

Delta Winds

A Magazine of Student Essays

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Letter from the Editors

In this year's volume of *Delta Winds*, students of San Joaquin Delta College share their concerns about the social injustice of capital punishment, about the difficulties involved in collecting child support, about the questionable role of media advertising for drug companies, and about language, perception, and the association of words with negative meanings to a group of people. These student-writers show their ability to synthesize articles in specific subject areas and to formulate original findings based on this research. In other works in this magazine, students discuss the complexities of family roles and ties. For one author, her father is a genius; for another, her mother is a liar. Some parents described in these essays provide comfort and guidance while others appear trapped by the consequences of their lives. Nevertheless, the loss of parental figures looms large in the formulation of some of these writers' lives. Still other writers in *Delta Winds* express themselves through humorous anecdotes that reveal a sharp eye for the incongruities in our culture and society. The creativity evident in these autobiographical works shows the community that an artistic sense has not been lost. The blend of seriousness and sadness, of joy and nostalgia makes this volume both compelling and illuminating.

by
Cassandra J. Eastham

Forgotten Children



Cassandra J. Eastham is a California native but calls a military base her “home town.” She spent a tour of duty during, but not in, the Gulf War, and eight years afterward discovering that she didn’t like working in electronics. Now she is pursuing a college education and a chance to write professionally, a chance that she never had before. She lives in Manteca with her two sons.

We pay before we pump the gas, we work before we receive the paycheck, and we must pass the exam before we get the grade. It’s legal and it’s fair. It’s unfortunate that people are not required to raise a child *before* they are awarded an orgasm. A moment of romance results in a life-long responsibility. Some planned on it, and some tried to do the “right thing,” but when the romance ends, when the marriage is over, when the reality of responsibility becomes unbearable, it is too easy to leave those responsibilities, those children, to somebody else.

I suffered from serial monogamous relationships for ten years, and, as a result, I have two very different child support cases that I struggle with every day. The primary reason I kicked these men out of my home was that it was easier to raise and support my children without them. Each had decided he could not handle the stress of supporting a household, so he just stopped. I spent years trying to talk to, convince, coerce, assist, con, plea, support, get on my knees and *beg* each man to stop neglecting the child, to get a job, and to stop spending money on computer games and pornography. There was nothing I could do to get their help while they were still in my home, and I was naïve enough to think the laws would help me retrieve financial assistance from both fathers once they were gone.

My sons and I have dipped under the poverty line more than once. We have frequently gone without daycare, dental work, clothing, food and a place to live. It turns out that my situation is not unique. “Child support payments, which are intended to provide economic resources and security to youngsters, are often made irregularly, partially, or in many instances not at all” (Kalter 10). Why? “Married couples brought in \$28,168 a year more than single mothers.

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Even single women managed to collect \$7,494 a year more than single mothers” (Watnik 339).

Why? “Despite efforts to increase awards, the average amount received is less than half of what it costs to actually raise a child” (Watnik 333). Why? “Seventy-five percent of women on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children, also known as welfare) [are receiving] public services because the absent parent of their children is unable or refuses to pay child support” (Spence 153) *Why?* Is it the laws or is it the fathers?

The laws, at least in California, seem to be in place. The California Family Code Section 4053 states that,

In implementing the statewide uniform [child support] guideline, the courts shall adhere to the following principles:

- (a) A parent’s first and principal obligation is to support his or her minor children according to the parent’s circumstances and station in life.
- (b) Both parents are mutually responsible for the support of their children.
- (c) The guideline takes into account each parent’s actual income and level of responsibility for the children.
- (d) Each parent should pay for the support of the children according to his or her ability.

(e) The guideline seeks to place the interests of children as the state's top priority.

The process to collect child support also seems to be very simple. One must first locate the other parent, establish paternity if the other parent is male, establish a support order and then have that support order enforced.

Locating the other parent can be difficult if the custodial parent has no legal data on him such as social security number, driver's license number or place of birth, but locating the other parent can be simple if the custodial parent is still in touch with him. Still, in order to enforce the support, the government needs to know more than simply where the parent is. It is customary to fill out more detailed information on a case file, such as the parent's place of business, the license plate and model of the car he drives, any assets or real estate the parent owns, names and locations of the grandparents and so forth. The more information collected at this point, the smoother the process will be.

Next, legal paternity must be established if the non-custodial parent is the father. If the father is present at the child's birth, hospitals establish paternity while issuing the birth certificate. If the parents are married, it is assumed the husband is the father unless legally contested and proven otherwise.

Once the other parent is located and is legally recognized as the child's parent, a child support order must be awarded. If the child is a product of the marriage, child support orders are often established at the time of the divorce. Historically, the amount was determined by an agreement between the parents before the divorce was filed in court through a Marriage Settlement Agreement. Forc-

ing two people who are already at odds with each other to cooperatively discuss money matters is like pouring gasoline onto a fire. Luckily, the laws in California have changed, and the amount of child support is now calculated by the courts. The three key factors in deciding the amount are income of both parents, percent of visitation of both parents, and price of childcare.

The last step, enforcing the support, is not something the custodial parents can do themselves. They must rely on the District Attorney's Family Support Division to enforce a support order for them; however, the real responsibility of expediting a court order lies on the shoulders of the custodial parent (Watnik 310). Raising a child is not easy with two parents involved; but raising a child alone requires a superhero effort. That single parent now has to be the mom *and* the dad, the disciplinarian and the nurturer, the teacher and the playmate, the taxi driver, the housekeeper, the cook, and the breadwinner. Society does not generally call single parents superheroes because it plainly *cannot be done*. On top of all that, these single parents are forced to tack on the duties of legal secretaries in order to get the help they desperately need.

However grave the problem may be now, the history of child support has not been without its occasional legal adjustment. The federal and state governments have gone through great pains to support the needs of single parent families. "Despite custody orders, collection of child support long relied heavily on voluntary cooperation and was rarely enforced It took many years of seeing women and children intolerably impoverished before people realized that a system of child support would not work without serious enforcement measures" (Wallerstein 251). The

However grave the problem may be now, the history of child support has not been without its occasional legal adjustment.

AFDC was established during the Great Depression to help single parents who were not receiving support. A Head of Household status has been added for filing taxes. In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility Act for tracking down and enforcing payment from fathers (Mink 69).

Why don't parents want to support their children?

Orders can be enforced by wage withholding, wage garnishment, writ of garnishment for personal property, a creditor's bill if assets have been signed away to a third party, and even a till tap in which authorities can empty the cash register of a business the parent owns. Orders can also be enforced through a diversion of government benefits: child support can be deducted from unemployment compensation, worker's compensation, pension, retirement fund, trust, social security, disability and tax refund. Up to 55% of the obligor's wages can be withheld in all states (Watnik 311). A non-custodial parent failing to produce a good reason for failing to pay past due child support is now charged with civil contempt of court. "Criminal prosecution for non support means the paying parent is accused of criminally neglecting the child by failing to pay support" (Watnik 313). Delinquency of over \$1000 is, by law, reported to the Credit Bureau, and a bankruptcy does not absolve the non-custodial parent of past due amounts. Driver's licenses, business licenses and even fishing licenses can be revoked. "The judge can order extra child support payments to make up the difference, require that a bond be posted, or even send the parent to jail until back payments are made" (Watnik 313). Furthermore, there is no statute of limitations for back-owed child support. Whatever monies were not paid to the child before the child turned 18 will continue to be owed to the child after age 18, after the child is adopted, married, and to the next of kin when the child dies.

In short, authorities have tried to write child support laws to carry the same weight of responsibility as actually raising children: you cannot get rid of them, it is very bad if you fail, and the duty does not expire. Why, then, "when the Census Bureau surveyed child support collections, they found that only 51% of the parents received full payments, 24% received partial payments, and 25% received no payments at all" (Watnik 303)? Why don't parents want to support their children? There are a lot of miserable excuses, but the top 5 reasons why parents don't pay child support fall into the following categories. The non-custodial parent:

- wants to "get even" because visitation is frustrated or denied
- believes that the other parent should be the sole supporter of the children
- wants the other parent to get a job
- is convinced the children don't need the money
- doesn't like to be ordered to do anything (Watnik 313)

Despite the laws, fathers have side-stepped child support because the sense of responsibility is just not there. Perhaps the laws should be even tougher. Welfare mothers are sometimes given court ordered birth control. Why is it that fathers who deliberately fail to pay support for their children are not?

Every time I balance my checkbook, I thank the powers that be that I miscarried the pregnancy in the marriage that occurred between leaving Frank and meeting Jim. It is as bitterly ironic as it sounds.

Looking back, I can only say that, if I had known they would fail in their responsibilities, I would not have tangled with them in the first place. I have already cut a lot of fat from my financial worries. No one is spending my paycheck behind my back. No one is beating or neglecting the boys while I am at work. There are no mysterious purchases showing up at my door and no 1-976-HOT-SEXX numbers showing up on my phone bill. I feel a great deal of security just knowing that my children are actually receiving every resource I can provide.

It is easy to want to blame laws, society, bureaucracy or the fathers themselves for the lack of support, but trying to force people to accept the virtue of responsibility would take far more than laws and consequences.

I am very and most permanently single. From this position, it is easy to want to hate all men, but I cannot, for I am raising two boys to become men. It is easy to want to blame laws, society, bureaucracy or the fathers themselves for the lack of support, but trying to force people to accept the virtue of responsibility would take far more than laws and consequences. It would take a bunch of big miracles. I will continue to wiggle my way through the red tape, and the fathers may pay up eventually, but I can no longer hold my breath.

Fighting to squeeze blood from an unyielding stone requires a lot more energy, time, money, and patience than any single parent has to offer. Instead of spending these precious resources on making my exes pay, I feel they are better spent on raising the children my exes forgot.

Perhaps that is why.

...child support can be deducted from unemployment compensation, worker's compensation, pension, retirement fund, trust, social security, disability and tax refund.

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by
Karrie L. Bennett

A Hard Act to Follow



Karrie L. Bennett is a single mother of Courtney, 22, Stephen, 19, and Cheyanna, 12. Her major is psychology with a pre-law minor. She will be receiving her A. A. in May 2004 and will transfer to UOP in the fall. After completing her bachelor's degree, Kerrie plans to attend law school in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her career goal is to become a criminal defense attorney.

The beautifully diverse quilt of humankind is intricately woven with people from every walk of life. Each thread represents a trait carried down from generation to generation. Diversity can be seen in age, intelligence, beauty, culture, lifestyle and numerous other characteristics. There are “teachers and learners,” “parents and children,” “lovers and haters,” and the wonderfully gifted individuals known as the “Geniuses.” The concept of genius means something different to every person but can be found in every culture. There are great thinkers from our past, such as Beethoven, Einstein, and Freud. The geniuses of today include Bill Gates, Martin Luther King and even Eminem.

They strive to reach different goals, but in their struggles a connection to each other sets them apart from everyone else. All of these people have one thing in common: the complete and consuming drive to succeed at any cost. With genius come many things both good and bad — notoriety, wealth, satisfaction, and isolation, loneliness, exhaustion, and illness. Some give up everything for the “cause,” even their lives. Geniuses become so devoted to what they are doing that it envelops them. Many people will never have the chance to meet someone of true genius, but I had the distinct honor of being related to such a person: my father, Walter P. Bennett.

My father was a genius. He did everything in his life with pride and determination. In fact, he set his bar so high

that at times he could barely meet his own expectations. I'm not sure if people of genius make a conscious decision to be this way or if it is an innate characteristic. Perhaps it is a combination of both. However, I do know that my father was driven by some unseen force to surpass even his own boundaries. In all the things my father did in his very short forty-three years, he shone brighter than anyone around him.

He enlisted in the United States Army. Determined to be the best, he excelled at every aspect of his military career. Honorably discharged as a corporal with special training as a paratrooper, he re-enlisted for another eighteen months in order to get a college fund. Once he left the army, he married my mother and set out for college.

He started small, enrolling in Camron Junior College in his hometown in Oklahoma. But he yearned for more. He showed such determination in the field of mathematics that he received a scholarship to Colorado College. His life plans were to be a high school math teacher and football coach. While at Colorado College, my father excelled academically and was noticed by many of his faculty and administrators. As a Phi Beta Kappa, he graduated second in his class, with two bachelor degrees, one in mathematics and the other in physics. It was at this point that his life took another turn, a turn that would eventually kill him. He was offered a full scholarship to study health physics at Vanderbilt University in Nashville,

My mother was looking forward to children, and my father wanted to change the world.

Tennessee. He jumped at the chance. He was completely driven. He no longer wanted to teach; he wanted to be a Health Physicist and he would do anything to succeed.

In Nashville, my father continued his ever-growing knowledge. My mom was their financial support, working as a receptionist at a small recording studio. Nashville was a hot spot for new talent in country music. It was at that small studio that she met "The King," Elvis Presley. To my mom, this made all of her hard work worth it. While my mom was meeting legends, my father was becoming one — to me at least — although I wouldn't be born for a few more years. As always, my father threw himself into his education at Vanderbilt, but he also found time to play on the football team there. He excelled at both and graduated with honors with a master's degree in health physics. Now my parents' future was set.

This was a wondrous time for both of my parents; they were starting a new life. My mother was looking forward to children, and my father wanted to change the world. I often wonder if they would have changed the course of their lives if they could have seen their future. If they could have known that my father's passion for his career would eventually cause his death, would they have changed anything? I would like to believe that if he had known he wouldn't get to see me grow up, he would have made many changes. But in all honesty, I'm not sure because the mind of a genius is far too complex for me to comprehend.

My parents embarked on a new life in Idaho Falls, where I was conceived and where my father received his first massive dose of radiation. He probably knew that he had been exposed, but he didn't stop working. My parents moved to Las Vegas where my father continued his career as a health physicist and my mother gave birth to me. My father also continued to receive various amounts of radiation at the Nevada Test Site. As my father was making a name for himself in the world of nuclear physics, he was



slowly dying. My parents wanted to find a perfect environment in which to raise me and soon decided that Las Vegas wasn't that environment. We moved to what I consider my hometown: Livermore, California.

Livermore was a very safe, semi-wealthy suburban community in the Bay Area. The town offered many things to our young family, such as friends and a wonderful new church that kept both of my parents busy. We settled into our custom built, three bedroom home and lived a very peaceful life. As it turned out, I would be my parents' only child. I realized early on that my father was a workaholic because he wasn't home very much, or at least it seemed to me that way. My father was so very driven that it wasn't long before he was promoted to the position of Senior Health Physicist in charge of the Hazards Control Department at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. This prestigious position made my father proud but also put him in a harmful setting. In charge of any nuclear accident cleanup, he would be sent all over the world, gone for weeks or even months at a time. I started to realize how important my father was, but I didn't know that I would only have three more years to spend with him.

He made many classified missions for our government. When he came home, he would bring us wonderful gifts from the regions he had come from. That was our only clue as to his whereabouts. Every one of these "missions" further exposed him to radiation. We took

He spent much of his time at work developing a nuclear waste containment center that would later be named after him, "The Bennett Bucket."

family vacations at least twice a year, but my father's work was his priority. He wanted to find a safe way to dispose of nuclear waste and he eventually did. He spent much of his time at work developing a nuclear waste containment center that would later be named after him, "The Bennett Bucket." The Bennett

older, but when I did begin to understand, I realized that the life of a genius wasn't any life at all. My father spent most of his time among people he worked with, not the people he loved and who loved him back. He was driven to succeed and he did.



Bucket, used in the 1960s and 1970s, was very successful.

My father compromised a lot to achieve his goals; he gave up his time with his family and his friends, and he gave up his life. In 1972 he was diagnosed with leukemia and lymphoma. He went through rigorous treatments of chemotherapy and, ironically, radiation treatments. This, coupled with three surgeries, still couldn't save my father's life. Although he was gravely ill, he continued to work. His condition worsened until he had to be hospitalized permanently. I could no longer see him. His kidneys eventually failed, and he lived on a dialysis machine and life support system. He became weaker and weaker. We had lost so much time and now there was no time left. In the end he died exactly as he lived, alone. I didn't understand all of this until I was much

My father was a prominent man in our community and very respected by his peers. We had to have three funerals just to accommodate all of the people who wanted to pay their respects to him. My father left behind a legacy of knowledge. But he died alone, and I think he wanted it that way, for that is the way of the genius, and this is something most people will never understand. Every day I think about my daddy and miss him. Sometimes I find myself so driven by my own desires that I have to stop and remember that it takes a very special person to fill the shoes of a genius. I don't want to be that person. I still wish we could have had more time together, but the genius takes that time away from us all.

GROWING UP WITH LIES

By
Katie Williams

When I was seven, my mom sat me and my brother and sister down and told us she had cancer and had six months to live. My mom is still alive today. My mother is the biggest liar I know. Even today, as a grandmother of twelve, she lies about almost everything.

Growing up with a mother for a liar was hard. I learned early in life how lies could have devastating repercussions. Due to my mom's lies I had to grow up without my family. I had a lot of emotional problems as a teenager. I had to learn not to get attached to people because I never stayed in the same place for a long time. Even as an adult, I have a hard time trusting people. I found out my mom was a liar when I was nine. I came home from school one day to find my mother having an affair. She told me the man was just a friend, but two weeks later we moved in with him. That was when I knew my mom was a liar.

Earlier, I remember my mom telling us lies. She once told us that she was redecorating Clint Eastwood's house. She took us to Oxford Circle where she said he lived and showed us a house. I remember being excited and wanting to meet him. We begged my mom to get an autograph, but she never did. I found out she was lying from a neighbor who said Clint Eastwood did not live in Stockton. My mom never brought it up again. She said she had to quit working because she was sick and was unable to decorate houses anymore.

My mom gave me up when I was ten. I lived with my grandmother until I was eleven. Then I was shipped out of town to live with my aunt. While I lived with my aunt, my mom used to call me periodically and tell me to pack my stuff, and that she wanted me home. I would pack my stuff and wait. Two months passed before I would hear anything from her. When I asked her about me

coming home, she would tell me that she never said that. After a while, I got tired of her lies and stopped accepting her phone calls.

When I moved back to Stockton, I would speak to my mom on occasions. Every time I saw or talked to her I caught her in lies. She lied about buying houses or being sick from some disease that I had never even heard of. When I confronted her about a lie, she acted as if she could not remember telling me those things. The most recent lie my mother has told was that she lost her memory. She even had the nurses believing it. We caught her when we brought my niece Estella to the hospital to visit her. We called my niece Estella "Wella" as a nickname. We introduced my niece to my mom as Estella; she then turned to her and said, "Hi Wella Wella." We all knew she was lying. We all got quiet and one by one left the hospital room. I have never confronted my mom about it. I did not talk to my mom after that for a year. I was hurt that my mom would lie about something so serious.

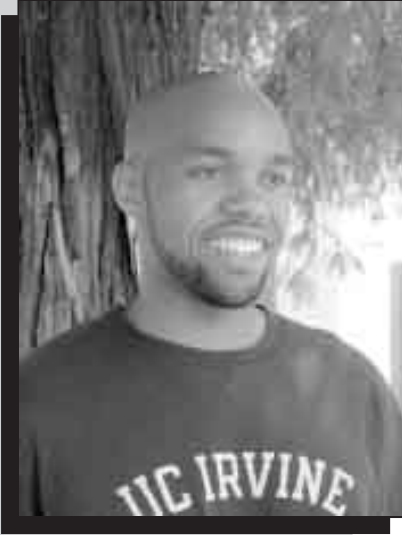
It is hard as an adult to know you don't have a mother you can depend on for things. I can't take my kids to her house for her to baby-sit or even to have Sunday dinners with. I barely speak to my mother. The only time she ever calls me is when the rest of the family won't speak to her because they have caught her in a lie. I once confronted my mom about the lies she told. She blames it on her childhood. She had a mother that was a liar and taught her how to lie. I'm glad in some ways that my mom gave me up. I think if I had stayed with her I would have ended up like her. I don't know if my mom will ever change. I still catch her in lies today. She is and will always be the biggest liar I will ever know.



Katie Williams is 27 years old. She has four kids and attends Delta College to get her nursing degree. She works at San Joaquin General Hospital as a medical assistant.

**That was
when I knew
my mom was
a liar.**

by
George Austin



“Albert Einstein is credited to have once said, ‘only a life in the service of others is worth living,’ and I too, have adopted this mindset as my own,” says George Austin. With plans of a double major in sociology and psychology, and a goal of an eventual Ph.D. in sociology, George Austin plans to use the knowledge and experience gained to serve his immediate community as well as the larger. Essentially, during and after his life he wants the world to have benefited from his existence. The inspiration of this piece comes from two semesters of African-American History, one semester of Intercultural Communication, one semester of Sociology, several books, prose, and magazines read at his leisure, and “a lifetime (19 years) of experience as an African-American male.”

The Burden of Being Black

Sit a spell as I tell you a once upon a tale

The haunting story of a young boy waiting to exhale . . .

It didn't take him very long to sense the naked truth

To smell the stench of ghetto hood that smoked from every roof

He grew up in a world of crack and beer canned coated streets

Where twenty-one was old and wacked and college was unique . . .

But in his mind it wasn't lost, the one undeniable fact

That in a land of justice for all, he always would be black

This vivid truth held him inside his self inflicted prison

Afraid to peep out of his cave, afraid to share his vision . . .

—Author Unknown

“But in his mind it wasn't lost, the one undeniable fact/That in a land of justice for all he would always be black.”

During the 1300s, from Europe to Asia, a deadly disease known as the Black Death swept through, in some cases wiping out entire towns. Black magic is the “evil” practice of witchcraft; a black lung is a chronic disease of the lungs mostly associated with coal miners; the black market is filled with all kinds of illegal activity; and black humor or “sick humor” is humor that is perceived as morbid, nasty, psychopathic and twisted. Who in their right mind would choose to be the black sheep of their family and community? Let us not forget that no one would ever want to fall into a black hole from which even light cannot escape. What do these words have to do with the burden of being black? *Everything!* The English language itself is biased, and the process of learning the language teaches prejudice and passes

on racist ideas through the society.

However, before dealing with the burden of blackness, let us dive into what race really is. Some believe that race is a biological term, understandably so. People with similar physical appearance, such as eye shape or color, could be assumed to be of the same heritage, but this is not always true. According to the authors of *Intercultural Competence*,

“Contrary to popular notions . . . race is not primarily a biological term; it is a political and societal one that was invented to justify economic and social distinctions. . . . One's ‘race’ is best understood as a social and legal construction” (32). Since race is not inherent or “naturally ordained” but a social and legal construction, the use of this term is subjective. One's “blackness” or “whiteness” is dependent on how society defines it.

What are white and black anyway? As people of different origins and of different heritages, the average American is a “mutt” (of mixed ancestry). What defines what “race” the average American is or what race you are? The color you turn out to be? Is Stacy, a person who is ninety-five percent “white” and five percent “black,” considered black because the genes in her happen to be stronger on the African-American side and show up more? What about Jared, who is of equal mixture and who turns out visibly “white”? What is he? The key is that the terms “white” and “black” are nothing but what society has created them to be and mean. Let's return to the issue of what's wrong with being black.

The problem is not with being of African descent or of having a certain skin color and hair texture, but being black. While searching through several dictionaries and thesauruses, I found a common feature, an interesting tone of negativity

in words associated with the term “black”: mourning, gloomy, dismal, cheerless, dark, bad, evil, wicked, sullen, angry, grim, villainous, hostile, sinister, threatening, soiled, dirty, unclean, grimy, filthy, obscure, slander, tarnish, immoral, unchaste, carnal, indecent, lascivious, vile, lustful, foul, nasty, depressive, discouraging, funeral, oppressive, coarse, raging, furious, rough, vulgar, ugly, joyless, cold, barbaric. And, as if the name-calling had not been bad enough, black is unholy too! However, not all societies operate with the same etymology and color associations. For instance, white is the color for weddings in western societies, but for funerals in Chinese culture; red is associated with rage in America but with happiness in China, illustrating that these meanings are not so much “written in stone” but are just cultural and societal inventions.

The words change, but the underlying meanings are the same from black, to nigger, to negro (which is Latin for black), to colored, to people of color, to persons of color, to Afro- American and to African American. While some of these words are extremely offensive and some are not offensive, all do the job of separation. Whatever the name is, underneath, the person of African descent is still black in society’s eyes. These words and associations with color affect the well being of the person who happens to be black and affect the society that sees the person through a tainted vision.

We are sometimes taught that “sticks and stones may break our bones, but words may never hurt me.” Although we wish that were true, sadly it is not;

words can kill, words can soothe, words have power. The Bible says, “life and death is in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18.21). Literally, is that saying that you can murder someone by saying so? Of course not. But words do have a great influence on perception, self-worth and life. Entire wars have been fought and genocide has been committed on the passing of ideas through words. For example, Adolf Hitler led Nazi Germany into an attempt of total annihilation of a group of people. He did so with the power of words. Anyone who has been the victim of the sinful symphony of the words nigger, fag, kike, homo, spick, etc. can understand the power therein, the frustration caused, the hurt and the long lasting pain.

According to Annette T. Rottenberg, “[E]ven to a small child it is clear that ugly words are as painful as sticks and stones and that the injuries are sometime more lasting” (238). Words, however, are not the whole story, for they, like us, are just pawns in the game, just a part of the system of communication. Communication is highly subjective, through the eyes of society. Lustig and Koester state, “People must share a set of symbols, socially defined, learned representations for meaning” (137). They continue, “Symbols are words, actions, or objects that stand for or represent a unit of meaning. The relationship between symbols and what they stand for is often highly arbitrary” (207). There are two points that are quite interesting about the subjective nature of communication: first, it is socially defined, and, second, it is often highly arbitrary or unrelated to what it stands for. This brings up an interesting

Is Stacy, a person who is ninety-five percent “white” and five percent “black,” considered black because the genes in her happen to be stronger on the African-American side and show up more?

For instance, white is the color for weddings in western societies, but for funerals in Chinese culture; red is associated with rage in America but with happiness in China, illustrating that these meanings are not so much “written in stone” but are just cultural and societal inventions.

dilemma. If communication is socially defined and usually unrelated to what it stands for, then why does “black” have all these negatives meanings associated with it? What does it say about our culture? Could it be that some of our problems with discrimination have been indiscriminately passed on through concepts of negativity toward people of African descent? And how does that affect our schema?

The authors of *Sociology For a New Century* believe “Every language has its unique features and ways of allowing those who speak it to identify specific objects and experiences. These linguistic features, which distinguish each language from all others, affect how the speakers of the language perceive and experience the world” (Bradshaw et. al. 217). The essence of the message is that our views differ with experience, education, and language. Language is more than just a tool used to express; it helps shape the world we see. What if black were no longer the color of death, but white was? How would a simple change like that affect how we see the world? It could be imagined that it would greatly affect our world. Let us look at the word black once again. What would this country be like if the meanings of white and black were switched? If black were pure, clean, undefiled, and cheerful, how would that change the way we view “black” people? It is a huge mistake to believe that language has no role in our experience and view of our world, because it is one of the first teachers to dictate good and bad, positive and negative. Sadly, in our language, black has been given the short end of the stick.

Could our language reflect a greater dilemma within the societal structures of our “Great Nation”? Could this obvious dissent for black reflect years of past pain and injustice? Could this be a window into the “soul” of present-day America, to get past the propaganda of “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” and “all men are created equal”? Could this illuminate the inequalities built into the social structure of the United States of America? The answers are yes, yes, yes, and yes! Most people want to believe that they are unbiased, but the fact is we are all guilty either consciously or unconsciously. Our language teaches us to be. When we begin associating concepts with people, problems truly begin. Some may contend that they are immune and have the ability to move past these obstacles and not be affected. This may be true, but it may not be true.

Just like Pavlov’s dogs, our minds can be “conditioned” to respond in certain ways, either consciously or subconsciously. The word black is synonymous with negative things in our culture, from death to dirty, from foul to unholy. This word, which is basically a curse, is then placed upon a whole group of people. Each time the negative associations are presented, we, the culture and society, become more and more “conditioned” to prejudice. Each time, we begin to subconsciously transfer the “evils” of blackness to the person and the group.

“Your thoughts are based on the language that you acquire through your culture, and this ongoing inner speech reflects higher-order cognitive process” (Gazzaniga and Heatherton 375).

Simply stated, your language and all its flaws shape your thought pattern, including what is good or bad and who is good or bad. "Henri Tajfel argues that humans categorize themselves and others into different groups to simplify their understanding of people. When you think of someone as part of a particular social group, you associate that person with the values of that group" (Lustig and Koester). It's a process of association, a process of associating black, an abstract word, to negative meanings, of associating abstract meanings to something tangible: a real live person and a group of people.

W.E.B. DuBois articulated it well in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois, the first person of African descent to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, a prominent civil rights leader of his day, spoke of a "duality" with African-Americans consciousness. This duality was a result of being "black" and "American," torn between two entities, one in which you are supposed "to have certain unalienable rights" and the other in which you are "perceived through the veil" as less than (DuBois 45). The problem is not just in the language. It goes much deeper. A word without meaning is just that, a word. A meaning without association to something tangible is just a meaning. The issue comes into play when associating the meaning of the word to something tangible, and, most important, associating the meaning to a human being. As the unknown poet said, illustrating how so many others feel: "But in his mind it wasn't lost, the one undeniable fact/That in a land of justice for all, he always would be BLACK."

**What if black
were no longer
the color of
death, but white
was? How
would a simple
change like that
affect how we
see the world?**

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If communication is socially defined and usually unrelated to what it stands for, then why does "black" have all these negatives meanings associated with it? What does it say about our culture?

by

Monica Wunderlich

Monica Wunderlich has attended Delta College since 1998. Since this essay she has moved to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district to continue on with her college career (and she even bought herself a computer!).

**However,
nothing is
permanent
and walls do
come down,
and so be it
— the
Wunderlichs
buy their
first
computer!**

MY TECHNOLOGICALLY CHALLENGED LIFE

It probably seems easy for someone to use a computer to solve a task or call a friend on a cellular phone for the solution. I, however, do not have access to such luxuries. My home, workplace, and automobile are almost barren of anything electronic. It's not as if I don't want technology in my life, but I feel as if technology has taken on the role of a rabbit, and I am the fox with three legs that just can't seem to get it. And after many useless attempts at trying to figure it out, I have almost given up.

In my house, technology does not exist, at least not for my parents. In fact it was 1995 when my father finally had to part with his beloved rotary phone, not because it was worn out, but because it would not work with the new automated menus that companies were using. Reaching an actual person was difficult the old way because of the physical impossibility of being able to *push* 1, 2, or 3 when a phone possesses no buttons. It was quite embarrassing, especially since I was fifteen and all of my friends had "normal" phones. My dad's biggest argument was that "It's a privacy issue. No one can tap into our phone calls and listen to our conversations." Well, the last time I had checked, none of us were trafficking dope.

I also had the privilege of not using a computer. It was hard going through high school without one, for I had many teachers who demanded many essays from me. Yet I had no way to type them. My sister was in the same boat, so we tried tag-teaming my parents into getting us a computer. But to no avail. We kept getting things like "They're too expensive," or "We have no room for one," or "We'll get one later." Later! My parents should have just said NEVER! So my sister and I resorted to spending

hours at our friends' houses, because their parents were nice to them and bought computers. The only problem was that our friends had lives and weren't always around at our disposal. So Plan B for essay completion was using a cheesy electronic word processor that my dad had borrowed from my *grandparents* to supposedly "help us out." This beast of a machine wasn't much help, though, because it was a pain in the neck to use. It had a teeny tiny little screen that wouldn't show the entire typed line, so by the time the line was printed, I'd find about ten uncorrected mistakes, and I'd have to start over. However, nothing is permanent and walls do come down, and so be it — the Wunderlichs buy their first computer! Two years after I graduate high school. As of yet, we still do not have the Internet.

My job is another place where technology is lacking. I work in a home for the elderly, and I take care of about eight to ten patients a night. I have to take some of these patients' vital signs, and I speak on behalf of anyone who has ever worked in the medical profession when I say that the most efficient way to take vital signs is electronically. However, my employers do not grant us the equipment for electronic vitals. We are still using glass thermometers, which are not only a waste of time (3 seconds vs. 3 minutes for an oral temp), but they are extremely dangerous. Residents are known to bite down on the thermometers, exposing themselves to harmful mercury. I can't even begin to count how many thermometers I have dropped and broken since I've worked there. One time I dropped a thermometer and didn't realize I had broken it. So I picked it up to shake it down, but instead I flung mercury everywhere. An electronic thermometer just makes more sense

when trying to make the residents' environment as safe as possible.

We also have to use manual blood pressure cuffs. They're just the normal cuffs that are wrapped around the arm, pumped up, and read using the bouncing needle. The problem is that none of our blood pressure cuffs are calibrated correctly, and the needles are way out of kilter. This makes it impossible to get an accurate reading. An ingenious solution would be digital cuffs, but that is highly unlikely. Actually, the home did try to supply some digital cuffs, but they were stolen. One man's sticky fingers equals inconvenience for the rest of us, and the home no longer supplied us with such time-saving technology. Using manual equipment is hard not only for us but also for the nurses. The care home does not allow feeding machines in the facility, yet people who need to be fed by a stomach tube are still admitted. This means that the nurses have to allot a special time from their med pass to hook up a syringe to the patient's stomach tube and pour their "steak dinner in a can" down the tube little by little. This tedious process takes about twenty minutes, and nurses don't really have twenty minutes to throw around, so it really crowds their schedules. If we had feeding machines, the nurses would only have to change a bag when a machine beeps. Problem solved if things went my way.

Another part of my life that is technologically crippled is my car. As much as I like my car, I still think it could use a few more bells and whistles. I drive a 2002 Volkswagen Jetta, which would probably make the reader think "Oh, a new car. There must be plenty of technology in that new car." My answer to that is "No, there isn't." The only technology is the 5 billion standard airbags for when I do something really stupid. Other than that I have to shift it manually. If I want to

roll down my window, I have to turn a crank. My car did not come with a CD player, so I shelled out \$500 for one. I've had this stereo since last May, and I still can't figure out how to set the clock or preset stations. Volkswagen technology could not stop my car from exercising its "check engine light" once every three weeks. Even though the design techs included a cute warning light, my blood still boiled every time the light would come on proudly, and I made yet another pilgrimage to the dealership... on my day off. It would be nice if my car came equipped with one of those Global Positioning System things as well. I am really good at getting lost, and if I had one of these systems a year ago, I would not have found myself driving over both the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge when I was supposed to be on the Richmond Bridge. (Ironically enough, I did this during the weekend that terrorists were supposed to be blowing up the Bay and Golden Gate Bridges.) And if I had had any passengers while tempting fate that day, I could have kept them distracted from the fact that we were lost (and possibly going to die) by letting them watch a movie on one of those in-car DVD players. But of course I don't have an in-car DVD player, so my hypothetical passengers would probably have been frantic.

No matter how much technology is out there, I seem to be getting through the day without most of it. It would seem hard to imagine someone else living without such modern conveniences, and, yes, at times I feel very primitive. However, I am slowly catching on to what's new out there even though incorporating every modern convenience into my day is out of the question. I am learning even though it is at a snail's pace. Hopefully I'll have it all figured out by the time cars fly, or else I will be walking.

One man's sticky fingers equals inconvenience for the rest of us, and the home no longer supplied us with such time-saving technology.

It was quite embarrassing, especially since I was fifteen and all of my friends had "normal" phones.

by
Loring Scotty Hoag



Loring Scotty Hoag is a strange character. He claims to be from Stockton, but most refuse to believe he was even born on this planet. He enjoys coffee and video games in excessive amounts and becomes highly volatile when others attempt to interfere with his all-nighter java-gaming binges. If you wish to interact with this individual, remember that he refuses to make social interaction with anyone not bearing gifts containing high amounts of caffeine.

**APPROACH WITH
EXTREME CAUTION.**

“NO.”



I knew the question he was going to ask, and I shot it down before he could even form the words. He had that look on his face, that sort of half-hidden depressed cringe that he wore when something was bothering him. More specifically, he wore it when something about *me* was bothering him. The tangled bristles of his scraggly black beard did not conceal his intentions; I knew full well what he was thinking, and I gave him the same obstinate reply that I had been giving him for the last eighteen years: a firm and unforgiving “No.”

“But Scotty, it’s in your eyes. You can’t see.”

“Dad, I don’t care if it’s so long that it’s in my shoes and I can’t walk. I said ‘no.’”

There was that look again. It felt as if he were trying to find the loose fuse in my skull that caused this obscure, long-standing father-son feud. Now that I was older, it was my choice, not his. I didn’t like getting my hair cut, and as far as I could remember, I never did.

He wasn’t the only one who opposed my choice of hairstyle. Friends, relatives, and nearly everyone else that I happened to meet showed some visual distaste at my long hair. I was usually

quiet, but I was also fairly observant of others around me, especially when they were concerned about this issue.

“That’s him, man. Doesn’t he look like a girl?”

I caught that remark through a noisy passing period at school. It came from a kid who shared a class with me. He was sitting with a friend about 30 feet away. I knew they were talking about me; they were looking right at me. They didn’t realize that I had heard them, and I was a bit surprised that my mind could filter a particular sound byte out of the campus chatter, but I acted as if I hadn’t noticed anything. I passed by them and headed for my next class. They all had that look on their face.

“Girls aren’t going to date you with that long hair.”

That came, quite unexpectedly, from my best friend in high school. Every now and then he would just throw something like that into a conversation. Feeling simultaneously confused and amused about the radical change of topic, I would look at him, and he would stare back with “the look.” It was the same look everyone else had worn in front of me. It seemed much colder on him,

though. Maybe it was because he was my best friend. Maybe it was because the longest he had ever gone without a haircut was about three weeks, whereas I was working on my third year.

"It's looking really bad, Scotty. You need to get it cut."

I would instinctively begin to think of some form of retaliation to these seemingly random slams, but I always decided that a blunt and rude remark deserved an equally blunt and rude response. Time after time, I would smirk, raise my bow finger, and restate my unchanged opinion: "No."

. . . but why? In a way, I knew he was right. I was totally different from everyone else at school, the guys at least, because I had long hair. I had had long hair since I was little. All of the other kids would compliment each other on their new "do's" while making snide remarks about that boy with the ugly, greasy, grimy long hair.

The biggest problem was that I agreed with them. I didn't really like long hair much either. I wanted friends, I wanted to be part of the group, I wanted to blend in with everyone else, I just didn't want a haircut. I wouldn't do it, couldn't do it, even when I wanted it. I would protest my haircuts for as long as humanly possible. I would have to be forced into the airplane-shaped barber chair with threats from my superiors, like the dreaded "No Nintendo" rule. Not only that, but after a cut, I would be stuck in a violent and belligerent mood-funk for about a week, with occasional fits of extreme depression creeping in. I wasn't scared of the scissors or of being cut, nor was I intimidated by the salon ladies who seemed to be advertising the entire line of Mary K cosmetics on their face. I just had a general fear of the haircut process as a whole. I thought that I must have been the only kid on earth that had a haircut phobia.

One day, however, my mother decided to tell me an interesting story. I realized at once that this story had been the source of my unique predicament the whole time. It was the story of my *first* haircut.

I was born totally bald — and ugly. Due

to some serious health problems and some highly erroneous decisions by the doctors, I had had a very rough delivery. Unlike my fifteen-month old sister, who the nurses claimed was "The prettiest newborn baby in the whole hospital," I was a cross between a Simpsons cartoon character, a zebra, and Mr. Magoo. My grandmother was quoted as saying to my mother, "You should have quit when you were ahead." A year later, however, I had grown a full head of naturally curly blonde locks. My mother thought I looked like an angel. My father thought I looked like a girl, and everyone he met thought so, too.

"Oh, what a cute little girl! How old is she?" they would ask as they passed by my stroller. My father, staring viciously through his grizzly bear-sized shadow at the passerby, would nearly bite straight through his stogie every time he heard it.

"He's *not* a girl."

"Oh . . ." And that would be the end of the conversation. My father watched the people slowly back away. Then he would look down at me in the stroller. Then he would look at my hair. My father felt that I was far past due for my first haircut; my mother, however, did not. A long battle ensued, and my mother won. Admitting defeat, my father promised to leave my hair as it was.

"Now, Scotty," my mother said to me as she momentarily broke away from the story, "there are a few lessons I need to teach you about life. The first lesson is always keep gas in your car. The second lesson is never trust a

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I was a cross between a Simpsons cartoon character, a zebra, and Mr. Magoo. My grandmother was quoted as saying to my mother, “You should have quit when you were ahead.”

man.” A man myself, I wasn’t exactly sure what she was implying with this remark, but she related it to her story nonetheless. It turns out the very next day after the explosive haircut argument, my father sneaked out of the antique coin store where he and my mother worked and took me with him. Once my mother realized that her husband and son had mysteriously disappeared, she turned the open sign around, locked the shop door, and dashed across the busy intersection to the barbershop on the other side of the street, ironically named “Harry’s.” As she opened the door, a blood-curdling screech, similar to that of a severely wounded animal, nearly knocked her over. Stepping inside, she realized that she was too late. It was her son causing the sound waves. With the assistance of my dad, who had performed the Herculean task of holding me still the whole time, Harry had cut off about three fourths of my curly blonde locks. The damage had been done, and there was nothing my mother could do.

Then, my mother opened an envelope and showed me the hair from that very first haircut. It was a bright and shiny orange-yellow color. It seemed eerie to hold, because while it felt like hair in the physical sense, smooth flowing, soft feeling, and sort of a grainy texture, it meant something a little different to me; it marked the only truly traumatizing experience of my childhood life and the sole reason I developed such a bizarre phobia about getting my haircut.

I had to get a haircut sometime though, I thought, because I still wanted to be accepted. I knew this wasn’t a normal condition, so I examined my options for fixing my highly uncommon mental

block. I decided trying some of the techniques my parents used, like self-enforcing the “No Nintendo” rule. That plan blew up in my face when I realized that, while I would rather commit Japanese ritual suicide than be separated from my Game Boy for more than twenty-four hours, I still wouldn’t cut my hair. It became apparent that more clever methods would have to be implemented to solve my case.

My sister, once the prettiest baby in the hospital, was currently majoring in cosmetology. She was also growing quite restless from cutting fake hair on her dolls’ heads. I thought that maybe I could get over my phobia by getting my haircut by someone I was comfortable with, someone I knew on a personal level. It would help her as well, seeing as how she had never cut the hair of a real person and could use the practice. That might seem like a bad thing to most people, but I honestly didn’t care if the cut would turn out uneven or lopsided. My main concern was getting over the phobia. However, the more I thought about it, the more fearful I became of the idea. Being brother and sister didn’t necessarily mean that we were always kind and friendly towards each other. We had had a long history of sibling rivalry, which began 24 hours after my delivery when my sister smashed a heavy gold bracelet into my forehead and created a dent that is still somewhat recognizable. What’s to say she wouldn’t take a little too much off the top, like all of it? I might have needed a haircut, but I didn’t need a military buzz. What seemed even worse is that she might have tried to make me look like “The love of her life,” former American Idol contestant, Clay Aiken. The seppuku suicide ideas came flooding back into my head.

In a slightly more desperate state, I thought of using hypnosis. The idea was that if I were told to get a haircut while in a relaxed state of hypnosis, I might be able to reprogram my brain and erase the phobia from memory. Therefore, upon awakening from the trance, I would be able to walk into a salon without fear. Hiring a professional hypnotist would be far too expensive, but I knew enough about the techniques used in public stage shows to induce the hypnotic state upon myself. I knew that the methods worked, too, after watching, and subsequently burning, a taped recording of myself impersonating one of the Back-Street Boys. The only problem that I couldn't remedy was how to persuade myself to get my hair cut after

about doing this.

I sat down and thought through the problem once more. If the problem resulted in the way others saw me, maybe I could bypass the whole haircutting process by changing the mental image, rather than the physical image, that those "others" saw when they looked at me. This seemed like a much more comfortable approach to the problem, and if I pulled it off, I could avoid the barbershop entirely.

"... you know, no one likes your long hair, Scotty. You really should cut it."

I was expecting him to mention it again sooner or later. In his typical clockwork type fashion, my best friend had just

We had had a long history of sibling rivalry, which began 24 hours after my delivery when my sister smashed a heavy gold bracelet into my forehead and created a dent that is still somewhat recognizable.

falling into a hypnotic state. I thought of recording my voice on a cassette tape, but I remembered having many problems with tape recorders. If I didn't record everything correctly, or if I used the wrong type of tape, I might wake up speaking French or Spanish. I then thought of having a second person on hand to give me the necessary instructions while under hypnosis. However, everyone I thought of electing as a trustworthy hypnosis partner was also waiting for the perfect opportunity to get back at me for some juvenile prank I had pulled on them. Just thinking of what my sister would want to do made me cringe. I might have come out of the trance thinking that I actually *was* Clay Aiken. I immediately scratched the idea off the list, almost ripping the paper with such force. There had to be another way to go

gotten his hair cut again. He had also received compliments from every single girl on the campus, as usual.

"I don't know, man," I replied as I put down my pizza slice and leaned back in the cafeteria chair, grinning my half-smirk. I pulled some of my hair out of the neck of my wavy red Acapulco shirt, tilted my hat up a bit, and moved a couple of flowing brown tresses out of my eyes and twirled them around my fingertips. He watched with a hint of hidden disgust in his eyes. I could see "the look" on him, as well as on a couple people in the distance who didn't realize I was scanning them. It was now or never, I thought. My grin widened. "The chicks dig it."

That seemed to cause some confusion.

As she opened the door, a blood-curdling screech, similar to that of a severely wounded animal, nearly knocked her over.

My friend raised his eyebrows.

“The chicks dig it?”

I realized then that I had probably used the wrong choice of words for my case. Instead of sounding cool, I came off like some wannabe ‘70s film star reject. My grin faded.

“It keeps my ears warm, too. It gets cold here in the winter.”

That didn’t seem to change his attitude much either. Strike two.

“You know, lots of smart people have long hair. I mean, like . . . look at Albert Einstein. The guy practically had an afro!”

“Scotty, Einstein couldn’t tie his shoes. He couldn’t even match his clothes without his wife’s help.”

“Well, yeah, but he made that whole relativity thing, and, like, nuclear physics theories, and . . . stuff.”

His expression, the familiar looking cringe that I had seen so many times before, didn’t change. I was making about as much progress as a crash test dummy trying to go through a brick wall, but I laughed. We both laughed. It was a stupid argument that denigrated the name of one of the greatest scientific minds that had ever lived because he had had difficulty getting dressed in the morning. I thought about that for a second: Did Einstein care if people knew he couldn’t match his clothes? Did he worry that people might find it strange that he could barely tie his shoes? Did that stop him from being accepted as one of the world’s greatest mathematicians? Did he care?

I thought about my problem again, but from a different perspective this time. Did *I* care? Did I care whether or not people liked my long hair? Did I truly care? The only fault I could find about my long hair was that other people didn’t like it; but, I realized for the first time, that I did. I liked my long hair. It made me feel comfortable and relaxed. I was able to relate with the sort of laid-back attitude that it was associated with. I could see a little bit of the Zonker Harris in me through it. I could see a little bit of the beatnik, a little of the rebel, a little of the Beatles rock-era revolutionary, and I enjoyed that persona. My long hair had been with me since I was a kid. How could I get rid of it? It defined me as a person. It was my style, my essence, my unique individuality. More important, it was mine.

The barren spot on my father’s forehead reflected the light of the fluorescent light bulbs above. I could see the look in his eyes. His dark, tangled beard, reaching about two feet in length, unsuccessfully tried to hide it. He was staring at me the same way he had been doing for the last eighteen years. I knew the question he was going to ask.

“Scotty, don’t you think it’s about time you . . .”

“No.”

PARENTAL ADVISORY

by

Lorrie Condon

Friday, the day I have been waiting for all week arrives. Tonight is the night of the biggest party of the year. This party will launch us into a summer full of teenage independence and rebellion. With excitement in our voices, my friends and I walk home talking about tonight's event. "What do I wear?" "How should I do my hair?" These are all extremely important maneuvers needed to hook that certain boy I have been watching. One boy stands ten feet above all others as he saunters through the crowded school halls. With chestnut hair and a smile that takes my breath away, he came packaged and stamped straight from heaven. Convincing myself he feels the same for me, I spend many hours day-dreaming about our perfect life together as a couple. I am eagerly awaiting the evening and the chance of spending time with him.

Trusting only my best friend, I ignore questions from others for details about my plans. As I walk up the stairs of my front porch, my thoughts switch from fantasy to reality: Be cool, do not blow this. Before I can race to my room, I see my mother sitting at the kitchen table, reading the paper and drinking a cup of coffee after a long day at work. She waits to hear the door open. Modifying my customary quick grumble, I step into the kitchen and sit down with her.

I start talking about my day. Oh no! Did I just ask her about hers? Although

conversation is not foreign to our relationship, the phenomenon of asking her how her day was could cause suspicion. Nevertheless, I am far too consumed with delusions of love to take notice of the irregularity of the discussion. My mother, recognizing the opportunity, seizes the rare chance to bestow on me her memories of teenage years gone by. The all too familiar lecture of heartache due to undesirable decisions commences. "When I was a girl, blah, blah, blah, just your age blah, blah, blah" or something like that; I had heard it all before. All my thoughts are focused on the night. Straining to look interested, I realize she has asked me a question. I quickly respond with the standard answer, "Don't worry, Mom." Giving me a look of insight, she asks, "What are your plans for this weekend?"

Knowing about this party for weeks, I have devised a perfect plan. If all calculation is correct, one plan should cover all possible assaults of questions. Nonchalant, I calmly remind her of the plans I had made a few weeks ago. "Remember? I made plans with a few of the girls, to spend the night doing makeovers and eating pizza?"

"Sounds like fun," she says.

Almost feeling guilty, I hesitate as I walk to my room. Packing takes forever when



Lorrie Condon is a single mother of three children. She completed the Vocational Nursing Program at Delta, and now has returned to finish her A.A. degree. She is hoping to enter the ADN program in the fall. Her children are grown, one is married, one is a sophomore at San Diego State University, and the last one is a freshmen in high school. Lorrie has one grandchild. Going back to school has been a challenge, but she is determined to finish and accomplish her goal.

"When I was a girl, blah, blah, blah, just your age blah, blah, blah" or something like that; I had heard it all before.

**Resembling
an extra in a
Madonna
video, I am
ready for the
night.**

**In a soft
voice he
whispers in
my ear,
“Let’s go
upstairs.”**

trying to find the perfect outfit, one that stands out, one that would make my mom gasp for air.

Beep, the horn blows out front. I give her a kiss and hand her a piece of paper containing the number where I can be reached. This too is part of the plan: eliminate any reason for her to ask questions. Brilliant! Radio blasting, we drive away.

After spending hours on makeup and using about two cans of hair spray, I emerge triumphant. Resembling an extra in a Madonna video, I am ready for the night.

Later, we arrive at the party around the same time as most of the guests. Eagerly I look in each car, searching for the one face I long to see. At last I spot him, standing next to a group of boys all laughing and shoving each other. While walking over to say “Hi,” I am handed a plastic cup filled with the teen beverage of choice — beer, of course. After slurping up the foam and taking a big gulp, I cringe at the bitter taste. Anxious to fit in, I drink it down fast and ask for a refill. I walk over to join the conversation and make my presence known.

After several dances and a few refills, I am living the dream I desperately wanted. Holding me tight in his arms is the most perfect boy on the planet. In a soft voice he whispers in my ear, “Let’s go upstairs.” Hormones in overdrive, I convince myself that my deepest hope has been validated; he loves me. Pulling me down on the bed, he kisses me. My heart is in my throat. As his hands start exploring my body, a feeling of conviction runs through me. I hear my mother’s voice in the air. Reluctantly, I pull away. “I can’t do this.” Ignoring my plea, he kisses me again. Now the voice is loud in my head, so I resist the physical urge to stay and run out of the room.

In the bathroom, I wash my face trying desperately to regain my sobriety. A knock at the door captures my attention. “Are you ok?” he shouts.

“I’ll be right out.” Feeling dizzy, I lie down on the floor; it feels cool, and it is helping me compose myself.

After five or ten minutes, I feel better. Upon exiting the bathroom, I am expecting to see my Prince Charming waiting to rescue me and safely return me home. Boy! Am I wrong. The only thing in the hallway is an echo of music and voices. In the distance I hear a girl laughing.

Pulling me toward the familiar door at the end of the hall is a constant giggle. Opening the door I see a sight that will remain with me the rest of my tragic teenage life. My love is lying beside another girl — and yelling at me to leave and shut the door. How could he do this to me? I love him. I feel the tears welling in my eyes and my heart breaking like fine china. Desperately, I search for my friends.

After locking the bedroom door, I begin to tell the girls. We hug and swear never to fall in love again; we conclude that all boys are jerks and only want one thing. Then I hear a painstaking voice in my ears. This is it, the lecture I have heard many times, “When I was a girl,” Only this time the words seem to take on new meaning. How could she know?

Feeling like someone ran over me with a truck, I walk into the house. All I want is to march straight to my room, wallow in self-pity and recover. To my dismay there she is sitting where I left her last night, drinking coffee in her robe and slippers with a fresh look of morning on her face.

“Wow!” she says. “Rough night of makeovers?”

Certain that she knows, I wait for her to scold me. Instead she calmly directs me toward the bathroom. I look over at her with tears in my eyes.

Wiping the tears from my face and looking into my eyes, she says, “I guess you didn’t read the warning on the package.”

“What warning?” I ask.

“The one that comes on all perfect packages from heaven: The Parental Advisory.” We look at each other and laugh.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ADS: *Too Much Information?*

by
Bryan Tortolani

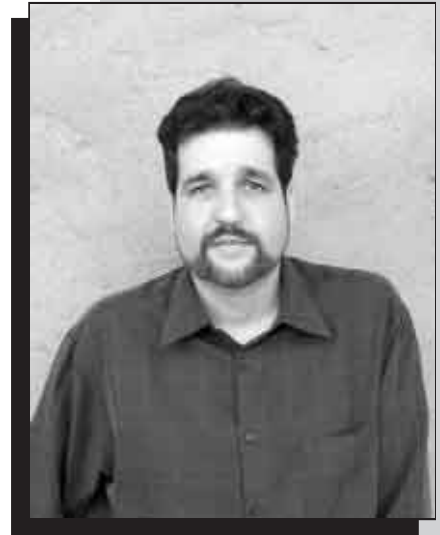
“There’s a tumor in the T. V. mouth; burn it out before it grows.” Although this astute observation came from a dubious source (Marilyn Manson, *Little Horn*), when applied to the barrage of pharmaceutical advertising on television that has been steadily increasing, it is very apropos to the damage being done by the “helpful” ads. The advertisements for prescription drugs, promising cures for impotence, crippling arthritis, lowering high cholesterol levels, and depression (just to name a few), often make overstated claims of effectiveness, while understating the importance of preventative health care. As a result people are less likely to take responsibility for their wellness and more likely to engage in self destructive behaviors on the assumption that a “pill” or instant cure will solve all their future problems. Prescription drug companies have been aggressively targeting the general public with their advertisements rather than the physicians. The physician is the one that writes the prescription, yet it is the patient that has been conditioned to request and, in many cases, demand a particular medicine from his doctor. These ads, which appeal to the emotions of people who are suffering from medical conditions or just the everyday stress of life, are very effective and very dangerous to the health of many Americans.

Children and parents are especially vulnerable to the manipulative appeal of these advertisements. Pharmaceutical companies are selling the American dream by offering the newest and latest “cure all” products. Many pharmaceutical companies are preying on the competitive nature and fears of parents in regards to their children’s chances for succeeding in school. Drugs like Adderall, Concerta, and Ritalin are used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a brain disorder characterized by inattention and impul-

sive behavior. These drugs are being prescribed at an alarming rate. In a recent episode on PBS’s “Now,” the commentator, Bill Moyers, reported on a recent government study that suggested approximately four million school-aged children suffer from ADHD, yet about 20 million prescriptions are written each year for stimulant drugs. And the number keeps going up. If these studies are correct 16 million children are receiving a drug they do not need for a disorder they do not have.

Prescription drug ads on television offer pills for every illness. As a result, more prescriptions are being prescribed than ever before. This is because more and more print and television ads are selling the drugs directly to the public. One example is a television advertisement in which the announcer’s statement that

**Prescription
drug companies
have been
aggressively
targeting the
general public
with their
advertisements
rather than the
physicians.**



Bryan Tortolani is a happily married 36-year-old cancer survivor. Bryan’s unique life experiences have taught him that education leads to empowerment. Despite entering Delta College with little more than an eighth-grade education, a GED, and a powerful motivation to succeed, Bryan will graduate in the spring and transfer to Stanislaus State in the fall. Bryan ultimately plans to earn a doctorate in history. His career goals include teaching history at the college level and freelance writing.

“Go-ahead. Ask your doctor about Altace” and “Ask your doctor if Zocor could work for you” are examples of the pressure pharmaceutical companies are placing on the general public to request medication from their doctors.

“acid reflux disease can really upset your plans” is followed by a tired and haggard looking man moaning, “All I want are nights with less pain.” These ads also contain very healthy looking people smiling and having a great time. There’s a clue to indicate that the viewers can be like the happy people on the screen if they only take the medicine. Such ads place a lot of pressure on the patients to march right down to their doctors’ offices and demand the medications. “Go-ahead. Ask your doctor about Altace” and “Ask your doctor if Zocor could work for you” are examples of the pressure pharmaceutical companies are placing on the general public to request medication from their doctors. Another example involves medication for arthritis. This particular ad combines effectual claims like “power 24-hour relief” with images of healthy people. Ads like this one are giving many people false hopes because the medications may not be right for them and not all drugs can deliver on the promises for “instant relief.”

Before the FDA released advertising restrictions for drug companies, the doctor’s office was the primary vehicle through which the public learned about new types of drugs. Since then a trend of self-diagnosis has developed, leading to a spike in over-prescribed medications as well as an over-reliance on instant gratification. People will be less likely to take care of themselves if they believe that a medication will reverse any damage that their bad health habits

may cause. For example, Lipitor (PH) and Zocor (PH) promise to lower cholesterol, which negates that concern for healthy dietary intake. This particular ad promises to make people healthier. Although such a claim is absurd, many people believe it to be true, and as a result people are racing to their doctors requesting Lipitor rather than addressing the dietary habit that caused the problem in the first place.

Doctors are under similar pressures because the pharmaceutical representatives come directly to their offices. Direct marketing can be hard to resist, especially after a semi-personal relationship has been established. Pharmaceutical representatives often provide special perks to doctors who prescribe their medications. Current news stories report that many doctors are supplying the requested medications to their patients, even when they know the drugs may not provide relief. In cases where doctors stand firm and refuse to prescribe requested drugs, many patients travel to Mexico and Canada where the drugs are available without prescription. This unfortunate scenario is causing many people to take medications that may produce terrible side effects when mixed with certain medical conditions or with other medications.

This type of advertising preys on the emotions of people who are disabled by chronic medical conditions and causes “healthy” people to become alarmed about certain “symptoms.” For example,

the advertisement for Zoloft shows an animated blob pouncing along while an announcer declares, "People suffering from depression, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or in posttraumatic stress disorder may have an imbalance of serotonin so the nerve cells cannot communicate properly." The advertisement uses a simple animation to explain how this imbalance can be corrected. The ad states, "This blocking action by Zoloft helps build up more serotonin between the brain cells, which in turn may help message transmission return to normal." Advertisements like this are obviously directed to the general public in an effort to encourage patients to diagnose themselves. This ad promises false hope to those who are seriously depressed by over-simplifying a complicated disease while causing healthy individuals who are experiencing everyday sadness or have introverted personality traits to believe that they have a disease and are in need of medication. Hundreds of thousands of people may feel overwhelmingly sad at times, or suffer from lack of sleep, or feel fatigued (all symptoms described on the many depression medications), but does this necessarily mean that they need to take medication for depression? There are frequently simple solutions to handling "mental" and "emotional" problems, especially since many times the problems are due to diet, life style, or undetected physical conditions.

The success that the drug companies are realizing by advertising on television is

Hundreds of thousands of people may feel overwhelmingly sad at times, or suffer from lack of sleep, or feel fatigued (all symptoms described on the many depression medications), but does this necessarily mean that they need to take medication for depression?

not only a direct result of the fact that they are now allowed to reach the masses with their powerful promises but a society that has been seduced by instant gratification. Most everything in our society is centered on an instant fix. In the modern world of a technology-based society, the public is ripe for the outrageous promises of drug companies.

Despite the alarm being sounded by concerned members of the medical profession about the claims that these new "wonder drugs" are making, we will not likely see a decrease in advertisements by prescription drug companies any time soon. As a result, people must exercise caution regarding prescription ads and must be aware of the risks involved in taking medications that are unnecessary (e.g. anti-depressants), that have dangerous side effects for people with certain medical conditions, and that may not mix with other medications. Patients must carefully look into any new drug that promises to relieve chronic conditions. Even if doctors respond to requests and prescribe new medications advertised on television, it is a good idea to consult a pharmacist about any adverse side effects and about the drug's interaction with other medications. The power of good judgment, in terms of our health, is now in the hands of the individual viewers and those who care for them.

This type of advertising preys on the emotions of people who are disabled by chronic medical conditions and causes "healthy" people to become alarmed about certain "symptoms."

by
Daniel Maychen

Daniel Maychen was born in Stockton, California, on January 19, 1984. He is currently in his first year at Delta College and plans to major in sociology and/or music industry at Northridge State. He loves music and enjoys playing basketball in his free time. He also enjoys hanging out with his friends.

The Day I Died

The springtime weather of May always seemed to call out children's names in central California. All of my childhood friends and I would meet at Hidalgo Elementary School and play a variety of games from basketball and football to the classic tag. We all understood that the summer sun would no longer allow the joy of playing outside without feeling as though we were enemies of its overwhelming wrath of heat. As I reminisce, I can actually feel the holy, ripped up, and soft nerf football that my friends, brother and I would play with at the school soccer fields directly across the street from my apartment complex. It was our own pro football field. It's amazing what a child-like imagination can do. Although my friends Fernando and Roberto had bellies that overlapped their waist, it still felt good to outrun them and feel like I was Jerry Rice after catching a touchdown pass. We would play until one of our parents yelled out our names to come back inside or when one of us got knocked to the ground a little harder than we would like and start to cry. Other than those painful memories of being knocked to the ground, my childhood was an amazing adventure filled with nothing but joy. There was nothing that could take away those precious moments that I loved so deeply. Or so I thought.

It was 1992, about a year since my family moved from Stockton to Fresno, and I had just begun to blend in with my new surroundings. My dad's face glowed after he was blessed with a job as a pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Fresno. The church, with its modern structure, looked more like a commercial building. He had been looking for a pastoral job for about a year and finally found the job he had faithfully searched for. My mother yearned to work, but due to her lack of work experience and bad English, she was better off staying at home and taking care of my brother and me. By this time, my father's former stick figure

was filled out. His coarse, dark, husky voice was so distinctive. I could hear it in the midst of twenty other voices conversing in a room.

My mother wore her black, wavy, curly hair, as usual, and never said more than she had to. Truth is, she never needed to because her actions were the voice she seldom used. Her hands were like magic to me. With her beautiful small, soft hands she could fix up some of the most incredible dishes ever known to man. My stomach growled just at the sight of her cooking up a meal. There was always something special and mysterious about her that I could never quite understand, but I never thought too much of it.

I was in the second grade and on my way to the third. My brother, in the fourth grade, impressed my parents with his straight A's. We lived on the second floor of a beat-up apartment complex that cried for a paint job. Every time we would use the stair-rail to get up and down, to and from the second floor, we felt like we were playing a game of Russian roulette because it could've fallen off at any moment. Although we obviously didn't have much, we were a happy and humble family.

But in the middle of May, reality revealed what was once concealed from my heart. It was a sunny and beautiful Saturday afternoon when my older brother, David, and I were watching some cartoons in our bedroom. My father was taking an afternoon nap on my bed while wearing one of his infamous faded blue shorts that were too high on him. Suddenly, my fragile bedroom door burst open, as if a SWAT team was storming into the room. My uncle appeared and erratically shook my dad, "Paul! Paul! Get up, she's about to go now!"

My dad lunged out of my bed like a grasshopper and ran to my parent's room. My brother and I stood up quickly

and followed them. Although I had no idea what was going on, my heart pounded intensely and my body started to shake. While walking towards the room, I could see my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all gathered close to one another. My heart continued to pound and my body began to shake even more. As I walked into the room, I could almost smell the sadness that had filled the thick air.

Suddenly, I heard my grandmother cry in great anguish and her body seemed to collapse with her heart as my uncle caught her from falling. Then, one after another they all cried. My mother, still as beautiful as she'd always been, was lying in her bed. Her eyes were shut and her body lay motionless. My Aunt Molly sat beside my mother and caressed her "magical" hands. My brother, David, ran to the left side of my mother and hugged her as his tears fell. I looked at my usually stoic grandfather, looking down at his daughter, and watched tears stream down his face. The silenced room had now become overwhelmed with wailing.

I was trying to figure out what in the world was going on. Why is this happening? What is happening? Is this real? Why is everyone crying hysterically? Why am I not? Although I didn't quite fully understand what was going on, my naïve guilt forced me to cry. I looked at my mother and began to cry even more. With each tear that I cried, my conscience grew heavier because I didn't fully comprehend why I was crying, or didn't want to. As my beloved mother was lying there peacefully, I wanted to hold her but my childlike fear kept me still. I yearned to talk to her, but my words had left me. My older cousin, Nichole, put her arms around me and tried to console me as she softly said with her broken voice, "It's going to be ok. It's going to be ok." I cried even more, because I knew everything wasn't going to be "ok." While we all wept, I almost had to touch my face to completely grasp that this was not a dream.

Not long after, two men came with a stretcher and gently laid my mother on it. Their straight faces showed no sign of emotion as they quickly but carefully did their job. As they covered her in a black

bag and drove her off in a long black vehicle, I began to understand exactly what was occurring in my life. I began to painfully realize that my mother would not come back the next day, or the day after that. My developing, eight-year-old mind prematurely began to accept that death was not just in Hollywood movies, but was a part of my childhood and life.

Suddenly, all of the abnormalities that surrounded me started to make sense. It explained why my mother had been sick for a couple of months and would lie in her bed all day and night in my parents' room. I always assumed that she was just fighting a really bad cold that would some day go away. It now made sense why in mid-May, for some strange reason, many of my family members came to stay with us even though the two-bedroom apartment was packed to the point where some of my aunts had to sleep on the floor. Although I enjoyed their company, I didn't quite understand why so many of them had come to visit for such a long time and went through such hassles. It also made sense why my grandma, aunts and uncle, who lived two hours away in Stockton, always urged my brother and me to spend time with my mother.

The next day when this horrible dream became even more real, and the pain that I felt started to pierce my soul, I thought about what had just occurred and how this moment had changed and would forever change the course of my life. As I sat in my room, I only could think "why?" At the age of eight when the reality of mortality was still inconceivable, I wondered why. Why is it when innocence was supposed to bring joy was I ashamed I would cry? Why, during my childhood while other kids laughed and played, could I only cry? But in the end, all I came to realize was that at the life-changing age of eight, when life had just begun . . . I died.

Suddenly, I heard my grandmother cry in great anguish and her body seemed to collapse with her heart as my uncle caught her from falling.

by

Samuel S. Berbano



From the cornfields of central Iowa to the streets of Stockton, 16-year old Samuel S.

Berbano is no stranger to schooling. Berbano, a Gilbert High School senior, spent the Fall 2003 semester in Stockton at San Joaquin Delta College. He has received recognition from Phi Theta Kappa, National Honor Society, the Congressional Youth Leadership Council, and Who's Who Among College Students. Samuel currently resides with his father Orville, mother Leah, and younger brother Seth in Iowa. He plans to attend Iowa State University in the fall and major in Journalism and Political Science. This is his second published work.

The All-American Prospect

From the Bard's heart-wrenching stories of love and tragedy to Bill O'Reilly's sharp wit and social commentary, writers through the ages have had much to say about the human condition. While many critics are not as well known as these two, other authors like Ben Franklin and Henry David Thoreau have done much to influence our American sensibilities. Before he became one of our nation's founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin worked his way up from being born the fifteenth of seventeen children to becoming the anonymous, proverb-spouting author of the popular *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which he published for twenty-five years until 1757. While his bits of American wit and wisdom are less familiar to our Millennial generation, many a Builder and Boomer went to bed hearing Poor Richard's famous proverb "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Our other author, Henry David Thoreau, became the original proponent of passive, nonviolent resistance 157 years ago when he refused to pay his poll tax, which supported the Mexican War. Thoreau is better known for his

two-year sojourn in the Massachusetts wilderness, which was the basis for his famous book *Walden*, or *Life in the Woods*, which discusses the benefits of frugal, simple living. To the casual observer, it seems like these two authors — one who laid the foundation for our nation's government and another who wrote *Resistance to Civil Government* — are greatly at odds. But after a few minutes of comparing the two, it becomes clear that Thoreau and Franklin are too complex of characters to be given such plain and generic labels as "alike" or "different." While their opinions on many subjects like hard work or fashion appear to differ on the surface, the common thread of American wisdom is spun throughout.

Consider Franklin's thoughts on clothing: "Industry gives plenty . . . and the diligent spinner has a large shift [wardrobe]." At first glance, he and Thoreau seem to have nothing in common, because Thoreau blasts extravagance with a three-page volley, saying that "we worship not the Graces, nor the Parcae, but Fashion." But before we rush to judgment, we must heed Poor Richard's proverb that "a little neglect may breed great mischief" and examine these

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authors' comments closer; by investigating the context of their statements, we see that our authors are actually arguing the all - American prospect of having their cake and eating it too!

Next, we must examine their attitude on another subject—hard work. Thoreau's time was occupied, but only "six weeks a year [were spent] meet[ing] the expenses of living," leaving the rest of his time for writing. But what exertion he accomplished in those six weeks — building, farming, and incredible work. And the ever-dutiful Franklin leaves us a chart of his labors: while running on seven hours of sleep every night, he crafted an enduring legacy of thoughtful writing and interesting research. In one of his "Poor Richard" proverbs, he says, "fly pleasures, and they'll follow you;" what better way to avoid pleasure if not through work?

We see our authors' attitudes toward these subjects of work and luxury, but now their true message of wisdom shines forth. Upon closer examination, their thesis of the way to wealth through work or even the lap of luxury through labor is

made clear. Franklin speaks of the diligent seamstress having a large wardrobe, but also of the humble farmer on his legs as being "higher than a gentleman on his knees." The truth is that the seamstress and the farmer produce for themselves and receive shares of their labor. Thoreau derides people who work themselves ragged for their extravagant lifestyle, but after his six weeks of hard labor, he reaps his reward of time to reflect and write about his days at Walden Pond.

Franklin and Thoreau's roads to wealth travel the same distance, but lead to two different kinds of riches: one of intellect and study, the other of natural beauty and simplicity.

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by
Angela Quinones

THE BEST THING

Angela Quinones grew up in Linden but moved to Pennsylvania in 1998 when her mother passed away. She was not happy there, so in December of 2003 she moved in with her grandparents here in Stockton. She is attending Delta and plans to transfer to Stanislaus to get her teaching credentials.

In the year 1988, when I was only four years old, my parents were divorced. Although I was too young to remember this, I do remember growing up without a father. The court granted my parents shared custody but my dad was always too busy to take me and my younger brother, Cris, on his days. My dad got remarried on July 15, 1990, to a woman named Lou Ann. She had a son, Zach, who is about three years older than I am. My older brother, Mike, lived in Lodi with my dad and his new family. The four of them lived in a two-bedroom house which did not leave any room for Cris and me. In July of 1997 my dad received a huge promotion, which meant he would be moving to the corporate office of AmeriGas. He was so excited. The only catch was that he had to move to King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. Mike and our dad were moving three-thousand miles away from us, but we knew that it did not matter. At least this way we had a reason for never seeing them. I was confident that our lives would only get better from then on. We were living in California with our mom, all of our family and friends, and each other; what could be better than that?

Approximately two months after my dad and his family moved I began eighth grade at Waterloo Middle School. Cris was in seventh grade and attended Glenwood Elementary School. One day we both came home from school around 3:00 in the afternoon and my mom was there. That wasn't normal; she never came home from work before 5:30 in the evening. As it turned out she had had a doctor's appointment for her annual check up. It was great. That meant that we could spend some extra time together as a family.

After a week or so our whole lives

turned upside down. My mom was called back in to see the doctor so that she could get the results from her check up. Apparently my mom was not as healthy as she appeared to be. She had been diagnosed with a recurrence of cancer. My mom was wonderful; she reassured us that everything was going to be just fine. She came to us and said, "You don't need to worry, we have been through this before and everything turned out great. And it will again." She would make us smile and laugh until we forgot all of our worries. Of course this meant that things would change over the next few months, but my mom tried the best she could to keep things the same for us. I still don't understand how she could do it, but she battled the cancer for fourteen long months and constantly had a positive attitude.

As a little girl I remember thinking about how my mom was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She was tall and petite with long, wavy, golden brown hair. After months of extensive radiation and chemotherapy that all changed. All of her hair fell out in chunks, and she was eventually forced to get a wig. It was made of short, pale blonde hair — kind of like the color of the moon. Her wig was also very straight. She later became very fragile and she couldn't even manage to stand up straight, if at all. Throughout her illness she lost lots of weight and at one point weighed only a hundred pounds. She no longer looked like the same person. That wasn't the only thing to change; our home was like a hospital. Our living room had a television, a couch, and a hospital bed in it. Right next to the bed you could always find a table covered in prescription bottles and syringes. The dining room had a table and chairs, a china hutch, a wheel chair, and a walker. Eventually we

As a little girl I remember thinking about how my mom was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

also had to put a morphine drip machine in the living room. We also constantly had a Hospice aid coming in and out of the house to help out. Sometimes I could take that first step into the house and just get the whiff of a hospital.

No matter how much pain she was in she always tried to be the best mother she could; and she was. She was the manager of Cris' Pee-Wee football team and tried to attend every game in her wheel chair. As the school year was coming to an end, my eighth grade graduation was rapidly approaching. I had continually told my mom that I did not want to go, but then one day she had had enough. She smiled and simply said, "Oh yes you are. After everything you have done for me, you deserve to graduate with your friends. And believe me I will be right there in the stands to cheer you on." My mom had put her foot down and I had no choice but to attend my graduation. After the ceremony my mom threw me my first ever surprise party; all of my friends and family attended. Even though I knew that she probably felt like an elephant had ran her over, she never once stopped smiling.

As our mom continually got worse, Cris and I used our friends as a way to kind of skip right over reality for a while. Our friends were great; they were always there for us in every way imaginable, even if it was just to get us out of the house for a few hours. Even my mom's friends would come and take us out to lunch occasionally just to let us know that they would always be there for us. When we were at home, Cris would hibernate in his room for hours upon hours. I would keep my mom company while I kept the house clean and did all of the cooking. When Cris and I could not be there for our mom, either our grandparents or our aunt and uncle would come to just sit with her for a couple of hours. We really did have a great support system.

When the summer ended and we had to go back to school, our grandparents moved in with us to take over some of our responsibilities. My grandpa began giving her the shots, morphine, and other medications, while my grandma helped Cris and me with the cooking and cleaning. This not only helped us to find time for our homework, but it also gave us more time to spend with our friends. The only thing we had to do was make sure we carried the cellular phone that grandpa bought for us in case of an emergency.

We were standing in line for Linden High School's homecoming dance on October 23, 1998, when our cell phone began to ring. My heart was racing a mile a minute and I didn't know what to do; I didn't want to hear what was on the other end of that phone. After it rang a couple of times, Cris grabbed the phone away from me and answered it to hear Grandma's voice on the other end. I could faintly hear her but not quite to the point where I could make out what she was saying. When Cris hung up the phone, he turned to me with tears in his eyes. His crackled voice said, "We need to go home, now. Doctor Wilkins believes it is time." We took off running and when we arrived at home our mom was having difficulty breathing. We stayed up with her all night and she was doing much better the next morning.

On October 24th we went to bed once again afraid of what the outcome might be in the morning. I got up around 5:30 on the morning of October 25, 1998, and as I approached my mom to tell her good morning, I was stopped. I turned around to see my grandma standing there with tears streaming down her face. It had happened. She had died. My grandma said, "She's gone. It happened around 2:10 this morning. She was holding my hand and next thing I knew her grip was gone; she was gone. There was nothing I could do." I just

stood there. I could not believe that my mom could be dead. I turned back around and headed for the living room where I saw her cold, dead body and knew it was true. My grandpa's voice then came into the room, "Michael and your father will be on the next flight and they will see you and Cristopher in the morning."

Mike and my dad picked me and Cris up around 9:00 in the morning. We went over to our grandmother's house where we could talk privately. My dad then asked us, "I need to know, would you rather finish out the school year here or come to Pennsylvania with your brother and me now?" Cris and I knew exactly what we wanted to do. We needed to be in California where we would be surrounded by people to help us get through this difficult time. As we explained this to our dad, he just sat there and shook his head. He then informed us, "I know you think it is best for you to stay here, and I don't entirely disagree with that, but you will be coming to Pennsylvania with Michael and me first thing Sunday morning." We were devastated. He wouldn't even listen to what we had to say. He then took us back home to be with our grandparents and explained to them what was to happen. They begged him not to do it, but he still would not listen to reason. As he was leaving he simply said, "I suggest you begin packing, I will be back to get the three of you Saturday afternoon and I expect you to be ready to go."

Our mom passed away on October 25, 1998, and exactly one week later we were on a plane to Pennsylvania. We didn't want to go but according to our so-called father, it was the best thing for us. I started at a new school, Springfield Area High School, and took my straight A's and turned them into almost

all F's. In California I had friends and family to help me get through that difficult time, but I was forced to move to Pennsylvania where I knew absolutely nobody. I had to live in a house with people I barely knew, where we couldn't even mention my mom. My step-mom and I despised each other; one day I finally found out why she was always ragging on me. She got really heated one day for no reason at all and let it slip, "I hate how you constantly remind your father of your mother. Why can't you just leave us alone? He loves me now, not her." She really ticked me off by saying that, and it was definitely the last straw. Neither one of us wanted me to be there, so as soon as I graduated from high school I was forced to move out. In the middle of my first semester at Montgomery County Community College I dropped out. I didn't want to, but I just could not handle paying for my rent, bills, insurance, and tuition.

After about a year of living on my own and not being able to afford college, I began to remember more and more what my mom wanted me to get out of life. She always wanted me to finish college because she didn't get the opportunity to with her first encounter with cancer. I thought long and hard about how I might be able to achieve this. I finally called my grandparents. I asked them if they would pay for me to move back to California and also let me live with them while I attended college. They graciously agreed so I am now in California and have absolutely no contact with my dad. When I told him I was moving back to California to go to college, he said, "If you leave, I don't ever want to hear from you again." I thought about it and decided that I would rather get a college degree and be surrounded by people who love and care about me than be stuck in a state I hated with a family who tossed me out the first chance they got.

I started at a new school, Springfield Area High School, and took my straight A's and turned them into almost all F's.

The Death Penalty:

Society's Injustice System

In the year 2002 alone, seventy-one inmates were put to death. In 2003, thirteen prisoners were executed and another twenty-six were scheduled to die. In the United States, methods of execution range from mild torture such as lethal injection and electrocution, to more barbaric torment such as hanging or being shot to death by a firing squad. According to Amnesty International, seventy-six countries have eradicated the death penalty completely, and many countries that retain the death penalty have not utilized it for years ("Facts" 1). Capital punishment should be abolished because of the following: it is not an effective crime deterrent, it may result in the loss of innocent lives, it is morally wrong, and there are other, more humane, alternatives.

The death penalty does not contribute to the deterrence of crime. In fact, the death penalty may actually raise crime rates. Studies posted by the Death Penalty Information Center confirm that in 2001, the murder rates in states which did not employ capital punishment were thirty-seven percent lower than the murder rates in those states which did utilize capital punishment ("New" 1). Researchers also found that Southern states, which are responsible for eighty percent of the executions in the United States, have the highest murder rates in the country ("New" 2). Investigation into the causes of higher murder rates in death penalty states reveals a connection between executions and increases in homicide. A study conducted on capital punishment in Oklahoma found that "there was a significant increase in stranger killings and non-felony stranger killings after Oklahoma resumed executions after a 25-year moratorium" ("New" 1). Capital punishment is not a solution; it is a burden on society and does more harm than good. Many other countries have eradicated the death

...it is wrong to execute criminals who have become mentally challenged or insane after they are sent to prison.

penalty for this reason. The countries that have abolished capital punishment have substantially lower crime rates. The murder rate in the United States is three times higher than in countries such as France, Italy, and Sweden, all of which do not use the death penalty as a form of punishment. Capital punishment does not discourage crime and, as studies have shown, may increase crime in our country.

Capital punishment does not prevent violent behavior in mentally ill or retarded criminals. Criminals who are mentally incapacitated before they are sent to prison do not have the state of mind or intellect to determine right from wrong. Many of these criminals commit violent crimes because these individuals aren't able to function properly in society and do not understand the consequences of their actions. These people do not understand the death penalty or comprehend what it entails. As a result, the death penalty is

by
Alisha Ott

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When the government or individuals make the decision to take another human life and act upon it, they commit murder.

unsuccessful in averting violent crime in these individuals. Likewise, it is wrong to execute criminals who have become mentally challenged or insane after they are sent to prison. In his essay, "The Death Penalty," abolitionist David Bruck writes about a man named Alvin Ford who is on death row in a Florida penitentiary. Bruck paints a picture of a man who has "[...] lost his mind during his years of death-row confinement and now spends his days trembling, rocking back and forth, and muttering unintelligible prayers" (564). In the case of Alvin Ford and many other insane convicts, living each day as a prisoner in one's own mental hell is punishment enough. In these cases, capital punishment does not serve any purpose because these criminals are too incoherent to learn any lesson from death. Most of them do not even understand they are going to die or what they are dying for. The death penalty is not a viable solution for offenders with mental problems because they are incapable of normal thought processes and many cannot even grasp the concept of death.

The death penalty puts innocent lives at stake. It is widely recognized that our justice system is not perfect. There are times when people are wrongly accused of crimes or they are not granted fair trials. There is still corruption in our justice system, and bias and discrimination occur. For example, in Chicago, twelve African-American men were repeatedly beaten and tortured by former Lieutenant John Burge during interrogation. Eleven of these men are currently on death row, while one man died of medical neglect at the hands of prison caretakers ("Justice" 1-2). These men were not treated fairly, and their right to a fair trial was stripped from them when they were beaten into submission and forced to sign confessions. Were they treated this way because they were African-American? When innocent people die, the death penalty has failed. Another example of this failure is the case of Roosevelt Green, who was executed in Georgia for the kidnapping and murder of a young woman. According to author David Bruck, "[...] Green swore that his companion shot her [...] after Green had left and that he knew nothing about the murder. Green's claim was sup-

ported by a statement his accomplice made to a witness [...]" (565). Roosevelt Green was executed despite witness testimony that he had nothing to do with the murder of the woman that was kidnapped. Unfortunately, our justice system is not always accurate and faulty cases slip through the cracks. Families of innocent people should not be made to suffer for the inadequacy of the death penalty. Capital punishment poses a large risk to innocent people and their families.

The government has no right to put conditions on human life. Life and death will occur at a natural pace, and it is wrong for the government to interfere. Helen Prejean, author of "Executions are too costly—Morally," encapsulates this idea in her essay when she says "Allowing our government to kill citizens compromises the deepest moral values upon which this country was conceived: the inviolable dignity of human persons" (584). When the government or individuals make the decision to take another human life and act upon it, they commit murder. When society advocates capital punishment and allows the government to assassinate inmates, we are no better than the murderers and common criminals who fill our prisons. Capital punishment is premeditated murder.

The death penalty sends a confusing and contradictory message. Capital punishment strives to prevent criminals from murder and violent crimes by terminating the lives of those convicted. This is highly contradictory. The death penalty sends the message "Don't kill or we will kill you." Punishing an action with the same action is incongruous and inconsistent. The death penalty is like spanking a child for hitting another child at school. It only serves to confuse and reinforce the behavior rather than correct it. It just doesn't make sense. Capital punishment only reinforces violent behavior and serves no purpose but to avenge victims and their families. Society is endorsing revenge by embracing the death penalty. Capital punishment is not a correctional tool; it is state-sanctioned revenge.

Capital punishment is not necessary because there are other alternatives. First of all, tougher sentencing would



help deter offenders from committing crimes. According to the Bureau of Justice, of the “inmates under the sentence of death” two-thirds had “prior felony convictions,” and one-in-twelve had “prior homicide convictions” (“Capital” 2). Longer jail time for felons and first-time offenders would keep them from entering society until they were able to rehabilitate. In addition, life sentences would prevent violent offenders from committing additional crimes upon society. Also, keeping convicts in prison is cheaper than executing them, so it is a better alternative. A study from the Death Penalty Information Center revealed that North Carolina alone pays “2.16 million per execution over the costs of a non-death penalty murder case with a sentence of imprisonment for life” (“Costs” 1). Requiring inmates to pay for their time in prison would further reduce the cost to taxpayers. Allocating a portion of a prisoner’s earnings toward facility expenses and programs would force them to literally “pay” for their crimes. A portion of inmates’ wages should also be put into funds for crime victims and their families. Although money can never replace a loved one or completely heal the damage, it could help families reconstruct their lives. There are more constructive alternatives to the death penalty.

Human life is precious, yet society does not hesitate to cast it aside into a system that is mediocre at best, without remorse. Capital punishment does not deter crime, cannot ensure the safety of the innocent, and is morally deficient. There are other alternatives. Murderers and violent offenders deserve to be punished for their crimes, and victims and their families deserve justice. However, the death penalty is not the answer.

As a nation, we are responsible for maintaining justice. Throwing lives away in a practice that is flawed because our government and politicians are too indolent to seek other alternatives is not just. Justice for victims, their families, and the innocent will not be obtained until capital punishment is eliminated.

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The death penalty is like spanking a child for hitting another child at school. It only serves to confuse and reinforce the behavior rather than correct it.

King of the Road

"Pic, pan, pnc, punk, pnt. . . ."

The men continued to pound away on their hammers. Their work was quickly evolving from seemingly random geometric figures into sturdy wooden walls and roofs. Where only days before you could see nothing but a barren field of dust and rock-solid adobe ground — near-worthless soil that the local farmers had long since given up on — you could now make out the framework of the dozen or so new living establishments. You could see them all quite clearly from where the road ends. I own that road, so I am king.

I closed my torn, aged copy of *The Great Shark Hunt* and set it down on the passenger seat. I was watching through the windshield of my silver Pontiac Trans-Am, which was covered with dozens of pale transparent white splotches left by the naturally high calcium well-water shot from the sprinklers during the night. The paint was wearing thin due to the intense California summer heat, and I could distinguish some of the lighter spots on the hood in the silhouetted reflections of the trees. It reminded me of the faded dust jacket on my book. "Have to wax this thing soon," I thought to myself. There was one major nick in the front-left shoulder guard and a few minor scratches elsewhere. "Need to change the tires, too."

Of course, the cosmetic qualities of an automobile are second to me. What mattered most was its raw, brute strength and power. Under the rough curves of its calcium drenched hood lay an incomprehensible nightmarish labyrinth of wires, pipes, and assorted other gadgetry capable of out-performing up to 400 of the world's finest racing horses — a true testament to the supreme hot rod engineering insanity of the mid-70's. "So it could use a little touch-up on the outside, big deal," I thought. "The guts are bright enough to

help you adjust the part in your hair. Just listen to the engine purr . . . roar . . . scream. . . ." I grinned. I loved that sound. Hear it just once in the driver's seat and you feel like a Starbuck's double-shot of adrenaline has been sent straight to the frontal lobes of your brain and forced throughout the rest of your biological system. Again!

"Buh, luuuuh-luuuh-luuuh-luh-luh-luh-luh-lh-lh-lh-lh-bloommmmm," it went. "Blilllllooom, blloom-bloom." It was the perfect accompaniment to an egotistical megalomaniac like myself. Yes, it was pure performance perfection, and the king of the road should demand no less.

I often sat there in the driver's seat, just staring out into the desolate field past the end of the road. The private road, about twelve feet wide and about a football field in length, led from the main drag, passed by my little country home, and then just seemed to end. Then there was nothing but the barren field of dust. Even the bushes, the giant trees, and the various other shrubberies came to an abrupt end. Road, trees, flowers, grass, *POOF*. Dust, crackled lumps of orange-red dirt, useless hard adobe ground . . . nothing. Not so much as a tumbleweed was visible in the void. It's like someone had taken about a hundred acres out of Death Valley and, in an attempt to get rid of it, just dumped it off here.

"Pssshhhhh. . . ."

"Vvvvvvoooooommmmm. . . ."

Some cars passed by the entrance of my road, and I could hear them forcing the wind out of their way. They passed my road. That's fine; it's not their road to use in the first place, and it wouldn't take them anywhere except past my house, my kingdom, and to the desert at the road's end.

by

Loring Scotty Hoag



"All jokes aside, I'm a nineteen-year-old, long-haired, full time Delta College student who has a hard time taking life seriously. I like playing video games, sketching, writing, drinking highly-caffeinated beverages, studying Asian cultures, taking long walks on the beach, and meeting people with an offbeat sense of humor. Capricorn. Single. Sexy. Call me."

—Loring Scotty Hoag

". . . Okay, just kinda sexy, but still sexy. . ."

***I own that
road, so I am
king.***

Why doesn't anything grow there? Why does everything just end? These are the kinds of questions I would ponder in the captain's chair of my silver ego-stimulant while watching blurred streaks of blue lightning zip past. They passed by silently, not like the forceful cars behind me. They moved too quickly for me to comprehend exactly what they were, but I assumed that they must be birds of some sort, even if the sole reason for that train of thought was to explain all of the other splotches on my car not caused by the late-night sprinkler system. Didn't they know it was unwise to mock their king?

"Yacch. . . . Wer, wer. . . ."

Did the same blue blur make those sounds?

"Yacch. . . . Aighnn. . . ."

There must have been hundreds of them resting in those trees.

"The trees," I thought as I shifted my train of thought. I didn't know what they were exactly. Redwood? Oak? I just knew that people must have stayed out of their way for quite a long time for them to get as large as they were. They were all over forty or fifty-feet tall. Their leaves were like little green needles connected to long, thin twigs. They seemed too minute to absorb light, but the huge groups that the trees had amassed over the years could block out all light projected onto them and could make the afternoon seem like 2:00 A.M. One small strand, about two and a half inches in length at most, had fallen off the tree and was caught in my windshield wipers. It was dry and brown. Its needles seemed sharp enough to puncture skin. The trees seemed strong, but not even they dared to grow past the end of my black asphalt road. Not even a volunteer sprout could be seen. "It was good to be the king," I thought.

"Pnc, punt, puck, pac, pnt. . . ."

The men in the blue overalls were making good use of the useless land. You can't do anything else with it, so build homes on it. I could see them hauling up boards and planks to the unfinished roofs and could almost make out the sweat on their foreheads, even though they were hundreds of feet away. Urban development is very important in California, especially in places like this where people can easily commute to the Bay Area. I could make out the tracks where the mammoth lumber garbage trucks had gone past the end of my road to deliver supplies to the homes. My road. What right did they have to use my road? One of the truck drivers shouted down to me from his gargantuan cockpit about my silver carriage being in his way.

"You act like you own the road, or something!"

"You want me to get out the deed?" I thought to myself as he drove off of the royal pavement and onto the dirt of the lesser masses. The king never loses his cool.

Actually, that's a complete lie. My egotistical mania exploded and rage overcame rational thought as I began to swear random obscenities and act like a complete lunatic. This startled him and he went to find another route. I sat back down in the cab and picked up my book, glancing over some small pale coffee stains stretching across the bottom of the dust jacket. "I've been reading too much of Hunter S. Thompson's stuff," I thought.

Are they going to try to extend my road to the houses? Are more people going to try to share my throne? Will I remain King of the Road?

***Of course, the cosmetic qualities of
an automobile are second to me.
What mattered most was its raw,
brute strength and power.***

What Did You Say?

by
Lorrie Condon

I asked her, “What in the world does ‘hecka’ mean?”

People often become upset and complain when a person behind the counter or on the phone cannot speak clear English. Yes, this can be frustrating, but has anyone been paying attention to some of the language native-English speakers have been using? I have heard that English is one of the hardest languages to learn. Personally, I think the American Slang Language is the difficult one to learn. Although this informal language seldom makes any sense, it has become a colorful part of the American Culture.

My daughter came home the other day and we discussed her day at school. As she was talking I heard her say several times that was “hecka fun” and that was “hecka cool.” I asked her, “What in the world does ‘hecka’ mean?” She said, “All the kids use it instead of a cuss word.” That reminded me of when I was young; we would use the word bad for good. Since I was young, our society has become increasingly comfortable with using crazy substitutes for proper English, and we do not realize how silly it sounds.

Listen to some of the expression our kids use in daily conversations: “Yeah, Dude that was whack,” “Not,” “I’m down wit it,” “Tight.” Sometimes the words they use are not completed words at all. Take “Hello, how are you?” I have heard it change from “Hi,” to “What’s up?” and now “SUP?” says it all. I can only imagine how frustrating it must be trying to learn our language.

I have seen many students walking around the campus, looking up words in a translation dictionary. What can be running through their minds when they

read the actual definition? If there is a definition at all! I am still trying to figure out the rules involved in English and I have lived here all my life. We have so many words that sound the same, but they are spelled differently and have different meanings. Words like “where”— for where are we going, and “wear” — for what will I wear; how about “sale” and “sail”? Let’s not forget the number of words that have the same meaning but are actually different: “forward,” “ahead,” and “advancing.” If this is confusing, a whole book of these words is provided for our convenience.

Another baffling factor is what we call an idiom. An idiom is a ridiculous scenario used as a form of expression. For example, I was sitting in the beauty parlor the other day when an older lady walked in. It had been raining most of the day and she was quite wet. Shaking off the rain and folding her umbrella she announced, “It is raining cats and dogs out there!” I giggled at the thought. I have never seen it rain cats and dogs. Come to think of it, I have never seen it rain buckets, but I have used that expression myself a time or two.

Last Friday my family and I went out for dinner. While we waited to be seated, my husband said, “I am so hungry, I could eat a horse.” I thought he must be incredibly hungry. Have you seen the size of a horse? I wonder what he would have done if they had brought him a horse. He might have run out of there like a chicken with his head cut off. We would probably never eat there again, until pigs fly or hell freezes over.

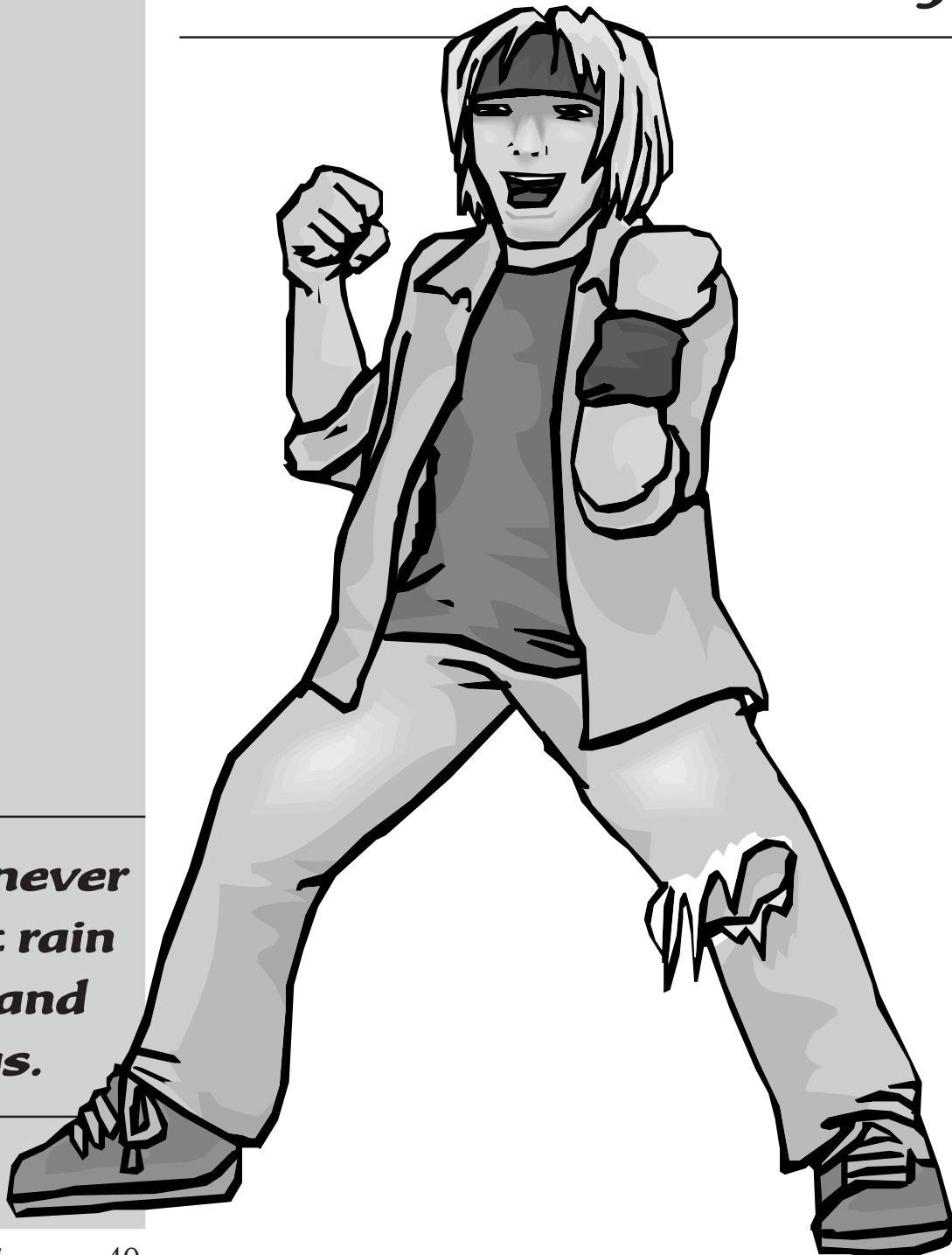


Lorrie Condon is a single mother of three children. She completed the Vocational Nursing Program at Delta, and now has returned to finish her A.A. degree. She is hoping to enter the ADN program in the fall. Her children are grown, one is married, one is a sophomore at San Diego State University, and the last one is a freshmen in high school. Lorrie has one grandchild. Going back to school has been a challenge, but she is determined to finish and accomplish her goal.

So the next time a person is having a hard time expressing himself in English, we should extend a little compassion. Let's back up and hold our horses. Chill for a while, and give homeboy some room. He and his peeps are just tryin to

hang with the big boys, ain't no shame or blame in dat. Keep it real and quit drinking that hater aid. Let's show em da love. Dat's it for now; peace out y'al; gotta bounce; late.

***Listen to some of the expression our kids use in daily conversations:
"Yeah, Dude that was whack,"
"Not," "I'm down wit it," "Tight."***



***I have never
seen it rain
cats and
dogs.***