skin  
Protecting your irises?

One of those days,  
Long ago,  
You measured clarity in the escalating neurons  
In your increasing gray matter.  
You said  
Learning is a lot like being color blind.  
How could I agree,  
When I was mesmerized by the  
Deep cyans of that Glass sky?

# Poetry First Runner-Up

*Rita Feinstein*

## **Un-Expectancy**

Bigger than myself, I break  
    into my daughter and my own.  
Everything I give, you take  
    and, like a sunset in your wake,  
I bleed into my own dark lake  
    and on my hips, a screaming stone,  
that I cannot remove or shake.

Nine months you gathered like a heap  
    of autumn leaves against my spine,  
a restless weight in blazing sleep—  
    yet—etherized even as I rip,  
I whisper to scalpels, “You can keep  
    this blue-blood creature of mine.  
Dig deep.”

Bigger than my skin, my bones  
    are torches splintered with medical cold,  
my knees staked up like traffic cones.  
    Nine months ago I should have known—  
today I turn thirteen years old.  
    White-skinned fish, you’re on your own.

# Poetry Second Runner-Up

*Gabe Tafoya*

## **Consonant Cry for Help**

A lonely cry, a silent scream,  
To echo out of dreaded things.  
True emotion hindered not  
By dissonance or what is taught.  
True love? Perhaps, or something more,  
For he does this not from a heart that soars  
On wings of gods to Olympus' throne,  
Or broken wings of devils once known;  
But of deepest pain and sorrow wrought,  
From hearts divided and distraught,  
Most beautiful of things is brought.

Melody strays and flows like tides  
Erasing love and genocide.  
A solemn drone echoing on  
Through empty halls and further on.  
Oh most morose of monologues,  
Manifest in malevolent song!  
Nihilist by nature, nothing more now than past,  
With nothing but that music brash  
How long can this one man possibly last?

Television playing on, empty souls do speak,  
So foreign, foolish, feigning, weak.  
No passion like this brilliant man  
Who dares to take unpopular stand.  
And thus a man who lives alone  
With music the only friend he knows.

Melody, his tender love;  
Scales, his mistress bound by blood;  
Chords, consonance to be struck;  
Strings before him meant to be plucked,  
And all this skill, not foolish man's luck.

The bow swaying back and forth  
Creates an eerie tune of sorts.  
“Vivace!” the conductor signs,  
Crescendo of most poignant lines.  
Adagio repeats once more  
To end this most brilliant of scores.  
No more days pass, no music played,  
Violin weeps upon the grave  
Of the genius music couldn't save.

# Poetry

## Honorable Mention

*Rita Feinstein*

### **Half-Life**

The children's children's rabbits are still living with plutonium,  
nibbling it like yogurt pellets  
Their eyes open to a glow-in-the-dark wonderland  
where the grass is radioactive spinach  
and all the doors are painted to look like tarot cards.  
Where do rabbits go at night?  
When the sun drops into the buttery glaucoma of evening,  
when the yellow croquet ball is smashed below the horizon,  
what conspires in rusted hutches?  
What sweat-beaded fur disturbs the wire,  
what toes scrabble,  
what whispers simmer to a boil, what white of eye remains  
after the radioactivity congeals like oatmeal in the gut?  
Slippers without feet, they shuffle into the contemptuous midnight,  
each hair bruised into flame,  
paws like green glowsticks leaving toe prints in the asphalt.  
When the gibbous moon blows its nose,  
noble gasses funnel to the bottom of the sky,  
sticky sediment in our water dishes,  
radiation-gorged fleas inside our rabbits.  
Chartreuse rabbits chew webs of nothing through the soil,  
tails bobbing like the pompoms of those cheerleaders present at the apocalypse.

# Poetry

## Honorable Mention

*Tom Troth*

### **Fence Link**

Let me impress you with my fences.  
I drag the lumber myself, dig holes,  
and wrap the wire. It tires me.

Let me impress you with my fences.  
I load the roll of chain link into the truck  
and toss in the brackets. I am getting tired.

Let me impress you with my defenses.  
They are here so you cannot pass into  
the area of my true trouble. They let me rest.

Let me impress you with my defenses.  
You will never get as close as you would like  
to me, for I can easily construct another barrier. They console me.

Let me impress you with my drudgery.  
It buys me time to be away from you to  
think my thoughts, not yours. I listen intact.

Let me impress you with a sad glance.  
Stood up on ceremony to get your attention,  
then I trouble you with my mystery. I don't tell you.

Let me impress you with my pleading.  
For your hand back in mine because  
I've nowhere to go. You mean more than caution.

Let me impress you with my fences.  
I work hard at building them,  
but you should tear them down. I said so.

Let me impress you with my fences.  
I build them for us, for space when anger sets in.  
Before our eyes, let's bulldoze them.

# Poetry

## Honorable Mention

*Tom Troth*

### **Discussion Through Smile**

In my eyes you could have been a  
talent or discusser of ideas.

You could have entertained me or  
yelled.

Your eyes could have made so many points  
on the weather or the news.

But the car crash jogged your thirty-year-old brain into infancy.

You've shared and you made me laugh, but  
certain virtues get kept inside from now on.

In so many heartbeats you could have  
expressed an anger, a resentment.

I would have welcomed rage or  
utter terror.

Would have been surprised on a different plane  
by more communicative wit, enlightened by  
sophistications, or blatant lack thereof,  
but there is another  
reality.

Not everyone needs to  
show off his or her talent.  
Keeping it inside is  
not like keeping it in a hiding place.

Inside  
is where the harnessed  
runs together, and expresses  
itself with a smile on the  
outside.

# Poetry

## Honorable Mention

*Sarah Velez*

### **Wings Oil Slick**

Mother says,

“Daddy will be home soon”

And with two clangs, knocks her wooden spoon on the pot.

She hides her face from Baby

Her stomach is boiling and she doesn't want the child to see her face flush.

Kneeling at the docks;

The hardships are coming into harbor.

Mother and baby count the barnacles

That create starbursts on the metal.

Mother says

“Daddy is the grain of the rust.”

Baby slowly traces her future with one small finger

On the side of the ship.

Mother drops smooth, pastel pebbles into the bottom of the ocean.

Baby mimics the small plunks with pursed lips

Dipping her fingers softly in the lapping waves

She presses her ear firmly to the splintered wooden boards.

Hears crying at her mother's feet.

Pressed back behind the docks

An artist is painting the boats in copper, gold, and blood.

He sings a broken song to the gulls

And they dance to push the tide back.

Baby spots a coral reef

Tells mother the porous fingers are searching for god.

Tells mother that the sailors are searching for truth.

At home,

Mother cradles baby in one loose arm

And sings sea shanties.

Baby dreams of drowning in tears.

Mother locks the door with one small

Click.

# Poetry

## Honorable Mention

*Lucy River*

### **First Movement**

When I kiss you it will be  
With a fumbling and a bumbling

The choreography -  
The clash of glasses

The inhalation of our breath -  
The score

Nothing graceful in our impulse to begin  
Your naked shiny skull beneath my skin

# Personal Essay Winner

Rita Feinstein

## Glendale Stadium is My Cathedral

Dear Lord, today is September fifteenth and I am feeling—what’s the word?—anarchical? Yes, anarchical. I have striped knee socks; muddy sneakers; a cargo miniskirt; and a shirt advertising atheism, communism, and free love. It has been pointed out that this shirt is the exact inverse of my belief system, but what the hell. I’m dressed for anarchy, not self-expression.

I clomp down the hall, feeling more spite than usual towards the tacky Native American art sealed in glass cases. Why bother protecting it? It’s not like anyone *wants* to steal this crap.

I hate this carpet. It looks like its been regurgitated. And I hate the ping-pong club. The renegade ball always manages to hit the exact same spot on my calf. I propose we lock them in a biohazard safe where they can play ping-pong till they kick their respective buckets.

But what I hate more than anything is that I’m trapped. My soul is on a ball and chain. I’m so close, but so far. My parents don’t realize that by refusing to buy me a concert ticket, they’re denying me enlightenment. Dear Lord—may I call you Bono? Or is that too intimate?—I want mayhem. I want neon sweat to fly off the concertgoers’ shoulders and hug my neck like prayer beads. I want to wear The Sexy Boots with my pink plaid dress, which will match the pink umbrella I’ll use to deflect the cascade of cheap stadium beer dumped on my head. People will be shrieking and puking and peeing in their soda, but I will not be stapling my lab report to calculations on atomic mass, so I will be happy.

This Glendale Stadium in Phoenix—this dizzying church of lights and music—it’s not *that* far away. Besides, Mom is always saying how we need to take more family road trips. What better way to bond than through the power of sound? And what about Richard, my dad’s college friend, who lives in Illinois? He took his whole family to see U2 in Chicago. Why should our family be any different?

I want to miss Chemistry Lab. I want my parents to chauffeur me across eight hours of sweltering desert and soul-sucking tourist traps. But I refuse to drip hydrochloric acid onto a magnesium strip when I should be flinging adoring tears in your direction.

I bitch to various people during the day, hoping that my sisters’ philosophy of “whiners get everything they want” will work for me. No luck. These heathens are still living in a cultural wasteland where washed-

up anorexics from American Idol cavort through Coca-Cola ads. I will pray for them, Bono My Lord, but retrieving them from the musical dark ages is the work of a prophet, not me. Although I cannot sway them to buy me tickets, I can at least recount my dream for them.

In the dream, Bono, you abandoned your concert to help me save a family of hippos. They were being evicted from their swamp because they could no longer afford the rent. Grandmother Hippo adjusted her chintzy bonnet and shrieked, “What’s the world come to when you need to pay to live in a swamp?”

Not only were they homeless, they were responsible for a handi-capped young hippopotamus, who, having no sense of whether he was underwater or not, needed constant supervision to ensure he didn’t inhale lung-fuls of H<sub>2</sub>O.

You’re such a nice man, Bono. Not just anyone would relinquish the spotlight in order to perform an act of charity.

And you’re a good man, too, you know that? When I was too ill to even nibble a vitamin-C tablet, you kept me company. That was during my family’s Mexican vacation, which we intended to spend bronzing in the sun, naked except for bikinis and parrot feathers. Then we found out that San Carlos was enduring its only cold spell in pretty much forever. Our condo didn’t have a heater, but it did have a blanket peddler that walked by in the evenings. Bundled in the itchy fabric, my family and I strolled by the Sea of Cortez. My dad called the view “amaze-frickin’-zing,” but I thought the sunsets looked like butter on fish meat.

The first morning, I woke up drowning in my own mucus. So congested I could barely function, I hauled my shivering body to the kitchen, made a soy chai, and rocked myself into consolation by watching dorsal fins slice the surf. My white blood cells refused to cooperate. No matter how much herbal tincture my mother pumped down my throat, I continued to feel as if mounds of green cheese were melting inside my body. By the time our wretched vacation was over, my little sister was blue from swimming attempts, my nose throbbed with pressure, and our car groaned under the weight of fresh fruit and tortillas. On the drive home, I pressed my forehead to the window and whimpered. The only thing sustaining me was the iPod.

But why did you bother saving my life when you knew I couldn’t go to your concert?

★

★

★

It is now 8:12 on Thursday morning—the autumn kind that makes phlegm burble in your lungs. There is no sky to speak of, just soggy clouds.

Mom just got off the phone with Dad. He received two instructions from her, the first of which I forget. Buy bagels, or something like that. But the second instruction plunged me into gooey despair. *Buy Steve*

*Martin tickets.*

Look, I have nothing against Steve Martin. Under any other circumstances, I would enthusiastically listen to his banjo for two hours, but these are special circumstances. Giving my most pathetic whimper, I begged Mom to buy me a U2 ticket instead. And you know what, God? Flat-out denied. The blasphemy.

Don't get me wrong, Lord—I love my parents. We agree on almost everything—local vegetables, the accuracy of astrology, the unbearable cuteness of our dog, for example—but now I've discovered this generation gap. For mysterious reasons, my parents are doing everything in their power to turn me against my band. "Hey, Rita," my dad will say. "Did you know that Bono is really *short*?"

"And stocky!" I'll say.

He'll grumble at my enthusiasm and make himself a tofu sandwich to dull the pain. I just know he wanted a Deadhead for a daughter.

My parents think U2 is an epidemic. They are the only people I know who don't appreciate these godsent musicians. Then again, my father doesn't like anyone but his own band, Advance Trance, who do everything within their power to mutilate their eardrums. Advance Trance has a secret weapon, an amplifier named Sammy Kablammy. Sammy is aptly described in the ode my father wrote for him. "He's a real heavy dude / he'll be around for years / bring a tear to your eye / and blood to your ears." As if anthropomorphizing his sound system isn't weird enough, he treats it like one of the family. He goes so far as to call Sammy my little brother.

My grandma is another sacrilegious punk, meaning she doesn't see what's so *wow* about Irish boys. Actually, there are only three males she considers sexy: my friend (whom everyone is pressuring me to marry), Mick Jagger, and Chico, her lap dog.

At least *some* people have common sense. My godmother, for example. She's a naturopathic doctor, so her shelves are stuffed with homeopathic books telling you what to do if it feels like you have a hedgehog up your arse.

Back in June, she and my mom collaborated on a yard sale. For being women who consult their cards and stars between breaths, they couldn't have picked a worse day. The storm clouds spewed cold rain all over us, pummeling the garbage cans and knocking cherries from the trees. I rearranged the books in vain; their spines curled in the moist air.

Then I meandered inside and watched my sisters dump cheese crackers in bowls of butternut squash soup. Bored out of their skulls, they raided our godmother's video supply and watched *Sweet Home Alabama* with Reese Witherspoon. After the predictable conclusion, they were still not satisfied. They burrowed through the film stash until they saw it—a black-and-white documentary of four Irish angels. The VCR accepted it

slowly, savoring every centimeter of cassette.

*Look, God—there you are! Never mind that you need a haircut, or that you must've jumped in a tub of bacon grease. Never mind that you're wearing suspenders with no shirt, because I will suppress my gag reflex and pretend your sweaty, fuzzy moobs don't exist. Never mind how your body language screams, "I am a conceited jerk, so you can kiss my tight-pants ass." I love you all the same.*

My muffin-gnawing father had the nerve to wander into the room, gesture towards the screamy version of "Sunday Bloody Sunday," and ask, "How long, how long must they sing this song?"

I gave my loftiest snort, prayed that his soul would reach the state of enlightenment mine has achieved, and focused back on your antics.

You probably won't be doing aerial splits at the Phoenix concert. You're too old for that. Actually, your whole band is beyond my personal aesthetic. I preferred when you were young, hot, and greasy.

My dad preferred you when you didn't exist. He kept a running commentary on all the video's flaws, like how one shot made your band look four feet tall. Poor bloke. He doesn't realize that by knocking my band, he is knocking his chances of having grandchildren.

You see, if a boy understands me, he'll know that U2 lyrics are the passwords to my heart. If, after months of fruitless courting, he tells me, "To touch is to heal / to hurt is to steal / if you want to kiss the sky / better learn how to kneel," I am his. He will be asphyxiated by my kisses. He will be the envy of the boys who thought they could win me over with, "You have pretty hair," and "You could have any guy you wanted if you weren't so shy." As for the boys who threatened me with, "If you don't get a boyfriend now, you'll be alone for the rest of your life!" they'll go home and cry into their teddy bears.

Meanwhile, I will be creating a child.

I will puke myself to pieces and compare the kid to *Ictaluridae*, the North American catfish, which suckers itself to the tank and relentlessly vacuums up nutrients. But I will still love it, mostly because I'll have an excuse for eating more.

Genetic material will shuffle inside me, along with my shamrock-colored, quarter-Irish blood.

My great-great-great grandfather held a blackened potato between his fingers. He cursed the land. So much misery because of blighted spuds. He swept his family from the motherland, shouldered his way through Ellis Island, and slept in puddles of sludge, kissing blarney goodbye. The Dougherty blood took a lopsided course to my body. It gave me a brogue that could fool a leprechaun.

Perhaps, Bono, your great-great grandfather was on the same ship. Perhaps they exchanged potato recipes while gazing mournfully at the bilge rats and wondering if rodents taste starchy, or good with butter.

What else explains this soul connection? What else justifies the electricity that blasts through me while turning the pages of your 1980's photo shoots? If I was older—or you were younger—I would hunt you down and choke you with my tongue. And then, while you were recovering, I'd kiss The Edge too. But not Adam. Seriously, what the fuck is up with his hair? And I do mean *up*. I think he styles his fro by sticking his finger in an electric outlet. And Larry? Who kisses a guy named *Larry*? (Let us ignore the more pressing question of *who kisses guys named Edge and Bono?*)

God, your wife is the luckiest woman alive.

I swore I'd never fall for a celebrity, but I've failed. I used to tease the girls who swooned over what's-his-face in insert-band-here. After all, how can you love a person you've never met? But you're different. You helped me save those hippos, remember? So maybe we *have* met. Maybe you had the same dream.

I wish you were forty years younger.

I wish I wasn't so perverted.

I wish I was exaggerating when I said U2 is the only thing that makes me believe love exists.

I'm worried that if I go to the concert, I'll be disappointed.

I'm worried that if I don't go, I'll regret it for the rest of my life.

Because if I have Chemistry Lab in the morning and the Steve Martin show at night, I just might cry.

# Personal Essay Winner

*Kris Swedin*

## Higher Ground

“If you see a dead body, don’t touch it. Call the police.”

It was 1972 in Rapid City, South Dakota, a small community where nothing much ever happened. It was the summer before I entered high school and things had started off pretty much the same as every other summer. I was teaching swimming lessons at the neighborhood pool and trying to earn my life saving certificate. I was battling a mean case of Swimmer’s Ear which I always had in June every year from going in the pool too many times when the temperature was less than 65 degrees. My mother begged me to wear a swimming cap, but I wouldn’t be caught dead in such an ugly thing. I thought I looked pretty hot in the lime green polka-dotted swimming suit I got new that summer. I had also been working on straightening my hair and growing it longer so it would look good when I started my sophomore year in the fall. My Aunt Mayme told me how to rinse my hair with vinegar to lighten it in the sun. A bathing cap would ruin my image and style. I preferred Swimmer’s Ear to the alternative.

My friend Debbie and I were fifteen that summer and had been left in charge of my two brothers -- aged eight and two -- while my parents went out of town to a convention a few hours away for the weekend. I was experienced at watching kids – I had been taking care of babies since kindergarten. What could possibly go wrong?

Being the eldest daughter of the eldest daughter and the eldest son carried heavy responsibility at an early age. My siblings were younger than me as were all my cousins on both sides of the family. I helped take care of them and started earning money babysitting with neighborhood kids when I was fourteen.

I had also learned my way around five different schools by that summer. The high school would be my sixth. Because of frequent family moves I changed schools every two and a half years and had to learn how to walk to them and navigate my way through the different approaches to learning. I attended two different schools for kindergarten. My second kindergarten teacher sent a note home on my report card, “Kristi is very independent and reliable.” When I asked Mom what that meant, she said, “You can take care of yourself.” I felt very proud to be so grown up.

On Friday, June 9, Debbie and I took my brothers to the pool in the late afternoon and visited with friends through the chain link fence. It

was a pleasant summer day. We wanted to see who was hanging out with whom. There were some very cute boys to talk to about their summer plans. We went back to my house and made something for dinner. It didn't start raining until about 6:00. It began raining harder but that wasn't unusual for Rapid City in the summer. Almost every afternoon in June there was a fast forming thunderstorm which was often times accompanied by hail. Even if the rain was torrential, it usually lasted no more than thirty minutes. It wasn't anything to worry about because it happened so often and we were used to it.

Eight inches of rain poured from the sky in less than four hours. Before the TV station was knocked off the air, the ten o'clock news reporter told us about possible flash floods and moving to higher ground. It still didn't seem like anything to worry about, especially at our house because the creek was no where nearby. My brothers were already asleep in their beds and Debbie and I turned in early because there weren't any Creature Features to watch that night since the TV station was out.

I woke up curious about the flood warnings we heard about the night before. I tried to tune in to the local radio station I had always listened to but it was off the air. So were all the other radio stations. As I tuned the radio across the dial an unusual station came in scratchy at first and then stronger as I zeroed in on it. Civil Defense had taken over! This was the thing we learned about over the years with those annoying announcements on radio and TV. They were the ones warning about dead bodies. I ran to the window to take a look.

There weren't any dead bodies outside. I saw the crystal clean aftermath of a raging storm. The young morning was still wet and glittery from the previous evening's rain. The bright green blades of grass sparkled and the sky was a brilliant blue. The sun shone with the promise of a perfect 75 degree day. Everything looked normal in my neighborhood.

I picked up the telephone to see if it was working. There was no dial tone. People on the radio urged that we stay inside.

There was pounding on the front door. Debbie's mom had arrived to check on us and give us instructions. Do Not Drink the Water. Boil it First for Five Minutes. She turned off the water heater and drained it into the bathtub. Use that Water for Washing. When Are Your Parents Coming Back? Stay Close to Home. Debbie's married sister, Ray, had been trapped on her roof all night and her home was completely flooded. Debbie's mom had to help her try to clean up. She was relieved to see that everything was fine in our neighborhood and that we could stay safely out of danger while more serious matters were attended to by the adults. I'll Check on You Later. And she was off. Debbie and I and my two brothers were part of a natural disaster and still home alone.

A little while later my father called from the hotel where they were

staying three hundred miles away. He worked for the telephone company so he knew how to get a call through when no one else could. Dad was sitting in a restaurant drinking coffee when he heard the news. A man in the restaurant said, "Did you hear about the Rapid City Flood? Thousands of people were killed." He called us right away. He and Mom were getting into the car to drive straight home. They must have driven 100 miles per hour because they got home in record time. The city had been sealed off by public safety personnel and only residents were allowed into town.

I felt completely calm during the time Debbie and I were in charge. Since nothing happened in our neighborhood, it seemed like what was being discussed on the radio wasn't real. It is by the grace of God, and the fact that we lived on a hill, that nothing happened to the four of us that night. If we lived close to the creek or in a low-lying area of Rapid City we might have perished. I was calm and so was Debbie, but the two of us still had 15-year-old judgment.

I did finally get scared a week later when rain started pounding again. The bodies of water leading down from the Black Hills and in Rapid City were filled to capacity. Rumors were being repeated on the radio that a large dam was in danger of bursting and that everyone needed to take precaution and get to higher ground. My mind imagined our home looking like the smashed, soaked, ruined homes I saw pictures of in the newspaper during the past week. Some neighborhoods where trailer parks existed next to Rapid Creek had been completely swept away and bare earth was exposed where people once lived. Mom was home with us kids and Dad was out working to restore telephone service throughout the area. Now she wasn't taking the warnings seriously. Maybe it was because she didn't hear the radio telling her not to touch dead bodies the week before.

I was so nervous. I needed to do something to try to take my mind off the dread I felt. I packed my two-year-old brother's diaper bag with diapers, extra clothes and snacks for him to eat in case the worst happened. I put clothes in for my eight-year-old brother, too. Mom and the next door neighbor talked about how I was always prepared. I thought they were making fun of me and I was completely annoyed. This was serious. Didn't they understand that?

The rain continued and the storm water drainage system in the area was so filled with water that it started backing up into the street. The lower half of our block was covered with water. People from the bottom of the block started coming up the hill to stay out of the flooding. Many of them had water lapping at their front doors or beginning to fill their basements. The water crept up the street stopping in front of a home only four houses away from ours. The dam didn't burst but if it had, we, too, would have water surrounding our house or stealing in. All the adults were surprised to see the volume of water produced in the week two flood.

The rest of that summer was filled with hours volunteering at the Red Cross headquarters set up in a school gymnasium. Government officials were on one side of the gym helping people fill out paperwork to get a place to live and emergency cash for food and necessities. On the other side was the tower of cast off clothing that people could help themselves to.

They had us teenage girls shifting through the mountains of clothes that people dropped off for the flood victims. Trying to make some order of the chaotic jumble of clothes seemed nearly hopeless. It appeared that half the city pulled stuff out of their closets that they wouldn't be caught dead wearing and dumped it in the growing mountain of tangled trousers, shirts, skirts, and kids play clothes. Just to sort out the women's things from the men's was exhausting. Holding ripped and dirty clothes that people brought forward from their drawers thinking that some poor flood victim would be so desperate that they would gratefully accept them made me wonder what was wrong with people.

I saw a cross section of our community come through the Red Cross that summer. People who lost everything – including family members -- and were so dazed they could hardly speak. Sometimes they would be looking through the piles of clothes while crying. Little children were playing or fighting with one another while their parents tried to figure out how to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. Sometimes people would just start talking because they needed to say things to somebody. I would listen quietly while I tried to help them find something nice enough for their kids to wear.

Sometimes people needed a hug and I gave them one.

Our community was never the same after that summer. Two hundred thirty eight people lost their lives in one terrifying night. Seven hundred homes were destroyed or just wiped off the earth in an instant. It was one of the worst in-land floods in the history of this country. Higher ground saved my life.

# Personal Essay

## First Runner-Up

*Jacqueline Herrera*

### **A Gift from the Heart**

“I can’t believe this is actually happening!” Mike told me as we paced the hallway in front of room 309. “Did you hear that?” I asked Mike as we ran over to the door and pressed our ears to the cold wood. “Shhh!” he snapped back at me in an angry voice, but I didn’t mind. Angie burst through the door like a rocket shooting for the moon as tears streamed down her tired face. “He’s here! Our baby boy is here!” she shouted over the newborn baby’s cry as she melted into Mike’s arms. “Thank you God, thank you,” I silently whispered as I could taste the salty warmth on my lips. At that moment, I felt so blessed to be apart of this miracle and knew that if it wasn’t for Kim’s unselfish acts and genuine kindness, none of this would be happening. This experience has taught me the true meaning of love, friendship, and unselfishness.

Mike and Angie had been trying for what seemed like centuries to have a baby. Years of failed fertility treatments and thousands of dollars later, they had given up hope. That’s when our best friend Kim decided to do the unexpected. She would generously donate her body, carry and deliver a healthy baby boy to make Angie and Mike’s dream of becoming parents a reality.

Angie, Kim and I have been best friends since as long as I can remember. They are 5 years older than me and I have always called them my big sisters. They have seen me through my first loose tooth, first date and they never let me forget about the time I wrecked us into the garage door the day I was awarded my drivers license. We are completely inseparable and we have a bond that cannot be broken.

We’ve always known how much Angie and Mike wanted to have a baby and our hearts broke along with theirs after every failed attempt. Angie had a long history of medical problems that prohibited her from becoming pregnant. The doctors told her and Mike that there was nothing more they could do. We realized the harsh reality that they would never be able to have a baby. Angie felt cheated and angry at the fact that she would never feel the kicks of her growing child inside her and that she would never experience the miracle of giving birth. As time went on, Angie and Mike threw themselves into their work as owners of a popular Bed and Breakfast. They

worked long hours, met many new people, and became very successful. They seemed to have it all, but we all knew what was missing.

Every Thursday, Kim, Angie and I would take turns hosting our girl's night out. We were very strict about our "girls only" rule because it was our tradition and we didn't want any topic off limits. As I carefully placed colorful umbrellas into our frozen margaritas, I heard a knock on the door at 6 p.m. sharp. I knew it was Angie and Kim because they were never late. When I opened the door, I was shocked to see only Kim standing there with a silly grin on her face. She looked like a child who knew they were about to be busted for coloring on the wall. "Where's Angie?" I asked quickly. "Oh, I told her to come at 6:30," Kim mumbled nervously. "Why, is everything ok?" I asked. "Yes, everything is fine, I just wanted to talk to you alone before she gets here," Kim replied in a nervous tone. I handed her the glass decorated with a purple umbrella as we walked quickly towards the couch. "Ok, let's hear it," I said sarcastically, thinking I was about to hear another one of her crude jokes. "You know how Angie and Mike have been trying and trying for a baby?" she asked. "Of course I do," I replied sternly. "Well, I've been giving it some thought and have decided that I am going to give them a baby" Kim said as tears swelled up in her eyes. "What! Really! I mean how, when?!" I exclaimed. "Well the other day I heard Angie and Mike talking about possibly getting a surrogate mother," she said. "Yeah, Angie told me that was the only option left but they didn't know how to go about it," I gently said. "Well, I talked about it with my doctor and she said that I'm in perfect health and she sees no reason why I couldn't carry their baby," Kim said with confidence. "I mean, I have 2 kids of my own already and the way Angie and Mike look at them with so much love but yet so much heartache shows me just how much they long for a child of their own." She said as she fought back tears. I grabbed her and hugged her tight. I knew what it felt like to hug an angel.

At 6:30, the doorbell rang. "C'mon guys, open up!" Angie yelled from the doorstep. I walked slowly to the door and for the first time in my life I was nervous to see her. "Hey Angie," I said in a low tone that I myself could barely even hear. "Angie, there is something Kim wants to ask you, but before she does, please know that whatever you all decide, I support you all the way," I said excitedly. "Ok, what's going on?" Angie asked anxiously. "Angie, I am willing to be your surrogate mother and carry yours and Mike's child," Kim said in a sweet, loving voice. "Oh my God, are you serious?!" Angie said as her voice cracked. "I have thought this over and I know with all my heart this is what I want to do," Kim replied. "I can't tell you how much this means to me, thank you so much!" Angie said as she hugged Kim tightly. That night we cried harder than we ever cried before. But these were not tears of sadness from ending a relationship or

not getting that job we wanted, they were tears of pure joy. Angie had accepted Kim's generous gift.

The next 9 months were a complete blur for all of us. From helping decorate a new nursery to baby showers, it was hard work, but we were having the time of our lives preparing for the new arrival. It was Christmas Eve and I watched as Mike and Angie hung up their stockings above the fireplace. For the first time, they hung a small blue stocking that read "Baby's First Christmas" in the middle of theirs. As we admired the lights and the tree, we spent the last three hours decorating, the phone rang. While Mike went in the kitchen to answer the phone, I took a picture of Angie standing by the fireplace next to the stockings. "It's time!" Mike screamed loudly as he scurried through the house. Kim had called to say she was in labor and on her way to the hospital. "Get in my car, I'll drive us!" I shouted as I looked around frantically for my car keys. As we raced to the hospital, my hands were shaking and my heart beat so hard I felt as if my chest were about to explode.

Hours went by and our adrenaline was the only thing keeping us awake. As we heard the newborn baby crying, we couldn't help but cry along with him. When we walked into room 309, we were ambushed by doctors and nurses scurrying around steel metal tables and the room was so bright I had to squint my eyes. As we made our way over to the center of the room, I saw Kim sitting in bed holding a tiny baby wrapped snugly into a white blanket with blue and pink stripes. He wailed as he ingested his first breaths of air and Kim gently rocked him in her arms. Angie and Mike walked slowly to the bed as if they were balancing on a tight rope and stood a few feet away not sure as to what to do next. "Merry Christmas," Kim said as she gently placed the baby in the arms of his mother. For the first time in what seemed like years, we saw Angie smile. I had started to think that she had forgotten how due to all of the heartbreak she had endured but there it was, a smile so big that I could see it from a mile away. "Thank you, thank you," Angie cried softly. "We are so grateful, he is so perfect," Mike said in a shaky voice as he fumbled for his camera.

From that day on, we all knew what it felt like to be loved. The love Angie and Mike had for their new baby boy, Ryan, was so incredible, and the love that Kim had for her friends to devote herself and her body entirely to fulfill their dream of becoming parents was magical. She is truly the definition of an unselfish act. Throughout this experience, I have learned that although life has many challenges, it often rewards us in ways we never dreamed possible and helping one another is the greatest gift of all. We continue our traditional Thursday gatherings but our girl's only rule has changed a bit now that Ryan is here!

# Personal Essay

## Second Runner-Up

*Lyndsay Flowers*

### **AA: Alcohol and Abuse**

From a very young age, I can recall my home being filled with screams, the slamming and pounding of doors and cries. Even though I was five and had a newborn baby sister, those piercing sounds did not come from us as children...they were had by our Mother and Father. Through many years we endured as a family drowning inside a broken home. Bruises, slaps, “spankings” and the stench of whatever the choice alcohol may be, never fades far from your senses, no matter how young or however many years go by.

My Grandmother married unhappily at a young age to my Grandfather forty-six years ago. After the births of my father and uncles, she soon left knowing she could not take the abuse or the drinking anymore. My Grandpa would remain in the remnants of the past for many years to come, conveniently ignoring his role as a husband, and more importantly a father.

My parents meant at the ripe age of twenty-one. Grandpa had decided to make amends – or at least attempt too – with our family; regret had begun to weigh heavily over him in recent years. Soon, my mom and dad would marry, unhappily and so young, just like my grandparents had. There was an underlined, yet obvious fear in the brides eyes, painted upon her face, staring at you in those twenty year old wedding photos.

The birth of my parents’ first child, being myself, followed quickly that year they were married.

Doctors, psychologists and scientists have conducted research studies that suggest a baby develops emotional senses such as love or fear, early on...perhaps even inside the womb or crib. I know as a fetus and infant, my small ears and my sister’s, were instruments to the sounds of our parents, much like all children’s are; however, those noises were not always of laughter and lullaby.

Within a year of courtship, marriage and a pregnancy, my Mother learned quickly “he had a problem.” “Like Father, like Son” people would comment. My father was clearly to my family and other, like my Grandfather and those before them – an alcoholic. It would become obvi-

ous to me as a child, as well in time.

By definition, alcoholism is:

1: continued excessive or compulsive use of alcoholic drinks

2 a: poisoning by alcohol b: a chronic disorder marked by excessive and usually compulsive drinking of alcohol leading to psychological and physical dependence or addiction

Many generations of my family dealt with the consequences of alcoholics, my mom, myself and my sister were no exception. I recall one humid Michigan morning, waking up to perhaps my first account of what was happening inside our home. Looking out my bedroom window, I saw a big, long shiny limo pull up in front of our house. "Wow! A real Barbie car!" I would gasp. Someone opened the door and fell out onto the fresh, green grass. It was my Daddy, but he did not look like Daddy Ken doll. Inside of the limo I could see lots of "pretty girls" laughing and giggling. My dad must have liked to play with Barbie's too, because that's whom I thought he was with... sparkling dresses, curled hair and pretty made up faces where that of dolls and movie stars.

The Barbie car that had brought my dad home that early morning sped off into our small, quiet town. He stumbled in his walk, vomiting as he made his way up to the door. The grass wasn't green after that. I hopped down onto the floor and raced to my door to go talk to my dad, maybe he could tell me what it was like to play with a "real live Barbie!?" My mom's screaming "Get the hell out of here! Go away!" followed by my dad's pounding on the door, stopped my little feet dead in their tracks. What was happening at the time besides that, I really don't know, but Daddy wasn't going to be coming inside that day to make us his famous pancakes for breakfast that morning.

By definition, abuse is:

1. To use wrongly or improperly; misuse: abuse alcohol; abuse a privilege.

2. To hurt or injure by maltreatment; ill-use.

3. To force sexual activity on; rape or molest.

4. To assail with contemptuous, coarse, or insulting words; revile.

Alcoholics are prone to other aspects of abuse, not just drinking. In theory, an alcoholic is an abuser of alcoholic drinks. My dad though, abused much more than his beer. I am not sure if he ever hit my mom, because like the sequence of events that happened that morning he came home with the Barbie's, I don't care to know the explicit details. I do know that my sister and I would come to know more than the slap-on-the hand as his form of discipline.

Walking around as a five year old, with my dad's handprint painted bright red upon my face, didn't faze me at the time. Being dragged up the stairs for one of my toys accidentally hitting my dad, hurt and scared me, but as cliché as it sounds, it was "the norm." Scenes like this took place for years.

In the eighth grade, blood would be splattered across the white paint of the walls of the tiny little house my dad occupied on his own, after my mother left him. My sister was hiding on the top bunk in our little bedroom, she was trying to call mom but was too young to remember the phone numbers. She had climbed to the top of that high mountain, running from him...he wouldn't climb that, and couldn't hit her little body, stung sore with crimson slaps, anymore way up there. That was a Sunday afternoon, and after my dad had finished his punishing, it would be time to go home to our mom.

My sister and I were thrown to the curb, like the morning trash, and our father washed his hands clean of his us that day. Mother wasn't aware of the extent that had occurred previously that day, until it was difficult to climb into the car and even sit comfortably. We exposed our damaged little bodies to not just her, but the police as well that day. Like grandpa, dad would remain in our rear view for years, too. But unlike his father, there doesn't seem to be any amends and has not been, that he has made or will make any time soon.

Before my sister was barely a year old, my mom found the strength like our grandma once did, to leave the alcohol and abuse brought about by the man she married, the man who was her children's father. She took me and my sister with her, and gave us the best childhood she could, whether he was a part of it or not. As adults now, he remains in the dust, sometimes stepping outside the road to make a quick appearance, but not as our daddy, just as a man who lives his life on his own terms and still as an alcoholic. Beer is in his mouth more than our names ever will be.

Inside my mothers home, where I still live, awaits the coming of a new generation... I will be having my first baby soon. Her little ears hear the kind voices of people who love her already, and the lullabies I sing to her quietly. One day she will play in the soft grass of our yard with her Barbie dolls. And as long as I have a part of my grandma and mother inside me, my daughter will not know what the definition of an alcoholic or abuse is, that can remain in the past, and behind our family, with or without "him," as my father or even now, a grandfather.

# Personal Essay

## Honorable Mention

*Mark Clark*

### **The Bridge**

“Hand me that wood plank and set it on that boulder!” I sloshed through the freezing mountain river and grabbed the board, swinging it over to the big grey rock. Normally I would have backed out of such a crazy job, but this sturdy old man had a way of bringing the best out of me. “There ya go,” he coaxed. “You got it, you’re a good man.” His gnarled hands took hold of the two by four and skillfully wedged it between a tree stump and the riverbank. “That oughta’ do it,” he declared. “Let’s head back to camp.” At the time, it seemed we were building a bridge. Later in life I would come to understand that the old man was building something in me; responsibility, service to others, pride and the importance of feeling needed. That old man was K.L. Higgins who laid out the steppingstones that led to my bridge in becoming a man.

My family moved from the Jicarilla-Apache reservation in Dulce, New Mexico to Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1967. I was seven back then. My father said he could barely understand anything I jabbered, ‘cause I had so much Indian and Spanish slang under my tongue. Most of the time I didn’t know either, it just sounded cool. I had to get into it with some kid almost every day. See I was a white kid with flaming red hair and a temper to go with it.

First day of school in second grade at Salazar Elementary, I got my butt kicked in the hallway going to the bathroom. I heard the click of shoe taps stalking me, and wham! this kid stuck his Beatle boot right up my crack, growling, “Me and you after school joto cabron!” I never made it to the bathroom. Well, some of the other kids took pity on me letting me know this guy had older brothers in sixth grade, and I had better run for it at the end of the day.

The three o’clock bell finally rang, so I grabbed my stuff and ran across the street. Three chimes from the Catholic Church bells had barely faded as I stepped to the safety of the sidewalk. “Just a few blocks to home”, I prayed to myself. The guy who put his foot up my backside crept around the corner, with his black Beatle boots clicking towards me. Then out of nowhere this big white honky cowboy kid grabs me and starts beating the crap out of “the new kid!” So now I have two guys to deal with.

Just coming into town from an Indian Reservation, I knew how to take a punch and give one back. The cowboy and I rolled around on the sidewalk exchanging blows, when I noticed this rosebush hedge right next to us. I saw my chance, and grabbed the cowboy by his hair, raking his face across the thorny hedge. He was pretty bloody, and so was I, but he backed off and ran away. “Beatle boots” decided he shouldn’t mess with me either! Never had much trouble after that first day of school.

Although I was a “P.K.” Also known as a preachers kid with an ex-marine/minister father who raised me to know right from wrong, I got into a lot of trouble. Most of “Casa Allegra”, the neighborhood I grew up in consisted of poor, to boarder line middle class kids. After my parents divorced, I was on the loose with no one to keep me in line except my best friend Scott, who wasn’t exactly a shining example of being civilized! Scott spent most of his time at our house to avoid getting beat by his father. By the summer of 1970, we knew how to spit, cuss, fight, steal, and lie. We were bona-fied hoodlums. I learned every bad word you could think of in English and Spanish, all on the playground. All those moral lessons from Sunday school had worn off. Without my father around, I figured I could do any thing I liked. Guess in a way, I was getting even with my dad.

I made it through sixth grade pretty much unscathed. Summer vacation wrapped around my ten year old head. Scott and I could ride bikes through the neighborhood and down to the dirt trails in the arroyo. No doubt the little gang I was in would be breaking into houses, stealing bikes, radios, food, whatever we could get our hands on. We had plans of building an underground fort to stash all our loot. Boredom would certainly lead to some good old-fashioned American vandalism.----- My mother needed a distraction for her son.

Playing drums and jamming with my older sister Lydia, who played piano, had become a ritual at our house, and I was getting pretty good for a ten year old kid. Even had private lessons. (That’s a whole other story.) John Damnguard, the elementary band director, believed I had some talent, and called my mother about this music camp. He even arranged a scholarship for me to go. This seemed like the kind of (distraction) my mom had been seeking for her son. She knew I wouldn’t go vacation bible school! Some sissy music camp called “hummingbird” wasn’t going to help my street credit either, so I told my mom, “no way!” I was into music, but not that classical crap! I’d rather hang out with Scott and get into trouble. Of course, my mother hauled my butt off to band camp just like she made me go to church. Something like, “I’ll sell that drum set of yours!” “Then what will you do all summer?”

We packed up the station wagon, headed through Los Alamos, New Mexico into the Jemez Mountains, winding our way towards camp. When we arrived, I kept up the tough prison yard vibe. Not hard to do

when you're surrounded by geeks! Anything I was told to do, I didn't. "Hell they can send me back home, fine with me!" At lunch someone ratted out this kid who had punctured a hole in my snare drum head. He stabbed a stick clean through! I had to punch him out, or he'd be messin' with me all week! This unsuspecting dude was at the front of the line waiting to eat. I stomped up beside him, pulled him out of line, and knocked him down to the ground. "Don't you ever touch my drum again!" I wasn't very big but I was tougher than a badger.

The next morning some counselor tried to wake me up for flag raising. I took a swing at the startled teenager and told him to kiss off! I guess word got out to the camp staff that I was gonna be trouble. Some man sat me down to straighten me out on the rules of camp. I got through the rest of the day. No one touched anything close to me! Camp was all right, but I missed my dog, and no one was hangin' out with me after the lunch line incident. We had band rehearsal after dinner, did some dumb skits, then back to the boys dorm where we had to clean. They even made us brush our teeth! "Man, this is baby stuff," I said half out loud. Someone called, "Lights out!" I crawled into my bunk wondering if this was the right place for me. "Maybe I can hitch hike home in the morning," I thought to myself.

Half way through a dream, I woke up startled and in a haze. There was this old man gently shakin' my sleeping bag. He whispered, "get dressed son, I need your help." Guess I was too foggy to tell him to kiss off plus my father did teach me to respect older folks.

Pullin' up my jeans and throwin' on my flannel shirt, I crept past rows of Coleman sleeping bags into the light blue glow of the morning sky. The Old man held out his hand, "I'm K.L.", he gently whispered. "What's your name son?" I had heard his name the day before. Instincts' told me this guy was safe. "Mark" I hesitated, then reached for his hand. "I need a strong sturdy young man to help me build a bridge this morning" he confirmed, "You look like you're tough enough for the job." No one had called me a man since my father moved out. "You're the man of the house now," my father advised. "Take care of your mother and sisters." I barely saw my father after that day. I liked the fact that this guy K.L. thought of me as a man and being tough, so I grabbed my coat and we took off into the brisk morning air towards the river.

It was barely light out. K.L. had me help him with some big wooden planks that we carried down the foggy mountain trail. I could here the rumble of the Jemez River, as we got closer.

The Jemez was flowing hard, and man it was freezin' cold! K.L. walked right into the water like he was steppin' into a kids wadin' pool. Didn't even flinch from the biting icy flow of the river. The water was kinda' high and made this relentless roar that only a mountain stream can

make. I thought I was gonna piss my pants when I followed him into the wet frigid water. We hardly spoke. K.L. would pick up a huge boulder and plant it in the middle of the river. “Man this guy is strong,” I thought to myself. Rapids leaped from the rocks that we placed in the water, disrupting the flow. He motioned to me with a nod, telling me to bring a plank over and set it down on a rock, leaving the other side of the board on the riverbank. We worked hard! No time to waste in that kind of water. Before I knew it, we had a solid bridge made from rocks and two by fours. We crossed the bridge and headed back up the trail. The sun warmed our backs, while the amber rays of light lifted the morning dew into the mountain sky.

The whole camp was standing outside, next to an old stone wall getting set for flag raising. The old man and I hustled up to the back of the formation. He took off his hat, held his hand to his heart and pledged allegiance to the flag. I felt a rush of pride come over me, standing next to this man who believed in me. Seeing the strength in his posture and hearing the sincerity in his voice, I joined in.

Later in the week, the camp went on a moonlight hike. As we crossed the bridge I felt the sense of belonging to something bigger. Being a part of the world. The way I felt standing with K.L.

Thirty years later, I started teaching at Hummingbird. Both my kids have been going to camp since they were eight years old. The bridge is gone, but I still visit the river and remember how K.L. pulled me back to the values my parents gave me from my church days. That fateful morning, K.L. could have taken me out of my sleeping bag and said, “Your mother is coming to pick you up son, you’re just too much trouble.” Instead he chose to give me the gift of self-esteem. I finally felt connected to life, knowing that my actions reflect my being. You have to believe in yourself to live a positive life. You have to pass that wisdom on to your children and everyone you meet. Lift yourself up to lift your fellow man.

K.L. was a master teacher. He could build your integrity without bruising your ego. Getting people to feel good about their own existence was as natural as playing fetch with one of his dogs. With his charismatic wife Wanda, they pioneered the dream of Hummingbird Music Camp into reality in 1959. The Higgins family with all the new additions of kids and grandkids still own and operate the camp to this day.

Hundreds of stories have unfolded about K.L. Stories of admiration and wonder. Stories of how one man could change your life forever. This story is dedicated to Wanda Higgins and her family. We all miss him.

# Personal Essay

## Honorable Mention

*Jacqueline Herrera*

### **In The Shadows**

I could barely keep my eyes open as I swayed that old mop from left to right. As I danced around with my own shadow, I could see the tip of that orange sunburst peering over the mountaintop. I knew that it would not be long before Mr. Miller and the rest of the neatly pressed workers would scurry into the office only to walk right past me and make a mess of everything I had spent the last two hours cleaning. As I drained the murky water out of the brown, tangled mop, I coughed as I inhaled toxic fumes into my already aching body. The stench stung my eyes and I could feel my hands sweating inside the bright yellow mitts. As I made my way through each small office, I cleaned extra hard hoping that when I finished, I wouldn't have time to clean room 108. I glanced at the clock and realized I had only four minutes to go from janitor to secretary mode. I neatly placed the cleaning materials in the closet and peeked into the bathroom mirror to see if I looked as bad as I felt. I applied my lipstick as I made my way to the front desk where I spent most of the day answering annoying phone calls. For the past two years, I have bent over backwards for these people who wouldn't care to acknowledge me outside of these office walls. No matter what your position is in a company or business, you should be apart of the team and be treated with dignity and respect.

Room 108 is much more than a conference room. It's the heart-beat of this financial institution. It's where the bald and overweight men who drive fancy and expensive cars go to make and lose money. Amounts that would bring financial relief to many people like me, would be traded, sold or lost without question. The Real Estate business can make a person extremely wealthy, that is if you play your cards right. Room 108 could have been mistaken for a High Rollers Gambling pit as everyone sat around a large table making and denying offers on various types of properties and buildings. If you were rich, you were allowed in Room 108. I, on the other hand, am not rich. The only reason I was granted access to this top secret area where millionaires gather was because I was the one who cleaned it. I despised cleaning this room because if I was not the janitor, I would not be welcomed here. If you did not have a Mercedes or Lexus emblem hanging

from your key chain, you were not good enough. In “Who Built the Pyramids,” author Studs Terkel states, “It’s hard to take pride in a bridge your never gonna cross, in a door your never gonna open.” That’s exactly how I felt each time I attempted to clean Room 108. I never put much time or effort into cleaning Room 108 like I did the others because I was upset that the only reason I was in there in the first place was because I had to clean it. I was jealous of all the people who entered it because they had more money than I would know what to do with, and I only had twenty-two cents to my name. If I were as important as they were and allowed a seat at the grand table, then I would take more pride in cleaning that room because I would know that I had a place there.

As I gathered the trash and emptied disgusting ash trays filled with cigar and cigarette butts into my cart, I studied the papers that were stretched out across the mile long marble table. They were littered with scribbles and numbers, some that were circled and some that were slashed out by red ink. On the last page of one of the piles, I noticed my name was written next to another girl’s name in my department. My name was spelled incorrectly and highlighted in bright yellow, while hers stood alone. I was not sure what to make of it but my heart raced as I studied the information. I neatly returned the paper to where I had found it and continued cleaning. As I turned off the light switch, I stared at the table where I had found my name and wondered why it was there. Although it was misspelled, I felt important that I had even made it that far.

The next day at work, I sat anxiously at my small crowded desk and pretended to work. “Are you ok?” Theresa asked. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just tired from being up so early,” I replied in a nervous tone. “I don’t know how or why you would come in early to clean up after these pigs,” she said in a disgusted sarcastic tone. “Well,” I replied “I really need the extra money and with the holidays coming up, I need it even more.” As Theresa answered a phone call, I kept staring at the gold plated numbers that graced the front door of the forbidden room. I expected my boss to come charging through it to either fire or grant a raise to either myself or Theresa. I knew our names were on that paper for some reason and I could hardly wait to find out.

As Theresa and I gathered our belongings and headed out the door to the dimly lit parking lot, Mr. Miller called us back into the building. “Hey, um, hey you gals!” he said in a confused tone. “Finally!” I whispered to myself as I took a deep breath. I knew it was time to find out what was really going on. As we followed Mr. Miller into Room 108, my hands began to sweat and my head started to hurt. I knew that this must

have been important because in the past two years, neither one of us was ever called into this room. I knew immediately that something big was about to take place.

As we stood silently like two soldiers in boot camp, I realized Mr. Miller was reviewing the page I had secretly studied the night before. I had always wondered what it would be like to be in here with Mr. Miller but I never thought it would happen. For the past two years, I longed for some recognition or even a hello from the man who I catered to all this time. And now that I had his attention, I could not take my eyes off the floor. I had no idea what we were doing here or why but I prayed that this would not end badly.

In “Heroes of the House” author Louise Rafkin states, “I was afraid I would be recognized.” “And afraid I wouldn’t be.” Standing there, that is how I felt. I was terrified that Mr. Miller would recognize me as the one that was to be let go. And I was also terrified that I would not be recognized as the one who is getting the raise. As I stood there staring at the floor, I played a vision in my mind of me leaping over that desk and shaking the information out of Mr. Miller. “Theresa, please be aware that due to some changes in the company and financial restraints, we are no longer in need of your services,” Mr. Miller said sternly. My heart sank and I swallowed hard as I prepped myself for the same disappointing news.

Mr. Miller waited as Theresa made her way out of the room to address me. “Well Jessica,” he said confidently. “Um, sir, it’s Jackie” I interrupted. “We here at Miller and Associates are experiencing some changes and because of your hard work and talent have agreed to keep you as part of the team.” My shoulders dropped at the sound of the relieving news. “Your job description will be evaluated and your pay will be adjusted appropriately,” he continued. “Thank you so much Mr. Miller,” I replied excitedly. I left that evening feeling bad that Theresa was let go but I was relieved to know that I still had a steady and now growing paycheck.

As I lay there in bed that night, I thought about how after working for Mr. Miller for two years and bending over backwards for that man, he still didn’t even know my name. I felt angry and I realized that I was better than that and I deserved to be treated with kindness and respect. After a sleepless night, I came to the conclusion that I was done. That morning, I got ready as usual but did not stop by the coffee shop to get Mr. Miller his usual coffee and donut.

It was 8:15 when I marched into Room 108 and slammed the door behind me. Everyone stopped what they were doing and for the first time ever the room fell silent. “For the past two years, I have worked my tail off for all of you! And not once have I ever gotten a thank you or good job out of anyone!” I shouted in a voice I didn’t recognize. “Mr.

Miller, last night you called me Jessica, my name is Jackie!” “How do you not know that after all this time?!” I continued angrily. “I am no longer your doormat that you can walk on.” “I am a person with feelings that deserves to be treated with respect and I surely am not getting it here so I am done!” As they all stared at me in disbelief, I took a deep breath and made my way to the door. I cried all the way home as I realized what I had just done. As I sat on my couch that afternoon and wondered how I was going to pay my bills now with no job, I was happy that I finally stood up for myself and realized that I’d rather be broke than be subject to that kind of mistreatment. To this day, it also makes me grin when I think about the final lasting impression I left on Room 108 and the people in it.

Just because you have a lot of money or are very wealthy, does not automatically give you the right to treat others that have less than you poorly. Whether you are the janitor or the C.E.O. of a company or business, you are part of the team and should be acknowledged and treated fairly and equally. I take so much pride in my job and strive to perform to the best of my ability everyday but I feel like I am being taken advantage of or disrespected, no amount of money is worth my time, dignity or respect I have for myself.

# Personal Essay

## Honorable Mention

*Miranda Dragan*

### **Only a Child**

The atmosphere was set for family movie night. The lights were dimmed, and everyone was seated on the couch, and I was helping my mom's fiancé (my step-dad) get drinks and popcorn together. When I reached for the microwave, door my step-dad grabbed my rear end and began to slowly massage it. I quickly grabbed the popcorn, dumped it in a bowl, and sat down to watch the movie. In the essay, "I'm the King': The Macho Image," by Rudolfo Anaya he states, "We take meaning from our sexual natures." In this quote, Anaya describes how men become macho from their sexual endeavors. I feel that if you were a true man "A Macho Man," then you wouldn't feel the necessity to share your sexual endeavors with those around you. Furthermore, a macho man should love his step-daughter in a loving way not a sexual way.

Every Friday was family movie night and everybody was ready for tonight's coming attraction. The lights were dimmed, everyone was seated on the couch, and I was helping my mom's fiancé (my step-dad) get drinks and popcorn together. When I reached for the microwave door my step-dad grabbed my rear end and began to slowly massage it. Is this normal? I thought to myself. I quickly grabbed the popcorn, dumped it in a bowl, and sat down to watch the movie. My sister and brother (Mary and Chuck) were already seated on the love seat, which was to the right of the couch. My mom was on the left side of the couch and my step-dad sat in the middle. That left only one spot for me to sit, and that was to the right of him, at the end of the couch. I'll just pretend that never happened and sit here and watch the movie. That was a mistake and will never happen again.

At least I thought that it would never happen again. How wrong I was. I pulled the blanket down to cover myself because it was extremely cold in the house, or at least I thought so. About ten minutes went by and then my step-dad decided he was a bit chilly as well. So he pulled the blanket on his lap and kept his hands under the blanket. I was beginning to get a little nervous. I looked around to see where everyone's attention was at during the movie. Mary and Chuck were dozing. One minute they seemed attentive and the next they seemed out cold. I looked over at my mom, and she was fast asleep. I just knew that if one of us tried wak-

ing her she would say, My eyes were just resting, I've been listening the whole time. My hands began to sweat as the anxiety and tension of the unknown built in the air. I felt a warm, big and hard hand on mine. I tried to pull my left hand away, but being only ten years old I was no competition by far. He jerked my small innocent hand towards his hairy leg. I felt warmth, hair, and disgust in my stomach. Say something...scream...do anything Miranda...what is wrong with you...say something I thought. But I couldn't and to this day still don't know why I couldn't do anything. I sat there helpless like a frozen puppet. My hand began to inch towards his shorts. They were soft and silky feeling. I continued in a strong arm battle to pull my hand back to my side. I just wanted this to be a dream and that I would awake soon.

This was no dream, but this nightmare continued. My hand went up the side of his shorts. The heat began to be more intense than it was just on his leg. Why don't you say something, Miranda? The next thing I felt was something squishy, soft and cylinder like. Oh my goodness this is a man's male part. I didn't even know what the name of it was for the fact that I was only in 5th grade. I felt repulsed by the action that was occurring and still continued to try to pull my hand back. I looked around and no one was awake. Why is this happening to me? I was screaming and crying inside. I didn't know what to do. I could hear what had begun as slow breathing turn into harder and harder breathing. Why am I the only one that hears this? You guys don't hear him breathing hard? Wake up you stupid heads. The squishy feeling soon went away and was replaced by a hard and firm feeling. What is going on? What is he doing? Why is he doing this? The motion of my hand was a pulling motion. It was a continuous up and down action. The pace of this unfamiliar movement gradually increased. It felt like this went on for hours. Before I knew it there was a long and quiet sigh, "Ahhhhhhhhh," released from his mouth. At that same moment I felt a warm liquid flow down my hand to my wrist. I wanted to puke, scream or do both simultaneously.

My hand was thrust off of him and he threw the blanket off himself onto me. He quickly got up and went to the bathroom. When he sat back down on the couch he leaned over and said, "You might wanna go wash your hands, you filthy whore." I got up slowly off the couch and walked down the long narrow hallway that seemed to continue for miles to my bedroom. In my bedroom that Mary and I shared was our own bathroom. I washed my hands with tremendously hot water and a handful of soap. I repeated this action until I started to cry. I couldn't let my mom see me like this, I thought. She will wonder what happened to me. I decided that I would go to bed, but I couldn't sleep because I was on my guard. I wanted to be awake if he tried to do something to me so I could yell or fight him off or anything. Nothing more happened that night. The

next morning I noticed at breakfast how happy my family was, and I didn't want to be the reason for everyone not being happy, so I kept this event to myself and wrote it down in my journal. Unfortunately, these types of events all went into my journal over the next four years.

Anaya quotes, "We take meaning from our sexual natures." The quote has a different meaning to me than it might to others. I feel that men shouldn't express their sexual endeavors with anyone, but the ones that they are in a healthy relationship with. Because of the events that happened to me over a four year span of my life, it made me never want to lose my virginity and to never be with a man in that way. Those decisions did change in my life. I did lose my virginity at the age of twenty and I have done many things with a man. My issue is I can't do it all the time because I have flashes that come in my head of what happened in the past and it disgusts me. Men who are macho wouldn't scar young women in such a way. My stepfather was a sick man. These type of situations happen way too much in our society, though. Men need to be taught by their father and mother that this is not how you treat women. I might have been able to move on with my life with some semblance of normality, but every woman is not the same and she might have scarring that is beyond repair. I'm extremely thankful that I found a man that understands what I've been through and doesn't mind if we can't do those types of things often.

# Fiction Winner

Clair Gardner

## The Last Meal

“Look,” Cynthia called, pointed to a bird flying in the cobalt sky of Greenland. “How beautiful!”

Gunshot splintered the air. The white falcon tumbled, a dead weight that landed at her feet. She caressed the limp body, transfixed by its transformation and the blood trickling down her arm. Barry snatched the dead bird out of her hand, the neck dangling like stretched elastic. She cried as he pulled out the feathers and tossed them into the wind. One feather stuck to her sleeve. She stroked it, smoothed the barbs. He threw handfuls of feathers into the sky until the bird was stripped. Cynthia shivered, even in the hot sun of the arctic in September.

“Crybaby,” he shouted, “how’re you going to be an explorer?”

She hung her head.

After Barry cooked the bird over the fire, he offered her one small piece. She ate what he gave her and stared at him as he chewed the rest of the flesh. He tore at the carcass with his teeth, crunched the small bones and head. She wanted more but didn’t ask, hungry but sad about the bird. He worked his mouth, spat out the beak.

Tall grass and stunted willows spread around them. The ice cap soared in the distance. They watched the changing colors until dark and stars popped out one by one to fill the sky with a crust of glitter. Maybe tonight the phantasmagoric aurora borealis Barry talked so much about would cover the sky. They sat by their fire, the third night of their honeymoon, waiting, but the roseate lights never showed.

At home, Cynthia worked in a bookstore and read voraciously about explorers, especially Rasmussen and Peary. Books by men who had lived with Eskimos, like *Top of the World* and *People of the Twilight*, kept her up late at night, filled her dreams. In the mornings, trudging off to work along Chicago’s icy sidewalks, or sweltering in summer, she had no ideas about how she could get to these places.

In the 1890’s, Barry’s great grandfather had sailed on the first steamship to reach the Arctic, with Captain Cook in his attempt to break through the ice surrounding Greenland. His great grandfather had written about the expedition in *The Last Voyage of the Miranda*, a book that Barry kept by his bed ever since he could read. Only a few miles from shore, the Miranda’s steel hull had been crushed by the ice. The experiment was a failure and the men were stranded with little food on the listing ship. Saved

by a rescue party sent by the governor of Greenland, Barry's great grandfather wrote one chapter of the book, but referred only to the smorgasbord served them by the governor at Sanderstormsford. He never adventured again after returning home to Cleveland, grew more obese each year until his death.

Ashamed of his ancestor's apparent cowardice, Barry wanted to be a brave explorer. If the going were tough, he would press on. Sorry he could not be the first man to plant a flag on the Pole like Admiral Peary, he focused on Greenland instead, learning everything he could about the continent. He felt pressure to get moving as his thirtieth birthday approached.

Cynthia and Barry met at a slide show about the Arctic. Cynthia approached Barry after the discussion, fascinated by the questions he asked and his clear knowledge of the North. She mentioned her love of that world.

"I'll take you with me when I go," he said. She looked sturdy and pretty. He recognized a passion like his in her eyes. He would marry her, take leave from his job with the city of Chicago for a honeymoon in Greenland.

When the arctic cold came on too strong, Barry and Cynthia crawled into the tent, the grease of the falcon still on his chin. His lips pressed hers. Her stomach contracted with hunger. She lay passive under his ardor, head averted until finally aroused and forgiving. She licked the grease off his chin.

Winter came on unusually early in Greenland that year. The airport at the military base would close soon for the year. Barry and Cynthia hurried across the snow that already covered the long golden grass, crossed a frozen lake and barely made it to the last flight out of Sanderstormsford. Their honeymoon had ended in a week.

The snowfields and ice cap disappeared beneath them. Icebergs sank emerald into the turquoise water below the airplane. They both cried.

"We'll come here again, Cynthia. Just wait, we'll do it." He squeezed her hand. She lay her head on his shoulder.

When their meals arrived, Cynthia understood how hungry she had been all week. My husband does not know how to share, she thought, and remembered that her father had not been generous with food either. She sighed. She did not know Barry at all, not really, except that he had so far always taken the lion's share. He had brought her to the North, though. What else would she learn about this man she'd married so precipitously?

"Don't cry, we'll come back," he said again, unaware her tears were not just for leaving Greenland.

At home in their new apartment, he presided over the meals—the

joints, ribs, breasts, and legs he insisted she fix for their dinners. Before slicing into the meat, he sharpened his carving knife, swiping the long blade across the silver-handled stone.

Barry told her about his day's work as he slid the steel back and forth, back and forth. One night, she grew impatient with his stories, longed for some crisp golden fat off the meat—pieces her father had hardly ever let her have. Her fingers flew to the platter to pull a crusty chunk off the bone.

He severed the air with the knife. The blade stopped just above her hand. She gasped, dropped the meat and thrust her arm under the table. He jabbed the knife into the meat on the platter and told her another anecdote about his office. When he ended his tale, Barry put a bit of the driest piece on her plate. Cynthia pleaded a headache, went to bed and slept poorly.

The days passed. She cooked and he denied her the choicest food. Memories of her father dulled her appetite. He, too, had brought a carving knife very like the one Barry had down on her arm. That time a thin line of blood appeared. Her mother left the table to get a band-aid. Still, Cynthia had not stopped trying to get the fat she craved and her father had not stopped threatening her, though he did not draw blood again. Surely he had never loved her.

One night at dinner, she whispered to Barry, "How can you say you love me and not want to feed me well?"

Silent air hung above them in the little dining room. He continued to chew, the muscles flexing along his jaw. She stared at his heavy face, breathed in shallow bits of air, waited.

He said, "I give you enough."

Memories of meals with his father bombarded him as he spoke. It was okay before his mother died, when his father stood at the head of the table and filled all their plates equally. Barry and his two older brothers had as much as they wanted, and Mom praised them for being such good eaters. Dinners were fun until she died.

The year his twin brothers finished high school, they moved away. Then it was just him, alone with the tall man who no longer laughed and still stood at the head of the table to serve the two of them. Dad stopped giving Barry as much as he wanted when they were alone, gone silent, too, as he carved the roasts the daily woman fixed for them. He cut off the crusty meat, the kind that crunched and melted in your mouth at the same time. One day Barry reached for some on the sly. Dad shoved his hand away with the point of the knife.

When Barry grew up and lost touch with Dad, he thought probably his father had wanted to starve him to death, be free of his son, free of family with no wife left to love or tie him down. Or give him pleasure

either, for Barry had seen the love between them, the way they smiled at each other, caught them snuggling on the couch together, whispering and laughing.

Barry *had* felt like he was going to starve to death after Mom died, but he didn't. He stole quarters from his Dad's pockets at night and lived on candy. He hated candy now.

Staring at Cynthia with her head bent over the table, he thought of the dishes of sweets she put around the apartment. Little glass dishes she said were so cute, filled with bright tinfoil-covered damn candy. Where was the rugged explorer he had married? Maybe it was a good thing they'd had to leave Greenland early.

Cynthia had given him a heart shaped box of chocolates the first Valentine's Day after they married. Her eyes filled with tears when he threw the full box in the trash and never explained why. He wanted to tell her about his Dad but couldn't, never had been able to. And after swiping at her hand with the knife, he didn't think he ever would.

He did love her, he knew he loved her in some ways, her body especially, but why did he have to earn the money to keep their lifestyle going, tie himself down? She contributed some, he couldn't deny that, but why had he ever gotten married? He wanted to be an explorer. He wanted to live near the Arctic Circle, hunting and trapping for his livelihood. He couldn't do that with Cynthia and her goddamn candy dishes.

He looked at her with her head bowed, hands hidden under the table. "I give you enough," he repeated. Maybe she flinched then, but so what. He knew he gave her more than his father had given him. She could eat her candy. He scraped his chair legs back on the floor, stalked out of the room.

Alone in the dining room, surrounded by the empty platter and greasy utensils, Cynthia lay her head on the table and sobbed, thinking of her mother who stayed with her father until he died. He'd been a mean man, slapping his little girl when he didn't like what she did, shouting at her mother a lot. She wondered why her mother never left him, wished she had.

One night when she was ten and sleeping in her bed, his loud voice woke her. Hiding in the hall, watching from the shadows, she saw Dad pull her mother's ear hard until she went down on her knees.

"Never," he said, still twisting her ear, "eat the last of the meat in the fridge." He'd shoved her away, into a heap on the floor. Cynthia tiptoed back to bed, lay with the covers over her head until daylight. She was the one who had taken the roast beef from the fridge, not her mother.

Next morning, she watched her father come into the kitchen with a big roast, saying he would cook it for his darling wife. Her mother had kissed him, and he leaned her against the wall with his body for a long time.

Now she knew how hard it was to leave a marriage. Where would she go, what would she do without this new husband who held her every night? But how could he be so much like her father?

She dried her tears and sat up straight. *Her* husband would change. She would change him and they would laugh at how their meals used to be.

That night Barry devoured Cynthia, brought her to ecstasy again and again. She dug into his body, her fingers pushing between his ribs. She drank in the odor of him. In the morning he gave her all the bacon she'd fried, eating only one piece himself, and she felt like a flower all day from his gift.

They flew to northern Sweden for their first anniversary, leaving Greenland for a long visit some other year. They fished the cold waters and paddled their canoe through silvery reeds out onto the vast, deep lake.

"More of a sea than a lake," she spoke, "so far from shore to shore," and shivered at the depth of water and distance, but believed Barry could take care of them and wanted to be with him.

The first night, they camped in a birch grove, and the aurora borealis filled the sky with green and red sashes of color. They made love slowly, transported to another depth of passion by the undulations flowing above them.

A week passed and they saw no other boats. They drifted on the placid dark blue water. Golden leaves fell from the trees that lined the shore and the scent of snow coming hung in the air. They laughed together, breathed in unison the icy quality of the water and land, recalled how they had met and the dreams they shared.

"We're on our way," he called to her, loving her for how she handled the paddle and shared his joy. "We'll find a way to live in the snow, to eat frozen seal and lie naked inside an igloo all winter making love."

"Yes," she smiled. "Yes, please." That was all she wanted.

The water turned rougher and slowed their progress. Days passed and their supplies diminished. Fishing was difficult in the heaving water. He gave her less of the fish they caught—almost enough, but not a lot. She'd grown used to eating small amounts after a year with him, but on this trip she worked hard paddling. Hunger stabbed her belly and she fought off a rising hatred for him, did not want to hate this man. He will change, she tried to reassure herself. We have been together only a year. He will change, she prayed, but believed it less and less as her hunger grew.

On the tenth day, a great wind began to blow. White caps whipped across their faces and the canoe tipped fearsomely. They struggled to shore through high waves. Exhausted, they beached the canoe and kindled a fire in the lee of a boulder, huddled by it until the storm blew itself out.

After frying the one fish he'd landed before the storm, Barry tossed

the head onto a tin plate for her, but kept the rest himself, eating out of the pan. Only a handful of oats were left in the canoe. Tomorrow they faced a long day's journey north and one more day of paddling before reaching a village. She looked at him chewing the fish, at his face hard in the flickering light of the flames, and put her hand on his arm. Now, she thought, now I can help him learn to share. She leaned forward to smile at him, to talk it out finally. He shrugged her hand off, wouldn't meet her eyes, tossed the last pieces of fish into his mouth, and wiped the grease off his chin. She remembered Greenland and how she had licked the grease off for him before he brought her to orgasm. This night he didn't even kiss her.

The fire died. The moon rose. He scrunched into a ball on the tarp. Her body shrank into itself, alone and motionless in her sleeping bag. He slept, his breathing slow and regular.

She waited until the moon was overhead before picking up the naked spine of the fish they'd eaten for dinner. She laid the little skeleton on the tarp beside his broad back where her sleeping bag had been. Sliding the canoe quietly over the sand to the water's edge, she listened for any change, but Barry slept on. She thrust her arms violently into the sleeves of her jacket. Paddling swiftly away from shore, she kept to the white bolt of moonlight running south into darkness.

# Fiction

## Honorable Mention

Rita Feinstein

### Tomato Touch

Her name is Roma, like the tomato. Pale as salt, too thin, with a cavity below her ribs—the perfect size for a baby’s head. She stands like a question mark, hips thrust forward, spine slung back. Those hips. Her most prominent feature, they are awkward and jutting like a roast chicken in tight plastic. She has a potato nose that is only noticeable from profile. That may be why she doesn’t have a boy. Everything goes swimmingly until he catches her at the wrong angle, excuses himself, and finds someone he can kiss without her beak jabbing his eye.

Tomato belongs to the nightshade family. Woody nightshade has flat white petals and lustrous berries the color of dragon breath. Each berry—a star in a noxious constellation—resembles a little Roma tomato. Roma herself looks in her mirror, pulls beneath her eyes to make herself a specter. Poisonous. Lethal.

Roma is pretty and polite, the kind of girl whose mouth you want to stitch into a smile so she can join your doll collection. You look at her and know she donated all her Christmas money to the Save the Red Pandas! Campaign. She’s a global thinker, someone who replants her peach pits and has a pen pal in Mumbai.

She has legs from here to heaven. She looks foxy in short shorts.

Grandmothers try to stroke her hair. Boys try to pinch her rear. Children try to tag her *it*. She jerks away every time, has grown accustomed to their hurt expressions. If they had touched, though, they would have been hurt much worse.

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Her name is Roma and she has seen a pickled heart. It was on that new hospital show, *411 on 911*, that’s on every Thursday at three. A jar of formaldehyde seems like a safe place for a heart, Roma thinks. She knows they bloat into plaque-yellow sea creatures with lacy tentacles, but she can’t stop believing that a preserved heart is as sturdy as a Roma tomato, encasing a trove of seeds.

Roma watches the program with her neighbor, whose hair curlers seemed about to uproot her face. The neighbor says “botox” so often it becomes subconscious, the way Roma says “like” and “wow.” Her face is a

plastic mask. She says botox changed her life, says with a face like this, you can't lose at poker.

The neighbor pokes the place between Roma's eyebrows, where the muscle bunches. She pushes and pushes, trying to lock it into smoothness, but it pops up again. She *tuts* and says, "That muscle is always the first to go. I'm taking you to Doctor What's-His-Face on your eighteenth birthday, hear? Goddamn it, what *is* his face? It was such a nice face, too..."

Roma goes to the kitchen for water. Sand always gushes from the spout and the glasses are soapy. She leans against the counter, views her reflection in the toaster, pushes the muscle. She doesn't want trenches, but she doesn't want botox either. She doesn't know what she wants, except maybe to eat a lot of tomatoes and therefore gain some identity. And some weight.

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Her name is Roma and whatever she touches dies.

She once had a plastic barn. When unlatched, it split in half to reveal rows of stalls with stick-on nameplates, molded hay bales glued to the floor, and a cat painted accidental purple. Roma stuffed her horse collection in the barn and latched it. Then she shook with all her might. And opened the barn. A toothpick jumble of legs, shattered at the thigh, poured into her lap, followed by fifteen legless horses, smooth as hot dogs. "Mom!" Roma howled.

Her mother looked away from the chicken skin she was picking from the dish drain. "Christ, honey, what did you expect to happen?" she said, which to Roma's ears meant, "Don't you realize you destroy everything you touch?"

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Her name is Roma and she had a mule. His name was Samson. He had eyes like Russian jewel boxes or fudgy mirrors thick with lacquer. He bore the humiliation of Roma's dress-up box—conical princess hats, polyester eye patches, hot pink lipstick, clip-on earrings.

She mummified him in toilet paper for Halloween. They got lost on a spidery, forested driveway and arrived at an outhouse instead of a chocolate-filled cauldron, though Roma's mother would later ask what the difference was. Red berries sprang from the spongy earth, gripping serrated leaves like blood grips a network of veins. Maybe they were jellybeans. Maybe this was the new fad. After all, there is nothing spookier than a portable toilet.

Roma began loading her pockets with berries, relishing the dark energy seeping through her fingers. Dry leaves bit her ankles. The cheddar moon buttered the sky to a higher gloss.

Roma's imp costume stopped scratching her armpits and became like a second skin. She felt ritualistic, and because a witch must nourish her familiar, she fed Samson a handful of berries. Just then, her name was

called. She grabbed Samson's reins and rushed back to her mother.

The next morning, flies paraded in Samson's eyes.

Roma emptied her pockets of what was apparently woody nightshade, swallowed wrong, started coughing, and ran behind a tree to puke up a pound of Snickers bars and Twizzlers.

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Her name is Roma and she is helping her neighbor. The neighbor recently received botox injections in her hands and cannot cook until the bandages are removed. She watches *411 on 911* and drinks raspberry iced tea. Her buns, steely from workout videos and liposuction, sit like perfectly packed snowballs on the couch. "Can you believe that?" she cries, banging a mummy hand on the armrest. "People wouldn't smoke if they had X-ray vision. Look at that Goddamn lung! Looks like a rice cake covered in tar, Goddamn it!"

Roma is making lasagna. The kitchen is hot and the air quivers like bacon fat. Roma wipes her hairline, dries her hands on a duckling-patterned dishtowel. She slices tomatoes and rubs in the salt, groans and drizzles cold water on her neck.

She gave up watching the hospital program several weeks ago, when it featured her old biology teacher. He was in for a severe head injury. While driving his European car down a dark road, looking for the right address, he stuck his head out the window. The steering wheel was on the right side of the vehicle. So was his head. It smashed into a mailbox. His nose was crushed, his frontal lobe mangled, and his neck snapped.

By the end of the program, the male nurse was reapplying cologne so that, when he told the man's wife the sad news, she'd let him take her out to dinner.

Roma's knife cuts deep. She remembers handing in her homework, her cold fingers brushing his calloused ones. A curse bloomed between them, invisible but fatal, and entered his bloodstream like millions of ravenous centipedes. Roma's touch. Roma's fault.

She reaches a hand to block the sun. Her fingers extinguish its light.

# Fiction

## Honorable Mention

Sally Benson

### P.S.

Is it true that if you wish for something long enough, you get it? Most of my adult life I haven't wanted to be here. In this body. On this planet. At this time. My therapist calls it Chronic Depressive Disorder. I call it Pointless Existence Disorder. I've wanted to end this sorry show for a long time. There have been attempts. Cowardly half-assed ones mind you, but enough to get a little attention, if you catch my drift. Girl, you should see the scars! But that was then. Now, no more waxing. Now, no more wigs. Now, no more support hose. I've even said goodbye to the girls at the Elizabeth Arden counter. Bertha Vanation has officially left the stage.

Is it an act of aggression, taking one's life?

*Dear Mom and Dad. Guess what? Elvis has left the building!*

I mean, on the one hand, yes, you do leave everyone behind. You're kind of screwing them by saying, hey you people, you're not interesting enough for me to want to stick around. On the other hand, you're gone, so what the fuck? You're finally free. Still, there's part of me that thinks taking your life by your own hand is a cop out.

I've written my parents a letter. It's the only way. Can't phone. Gotta write it on paper or talk face to face. Christ, going through the gay thing with them? Fucking nightmare. Things are happening so fast, I'm a walking pharmacy already. Traveling? Not. God forbid they should make the trip themselves. It's not like they've shown any interest in my life for the past ten years.

*Dear Mom and Dad. Wow, it's been ages since we've talked. Like 10 years!*

They don't even know who Bertha Vanation is or what she was in all of her glory. The audience knew. They couldn't get enough! Nature calls the shots though, because honey, there ain't nothing uglier than a sick drag queen. I look like an anorexic Joan Crawford, you know what I'm saying? We're talking Mildred Pierce meets Crystal Meth.

If John and Eric weren't here, I'd be in hospice already. I'm old enough to be Eric's father, and he's changed my diapers twice this week. It kills me to think about it (so much for using that expression anymore). I want to tell them how much I love them, but I can never repay the favor. I cry when I think about that. Whatever I do and say has to be about

now, as in this minute. Are a hundred cruel exchanges the going price for a single moment of tenderness?

*Dear Mom and Dad. I know we haven't spoken in a while.*

People are so hard on each other! I feel pathetic, like a child. What happened to all of that free love? I guess that's what got me in this mess to begin with. All of that affection spread around like poison and suddenly there we were -- naked, playing dead in front of our nation's Capitol with Larry Kramer and ACT UP. We just wanted drugs, honey, but damn if legislation doesn't take a lifetime (or half a million, if you catch my drift).

*Dear Mom and Dad. Remember that time you voted for Reagan?*

Chin up. March on. To that glorious blue box across the street.

I never thought I'd go this way. At least not after a certain point. I figured I'd made it past the eighties and the nineties. I must be invincible. Sex, drugs, and Absolut vodka - the cure for whatever ails you. Even HIV. Well, the party's finally over. I am telling my parents that I'm going to go before they do.

*Dear Mom and Dad. I hope you are well.*

By the way, that thing I said earlier? I think it's about choice, this fantasy about suicide. I think it's when we do think there's a choice, that the grass looks greener somewhere else. Or, is it when we don't see that we have a choice. . .? I don't know anymore. Because now, I don't have that luxury. Or so I'm told. Not that death is ever a choice, but "choosing" life is not really an option. Like a lot less of an option. Six weeks to a few months, I won't be having this conversation with myself. Poof.

*Dear Mom and Dad. Know anyone who wears size 12 stilettos?*

I'm strutting Manolo Blahniks one week and wearing diapers the next. Hell, I should have the garage sale of the year....these gowns alone are worth a small fortune. I wonder if my request is finally being answered, and that's why I'm dying now instead of later. Of all things, I hate to leave my parents. All of this time? I knew they cared, and now I'm finally telling them.

*Dear Mom and Dad. I haven't heard from you in a while, but I know you'd want to hear this from me.*

So, here goes. Out the front door and onto Seventh Avenue. I don't have to go far, thank God. Just across the street, and I can already see that beautiful mailbox waiting to eat my letter. Hold on honey, here I come.

*Dear Mom and Dad. First, I want to say that I love you.*

# Academic Essay Winner

Rita Feinstein

## A Puritan's Guide to Living with Sin

Sin isn't what it used to be. Today, adultery is no cause for public shame, nor are out-of-wedlock babies feared and demonized. In Puritanical times, however, placing one toe out of line could culminate in open execution. One would hope that with every slip-up automatically labeled a sin, there would be as many opportunities for redemption. Throw an unforgiving god into the mix, however, and you have Puritanical Boston, the setting of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter."

Hester Prynne, Hawthorne's protagonist, has sinned. It's no secret, either. The whole town clogs the streets, desperate to catch a glance of this dark, intense woman and her baby, whose father has yet to reveal himself. If nothing else, the Puritans are creative in their punishment. They have given Hester a letter—the letter A—that screams "adulteress" in every shade of red. Having gilded the letter in gold thread, Hester pins it to her dress, proudly bearing her shame. She suffers alone. Perhaps it would have been wiser to reveal the baby's father, because his secret decays him from the inside out. Hester, who hides nothing, is only strengthened with the passing of time.

It would have been easy to leave. With the ocean offering safe passage back to England and the forest offering a life of anonymity, free from the glowering townsfolk, Hester has several options. She chooses to stay. As Hawthorn wisely observes, "...there is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghost-like, the spot where some great and marked event has given color to their lifetime" (Hawthorne 72). Pinned here—either by otherworldly force or her own stubborn pride—Hester takes up residence in a cottage by the sea, where she spends hours sewing sumptuous garments for the villagers. We get the impression that this behavior is new. Something has shifted inside Hester that spurs her into producing mountains of beautiful clothing for people who have shamed and ostracized her. Her pride is the culprit. The same spirit that initially drove her to this "sin" is that spirit that refuses to fail at failure. If she's going to suffer, she's going to *suffer*. Nothing could give her darker satisfaction than showering the stern Puritans with splendor. She never portrays any genuine affection for these people, yet what she does seems like an act of charity. Hawthorne makes note of this bitter undertone: "This morbid meddling of conscience betokened...no genuine and steadfast penitence, but something doubtful, something that might be deeply wrong, beneath" (76).

Something *is* wrong. It has been gnawing at her since before the first page. This something is Arthur Dimmesdale, the father of Hester's child. Dimmesdale, the young and venerated minister, spends the entire story hiding his secret. Between being released from prison and moving into the cottage, Hester spends three torturous hours upon the town scaffold. Several men of high status, Dimmesdale among them, urge Hester to confess the name of her fellow sinner. Dimmesdale possesses the foresight to know that living with sin is much worse than revealing himself now, but he doesn't have the courage to confess. In a sideways manner, he begs Hester to speak for him: "Take heed how thou deniest to him—who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself—the bitter, but wholesome, cup that is now presented to thy lips" (62). Wanting to protect him, and thinking she is doing him a favor, Hester refuses to speak.

It is several years before Hester and Dimmesdale speak again. During this time, the meaning of the scarlet letter begins to fall into obscurity. Hester's inexorable generosity and grace have given the A new meaning—"Able", perhaps, or "Angel", but Adulteress is no longer the popular interpretation. Again, we are asked to examine Hester's strength. If she truly believes she has sinned, would she be weaker? If God is unforgiving, what's the point of being strong? Hester holds a visionary spark. It's not fully developed, but it tells her that sin is not the product of an act of love.

Were Hester to break down completely, she would not earn such a high degree of respect from the community. The Puritans value strength. Their governors "...had fortitude and self-reliance, and, in time of difficulty or peril, stood up for the welfare of the state like a line of cliffs against a tempestuous tide" (206). Hester emulates all these qualities, along with a great deal more intelligence than the politicians. These are the qualities that ultimately redeem her for the "weakness" of her sin. On top of this, Hester is notably purer than her fellow Puritans. She never lies or pretends to be someone else, and the image she presents is nothing but the truth. In a largely hypocritical society, this makes her genuine personality glow even brighter.

Although the A's meaning has become fuzzy to the general populace, it still holds its original venom for Arthur Dimmesdale. No matter how much time passes, he cannot work up the courage to confess. Instead, he channels his tumultuous emotions into his sermons. This only increases his feelings of hypocrisy, since the Puritans hold him in an adoring light he knows he doesn't deserve. For years, he has felt physical pain over his heart, the place he imagines his own scarlet letter to be.

One night, in a semi-somnambulant state, Dimmesdale wanders to the scaffold. This action, Dimmesdale's vain attempt at confession, is an amalgam of remorse, desperation, and frailty. It seems like he's working up

to a public declaration of guilt, but his hopelessness becomes clear when Hester and her daughter—their daughter—find him. With the child, Pearl, as the link between them, Hester and Dimmesdale stand together on the scaffold. Dimmesdale feels a rush of new life, and it isn't until Pearl asks if they will stand together the next day that Dimmesdale plummets back into catatonia. He replies: "...before the judgment-seat, thy mother, and thou, and I, must stand together! But the daylight of this world shall not see our meeting" (134). Given his physical ailments, which seem entirely psychosomatic, and his resistance to healing, it appears that Dimmesdale has no desire to continue living. He believes that his sin cannot be remedied during life, and that there is nothing to do but wait until Judgment Day.

He gets his wish. After enduring extreme heartsickness for seven years, disgusted at himself and physically deteriorating, he is finally at the end of his lifeline. If he hadn't met Hester on one of his forest walks, he may not have lived a moment longer. However, in the privacy of the woods, he is able to express his tormented soul. They have lost none of their original love for each other, and though Dimmesdale has relinquished all hope, Hester has a vision of togetherness. She throws her arms around him and holds him like a child. Here, we see a shocking reversal of gender roles. While Dimmesdale exhibits demure, feminine dependence, Hester sparkles with vitality. Awed at the strength and peace Hester has found, Dimmesdale implores her to think for him. Determined to create a better future for them both, Hester arranges for them to return to England by boat.

Before they leave, Dimmesdale must deliver an Election Sermon. This occurs during a holiday, when even Puritanical spirits are raised. To the crowd's surprise, Dimmesdale asks that Hester support him as he climbs the scaffold. As usual, Pearl accompanies Hester. Despite the clarity of the situation, the Puritans cannot comprehend the connection between Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl. The minister, however, has finally collected the courage to confess. "At last!—at last!—I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood; here, with this woman" (220).

Then, to the bewilderment of the crowd, he rips the ministerial band from his chest. Some townspeople claim to see a scarlet letter emblazoned on his skin; others see nothing and interpret this sermon as the minister's creative way of saying that everyone is a sinner. At this point, though, it is no longer relevant what the public opinion is. All the force of the narrative hangs between the minister and the bearer of the scarlet letter. With the knowledge that Dimmesdale is dying, Hester insists that, after death, they will spend a blissful eternity together. Dimmesdale clings to the belief that in their act of love, they forgot their reverence and cannot be forgiven. These are his final words.

By the end of the novel, Hester is still the strongest character...and not just because she's still alive. The only thing that gave Dimmesdale the

strength to confess was the knowledge that he would die immediately after. Unlike Hester, he could not have borne public disgrace. Hester, however, does not just bear it; she's *proud* of it. By openly, honestly accepting her punishment, her badge of ignominy becomes a badge of honor. She is in strange harmony with her sin. When tempered with the weight of human suffering, her powerful personality becomes almost saintly. The letter started as a curse, but it has become part of her identity, a symbol of virtue and empathy, and a pillar of strength.

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# Academic Essay

## Honorable Mention

*Chandrika River*

### **North and South India – Two Countries in One**

India's strength and beauty is its people, landscapes, wildlife, and ancient cultures, all interwoven in a huge flying carpet. Even amidst its noise and pollution, India radiates magic. While moving about in this endless sea of women and men wearing saris and dhotis, one is immersed in clouds of incense, scents of jasmine flowers, temple bells ringing day and night, and holy cows resting in open fields, or more likely, major road crossings. Amongst the endless stream of Maruti vans, Ambassador cars, and Tata jeeps, the streets of the cities are also filled with pedal and motor rickshaws adding to the maze of transportation options.

First time western travelers arriving in India will almost certainly perceive all this as a huge indefinable tsunami of sounds and smells. Like a huge painting that is moving paradoxically at an irrationally slow, yet fast speed, nothing seems to make sense. But once settled in and the culture shock diminishes, the traveler will quickly discover an order within the chaos that is prevalent throughout this one big country called India.

Still, when en route from North to South, it is quickly realized that there are at least two completely different countries living in one. There is Northern India, which is reigned by its crown jewel, the Himalayas, and then there is Southern India where endless rice paddy fields lined by coconut and banana tree orchards are surrounded by ocean water and canals. North and South India's dispositions are not only defined by their geographic differences but also by their very distinctive temperaments: for example, in the way rickshaw drivers engage with their passengers, how the local cuisine affects the temperaments of North and South, and how women reflect the genetic differences of the two Indias. These differing temperaments and cultural environments create completely opposite experiences. Some travelers love the North, while others will only set foot in the South.

In the North, for instance, when using an auto rickshaw, travel guides prepare the tourist for how to go about dealing with the drivers. First, he must find out what the going rate is. Then, make sure to set the price ahead of travel. Auto rickshaws are painted uniformly in black with yellow vinyl roofs. They are big, noisy, stinky bumble bees, which buzz

through the streets with travelers holding on for dear life. Roads are bumpy and so packed that the rickshaws fight for every inch of space to squeeze through traffic. Once at the destination, the traveler needs to be ready for an intense bargaining exchange and argument about price with the driver, no matter what was arranged beforehand. Very few drivers will speak any English, so if a traveler is not familiar with any of the native tongues, he will most certainly be drowned in a waterfall of Hindi while staring at the driver's beetle root tainted smiles as he collects too much money.

Once in the South, after a train journey that takes two days and nights from the northern city of New Delhi to Chennai, formerly known as Madras, in the south, the adventurer will realize how big India really is. Outside the train station in Chennai and throughout the city, rickshaw drivers wait for their clients while drinking the local coffee brew, unlike the chai that is customary in the North. A different demeanor is immediately apparent. The driver will be sitting inside the carriage with his colorful dhoti wrapped around his hips. Each vehicle will be individually and artfully painted with the driver's representation of his favorite gods. The gods are painted with a pastel palette which compliments the surrounding, endlessly vibrating green banana trees present in every open space of the city. But to the traveler's great surprise, he will most likely be greeted in nearly perfect English. Upon arrival at the hotel, the driver will offer to carry the luggage, and without being asked, every traveler will be happy to leave a tip in addition to the regular charge.

In exploring the various temperaments, comparison of the food of the North and South is a must. Simply put, India is one country but North and South are worlds apart in their temperament when contrasting the spiciness of their foods.

In northern cities, from Rishikesh to Agra and Jaipur to Varanasi and beyond, the North's cuisine is especially hot. Chile seems to be the first ingredient of just about every dish. A typical North Indian meal is comprised of often overcooked rice, dhal (lentils), with chile and subzi, which is a mix of seasonal veggies with...you guessed it ...chile. The only relief from chile comes with the side dish called raita, which is a salty yoghurt with a dash of cumin and ground pepper. For dessert the Northern Indian seems to be obsessed with sweets made primarily of sugar and milk. The varieties of desserts that can be created from these two ingredients are beyond imagination. Barfi, gulaab-jaamun, kalakand, rabdi, dhoda, laddu, peda and milak-cake. All of them translate to a nauseating sugar rush that may leave the traveler spending the night in the bathroom.

South Indian cuisine would be most certainly described by the Northerners in jest as something to be eaten when one has an upset tummy. The use of fermented rice fried into flat pancakes with a dash of ghee (clarified butter) and a side dish of coconut chutney has been known

to cure general ailments besides being the cultural comfort food throughout the south from Bangalore to Cochin. South Indian culinary art extends to a large variety of delicate meals like onion adai (onion/rice/dhal fritters), idlis (steamed, fermented rice balls with sweet, minty chutney), thanjavur then-gaipuri (rice flower, coconut pancakes with cardamom), and all using the local spices to perfection. Spice combinations are closely kept secrets and handed down for generations. Desserts are created from coconuts and bananas and have just the right balance of sweet and fruity flavors. This cuisine, which artfully appeals to the senses, is fit for kings and queens.

And speaking of queens, it is not possible to mention the differing personalities of the South and North without describing the Indian woman. This is where the country is entirely unified yet still differs in expression. But it is true to say that from North to South, the women are beautiful. They share an admirable devotion toward service to family and religion no matter what their age and cast. What differs is their genetic background. The biological diversity owes itself to the country's geographical position at the juncture of the African continent and the Eurasian countries to the north.

Northern villages of the Himalayas are home to women who have intriguing Asian dark complexions, yet whose facial structures are often Aryan. Scientific studies have discovered early migration connections between Europe and the northern parts of India. Indifferent to their origin, the women enjoy using black eyeliner to underscore their radiant eyes. Due to the cold, they wear rich dark colored saris made of nylon or silk, and they wrap themselves in intricately designed paisley shawls. Their ancestral roots predispose them to be feisty and resilient in an environment where they are dominated both by their male counterparts and the nature of the powerful mountains surrounding them.

In contrast, the southern beauties distinct features originate from a culture that is even older than the North's and had to adjust to a much hotter climate. Their genetic footprint points toward Africa and is reflected in their skin complexion which often is nearly black. Faces have rounder features but with the same disarming glow of the eyes. This glow is also underlined by kajal, which is a black eyeliner used to offset the eyes and is believed to keep evil spirits away. Southerners wrap their hand-woven cotton saris in an entirely different way and choose a lighter array of colors.

The invisible and far-reaching shadow of the Himalayas falls onto the plains profoundly affecting the people living there. They tend to be rougher and more direct, like the intense wind that comes down from the magnificent mountains. Southerners, on the other hand, are gentle yet dynamic. They emanate a calm energy that moves in harmony with the sea breeze blowing through the coconut trees. The heat is so intense in the South that the people are forced to live a more relaxed and slower lifestyle.

Travelers from the west will discover, by exploring India from North to South, that its rickshaw drivers have their very own North or South character. They will see that the women of the North and the South are beautiful and have fascinating eyes. Yet they dress differently and are physiologically and genetically diverse. And, by exploring India's culinary offerings, the traveler will learn that overall the North has the hotter food yet the South has the even hotter climate, and that is what gives South India a softer attitude and constitution. Despite globalization India remains a compelling and exotic world which continues to fascinate Western visitors. Both North and South are places of wonder, and the traveler cannot go wrong in choosing to begin with either one.

# Academic Essay

## Honorable Mention

*Kim Knowles*

### **Decrease of the Amerindian Populations from the Time of Spanish Colonization: Causes and Documentation**

In every war between nations and cultures, there is born an oral tradition of atrocities perpetrated between antagonists. As is always the case, oral traditions at some point become written history, henceforth cemented in 'history' by virtue of its wide distribution. Inevitably, in a clash between a literate army and an aboriginal society with no written language, the history would be initially be recorded by the literate.<sup>1</sup> Our original records of contact between Europeans and Amerindians are heavily weighted to the European perceptions, Aboriginal history being recorded sometimes decades or even centuries later.

The "Black Legend" was initially the product of Spanish chroniclers, friars and defenders of the welfare of the 'Indians' but other later Europeans, notably the Portuguese, seized on the legend with relish.<sup>2</sup> The Black Legend was essentially a widespread belief that the Spanish were promiscuous torturers and slayers of the native population, partly as a technique of subjugation but also as simple cruelty. The Black Legend suggested that the Spanish were responsible, by murder, exploitation, enslavement and abuse, for the reduction of the native population across the Mexican New World from a pre-European contact population of 25 million to 1 million after one century of occupation by the Spanish. This represents 96% attrition.<sup>3</sup> Similarly the combined pre-Columbian population of Mexico and Peru was reported to be 35 million, a number that dropped to 2 million after one century of European contact. This again is a decline in numbers of 96%.<sup>4</sup>

Lurid descriptions of the cruelty and sadism of the Spanish are abundant, involving mutilations, particularly sexual mutilations, wanton slaughter of women and children and public mass murder. Such accounts have been the stuff of every war from the beginning of recorded history to the present day and it is impossible to separate propaganda myth from fact. Doubtless most myths have some foundation in fact, but there have not been many conquests of a large population that involved a 96% death rate.

One must consider some other cause for such a large decline in the numbers of the indigenous people, if, in fact, these population figures are even remotely accurate.

Faragher *et al* repeats the common belief that factors such as disease were the more likely cause of the striking decrease in the Amerindian numbers after Spanish contact. This widely repeated explanation would bear closer scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> Again, it is often suggested that the native population of the New World lacked the resistance to the European diseases, especially smallpox, enjoyed by the Spanish, reputed to have carried the maladies across the ocean. Is that, in fact, likely?

In the absence of electron microscope documentation, one is forced to rely on often unreliable, biased or untrained observers, the inescapable Achilles heel of history. None the less, it is likely that the suspect diseases would be typhus, smallpox, measles and plague; all diseases endemic to Europe, all fatal in some degree and probable culprits based on contemporary accounts.

Typhus is a disease that could easily have been carried by the Spanish, humans being the natural reservoir and the body louse being the vector. The mortality rate was probably about 60%, leaving a handsome population of surviving Spanish to carry the organism to the 'virgin soil' of the Amerindians.<sup>6</sup>

Measles would be very highly contagious but one would expect a comparatively low mortality rate. In addition, the incubation period of 7–14 days makes an active outbreak among the Spanish on arrival to the New World after an ocean crossing of 6 weeks a puzzle, human beings being the only reservoir and the causal organism being relatively fastidious.<sup>7</sup>

Plague is the archetypical pestilence of the Europeans and the rats and their attendant fleas which carry the disease doubtless luxuriated in the bowels of nearly every Spanish ship bound for the New World. Plague, like typhus, has a mortality of about 60%.<sup>8</sup> The persistence of sporadic cases of plague in the American Southwest makes one wonder if it was possible that there was some pre-European presence of plague in New Spain.

Smallpox, by the drama of its presentation, was the one disease that dominates the contemporary descriptions of Amerindian epidemics. Even though it is commonly assumed that it was infected Spanish soldiers who brought smallpox to the New World, Tucker says that the infected carriers were African slaves brought directly to the Caribbean as early as 1518, precipitating an epidemic that ravaged the local population of Hispaniola.<sup>9</sup> There is inevitable dispute among present-day historians about whether it was actually smallpox in early Spanish descriptions. The disease could survive the crossing of the ocean easily, even in the absence of active infection in the travelers because the organism is very resistant to drying and survives happily in fabric, blankets and clothing. Smallpox is the bench-

mark for Spanish diseases that conferred immunity on those previously exposed, the untreated mortality averaging about 30%.<sup>10</sup> This left an abundant population of Europeans with sufficient immunity who would survive an epidemic that would kill at least 30% of the virgin Amerindian population.<sup>11</sup> The only presumed difference in the New World experience is that a large number of the arriving Spanish had immunity conferred by previous exposure. Doubtless Amerindians would soon develop the same proportion of immune individuals. Only 'virgin' populations of the indigenous people would experience the higher mortality. Prolonged contact with the Spanish should have given the same smallpox resistance in the overall native population.

Even if the native population of the New World was dramatically depopulated by Spanish disease and killings, it is highly unlikely that the attrition was 96%; low birthrate because Indian women were "worn out with work" and famine induced by Spanish depredations included.<sup>12</sup>

Underlying the reported decrease in the Amerindian population under Spanish colonization is the reported numbers of the native population. A simple and likely explanation of the big decline in Indian populations is that the initial estimates of the numbers of New World people were wrong. It was in the interest of the original explorers and conquistadors to inflate the encountered population of Indians to aggrandize their conquests and to magnify the potential gain from further exploration in their reports to their investors and patrons. One need only read the accounts of the southwest Pueblo "cities" brimming with the potential for gold in the New World to test the veracity of the early accounts. The classic example of the marketing exaggeration of early explorers to entice further investment and colonization is the name of "Greenland" coined by Vikings to describe a vast snow and ice covered landscape.

Most of the estimates of populations of the New World were extrapolations from crowds of local occupants which they encountered. Modern journalistic sources are replete with disputes between protest organizers and local governments over estimates of crowd size at any given gathering of protestors, aerial photos and grid formulas and simple guesswork leaving differences of opinion of factors of hundreds of times magnitude. Such disparities in population estimates are graphically demonstrated in recent historical estimates of the first European contact population of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. In 1492, the estimated native population varies from Verlinden's (1973) 60,000 to Borah and Cook (1971) of nearly 8 million, a factor of more than one hundred times.<sup>13</sup>

Reports of a population decrease in the Amerindian numbers after Spanish contact are based on contemporary Spanish written estimates. It is

likely that Spanish diseases and killings, decreased reproduction and famine all contributed to these reports. Since such reports of the population of the native people encountered by the Spanish are inevitably estimates, a notoriously fallible system, and, because these numbers are hotly disputed still today, the calculated proportion of the indigenous people's decrease must be viewed with caution.

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, Barbara and Montell, William Lynwood, *From History to Memory: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research*. Nashville: The American Association of State and Local History, 1981. p. 67.

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<sup>3</sup> Faragher, J.M., Buhle, M.J., Czitroom, D., Armitrage, S.H., *Out of Many*. Combined Volume. Fourth Edition. Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2006. p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Burns, E. Bradford and Charlin, Julie A., *Latin America, A Concise Interpretive History*, Seventh edition. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2002. p.17.

<sup>5</sup> Faragher et al, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy*. Editors, Beers, Mark H., and Berkow, Robert. Merck Research Laboratories., Seventeenth Edition. Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, 1999. p. 1226-1230.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 2320-2321.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 1171-1172.

<sup>9</sup> Tucker, Jonathan B., *Scourge: The Once and Future Threat of Small Pox*. New York; Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001. p. 5-9.


<sup>10</sup> MMWR, *Vaccinia (Smallpox) Vaccine: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices*. CDC, June 22, 2001. p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Persisting Humoral Antiviral Immunity Within the Japanese Population after the Discontinuation in 1976 of Routine Smallpox Vaccination*. Clinical and Diagnostic Laboratory Immunology. 2005 April; 12(4): 520-524.

<sup>12</sup> Faragher et al, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Cook, p. 23, Table 1.1.



The logo of Santa Fe Community College is a stylized, geometric design. It features a central circular element with four arms extending outwards, each ending in a series of parallel lines that resemble a sunburst or a stylized letter 'S'. The entire logo is rendered in a light, muted brown color.

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