

Delta Winds

A Magazine of Student Essays

Volume 16

2003

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Letter from the Editors

Multiple works originally published in *Delta Winds* have been reprinted in different editions of a popular composition text, *The Compact Reader*, by Bedford/St. Martin's Press. This year, we are pleased to report that two more *Delta Winds* essays have been selected for re-publication, this time in the 4th edition of a textbook entitled *Read and Respond*, published by Roxbury Press. The two essays, "AIDS in Africa," by Raulyne Kenfack, and "In Defense of the Real American Family," by Kenneth D. Valdez, were first published last year in *Delta Winds*, Volume 15. This means that the voices of Delta College students will continue to be heard on numerous college campuses around the country.

Furthermore, *Delta Winds*, through its online site, provides a world-wide audience a chance to read essays by students at this college. One essay, in particular, in this volume will be appreciated overseas since the author is from Stockton's sister city in Foshan, China. "My Relationship with Dad," by Yushan Hu, was written by one of the English teachers from Foshan who studied at Delta College last fall. *Delta Winds* continues to serve as a vehicle through which individual students share their views and opinions with an ever-growing number of readers.

A Fading Culture

~by Veronica Padilla

Like many other individuals in her family, Veronica Padilla is pursuing a career in the field of education. Her love for teaching, learning, and helping others has come from the responsibility of being the oldest daughter of Mexican parents. When she's not in school mode, she enjoys anything related to the arts or simply spending time with family and friends. She finds writing to be the perfect way to express ideas that are sometimes difficult to describe through spoken words.

I've read about Hidalgo's fight, admired Diego's paintings, contemplated Sor Juana's words, and have realized I do not belong with them. I belong to a different group, one that possesses a bicultural tradition that arises when Mexican and American attempt to harmoniously intertwine. I belong to the group that honors Chavez's heroism, marvels at Baca's murals and identifies with Corky Gonzales's poetry. But, to be honest, I'm lying to you. The Americanization process that has been quietly working within me has caught me so off guard I can no longer place myself among the Chicanos mentioned above. I once labeled myself as pure Mexican; then, with age, I realized I could not ignore the American culture that was growing on me, so I slapped on a new label and called myself Chicana. And now, although I still call myself Chicana, I've realized that the Mexican part of this label is slowly peeling off. I've been frantically trying to stick it back on by gathering the scattered pieces of tradition and language my parents must have considered unimportant to mention. I am determined to regain the Mexican part of me I have lost. Hundreds of years of family history and culture is not about to end because of me.

The realization of my gradual loss of identity and the feeling that there is a definite difference between what it is to be Mexican and Chicano came as the result of an unforgettable visit to my parents' home country. For two months, I was submerged into a culture that, at the young age of eleven, I

thought I knew extremely well. Sitting in the back of the plane, I had few concerns. Concern number one: I was afraid the cabin pressure would make my eardrums explode. Concern number two: I was worried I would not be accepted by the individuals I'd soon encounter. I eliminated the second bothersome thought rather quickly. Why wouldn't they like me? I thought. I'm Mexican too. But once my sneakers touched those stone-covered streets and the glances and comments began, I knew I did not fit in. I soon realized that to those around me, including my family, I was only American. I was, to them, a tourist—touring a culture I thought I knew well. Their concept of me was clear: my "Mexican" was in America and my "American" I carried in my suitcase, in my ideas, in the way I spoke . . . and that is what the natives saw.

My Abuelita was the first person to innocently surprise me with Chicano stereotypes I was completely oblivious to. The first morning with her was comfortingly familiar: I picked up the mess my younger siblings had made, the beds, then ran to the kitchen to help. It was no trouble at all; I was already accustomed to the routine. Apparently, grandma didn't know. "You do that at home too, mi'ja?" she asked, slightly lowering her eyebrows and studying me as though there were something she had forgotten to take note of. "Si, Abuelita. Siempre," I answered. My reply must have triggered something within her—her shoulders relaxed, the wrinkles around

her eyes fell back into position and her hands resumed the flattening of little maza balls. I was positive the next words out of her mouth would be an invitation to make tortillas. Wanting to avoid making the little disks I secretly hid under my place mat at home, I told her I'd sweep and mop instead.

The look she had just finished putting away managed to find its place upon her face once again. This time, the look seemed to question, "You know how to hold a broom?" I took the broom within my hands, walked to the furthest spot away from the kitchen and cautiously swept. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Abuelita nudge my Tia and softly whisper to her, "You help me sweep later." I am ashamed to say I was furious with my grandmother. My Mexican cousins and other children, some even younger than I, helped her with chores all the time and she never complained. What was I doing wrong? The floor was so clean you could practically eat off of it, the plates were spotless, the beds had no wrinkles, and yet, she assumed I couldn't do housework because, according to her, I didn't do it at home. How I wished that I had gone to the ranch with Abuelito instead. But then again, I was probably better off with grandma. Abuelito would have made me get onto the donkey that had managed to drag my cousins through rows of thorn-filled bushes and trees. Yes, I was better off with grandma.

Frustrated with seeking to impress my grandmother, I spent many days on the balcony listening to music, drawing endless rows of brightly colored houses and watching people pass by. There was one little girl in particular I saw often. She seemed to be around ten, a year younger than I. I recall her tanned

skin and her long, dark brown hair which moved swiftly behind her as she chased her brothers. I'd look down at my pale skin, run my fingers through my short, reddish brown hair, wondering why so many girls looked like her and why I wasn't one of them. Hoping she'd ask me to play, I walked downstairs, sat on the steps to the doorway and waited. After what seemed like an eternity, the girl began to walk towards me. My happiness ended quickly as I realized my Spanish was not only comprised of rolling r's and ñ's, it was creatively united with gh's that sounded like f's and ch's that sometimes sounded like k's. There would be no way for me to live through a conversation without the urge to utter a word in English. I felt embarrassed to say those beautiful Spanish words accumulating at the tip of my tongue. I imagined the embarrassment I'd face if a word came out wrong. Every step she took made my heart pound so much I was convinced she could hear it, just as I could. Finally, dreading the worst, we were face to face and she spoke. "You're not from here, are you?" Her words were cut short by a voice that shattered every feeling of acceptance I tightly held on to. "Marita, don't talk to her. Can't you see she doesn't want to talk to you?! She's just one of those stuck up American girls. Come inside." She left, and I ran to Abuelita and cried.

From then on, I tried everything to



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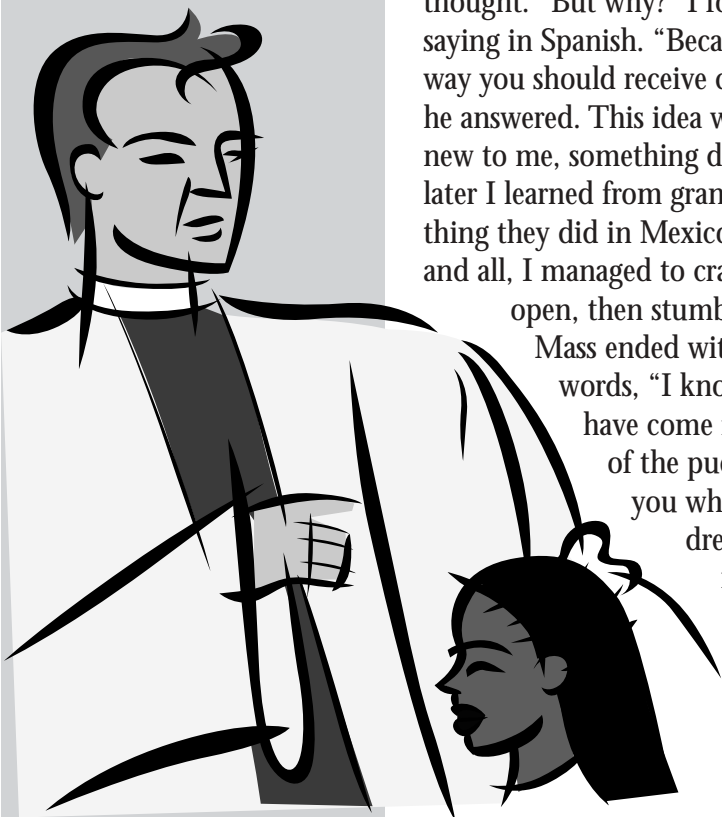
avoid going outside; I couldn't stand the embarrassment. Although I exhausted the details of the rejection, Abuelita remained convinced I was being ridiculous. "Ay mi'ja, people just think you're stuck up because you're so quiet. Forget about it. Go get ready for church." Abuelita's words were not much comfort, but I was relieved to think embarrassment would not follow me to church I was wrong.

Mass was comfortingly familiar. Perhaps this feeling should have hinted at the awkward situation I would soon face. When it came time to receive communion I got up, right hand under left, ready to receive a symbol of the only thing that was not different in Mexico—my religion. As it came to my turn, I made no eye contact with the priest but looked down at my cupped hands. It took me awhile to realize he wasn't placing the Eucharist within them. As I looked up, he sternly whispered, "Open your mouth." I was confused. "Open your mouth?" I thought. "But why?" I found myself saying in Spanish. "Because that's the way you should receive communion," he answered. This idea was something new to me, something different, and later I learned from grandma, something they did in Mexico. Flushed face and all, I managed to crack my mouth open, then stumbled to my seat.

Mass ended with the following words, "I know many of you have come for the fiestas of the pueblo. Those of you who have children, please remind them that the communion should not be received in the hand. It is not

correct. I am aware the children are used to that in America, but it is not okay here." As he spoke, I attempted to make myself smaller—it didn't work. Those around me, I thought, knew the priest had said that because of me.

Once in the United States, I released the anger I had felt at not being Mexican enough and transformed it into a frustrated concern to find my roots. Have I just been frightened by the Americanization process I have seen take others over, and therefore, see the presence of a Pocha (a full scale Americanized Mexican) in me, instead of a Chicana? I suppose it is possible that by thinking of things too much one begins to believe they are coming true. Or am I gradually losing a part of me? Whatever the case may be, I'm determined to keep my language and traditions alive. If it's possible to surpass the amount of culture my parents hold, I'll gladly do so. I'm worried about what may happen to the generations after me if I and others of any ethnicity do not know enough about our own culture to pass on and keep alive.



My Relationship with Dad

~by Yushan Hu

Dad was lying there in the hospital, his eyes staring at the white ceiling. His face was particularly red because of apoplexy. I was left to take care of him. It was my turn. I walked close to him, scared. I didn't know what to say. I never knew what to say. "Your great-grandmother had been lying in bed for ten years before she died," Dad suddenly began, his thick tongue moving slowly and with difficulty. It was the first time in thirty years that I had talked with Dad for an hour.

In my childhood, Dad and I had a cat-and-mouse relationship. He was always a powerful big cat who liked to control the whole situation. Dad worked in another city and came home only on weekends. When he was home, there was never peace in the family. Since Mom worked eight hours a day and took care of three daughters, Dad thought it important for all of us to help finish the housework on the weekends. The first thing he did was to inspect every corner of the house to check whether his daughters had done something wrong. Then he gave orders to the three of us. His voice was so loud that our neighbors probably thought we were all lazy girls. We had to stand by. No one had a chance to

take a break. Of course, Dad worked the hardest. He never stopped with the endless housework. Later, at the dinner table, we were required to shut up. This was one of his rules. Dad would be extremely angry if we talked while eating. I never had a chance to tell Dad that I was frightened of his returning home on weekends. I was so scared of his powerful, sharp eyes that I felt just like a tiny mouse.

There is an old Chinese saying: "A tiger-like father will never have a dog-like son." In other words, a domineering father will never have a cowardly son. When I was a teenager, my character was somewhat like Dad's. My relationship with Dad had changed from a cat-and-mouse one to a competitive one. We quarreled. We disagreed with each other. I was no longer a mouse. I was a little tiger ready to challenge while he was a big one protecting his own land. Both of us wanted to be the boss. It annoyed him that I was out of his control. As he realized this, he tried to maintain his authority, and I went on challenging. When I gave him my test papers to sign, he usually teased me, saying that I was poor in my studies. But I would never be defeated. I questioned him,



Yushan Hu, 35 years old, is a teacher from Foshan No.3 Middle-School, China. After studying at Delta for three months, she is going back to China to go on with her teaching career. "I love my job. I am going to tell my students what I have experienced and what I have learned here at Delta College."

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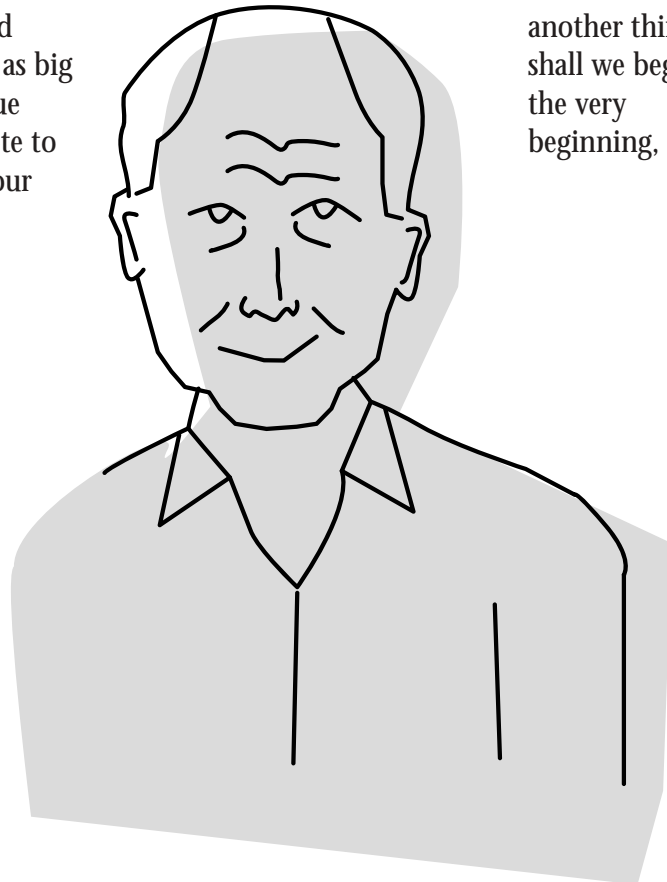
“Have you ever been the top student in your studies?” When he checked my homework, he laughed at my poor handwriting. I would blame him for my penmanship, saying it was caused by his bad genes. There was always a smell of gunpowder in our short dialogues. I knew Dad’s handwriting was wonderful. But he never thought of teaching me. He just went on laughing at my poor attempts to write. That was his way of keeping something from me. He wanted to be better than I in order to beat me down. He felt that was his privilege as a father.

Though our relationship was distant, I never denied Dad’s love for me. But his way of showing his love for me was so frustrating that I had to think about it before I noticed it was there. When I was studying in a famous university far away, I wrote my first letter home. Dad didn’t write a single word to me. However, he spent a weekend making an especially big mailbox that he painted silver. It was twice as big as our ordinary blue one. My sister wrote to me and said, “All our

neighbors are astonished at that stupid mailbox. Dad is making a fool of himself.” That mid-autumn festival I was absent from the gathering when everyone in the family shared mooncakes together. So when I came home from school during the winter vacation, he took out a freezing, cold moon-cake from the fridge and “ordered” me to finish it. God knows! He had saved it for three months! If these were hints about Dad’s love, they were difficult to understand. It took me some time to consider his ridiculous behavior as a kind of love.

My relationship with Dad made me upset. I had changed from a mouse to a little tiger. He was still so overbearing. I regarded his special love as nonsensical. Now, Dad is in the hospital. He is getting old and sick. He is losing his power while I am gaining my maturity. Isn’t it time for us to sit down and try to understand each

other? If there is another thirty years, shall we begin from the very beginning, Dad?



AN UNFAIR INCIDENT

~by Donna Hagen

It is a very disturbing thing to receive a diagnosis from your doctor that you have cancer. First, there are many questions that need to be answered in regard to the severity of the disease and what the options for treatment are. Then, there is the unhappy task of telling loved ones. Through it all there is the unsettling reality of facing your own mortality. After the initial shock wears off, you will undoubtedly go through a myriad of emotions that may include denial, anger, fear, and grief. None of these things, as unpleasant as they may be, can compare to the worst experience of them all, which is dealing with your insurance company.

A couple of years ago, my husband saw a dermatologist for a skin condition that had plagued him for several years. He had been to our family doctor many times and had tried several different creams and ointments but it only continued to get worse. I'll never forget

the day he received the phone call... a recent skin biopsy revealed that this stubborn rash was actually a rare form of skin cancer.

As you might imagine, we were devastated. Our doctor reassured us that it had been detected early and was not considered life threatening. We were told about a clinic at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto, California, which specialized in the treatment and management of this rare disease. The treatment he described consisted of a daily application of a chemotherapy ointment. This ointment, when applied to the skin daily, might halt any further spread of the disease, and in a few cases was even able to completely eradicate it. The doctor insisted that my husband be seen immediately and called to schedule an appointment for him before he even left the office. It was at this first visit to Stanford Hospital that our insurance nightmare began.

I was very relieved when I was told over the phone that Stanford accepted MediCal patients. That first visit included every medical test you could think of and even a few you'd rather not think of, but we drove home thankful that everything possible was being done to keep my husband healthy. When the doctor finally called us with the results, we were happy to hear that in regards to my husband's health everything was going pretty well, but with regard to our insurance we were in big trouble. Apparently, since MediCal was now being under-

Donna Hagen has been a student at Delta College for the past two years. She is a liberal arts student and plans to transfer to CSU Stanislaus. Mrs. Hagen is married and has five children. Besides writing, she also enjoys music and gardening.



Finally, I was able to speak to a human to explain that I needed an exemption form

She was mocking me
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written by either Blue Cross or Health Plan of San Joaquin County, my husband could only be seen by a doctor or hospital on their provider list. Neither Stanford Hospital, nor our doctor, was included in that list. He told us there was one other option: to apply for an exemption. This exemption allowed a person with certain diseases such as cancer to be seen by any doctor in the state of California. Unfortunately, this would only apply to future expenses and not the hundreds of dollars we had just unknowingly incurred. I remember thinking that a simple phone call should clear this entire thing up. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

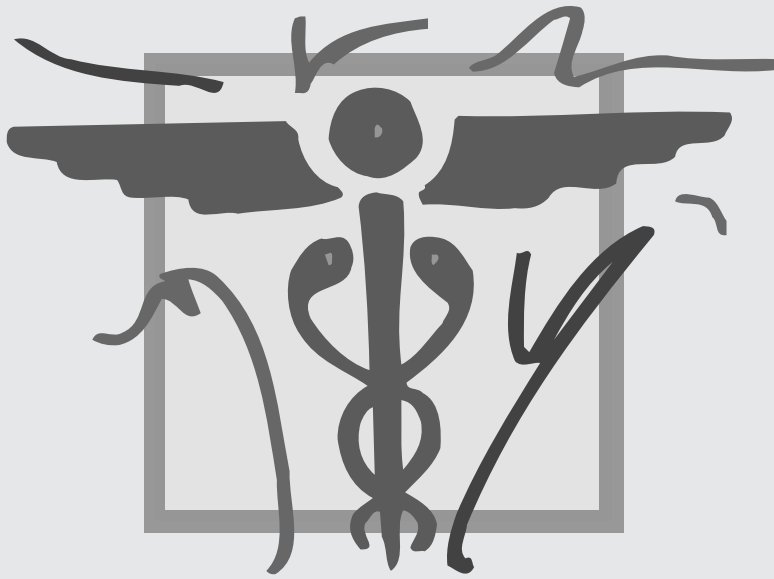
Trying to get through to the Health Plan of San Joaquin County was one of the most irritating and time-consuming things I have had to do. After being put on hold for what seemed like forever, I had to navigate through a phone system with more options than most phones have buttons for and certainly more that I could keep track of. Finally, I was able to speak to a human to explain that I needed an exemption form. We completed the form on the day it arrived and faxed it back to

them. Four days later we received a letter in the mail denying our request for exemption because we had not returned the forms on time.

Once again I found myself on the phone navigating the bureaucracy, requesting another form, receiving and faxing it the same day, only to be informed again by mail that we were being denied the exemption because we had not returned the forms in time. By now we realized something was very wrong. We spent the next six weeks calling, faxing, and repeatedly being denied

a simple exemption that would allow my husband the treatment he needed to stay healthy. As absurd as this whole thing was, I was sure that a phone call to the right person would fix it. This became one of the biggest nightmares of my life, but the most painful part was yet to come.

During one of my almost daily phone calls to the main office, I asked to speak to a supervisor. The woman who then spoke on the phone had absolutely no compassion for my situation whatsoever. As I once again explained the paperwork cycle I was trapped in, I imagined her to be rolling her eyes, bored to death, perhaps filing her nails as she listened to me plead for her help. In fact I did hear her let out a rather rude yawn. She repeated a list of instructions for me that she had either memorized or was reading from a script. I did my best to keep my composure as I explained to her how many times I had done exactly what she was asking me to do, only to receive a computer-generated letter denying my request. I told her also of the many times that I had called asking for someone to help resolve this situation.



This supervisor was still convinced that I was not in compliance with their procedures and decided to prove this to me by playing me a tape of an earlier conversation we had had. As she played the tape for me, she did not realize that her own comments had been recorded as well. I could clearly hear her joking about what a pest I was. She was mocking me for crying on the phone as I begged her to do something about the situation. She tried to shut the recording off, but it was too late. When she came back on the line, she fumbled over her words. I was so angry I could barely speak. I asked this woman how in the world she could go to work everyday and treat people this way. What she told me caused me great sorrow.

The supervisor on the other end of the line — who had the power to approve my husband's request for an exemption, which would allow him to receive the needed cancer treatment — told me that she was very good at her job. I questioned her as to how she defined

“good.” She proudly told me of her annual bonuses, bonuses given for her “success” at what she did. Her job was to keep people enrolled in the Health Plan of San Joaquin County and apparently she did that using whatever means necessary and at the expense of the health of the patient. Granting my husband an exemption would have threatened her bonus. I was ready to do a little threatening of my own.

I learned that MediCal recipients are allowed to choose between two health plans, Blue Cross and Health Plan of San Joaquin County. This allows for some competition between the two providers and some options for the client. If one entity is not sufficiently meeting the client's needs, then at enrollment time the client could switch to the other. Hopefully, this would encourage each company to do its best so that the enrollees would not switch plans. Exemptions, such as the one we were applying for, are only granted when neither entity is able to provide the specific treatment necessary for

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serious illnesses like cancer. You would think that, under these circumstances, Health Plan of San Joaquin County would work on behalf of the patient to get the treatment needed, even if it meant losing an enrollee. I am so sad to think that a person in a position of authority would use her power and influence to get bonuses for maintaining accounts rather than for serving the best interests of people whose lives literally depend on the treatment. I'm sorry to say that had I not taken some extreme measures, the employees of Health Plan of San Joaquin County would have been happy to let my husband go on indefinitely without ever getting the treatment he needed as long as he maintained his enrollment status.

Our nightmare finally ended after we wrote letters to elected officials in our area and had our case assigned to an ombudsman. However, this incident

really shook our faith in humanity. It is very difficult for me to comprehend how dehumanizing this whole healthcare system has become. We live in a nation that has made some of the most brilliant advances in medicine and yet every day, individuals are denied access to the treatment they need because of health insurance rules and regulations. People suffer in silence while somewhere a clerical worker determines their eligibility to receive benefits. Every day, important decisions, which directly affect the health care an individual receives, are made by individuals whose judgement is being clouded by bonuses dangled before them. In their minds they are "good" at what they do, because they are financially rewarded for it. Perhaps if they had to look into the eyes of the cancer patient desperate for a cure, they would feel a deeper responsibility for what they were really hired to do.



Best Friends Forever

~by
Tajmah Jones



As mothers and aunts bustle around us, my bridal party and I stand in the crowded, hot bathroom. The girls are already beautiful in their antique-yellow, lace dresses and neatly curled ringlets; they gather around me to touch up my hair and make-up as they argue about what shade of lipstick would look better with my complexion. I peer out the small, open window as the guests arrive for the most important day of my life. Anticipation grows as I watch groups of people enter the picturesque Japanese garden, lush with its greenery and colorful flowers. A life of memories walks by with the arrival of each friend and family member. Everyone is there from my third grade teacher to my old classmates in high school, and even my great aunt and uncle that I have not seen since I was small.

There are memories I can attach to each face. Tears begin to well up in my eyes as the time to walk down the aisle grows near. Diane, my Maid of Honor, is quick with a tissue and comforting words. Meanwhile, my bridesmaids, Dana and Felicia, are busy adjusting my veil and train. Candice, my last bridesmaid, amuses me with silly faces and stupid jokes to ease my nerves. What would I ever do without them? These four women are my best friends. For me, each of these women, different in their own ways, represents a person who was extremely important to me at a certain period of time in my life: my childhood, my adolescence, my teen

years, and finally early adulthood. In life, I believe we are given more than one best friend and each one can represent an influential stage of life.

Dana is the best friend who represents my childhood. Mr. Johnson's fourth grade class in the small, mountain town of Twain Harte brought us together and we became instant companions. Snow days were spent together and peanut butter and marshmallow sandwiches were shared. Building forts and tree houses in the summer always kept us busy. At these places, a secret club was devised in which she was the president and I was the vice president. Any member had to be approved by us, with a fee of a dollar. Everyone wanted to be in our club. My best friend was always a leader and I admired her and wanted to be like her. As a matter of fact, most of our quarrels were due to me "copying" her when I had my hair cut similar to hers or when I bought the same shoes as she had. But of course, the fights never lasted for long and we became inseparable again — although miles *did* separate us the summer before our sixth grade year when my mother's new job forced my family to move two hours away from Dana. With the miles between us, our visits became less. Leaving my childhood behind, I would enter adolescence in a new place. Then Dana became one of two best friends in my young life, but to me she would always

Tajmah Jones is a 28 year-old Delta College student who is returning to Delta after five years to continue her college education. She is undecided on whether to pursue a career in social work or teaching, but is presently working on her A. A. degree. She has been married for almost six years and has three beautiful children. When not at school she enjoys spending time with her family, reading, writing, photographing and scrap booking her family photos.

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Besides boys, we were
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be my favorite companion during my childhood years.

Along with a new school in the valley “hick” town of Oakdale, I also gained a new best friend, Diane. Diane, for me, mostly represents my adolescence. During the awkward years of junior high school we became attached at the hip and boy crazy pre-teens together. Where there was Tajmah, there too was Diane. Besides boys, we were also focused on Guess Jeans and Espirit clothing. Discussing what band member was the hottest of Bon Jovi or Poison while doing each other’s hair or make-up was a favorite past time. Fights over boys sometimes occurred, but no boy could ever part us completely for long. We were as close as sisters and “sister” is also what we called each other. On the weekends or during school vacations, we had sleepovers where we spent the whole night talking of what our future weddings would be

like and this is where we also promised each other that I would be her Maid of Honor and she would be mine. At these sleepovers big secrets such as a first kiss or a new crush were always revealed. Sadly, our weekend sleepovers ended when once again my family moved and along with my teenage years a third best friend also arrived into my life, but Diane would forever remain my “sister.”

After we had moved to Stockton, Felicia became my best friend at Tokay High School during my teen years. Although I may not have shared the closeness with Felicia that I had

with Diane, she was the one person in high school I trusted completely. If it were not for us being totally engrossed in our boyfriends, we probably would have become inseparable also. Felicia and I were not exactly popular in high school; we were actually kind of loners together. At school we joined the same clubs and we were athletic sports trainers for the football and soccer teams. Outside of school we both were employed at a local Taco Bell. Long hours were spent at each other’s houses studying for tests. School dances and football games became fun double dates. My best friend, Felicia, was the only friend at my high school that truly knew if I had lost my virginity or not. Complaints of having an overly strict and protective father were shared with Felicia. Our friendship was the only friendship that remained secure from rumors, jealousy, and popularity contests, which had been the reasons for my other high school friendships to

tear apart. But eventually, with the arrival of graduation, the new pressures of adulthood upon us, and little time left in our busy lives, our relationship did tear apart a little. A best friend is still what I would consider Felicia because she was the one friend that was beside me in a few of the hardest years of my life, my teenage years.

After high school, I was employed at Carlos and Luigi's and that is where I met Candice. To me, she represents my best friend during early adulthood or should I say my early twenties. As hostesses, we shared many shifts together and enjoyed conversation and laughs in between seating guests and making tortillas. From a relationship as co-workers, it grew into a friendship. Candice and I did many things outside of work together. Our days off were often spent taking road trips to San Francisco or to Sacramento. Roaming the outlet stores and the malls were usually on our agenda since Candice was a shopaholic. She and I loved to hang out at parties and dance at local nightclubs where we would check out the guys and pick up a phone number

or two. With time our relationship grew; we eventually became roommates and soon we threw our own get-togethers where we invited the Carlos and Luigi's crew and their friends. This friendship was full of the best times of my life. At one point, the day came that I met the man that would be my future husband. Later I became pregnant with my first child. Having the new responsibilities of motherhood, my priorities had changed and our fun times and outings did not happen as often. Then the day came that Candice decided she wanted a change of pace in her life and moved to Alaska where she met the man she would marry and had her first child also. Although miles and life have separated us I will always consider her my best friend; she is the one I shared life with back when I was single and living it up without the responsibilities of a family.

But now, as I stand nervously at the entrance of the garden watching each of my bridesmaids walk down the aisle that is surrounded by a sea of people's faces who have entered my life at one time or another, I come to a realization.

Out of all the faces that are here to celebrate this happy occasion with me, the people who have had the largest impression upon my life, besides my parents, will be standing right beside me as I say my vows to my husband. No matter how they may change over the years or what influential period of time in my life each of these women represents to me, I will forever call each one of them my best friend and they will forever hold a special place in my heart.



Our friendship was the only friendship that remained secure from rumors, jealousy, and popularity contests.



Tajmah Jones is a 28 year-old Delta College student who is returning to Delta after five years to continue her college education. She is undecided on whether to pursue a career in social work or teaching, but is presently working on her A. A. degree. She has been married for almost six years and has three beautiful children. When not at school she enjoys spending time with her family, reading, writing, photographing and scrap booking her family photos.

The Trip Down the Road of a Life-Threatening Illness

~by Tajmah Jones

In the days before my son's diagnosis, my family's life was like any other's - my family was made up of my husband, my two children (both under the age of three) and myself. My husband

and I both worked; he worked during the day and I worked in the evenings. We were a typical young American couple trying to survive and pay the bills while still juggling a family life. During this much simpler time in our lives, before we had ever been faced with a life-threatening disease in our family, I had never realized how the effects of such a disease could spread way beyond one's health. But once Leukemia invaded my baby boy's body, not only did it change his health, but it also invaded and affected our whole family in many different ways.

Anthony's health started to deteriorate at the end of May 1998. Within a few weeks, we realized something was seriously wrong. On June 10, 1998, Leukemia became the diagnosis for my son. My son had changed from an extremely active, rough-and-tumble little boy into a severely weak, lethargic and sick child. It was heart wrenching to watch this disease suck the life from his tiny body, but what was equally as hard to watch were the effects of the chemotherapy and medical procedures that were required to save his life.

The painful procedures, I believe, were the worst for Anthony and us, as parents. A child only used to having

small needles from a booster shot prick him was now being dug into with gigantic needles long and thick enough to travel through the bone in his hip or to reach the spinal fluid in his spine. My husband and I, week after week, would try to calm our child during spinal taps and bone marrow aspirations as he would kick, scream, and cry. Finally, we fought with the doctors and forced them to allow sedation for him, but our son's emotional anxiety about these procedures never went away. Today he is still a severely anxious and fearful child.

As for the chemotherapy, although it was used to rid him of cancer, it also had many serious negative side effects on his health. Our son lost his hair in clumps. Eventually, we ended up shaving it all off, and to help him through this, his daddy shaved his head too. At times, our son would develop sores in his mouth and throat, making it impossible for him to eat solid foods. I tried to make it better for him by allowing him to have a diet of chocolate pudding, but it could not ease the pain completely. In the future, he may not be able to have children due to chemotherapy. Neurological problems, developed since his chemotherapy began, have caused problems with his fine motor skills. He now walks on his toes. Chemotherapy also depleted his immune system, which made him tremendously susceptible to any cold, flu and infection.

Because Anthony's immune system became severely low, we had to change

many personal habits also. Constant hand washing before touching Anthony or after he touched anything became a part of our routine. He could no longer eat fruit with skin or have plants or flowers around him because of the pesticides. When we were in enclosed areas with many people, he had to wear a mask. The house and his toys had to be cleaned thoroughly to rid them of any unwanted bacteria or germs. Despite all these precautions, at times he would still catch a cold or the flu. When someone with a normal immune system has a cold, that person can usually simply buy an over-the-counter medication and his or her immune system would fight it off, but for Anthony it was different; it usually meant a trip to the hospital and sometimes a hospital admission. As a matter of fact, the Hematology/Oncology ward and clinic at the Sacramento Kaiser was our home away from home.

Immediately following my son's diagnosis, we were admitted into the Hematology/Oncology Ward of the Sacramento Kaiser. Anthony and I were there for a month. After Anthony was healthy enough to return home, we still had to return to the clinic in Sacramento three times a week, at first for his chemotherapy and medical proce-

dures. Our lives had become a whirlwind of appointments. My family became close to the staff and the other families at the clinic who also had children with cancer. During this intensely straining time, we appreciated having individuals to talk to — individuals who understood our exact same pain. Through these people, we discovered support groups and events for children with cancer that we still attend to this day. These became a special part of our lives.

Anthony also had a favorite nurse that he looked forward to seeing each time he had an appointment; she would kiss away his "owies" and find Power Rangers in his ears. These were wonderful people who we only met due to my son's illness, but who made our lives much richer. In a sense, we had a new family at that home away from home. More time was spent at that clinic and in the car than at our true home, but it was necessary and that was all that mattered. Our schedules had changed drastically; the days of coming and leaving to work and home were a memory. Not only had the clinic and the hospital become our new home, but also caring for my son had become my only job.

Once my son's doctor spoke to us about what caring for a child with Leukemia would entail, I realized I could not keep my two part-time jobs. Time was precious now, so I quit two waitress jobs



*My husband and I,
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and cry*

Once my son's doctor spoke to us about what caring for a child with Leukemia would entail, I realized I could not keep my two part-time jobs.

to stay at home and care for my sick son and his little sister. Due to the loss of income, credit card bills went unpaid and other bills fell behind. Paying the bills were no longer my family's first priority as before; saving my son's life was. With help from many cancer organizations, we paid what we could, but eventually filing for bankruptcy was the end result. To me, it was worth the consequences of having a bankruptcy on our credit report. There was no way I could have worked to pay those bills and taken care of my son at the same time; life had become too stressful.

With the busy schedule, the emotional pain, the fear and anxiety that my child might die, the new financial strains, the absence of my home and family, and the continual exhaustion, I felt the stress was enormous. Not only was I under tremendous pressure, but my husband was also. While holding all the financial pressures upon his shoulders, my husband had to continue working his regular job and was unable to see his sick son as often as I was. Anthony, too, had emotionally fallen apart; he was a young three-year-old child who could not understand why this was happening to him. Due to the confusion and stress he was under, he would act out with poor behavior. As for my little girl, she did not understand why she was left at Grandma's all of the time and she was under stress also because of the change in routine and missing her family. Fights between my husband and I began to occur. Many times when there is extreme stress in my life I tend to take it out on the person I am the closest to, which ended up being my husband during this difficult time. Eventually, I sought out therapy for depression. Therapy and the support groups helped me to find

peace among the chaos. A play therapist helped Anthony better understand the medical procedures and the reasons for them. Although this was a difficult time in my family's life, there were many things that we gained and learned.

Despite the many negative effects, I can definitely say that I have gained knowledge and awareness that I would never have had if not for my son being diagnosed. When I became a parent of a child with Leukemia, I gained knowledge about the disease and many other types of cancer that I would never have known otherwise. This knowledge helped me to understand the need for better cancer research, donations and fund-raisers. I researched what would be beneficial to my son in case of a relapse and learned about the benefits of cord blood. My youngest child's cord blood is now stored in case Anthony should ever need it. Life with a life-threatening disease in my family has made me aware of how precious life is. I never take it for granted. Our family no longer worries as much about the small stuff and always tries to make time for each other now.

Life since my baby boy's diagnosis of Leukemia has been an extremely difficult road to travel. As I stand near the end of that road, at the point where my son has entered one year of remission off chemotherapy, I understand that my family has learned an extreme amount from this trip. Not all the effects of having a child with Leukemia have been positive, of course; but now I realize that before life may have been easier, but now our family's life is much more meaningful.



A Lesson Learned

~by Tina Svetlana Gomez

“It is hard to survive the seventeen years of my existence alone.” I have lived with my grandparents all the days of my life, and they do whatever they can do for me. In fact, my grandfather is my wake up call every morning. He cooks my breakfast and prepares the bath tub while my grandmother washes my clothes and irons them. My parents live a thousand miles away from each other—my dad in the United States and my mom in Manila. All the years of my life, I have been living with my grandparents and a few relatives in San Juan. My grandparents are firm and determined to give me a prosperous life, but they do not know what it is like to exist alone—alone at the heart of a vague, chaotic and endless battle for emotional survival. Yes, I live almost like a princess, but deep inside, I suffer and starve for things money cannot buy. At my extremely young age, I fight the devils—the demons that I create.

“It is hard to survive the seventeen years of my existence alone.” There came a time when I wanted to share my emotions with them, but I am hesitant to do so. I prefer to unravel my knots and qualms all by myself. Why? Because I believe that no one truly cares about me. Yes, I am skeptical of all things in my life. My high school classmates used to say that I am loud, and I admit it! Maybe that is my only way to express what I sense deep within: the feeling of emptiness, of desertion, of loneliness.

I cannot breathe anymore. In the middle of nowhere, I suddenly cry. From the veranda, I watch my grandmother sitting on her favorite couch, reading a comic book. She is facing my

way, but she does not notice the brackish tears racing down my face. Do I blame her? She is old and cannot hear me. But, I feel like I am simply existing; I am not actually living. Feeling frustrated and helpless, I run to my room and slam the door as hard as I can. My arms are in pain, but this is not the reason why I am screeching out loud. Anyone who can see me will think that I am silly because I look like a kid abandoned by her mom. How I wish that were the case! That would be better than to have imperceptible parents. To tell the whole world that I am angry by screaming is easy, but nothing comes through my mouth. As I agonize, I feel like I am in the middle of nowhere. I am running as fast as I can, but the road seems endless. People are around me, but I appear invisible. No one can actually see me. I close my eyes and cover my ears. Tears start to well in my eyes and my heart begins to bleed. My knees and hands are shaking. I talk to God, “Please tell me what to do. I cannot take this anymore!”

I hurriedly pack my things. My migraine is poking my head, but I disregard the soreness. Where to go? I do not know. After all, no one cares about me! With a snap of a finger, I become a rebel. The girl that used to be praised from her classmates and relatives abruptly changes her color. When my grandparents are tightly sleeping, I come out of our dwelling like an escaping burglar. Taking little, careful steps, I leave the house. In the darkness of the night, I saunter the wet and lonely streets of San Juan. Raindrops are my only comrades. Maybe the crickets hanging on the trees are



“Nothing in this world is permanent. Eventually, things will change like the way we aspire it to be. However, we must stand and lead now to make small beginnings.”
Tina Svetlana Gomez believes that the youth of today are the only weapon to attain the change that our world needs. Because of that principle, she wants to major in Political Science at UC Berkeley. She also aspires to teach and write her own book, in God’s time. This adventurous seventeen-year-old freshman was born and raised in the Philippines and migrated in the USA July 2002. She spends her free time reading, singing and winning friends.

With a snap of a finger,
I become a rebel.

thinking that I am on dope because I am talking to myself.

Sparkling lights and loud sounds coming from different establishments awaken my stagnant thoughts. Suffocating smoke from vehicles covers the whole place. The city is the exact opposite of our town; it is extremely noisy and unruly. While waiting for the bus, I sit on a filthy bench on the murky corner of the street to rest my back and feet. I take off my navy blue jacket because the rain has saturated it. “Stars don’t even take a glimpse of me,” I whisper to myself. Yet I am amused because I feel like a movie star portraying a prodigal daughter role in an independent film. Midnight drizzles continuously bathe my face and wash the traces of tears from my cheeks. As I look at the lights on the post, I examine my conscience: Am I doing the right thing? My dense ego shouts with pride, “If they do not find me, they will surely look for me. At long last, they will...”

Ate, pahingi nga po ng piso . . . Gutom na gutom na po ako (Can you give me coin? I’m starving.) A five-year-old boy has disturbed my thinking. He is awfully thin and haggard. His small and dirty fingers are inside his mouth.

Bakit hindi ka pa umuuwi? Gabi na ha. Nasan nanay mo? (Why are you still here? It is already dark. Where’s your mother?), I reply while giving him a piece of bread from my bag.

May sakit po ang nanay ko. Salamat nga po pala sa tinapay (My mother is sick. By the way, thank you for the bread). Then, he runs toward the other side of the street. He looks overjoyed and relieved.

Curiously, I quietly walk after the boy. The next picture melts my stubborn

I prefer to unravel my knots and
quarrels all by myself

heart: The boy and his sick mother are sharing the small piece of bread that I gave him. His mother cannot walk. She is lying on the cold and damp street. My vision turns fuzzy. Tears begin to roll down my cheeks as if I carry a fountain of water in my eyes. And at that point, I almost become hysterical; I fall onto my knees and I cry like a feeble baby. I know that the bus is coming, but I choose to ignore it. I walk back to the bench where I sit and gaze at my muddy sneakers. I realize that my grandparents are indeed proud of my achievements, talents—me in general. Even though my parents rarely see me, they never fail to call me everyday. It feels heavenly to perceive the positive side of my being. Sadly, I had never recognized it. One of the best decisions that I ever made in my entire life takes place in that instance: I decided to return home. I clutch my backpack and walk two miles to be home.

All the lights in our house are turned on. Our front door is open and a crimson car blocks the driveway. For the first time, I see my grandfather cry. My mother looks upset and teary-eyed. Hugging my grandfather is my grandmother who is looking at my anxious mother. Suddenly, my emotions change. I am now exceedingly in shame about what I have done. Honestly, I do not know if I still have the confidence in me like when I deliver a speech in school—chin up with a hundred

A five-year-old boy has disturbed my thinking

percent composure. It is clear: I did a ridiculous thing. Within a split second, I notice my grandfather staring at me. His eyes are not overflowing with anger, but with love and concern. Hastily, I run to my grandfather and hug him tightly.

Patawarin nyo po ako! Hindi ko na po uulitin, promise (I'm very sorry. I will never do this again, promise), I exclaim with a coarse voice. He did not know why I was apologizing. Instead of blaming me or shouting at me, he cries again.

Bakit? Ano bang problema? Anak, huwag mo na ulit uulitin yun! (Why? What's the problem? Do not do it again!), he utters with a sound of relief.

My mother is leaning sideward on the door with a loving smile on her face. She does not say a word, but her expression speaks that she has unloaded a burden inside her. My grandmother, crying again, snatches the telephone from my mom's hand to call our relatives. I hardly notice that the rain is falling down from heaven again. Maybe God is welcoming and congratulating me since I am back from a turbulent experience.

"It is hard to survive the seventeen years of my existence alone." This is what I used to think. Now, even in my wildest dreams, running away from home never crosses my mind. As my other relatives start to fill our house, I spy a declamation trophy I received last year. At the bottom of the trophy is a picture of me and my grandfather receiving the award. I do not know why I smirk, but one thing is for sure: I will never run away from home again.

And at that point, I almost become hysterical; I fall onto my knees
and I cry like a feeble baby



The Quest for Awareness

~by Thu Phan



Thu Phan was born in Vietnam and came to the United States when she was two years old. She has three sisters, two brothers, and a family dog. She will be attending the University of Pacific in fall 2003 to major in psychology. Her long-term goal is to be an advocate for people who are physically challenged. She wants to be their voice and their spokesperson. Additionally, she wants to be a motivational speaker on self-empowerment.

The most significant disability issue facing college students with disabilities involves interaction between instructors and students who are physically challenged. Instructors have the responsibility to be aware of students with disabilities. A few instructors do not have the skills and the tools necessary to prepare them to interact with students with disabilities and to treat them fairly. This is a continuing problem, and I am obligated to address this issue because I feel that all students who are physically challenged have the right to learn and receive a strong education. Education is the key to self-empowerment and independence.

The majority of instructors are compassionate, understanding, and will accommodate students who are physically challenged. These instructors are optimistic and are willing to challenge themselves to work with students with disabilities. However, some instructors perceive that students with disabilities are deceitful, threatening, incompetent, or burdensome. Some instructors view students who are physically challenged as using their disability to their advantage. These instructors feel uncomfortable having students take their tests in Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) because they feel the students are likely to cheat there.

Other instructors get confused and lose their confidence when suddenly they see a student who is physically challenged in their classroom. For instance, one instructor on the first day of class announced, "They didn't warn me that I was getting a disabled student in my classroom, especially a visually-impaired student." Such instructors are shocked and perhaps feel threatened by the circumstances. Sometimes instructors speak to students with disabilities in an inferior tone and do not give them the same respect they give to students who are able-bodied. These instructors patronize the students who are physically challenged, viewing them as incapable individuals.

Finally, there are instructors who will not accommodate students with disabilities simply because these instructors do not want to tolerate the specific needs of the students with disabilities. In one instance, a student could not attend class because the elevator was broken and she used a walker to help her get to class. An instructor remarked, "Well, you could have found other ways to get to class." The only way she could have attended class was to have somebody carry her up three flights of stairs. If someone did carry her to and from class and if they both fell, who would be liable?

I have encountered one instructor who betrayed me, viewed me as a machine because of my wheelchair, and cheated me out of class participation. A few semesters ago, I enrolled in a civilization class. During the first week of the class, the instructor announced to all

students that he would offer extra credit if they participated in a classroom skit the next day. Realistically, I knew the class was going to be difficult, so I wanted to get extra credit to help boost my grade at the end of the semester. Right after class, I approached him and asked if I could participate in the classroom skit. He bluntly replied, "No, your wheelchair would be too awkward." I felt crushed and shocked.

In the same week, I was parking my wheelchair, making an effort not to block the aisle in the classroom. I did the best I could with the little room I had to work with. All of a sudden, he came up to me and rudely said, "You need to move!" There were more incidents like this. My note taker at the time witnessed how he was mistreating me. She told me that she confronted him and told him that if any student with a disability wanted to participate in his classroom skit, he could not deny them. He then stated that he would feel honored if any student with a disability were willing to participate in his skit, and he would accommodate them. When she told me this, I was infuriated. I lost all respect for that instructor as a person because no instructor has the right to lie like that and get away with it. Lying is not part of the instructor's job description.

Of the above-mentioned groups of instructors, some of these individuals are very giving, understanding, and receptive to the needs of students WITHOUT a disability. But why should I, a student with a disability, not receive the same overall level of performance from these instructors? According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), everyone has the right to an education. Why are the students who are physically challenged finding it more difficult to unlock their future?

My solution is to raise disability awareness in order to educate instructors. When instructors, through their own education, learned about different cultures and diverse backgrounds, the departments of education neglected to teach these instructors about the diverse backgrounds of people with disabilities. I propose that all future and current instructors be mandated to enroll in a disability awareness course. The disability awareness course would be strictly to raise awareness about people with disabilities. The course is not to be twisted around into something more. The course is not designed to solve any problems with prejudice that instructors may have. If there is prejudice, this course is not a remedy for it. I do not have the magical power to transform beliefs over night.

However, I do have the power to speak out on this continuing problem. The following guidelines should be incorporated in the disability awareness course. First, instructors need to give all students with disabilities respect rather than view them as an incompetent people who need pity. Second, each student who is physically challenged should be treated case by case. Instructors should not generalize or stereotype. An individual need is an individual need, and instructors should not apply one student's need to that of another student with a disability. Third, instructors need to experience how it is to be physically challenged. It will require a hands-on experience for instructors to never forget the significance of different disabilities. Last, the instructors should learn how to be verbally sensitive and use proper etiquette around students with disabilities. Verbal etiquette is involved when referring to people of different cultures; people with disabilities are no different.

Your teaching procedure
is obsolete...

The course is not to be
twisted around into
something more.

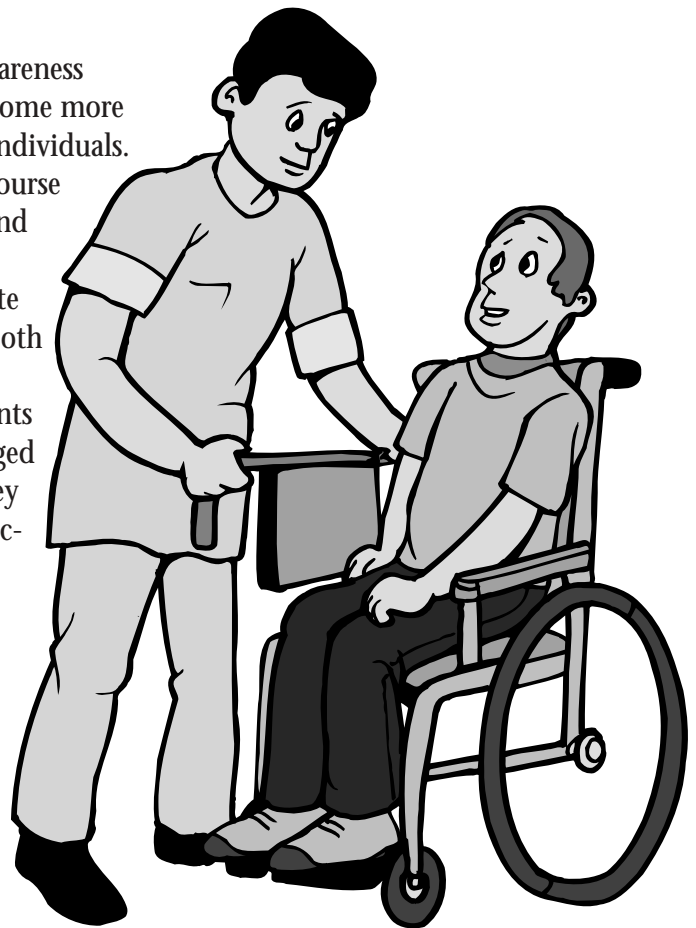
However, some instructors perceive that students with a disability are deceitful, threatening incompetent, or burdensome.

Lying is not part of the instructor's job description

Obviously, bitter, ignorant critics will fight to oppose this idea. Critics will demand, "Why should we waste our valuable time in a frivolous and non-sensical disability awareness course? Why should we change our teaching procedure?" In return, I will state, "Why not? What is it that you have to lose? Knowledge? Your teaching procedure is obsolete, and you have a moral obligation to all students' specific needs today. I GUARANTEE you that you would want a helpful instructor willing to provide you accommodation in a positive manner if you were a person with a disability."

I feel strongly about this issue. Something needs to be done about it. The more I analyze this challenge, the further I would like this plan to be implemented in the workforce. Being disabled is not a choice; we have no control over it. We live with our disability every day, and if people were more aware, we would have a more understanding society. Having a more understanding society would help to alleviate some of the predicaments that people who are physically challenged encounter every day.

By taking the disability awareness course, instructors will become more rounded and levelheaded individuals. This disability awareness course will build their character and self-confidence. Also, this course will help to eliminate some misconceptions for both instructors and students. Consequently, when students who are physically challenged enroll in a college class, they will have the quality instructor that they deserve.



Cell Phones at Public Events

~by Jacqui FitzGerald

The much anticipated second Harry Potter movie opened on a Friday night. Thursday night my husband stood in line in the dark to get tickets so my son could go to opening night. We spent \$21 on tickets, and another \$20 on snacks. We went into the theater and found seats close to the front in the sold out theater, exactly where my son wanted to sit to see the movie. The movie-theater was packed with families waiting to see the movie. The pre-teen children who were Harry Potter fans were not a quiet crowd, but when the opening credits started to run the sold out crowd became silent. The antics of Harry and Ron in the flying car on the screen kept all eyes looking straight ahead.

All of a sudden, a ringing noise came from the coat pocket of the man behind me. He must have missed the signs on the way in asking everyone to shut their cell phones off, or he forgot. I thought there was no way a father who had his son at the movie would answer the phone. He was there to spend time with his family. Was I ever wrong? Not only did the man answer the phone, he proceeded to have a lengthy, loud conversation with someone. While Ron and Harry were flying over London and landing in the Whomping Tree, the gentleman behind me was having a conversation with the person on the other end of the phone. The phone call went like this: "Hello" then a slight pause. "No, I'm not busy but I really can't talk; I have my son at the new Harry Potter movie." Slight pause. "Yeah, it seems like it's going to be a good movie." Slight pause. The theater was packed

with people watching a car falling out of a tree. The man's son was seeing his hero Harry Potter being bashed around and the child said, "Sh" to his dad. His dad said, "Yeah, okay, I'd better go and watch the movie. I'll talk to you later." By this time, I was very angry. How could this man think that I wanted to listen to his conversation?

How could he be so disrespectful to the people around him? The conversation I overheard definitely didn't sound like it was an emergency. If this man had no social skills to understand it was rude to the people around him to talk on the phone when he was at a movie theater, then what about how his son must feel when his father uses family time to chat with other people?

According to Public Agenda, a non-profit research house, I am not alone in being annoyed by a loud, public cell phone conversation. In a survey conducted, 49% of respondents said they have been annoyed by a loud mobile phone conversation in theaters or at concerts. In the same survey only 17% of cell phone owners thought they were guilty of such behavior (Gibbons 1). This means many cell phone owners are annoyed by others talking on their phones at these events, but they feel that their own conversations are not an annoyance to someone else.

The September 4, 2001



Jacqui FitzGerald moved to California six years ago from Canada. She lives in Manteca with her husband and eleven-year-old son. She is pursuing a business degree at Delta College.

Not only do they weave around the aisles like they have had a few too many drinks, they also seem to think it is appropriate to use any kind of language and discuss any topic that comes to mind

USA Today reported a survey conducted for Cingular Wireless in which 80% of the respondents had overheard cell phone conversations in restaurants and stores, more than 50% had overheard conversations at sporting events, and about 43% had been subjected to loud conversations at theaters and concerts (Sharp 2). If I have paid money to see a sporting event or concert, do I care what the person beside me, whom I don't know, has been doing for the last few days? Or how about the people who are on a cell phone in the grocery store? Not only do they weave around the aisles like they have had a few too many drinks, they also seem to think it is appropriate to use any kind of language and discuss any topic that comes to mind. It seems like every time I go out more people talk on their cell phones as if they are in their living rooms rather than in a public place.

For example, the woman in the grocery store discussing her son's failing grades and how his teacher is not doing her job, or the young girl sitting in the mall food court discussing her date from last night. Recently, a man at a funeral in Israel answered his phone while carrying a coffin. The mayor of San Diego's phone was ringing while she gave a news conference asking the public to stop using cell phones at inappropriate times in public (Sharp 3). Or the man who was talking to a used car salesman on his phone while the crowd around him was trying to view the Grand Canyon. He was repeatedly asked politely to take his phone call somewhere else. He ignored the request. Finally one listener wrote him a note "Nature: Yes. Cell phones: No." and he moved away (Sharp 2). In an extreme reaction to someone not lowering his voice while talking on a cell phone, two people shot a man in

How could he be so disrespectful to the people around him?

the leg when he wouldn't lower his voice (Sharp 1).

There were 120 million cell phones in the US in 2001 (Sharp 3). If everyone made one call at an inappropriate time, there would be many interrupted events. Some cities through legislation are starting to try to curb the annoyance of cell phones ringing during public performances. Has society become so egocentric that we need rules telling us how rude it is to interrupt someone else's enjoyment of an event by forcing them to listen in on a cell phone conversation? Obviously, if there are people like the man at the Harry Potter movie, someone must do something to curb this annoying behavior. There are already rules governing how loud a car can be or how loud a person can play a stereo, so it is only natural that society governs the use of cell phones.

Two San Francisco Supervisors, Chris Daley and Aaron Peskin, "have introduced legislation to prohibit the audible use of cell phones in places of public performances" (Fouhy). Ringing cell phones and people talking on the cell phone would be banned during movies, theater, concerts and lectures. Sporting events would be exempt (Fouhy). The New York City Council has approved a ban on cell phone use at concerts, plays, movies, lectures, dance recitals and other performances in the city. People are allowed to have their cell phones with them at the events, but they must just have them

set to vibrate or shut off during the performance. There is a \$50 dollar fine for a violation of the no cell phone rule (Cell 1). Amtrak has implemented "Quiet Cars" on the trains between Washington and Boston. Opera goers at the La Scala in Italy must check their phones in the cloakroom to ensure ringing doesn't interrupt the enjoyment of the opera (Sharp 2). Some companies have hired Jacqueline Whitmore, an etiquette expert, to tutor executives on appropriate cell phone etiquette (Gubbins).

None of these rules and regulations would be necessary if society started to think about others around them. If you are annoyed by a cell phone conversation that someone else is having, you can be sure that your conversation would be annoying to someone else. I really don't care where you have been or what you did while you were there. Write it down in a diary or speak to those who care when you are in a private place. Turn off your phone and let the rest of us enjoy the show.

The mayor of San Diego's phone was ringing while she gave a news conference asking the public to stop using cell phones at inappropriate times in public.

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The Misunderstood Femme Fatale

~by Brian Musich



Brian Musich was born in Fremont, California, along with his twin sister. He is 20 years old and a sophomore at Delta College. In the fall, he will be transferring to the California State University, Stanislaus. He is an English major and would like to become a teacher. One day, he hopes to write an Academy Award winning screenplay.

Throughout history, beautiful women have been adored and worshipped. Men swoon over what culture has defined as a beautiful woman; at times, men even view these women as supernatural or mystical creatures. They are the subjects of many paintings, poems and stories. Not only are they considered physical beauties, but also sometimes are seen as seductresses who lure men to their doom.

The poems “La Belle Dame sans Merci” by John Keats and “The Loreley” by Heinrich Heine share the male view of the female seductress. Both women in these poems lead men to their destruction.

In “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” the male character is a knight who meets a “Lady in the meads” and instantly falls in love with her. They spend the day together and have a wonderful time.

However, in a dream, the knight receives a warning that he has been put under a spell by the woman; eventually, he ends up alone and dying. Throughout this poem, the “Lady” is described as a magical creature, a “fairy’s child” who speaks in a “language strange.” She sings “a faery’s song” while riding the knight’s horse. She is a supernatural being who can put a spell on a man to make him love her. As the kings and warriors warn the knight in his dream, she captures the knight, just like other men she has taken “in thrall.”

In “The Loreley,” a woman stands on top of a hill and lures men to their death by singing a song that enchants them, eventually causing them to crash their boats on the rocks below. Again, the female is described in mystical terms. She “sings the tune of an olden Song that has a magical power.” Her singing distracts men so that they are blind to everything else around them. They are captured, just like the knight, in a death grip. Their fate is to die a horrible death, due to this woman.

In both poems, the women are seen as the reason for the men’s deaths. However, the women cannot be held fully

The poems “La Belle Dame sans Merci” by John Keats and “The Loreley” by Heinrich Heine share the male view of the female seductress.

Their fate is to die a horrible death, due to this woman

responsible. In “La Belle,” the knight falls in love (or is it lust?) with the “Lady in the meads” the instant he meets her. He spends all day with her and ignores everything around him. They make love and fall asleep. The men blame this woman for their misfortunes, but perhaps they are to blame as well. She cannot help being beautiful. She was born with her features. Also, she does not literally drag men to her home and then murder them. The men go of their own free will. They choose to spend the day with her and give her “gifts.” At the end of the poem, the knight is left alone on the hill. It does not mention what happens to the woman. The poem implies that she has left, and he is waiting for her, dying because of the wait. He has the option to leave. This poem may be a warning to anyone, male or female, that men and women should not fall in love so quickly. “Love at first sight” does not necessarily make for a healthy relationship.

In “The Loreley,” the female seductress is also not entirely at fault. She is a striking figure, a “siren,” who sits on the top of a hill and, while “[combing] her golden hair,” sings a beautiful song. This song and her beauty blind the

The men blame this woman for their misfortunes, but perhaps they are to blame as well.

men and cause them to lose control of their boat. However, the woman is not aware of her amazing power over men. She stands on the hill and sings, completely unaware of what is happening below her. The poem does not mention that her songs are directed towards the boatmen, only that the men are unfortunate enough to pass by her.

Both of these poems were written by men. These writers do not want to blame their own gender for their misfortunes, so they blame the opposite gender. These men, like so many others, most likely have had relationships that have gone wrong. To them, it is the fault of the women for seducing them into love; they did it on purpose. On the other hand, the women may see the men at fault. They are silly for falling in love with a pair of pretty eyes. Either way, both parties in these poems are to blame for the outcome, not just the women.

This song and her beauty blind the men and cause them to lose control of their boat.



~Goddess~

World Healer

~by Nola Pierce



Nola Pierce is twenty years old and a sophomore in college. She plans on transferring in the fall to Cal Poly at San Louis Obispo or Humboldt State University to study English and music.

Click. I switch on the news to update myself about the crazy world around me. Rarely do I hear an uplifting story. I hear about war, crime, rape, environmental destruction, sexism, racism, and poverty. . . . The list goes painfully on. As I read Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine, by David Leeming and Jake Page, I realize we are truly missing something. We lack balance, nurturing and wholeness. Living in a

culture in which Goddess is worshipped might not solve all of the problems of the human race. But I think there would be more understanding and respect toward each other, toward our environment and toward ourselves spiritually than there seems to be in the patriarchal society we have been living in. It makes sense that these ingredients would create an overall peace on earth. Because all sorts of people exist on this earth, we need to learn to have compassion, respect and understanding toward one another. The world would be more

positive if we all went back to our spiritual roots and worshipped Goddess again — as we did for at least some 25,000 years prior to the more recent male-dominated view that has had supremacy for only the last 5,000 years of history (47).

One Goddess our world could use in this day and age is White Buffalo Woman, worshipped by the Sioux. She asked for respect and prayer from her people and gave them a pipe that “knit together the Earth, sky and all living things into one family.” She taught balance and fairness to her people by explaining to the women “that the work of their hands and the fruit of their bodies kept the people alive. The women were Mother Earth and were therefore as important as the warriors.” When she left her people, she left with them great herds of buffalo to provide all that they needed: food, skins, and tools. Nothing was wasted (37). The Sioux Goddess White Buffalo Woman is still sacred to her people. She has wisdom that is needed in our world today: honor of the Earth and its creatures as well as unity and honor of one another.

Because all sorts of people exist on this earth, we need to learn to have compassion, respect and understanding toward one another.

The Sioux Goddess White Buffalo Woman is still sacred to her people.

The female role of Earth Goddess, Fertility Goddess, and Great Mother does not support the assumption that female-based religion requires a matriarchal society. Evidence from archeological sites in Asia Minor, Africa, and elsewhere show that these societies were not necessarily matriarchal, yet not patriarchal either. They were clearly not dominated by military

period, many examples exist of Goddesses who were disguised, like Eve and Lillith in the Bible. Their story gave females a new, sinful and evil persona. One shining Goddess who is part of the revival of Goddess is the Virgin of Guadalupe. Mary, mother of Jesus, has risen in status from a humble birth-giving peasant to the immaculately conceived Queen of Heaven (161). As the destruction of our earth continues, more and more people will realize how much we need to honor the stereotypical female characteristics of nurturing, renewal, growth, healing, balance, and wholeness instead of those favored by the patriarchal society we live in.

I hope that someday the news will change. A positive shift in the attitudes of humankind could be achieved through a return of Goddess. Our

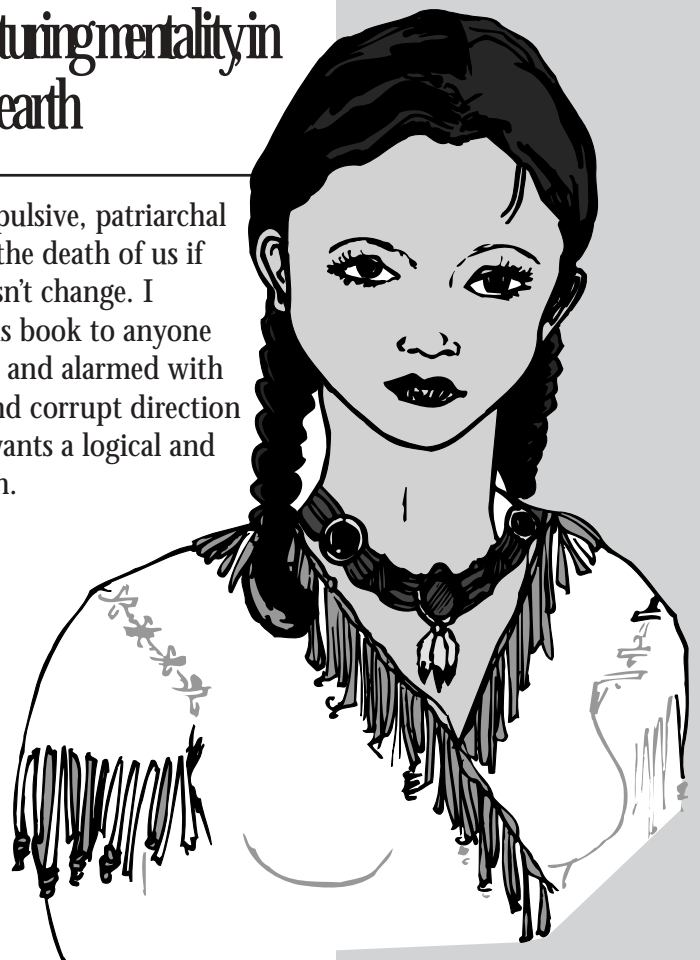
There is a gap in the collective human experience, which is reflected in our inability to move from a war-like to a nurturing mentality in our systematic destruction of the earth

power or male physical strength, as is the case today (22). “[M]any would say that we are emerging today from the artificial polarities of the male god religions in search within ourselves and our world of the ecological wholeness of goddess who contains and celebrates light *and* dark, life *and* death, male *and* female, and whose source is the inner depths rather than the airy heights” (3). We need Goddess.

As the authors point out, Goddess is re-emerging. She is returning because she is needed. There *is* a gap in the collective human experience, which is reflected in our inability to move from a war-like to a nurturing mentality, in our systematic destruction of the earth (161). Throughout the patriarchal

destructive, impulsive, patriarchal culture will be the death of us if something doesn't change. I recommend this book to anyone who, frustrated and alarmed with the distorted and corrupt direction of our world, wants a logical and ancient solution.

One shining Goddess who is part of the revival of Goddess is the Virgin of Guadalupe.



Jessica Pittman, eighteen years old, is a graduate of Calaveras High School. She decided to attend Delta College to complete her general education courses. She has hopes of transferring to U.C. Berkeley or U.C. Davis. She is concentrating on either a Business or a Science Major. She studies most of the time, but also enjoys spending time with her boyfriend.

“I’ll Always Love You, Mommy”

~by Jessica Pittman

In the small cozy Southern town of Meridian, Mississippi, the fresh scent of pinecones and summer blooms wafted through the air. There is this one memory in particular that reoccurs in my consciousness quite frequently. I was cuddled in my mother’s arms on a lazy summer day. Sheltered from the responsibility and insecurities of the adult world, I felt a great sense of peace enveloped the two of us. We lounged together on that summer evening amidst the summer’s sweltering heat. Nestled against the sweet skin of my mother, I looked up adoringly at her and said, “I’ll always love you, Mommy.”

Then the peaceful silence started to become disruptive and slightly jarring. After a few seconds I looked up to my mom. Instead of a smile, I saw

her mouth taut over an expressionless face.

She stated, “I wish I could record you saying that now, because you won’t feel that way forever.”

Suddenly, the gentle summer warmth became oppressive as I thought it over. What exactly could she mean? How could this incredible

feeling of safety and gentle warmth ever dissipate? As an innocent child of eight, I had yet to discover the meaning of my mother’s statement. I finally understood, many years later . . . ten years, to be exact.

It was not a particularly eventful day on the night that it happened. I had just started my first semester at community college, so I was still adjusting to many life changes. The humidity seemed slightly stifling that day, but nothing out of the ordinary. I was eating dinner across from my younger sister. My parents had finished dinner quite a while ago and were casually watching the television in the adjacent room. I’m not quite sure what struck a note of discord within my thoughts, but whatever it was, I couldn’t shake off the fact that my youngest sister appeared to be slipping back into her own ordeal of anorexia. I could not help but make an observation of her frail body. Her pitiful bones jutted out from beneath her shirt.

As I was eating my own dinner, I noticed that with each painstaking spoonful she took, she was trying to restrict herself from eating. Each minute of her dinner appeared to me as a battle that she was fighting against her own hunger. There was a ravishing hunger within her body that wanted to eat, yet there was a stronger part of her being that was trying to restrain the amount of food intake. She took about an hour to slurp up her meager bowl of



soup, but before she could finish it I interrupted. After watching her eat for an hour, I could not hold back my thoughts any longer. I knew that I had to be cautious and quiet when I spoke, though, or else my parents in the other room would hear us.

They held me accountable for my sister's anorexia because they felt I had influenced her. In no way did I ever intend for a debilitating disease, such as anorexia, to take hold of my sister. We had both been on diets before, but nothing ever this extreme. How was I to know when I started dieting, eight months before, that anything this horrible would happen? I originally started dieting in an effort to be a fashion model, but when they said I was not thin enough I lost control over my dieting.

Dieting soon became an obsession for me and my sister. It gave me a distorted sense of control that I had been craving for so long. She too had a dire need for control and direction in her life, so she wound up being a victim of anorexia too. It had taken over my soul and smuggled out any other enjoyment I had in life. It destroyed my personal life as well as my family life. My parents, in their efforts help us, had driven themselves almost to the point of madness, trying to restore both of us to normal. Or at least back to the way we were before anorexia had taken over our lives. But how could they help us if they did not even understand the actual mental complexities involved in anorexia? Neither my sister nor I had any comprehension of it.

"Suzanne, are you eating enough?" I whispered to her. From across the table she threw me a menacing glance to let me know I had invaded her private territory.

As an innocent child of eight, I had yet to discover the meaning of my mother's statement.

"What are you talking about?" she hissed back, "I've been eating a lot."

"No, you haven't," I quickly retorted. "You just spent an hour eating a bowl of soup for dinner."

With a slight desire for revenge, she cut back, "Well, what about you?"

As I looked down at a meager salad I had picked at for an hour, I realized that . . . wait, this wasn't about me. She was the one who had the weight problem; I was getting better.

"This isn't about me," I quickly replied. At that moment my heart sank as I realized my mother might have heard us arguing. I had tried my hardest to keep down the volume, but after my sister's biting remark I was unable to resist the urge to raise my voice. For a split second, the room was silent, and I thought we had gotten away with it. For that moment in time I could almost hear the sound of my heartbeat. "Da dum, da. . ."

My rhythmic heartbeat was quickly shattered by my mother's voice. It was too late. I realized my mother had indeed heard us, and there was nothing that I could do to prevent what happened next. Just as I had realized my mother's sudden attentiveness to our conversation, so had my sister.

She took about an hour to slurp up her meager bowl of soup but before she could finish it I interrupted.

“Suzanne, how much have you been eating lately? What do you weigh?” she demanded of my sister. My sister sat like a dog with her tail between her legs. She didn’t feel bad because she had lapsed back into anorexia, but rather that she had been caught. A deafening silence covered the room like a blanket, smothering us all, as my mom and I waited for an answer.

Finally, Suzanne muttered a weak reply that seemed to crackle through her thin pale lips. “I don’t know.”

“Get on that scale now!” my mother screamed. Her voice broke the silence. I sat staring at my sister’s bowl of soup, thinking to myself, “Darn it, what have I done.” I felt bad for her, but worse for myself. I knew that my parents held me responsible for my sister’s anorexia. If any punishment were bestowed upon her, then the penalty for my influence on her poor decision would be twice the price. My mother dragged my sister into the bathroom. I sat in anticipation of the results. Seconds seem to last for hours. My mother emerged from the bathroom yanking Suzanne out by the arm.

I saw her lifeless little head look up as tears swelled in her eyes and she mumbled, “I’m sorry.”

I’m not sure if I’ve ever seen such a mixture of fear and anger on my mother’s face. “Suzanne, go eat something now! Go to your room, Jessica, and don’t talk to your sister anymore. You have destroyed this family, you’re

hardly ever home, you don’t participate in family chores, you’re messy, demanding of others, and you’re evil . . . evil!”

A number of emotions surged through my body. There was no way to communicate my feelings of anger, sadness, hopelessness, and guilt, so I remained silent. I stood paralyzed with fear, waiting in anticipation for what my mother would do next. She had threatened me before, but I had no idea what she was capable of. I knew I had pushed her past the limit this time, just one step before the edge of sanity.

In no way was I prepared for her next few statements. “I am tired of this childish behavior. You are no longer my child, you are now an adult. Furthermore, if you screw up one more time you are out of this house!”

The words seemed to pierce right through my heart. Like a beast beaten into submission, I had given up rather than defend myself. I did not feel that it was fair that she held me accountable for my sister’s anorexia. At that point, though, my fear of being thrown out of the house was more prominent than my desire for justice. I felt trapped because I had nowhere else to go. I had lost touch with all of my friends when I became lost in my own problems of anorexia and depression. Since I didn’t know what else to do, I went to my room. My mother’s menacing eyes followed me the whole way there.

Once I shut my door, all of my emotions flowed out in a gushing stream of

“This isn’t about me,” I quickly replied. At that moment my heart sank as I realized my mother might have heard us arguing

tears. To whom I cried, I was not sure. When I was a child, I cried for my mother. Things were different now because I was not a child anymore; I was an adult of eighteen. Maybe God was listening, or maybe not. At that moment, however, I was in such despair I needed anyone or anything, so I assumed He was. All of a sudden, I had lost my will to live, but I did not want to die either. My tears stopped when I realized the horror of living another day. I was existing in that moment of time solely as a physical being, devoid of emotion or feeling. I stared into space, trying to separate myself from my physical being but to no avail. I remained in my room—trapped. At no other moment in my life have I felt more alone or more scared than I was that night. I went to lie on my bed and stared at the ceiling until my eyes burned with the fire of despair. At least despair was an emotion, and it enabled me to feel human once more. I began to cry again, but this time my tears were silent because I realized no one was listening.

I awoke the next day, hoping that maybe my memories were an awful nightmare. But with the taste of stale salt in my mouth, I knew that I had been crying all night. That day was probably one of the worst days of my life. Like a wounded soldier trudging through enemy territory, I searched for some sense of hope. The next day after school, just when I thought I was going to break down into a mass of tears and hysteria, my boyfriend appeared. He was there to comfort me. Perhaps it was his love that prevented me from suicide that day. I am not quite sure, but whatever he did, it enabled me to make it home that night and face my family again. Things were very tense at first, but eventually the hysteria and yelling that had come to be commonplace in my home tapered off.

As days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months, this event was slowly forgotten. Or at least it was never mentioned again. A certain part of me seemed to die that night. My sister finally came out of her anorexia, but something changed between all of us. I can not quite put my finger on it, but there's a certain glaze over her eyes whenever I talk to her. It is as though she can hear me, but she's not really listening. As for my relationship with my mother, I am not quite sure how it changed, but it seems a brick wall came between us.

Sometimes, when I think back to that memory of us lounging on that lazy summer day in Mississippi, I wonder how she could foresee this happening to us in the future. As a child, I did not understand what she meant when she said that there would come a point in my life when I ceased to love her. I understand now what she meant, because on that night I actually stopped loving her. What I will probably never understand, though, is how she knew that someday our special bond would be broken. I highly doubt our relationship will return to its previous state. I once again love my mother, but it is a different form of love than it was before. My love for her is a sense of understanding and respect. I also know now that there may also come times in my life when I will stop loving her because my hate will be more prominent. Unfortunately, the love I have for her will never again be the same mix of adoration and trust that I once had, because I am no longer a child. I will also never be able to say these words again: "I'll always love you, Mommy."

I stood paralyzed with
fear, waiting in
anticipation for what
my mother would do
next.

A Dishonest Society

~by Jasmine Poscablo

Jasmine Poscablo is a student of life at Delta College. Her hobbies include, but are not limited to, reading, drawing and writing. She is currently on a quest for enlightenment and other like-minded individuals.

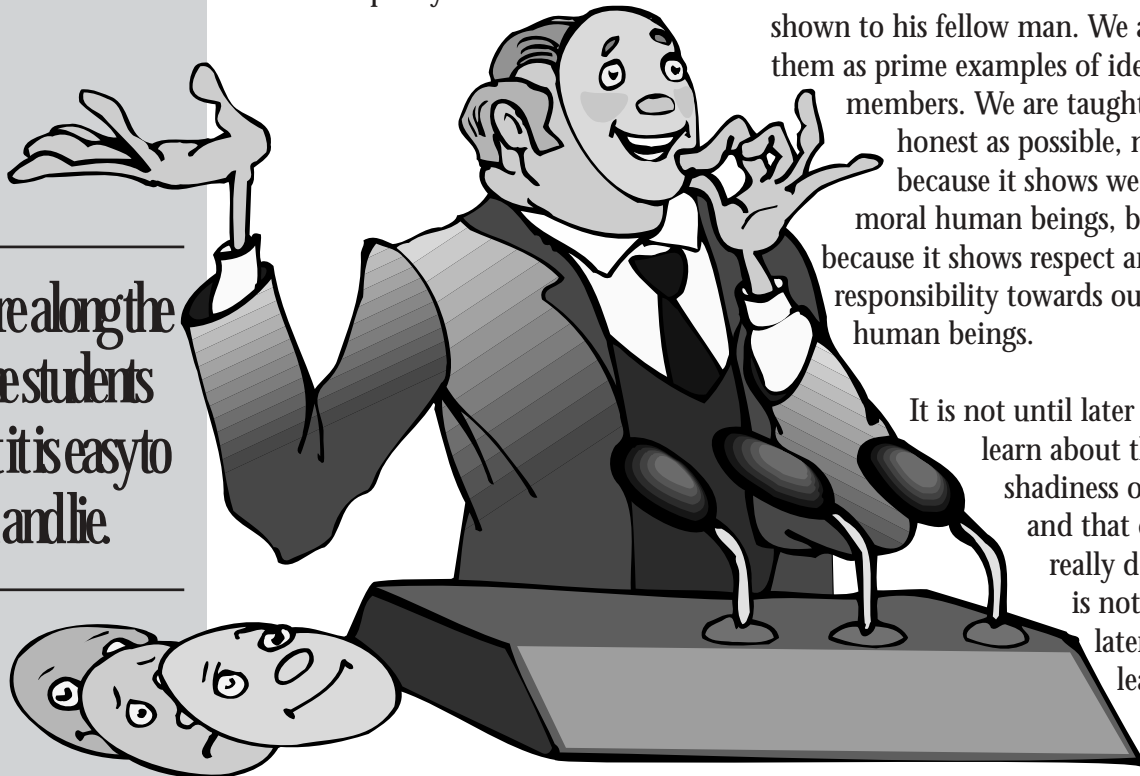
It does not seem as if anyone is to be trusted these days. Students, politicians, and Americans in general seem to be more and more dishonest. There is a growing awareness of corrupt business dealings throughout the country. Supervisors are spying on their employees by reading their private email. Neighborhood watch committees are being set up in already seemingly safe neighborhoods.

In grade school we are taught "Honesty is the best policy" and "Cheaters never

win and winners never cheat." Even so, somewhere along the way some students learn that it is easy to cheat and lie. Perhaps cheating is easier than studying; it's certainly less time consuming. We also learn of the divine honesty of our forefathers, the men on whom this country was built upon. Stories are taught of George Washington, how he "could not tell a lie" to his father when he allegedly cut down the cherry tree. There is also Abraham Lincoln who earned the name "Honest Abe" due to the consistent honesty shown to his fellow man. We are to use them as prime examples of ideal society members. We are taught to be as honest as possible, not only because it shows we are moral human beings, but also because it shows respect and responsibility towards our fellow human beings.

It is not until later that we learn about the shadiness of politics and that cheaters really do win. It is not until later that we learn

somewhere along the way some students learn that it is easy to cheat and lie.



**It is not until later that we learn
about the shadiness of politics
and that cheaters really do win**

Washington's story was just a fabrication. So maybe if cheating and dishonesty worked so well for others it could work for us as well. Perhaps honesty isn't always the best policy. After all, shouldn't the best policy get you what you want? We all know what happened to good ol' Honest Abe.

Parents are the most influential teachers in a child's life; children shadow each function down to the last mannerism. As children we do things we probably should not, like draw on the walls, hide our sibling's favorite toy, or pick the neighbor's flowers. Somewhere, perhaps by hearing our parents tell a white lie to a bill collector on the phone or a parent's broken promise filled with good intentions, children learn to lie. Maybe this works once or twice, long enough for a young mind to continue down this road. Children learn to lie to avoid something they don't want or to get something they do want.

What most children want is to make their parents proud. What most parents

want is for their children to succeed in life; hence the pressure to get good grades as a foundation for that successful life. So some children, driven by good intentions, cheat their way through a major test, perhaps, because they just don't feel like putting all that effort into actually studying. Perhaps the pressure to do well is so great that the student does not even want to take the chance at failure, which may even mean a "C+". When it comes down to it the payoff seems worth the risk. Soon enough it becomes a habit and it gets so easy that students even share their cheat sheets with friends. Their parents and teachers are happy with the good grades so it seems everyone has gotten what they wanted.

John Gotti once said, "You only lie if you're scared and I ain't scared of no man." America is a country that gave birth to companies like Enron and Worldcom, where lawyers are paid to find a way to cheat the law — and to Bill Clinton, who is famous for cheating, and George W. Bush, who mysteriously made it through Yale; let's face it he's not the brightest crayon in the box. I can only imagine what kind of pressure a wealthy politician's son may have to do well in school and follow in his father's footsteps. I am beginning to wonder if this is a society breeding anything but "scared" people.

**So some children, driven by good intentions, cheat their way through
a major test, perhaps, because they just don't feel like putting all that
effort into actually studying**

**After all, shouldn't the
best policy get you what
you want?**

America's Not Heaven, But it's the Closest Thing on Earth!!

~by Anonymous

*The author of this essay
wishes to remain anonymous.*

Somalia is on the easternmost tip of the African continent, a few degrees above the equatorial line. By February of 1992 the United States and the world had seen enough bloodshed in this country and had, some say reluctantly, decided to act. I was part of a U. S. Marine Corps detachment assigned to the United Nations. We were being sent to bring peace to this little sliver of inhumanity and to stop the death of the "innocents," if there ever was such a group. We were there to stymie the flow of blood created by the feuding factions. When we first arrived we were cheered and welcomed with open arms and applause by citizens of the country. That would all quickly change. I have no way of knowing what the powers that be were thinking when they sent us, America's sons and daughters, over there to that God-forsaken place. Perhaps the people in the United Nations thought that they could finally get one right. They had screwed up everywhere else thus far: Beirut, the Congo, and Iraq in the post-Gulf War times. We were told this time would be different, so they sent us in. I remember my friends and I sitting in the worst place we had ever been, wondering how long before the cheering and applause would be replaced by bullets and bloodshed. We would not have to wait too long to find out.

The climate was crippling to us. The very air we were breathing was thick and acrid. The humidity made us feel as though we had just stepped out of the sauna, or that someone was standing over us with a hose continuously dowsing us with water. A few weeks earlier we had been enjoying ourselves without a care in the world, a bunch of young Marines enjoying the tropic-like breeze on the beaches of San Diego. Now we were in this indescribable place.

If you've ever seen the movie Saving Private Ryan with Tom Hanks or Mad Max with Mel Gibson, you'll have a basis to form a mental picture of what I'm about to describe. If you have never seen a realistic war movie, then try to imagine a city in total anarchy. There are no laws or rules whatsoever. People kill one another for a spoonful of food. Parents sell their kids for a few dollars. As with any war or conflict, the very young and the very old or ill always pay a disproportionate price. This place was no different. The emaciated, starved bodies of the elderly and young littered the streets. A pickup truck from the United Nations went around town picking up bodies twice a day: nine in the morning and four in the afternoon. The driver did his job rather unceremoniously. With as much emotion and thought as you or I would

I remember my friends and I sitting in the worst place we had ever been, wondering how long before the cheering and applause would be replaced by bullets and bloodshed

put into taking out the trash or flushing the toilet, the driver would grab the bodies and throw them into the bed of the truck. The driver could grab most of the bodies with one hand. They were so light. He would grab the kids, infants or babies by an arm or a leg; sometimes the driver would just grab a handful of hair and with a flick of his wrist the bodies would go sailing in the air. I remember the bodies landing in a heap in the bed of the truck. When they started to cone at the top, the driver would grab a rake or shovel and level off the mound. Human beings had no value here, dead or alive. Any semblance of order, civility, or humanity was long gone.

Try to imagine your worst nightmares of how uncaring and uncompassionate mankind can sometimes be to one another. When you have this mental picture painted vividly in your mind, realize you haven't even come close to this reality. The strong and the powerful, without remorse, devour the weak, sometimes for their own gain and sometimes out of sheer boredom — for nothing more than their own amusement. There is nothing else for them to do, these thugs with guns, many of whom are no older than fourteen or fifteen, so they torment the weak.

Every building and street, every corner and alley was torn apart by this civil war. Not one building remained wholly intact or untouched. The pavement in the streets had been dug up, and the water pipes ripped out from the ground. It was impossible to make a phone call because the telephone wires had been ripped down off of the phone poles; eventually the telephone poles themselves even disappeared. The fixtures, windows, doors, furnishings and even the carpeting and baseboards had been removed from virtually every building we walked into. Anything that was, or possibly could be, of any value had been taken away. This

was the worst destruction I had ever seen in my life, even more devastating and destructive than the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. This is how I remember Somalia. It was a living nightmare. For some I'm sure it still is.

It was about noontime, and we were trudging through the streets of Mogadishu on yet another fruitless and time-consuming "sweep" of the city's ghettos. We all had to wear our flak jackets, vest-type contraptions that are worn in the same fashion as a normal shirt. The flak jacket fastens in the front with a long Velcro strap that runs down the middle of the chest. The vest weighs about 35 pounds and is painted military camouflage green. There we were in the middle of the desert, sand and dust and mud huts all around us, and we were totally dressed in green. It was par for the course. On this patrol Sergeant Washington was on point. Usually, I would have been, but since this was new territory for us and we didn't quite have our routine down, patrol Sergeant Washington took point, guiding us through the maze of the ghetto.

Sergeant Washington and I had both served in the Gulf War and took part in the battle of Khafji. I was older than he was, but he was my superior. He earned his position as well as my respect; we worked very well together. We knew each other's body language and moods. It was like we could almost read each other's minds. There were seven other Marines in our unit, nine in all. It might seem like a small element given our location and mission, but we were well trained, motivated, battle-tested, and ready. Most of the weight on our backs was comprised of Claymore mines, grenades, ammunition for our rifles and a host of other goodies. It was late February, 1992. My perception of why we were here and what I thought of these people and this place was about to change.

People killing one
another for a spoonful
of food. Parents selling
their kids for a few
dollars.

Any semblance of
order, civility or
humanity was long
gone.

The ghetto we were patrolling was about three hundred meters behind a former five star hotel, the Al-Sahafi. We were about a quarter mile from the nearest American unit, which was patrolling on a parallel course to our northeast. The ghetto was the most unimaginable and unbelievable living environment I had ever seen. No running water or toilets. People relieved themselves in cans or buckets; sometimes they did their business right where they stood. We were walking in human waste, nothing less than an open sewer, and the smell was indescribable. There was no electricity, which meant no refrigeration of any kind. That didn't matter much because no one had any food. Everybody was starving to death. The average shelter was nothing more than cardboard and tin siding slapped together haphazardly with bailing wire or rolls and rolls of tape. I recall thinking that the poorest in America would be millionaires here.

As we were walking, a fight broke out between two Somali men. They were about sixty feet in front of us. One man looked fifty years old. He was wearing a torn and frayed white dress shirt that had huge butterfly collars, lime green corduroy pants, and tennis shoes. His shirt was buttoned all the way to the top. The second man seemed to be about twenty years old. He had on a white Nike T-shirt with a silhouette of Michael Jordan in mid-air, just about to dunk a basketball. He was wearing a pair of red slacks and brown sandals. Something about the situation put me on edge: it just didn't seem right. I couldn't quite figure out what it was.

Sergeant Washington was in the front; I was directly behind him, and the rest of the patrol was behind me. Corporal Kruger was in the back. Corporal Kruger was new to the unit, so I didn't

know him well. He was also a Gulf war veteran and had seen some action in Kuwait. He was a big strapping jock-type from Nebraska, the kind of guy you just knew played football. He had no neck, and his arms were the size of an average man's thighs. An intimidating looking fellow in jeans and a T-shirt, let alone in full combat gear with grenades tied to his body.

I was on the radio trying to relay our current position and situation to our sister unit a few hundred meters away. I looked back at Corporal Kruger and the rest of my unit and realized we were in trouble. The reason I had that uneasy, gnawing feeling about the fight in front of us became frighteningly clear. The two men seemed to be fighting but were really not. There was no bloodshed, no telltale signs of a struggle, no angry crowd gathered around the two, taking sides and cheering on a favorite. The two Somali men were putting on a show. They were trying to draw us in and set us up; they had succeeded. We had walked straight into an ambush.

Try to imagine a huge "V" shape that is about 75 yards long from end to end. We had walked in from the open end and were about three-quarters of the way through. This is what's described in the military as the "fatal funnel." Anyone caught in the position we were currently in would usually suffer fatal results. The "V" shape creates a situation similar to that of a bottleneck, and it's probably one of the best ambush techniques known. It is simple to do and hard to detect. If we were to get pinned down, it would be extremely difficult for us to fight our way out.

As I turned back towards Sergeant Washington, I could tell that he also had just realized we were walking into an ambush. He had turned his head to

look back at me, and I could see it in his eyes and body language. At that instant, the wall of the hut in front of us was ripped to shreds by machine gun fire. Someone on the inside had let loose with a large burst and the bullets had torn apart the wall. Simultaneously, we yelled “Ambush” and dropped down flat on our bellies. The other seven Marines did the same, and we all were rolling around in human waste. Corporal Kruger was facing the direction we had just come from. He was trying to prevent some Somali gunmen from taking up positions against us.

In a situation like this everything slows down and speeds up at the same time. Everyone reacts without thinking or being told. It’s reflex. Whole sentences or even paragraphs of communication are reduced to one or two words and a gesture or body posture. “Ammo,” “Como,” “Rear Flank,” phrases that probably mean nothing to the uninitiated mean everything to those who know and have been tested.

So there we were, nine Marines, all of us covered in human feces, urine, and mud. Bullets were flying at us from every direction, and we were returning fire in every direction. I remember thinking, “Why are we here trying to help these people?” This wasn’t Vietnam. We had the support and backing of the American people, the United Nations and the world. We were the good guys patrolling this ghetto to keep its inhabitants safe from the armed thugs who had been terrorizing this country. The same hoodlums who had pillaged, raped and destroyed this city and the whole country were now being helped by their former “victims.” The people we were trying to protect had turned on us and were trying to kill us. I was getting mad.

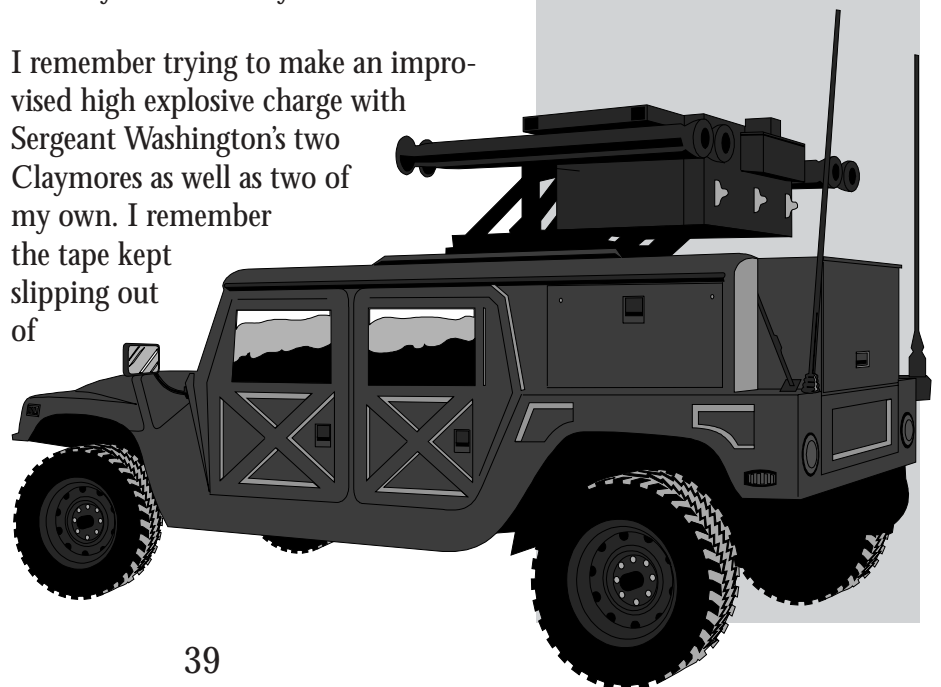
Sergeant Washington grabbed my arm and yelled in my ear, “We gotta move now or we are dead!” I looked back at Corporal Kruger’s position and saw four other Marines helping him. I also saw something that made me freeze for a few seconds. The Somalis shooting at us were not men but boys — eight, nine or ten years old maximum. Sure, there were men in the crowd, but most of the shooters looked no older than twelve. There were even a few women. All told I estimated a crowd of about one hundred people to our rear and about thirty to our front. We were badly outnumbered.

Over the radio I heard that our sister unit was on the way, helicopters were in the air heading towards us, and fighter jets had been scrambled to come help us. I yelled at Sergeant Washington, “Give me your two Claymores!”

Sergeant Washington and the two remaining Marines were firing off rounds as fast as they could pull the trigger on their rifles. The smell of cordite and gunpowder was in the air. Sometimes when I take a deep breath I still have a sense of the intoxicating feeling I got from the combination of cordite, human feces, and fear. It is a memory burned in my mind.

I remember trying to make an improvised high explosive charge with Sergeant Washington’s two Claymores as well as two of my own. I remember the tape kept slipping out of

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my hands as I was straining to wrap all four Claymores into one big bundle. I kept fumbling with the roll for what seemed like an eternity. The same way the drunken prom king fumbles with the zipper on the dress of the prom queen: nervous and anxious and excited all at the same time. If I could only make my device work. When I finally got it situated the way I wanted, I ended up with what looked like four VCR tapes stacked together.

Each Claymore has the equivalent of about two sticks of dynamite and over 900 bullets. Each bullet is just a bit smaller than a marble. I had just created an explosive device with a total combined power of over eight sticks of dynamite and more than 3600 bullets in a single punch. All I had to do was get it close enough to the crowd.

I sloshed through the mud and the muck to where Sergeant Washington was positioned. He and the other two Marines with him were putting out an enormous amount of firepower. I yelled at him, "Watch the bouncing ball!" while holding up my little creation, and then handed him the detonator.

The crowd at Corporal Kruger's end was being held off, but just barely. They were my greatest concern. As I stood up and started running towards them, I heard Sergeant Washington's booming voice yell, "Covering fire!" He was trying to give me some protection.

I ran about ten or fifteen yards and threw my "baby" into the air with all my might. It landed with a thud and flipped end over end a few times and stopped about thirty yards from the crowd. Close enough considering each Claymore had a front kill radius of about sixty-five yards. As soon as the Claymore stopped rolling, Sergeant Washington pressed the button on the detonator.

The sound was deafening. It was as if someone had tied my head to the engine of a 747 Jumbo Jet as it struggled to break the bonds of gravity on take-off. The shock wave knocked me on my back, and I almost dropped my rifle. I remember the crowd simply disappearing, as if they had been vaporized. At least half of them lay there dead.

It was like watching a movie where a real suspenseful part is played in slow motion. Every detail, no matter how small, is forever caught in my mind. I can still see the plastic covering of the Claymores flying through the air. I can see the projectiles, the bullets, as they fly in the air. I see the bodies being lifted up off the ground from the force of half a dozen bullets tearing into their flesh all at once: they look like rag dolls being tossed around. Some bodies drop to the ground like sacks of potatoes.

The rest of the people shooting at us stopped. They dropped their weapons and took off running in different directions with their hands in the air. This would be the strongest show of force the Marines would ever have to display while in Somalia. The Army did not learn this lesson, and you can watch their failure in the movie [Black Hawk Down](#).

The whole thing from start to finish lasted less than ninety seconds. I have no regrets or remorse for my actions or of those of my fellow Marines that afternoon. We did what we had to. We suffered two wounded Marines and killed fifty-eight enemy. We were able to come home and keep on living.

The lesson I learned during my time in Somalia was to be appreciative for what I have. I do not take it for granted. America's not heaven, but I think it's the closest thing on Earth.

THE BIG ROOT BEER FLOAT IN THE SKY

~by Becky Weeden

Walking down the all-white hall, holding my mother's hand, I smelled medicine, plastic containers, and bleach. I hated the smell of hospitals. A few people, mostly nurses and doctors, passed us. Was that my grandpa's doctor? Was that his nurse? Near the end of the long hall, my mom guided me into a room on the right side. As I looked up, I stopped in my tracks. I couldn't believe what I saw. Grandpa was lying there, on the hospital bed, with tubes coming out from everywhere. Each tube was attached to a different bag of fluid, on a different pole. The poles surrounded him.

Grandpa's face was sunken, pale, and a little bruised. He had lost weight. Already a thin man, he looked ghostly, like he was just barely there. My eyes started to sting. I didn't know it was this serious, but just then, when I saw him for myself, I knew it wasn't good. Grandma was sitting on his right side, holding his hand. She had been crying. Her eyes were puffy, and a pile of used Kleenex was on the nightstand.

He stirred, and then opened his eyes a tiny bit. He opened his eyes wider.

"My glasses, Beulah."

He knew we were there. Grandma adjusted the wide-framed glasses onto his head. Still, I stood in the same spot. He turned his head to the right, and looked in my eyes. I gripped my mom's hand tighter. I heard her whimper, fighting to hold back tears. Grandpa smiled meekly, and motioned for me to come to him.

"It's okay." Mom gently pushed me towards him. Slowly at first, but then at a run, I crossed the room and grabbed his left hand. His large hand was so light, even my small fingers seemed too much pressure to put on it. He had turned his head to face me.

"Are you going to be okay? I'll make you a root beer float, to feel better," I whispered.

"Everything's going to be okay. And I'll take a rain check on that float."

Even standing a foot away, I could barely hear him.

"Grandma, can I get you something...?" Mom started to talk so that she wouldn't start to cry. She blinked quickly, blew her nose on a tissue from her purse.

I said nothing for a while. I sat there by my grandpa's side, gently stroking his hand (carefully avoiding the needles that were taped under his skin), and silently praying. Please, God, make him better. I'll be a good girl. I'll give you my favorite purple blanket, and my favorite stuffed puppy dog, Daniel. Please just make him be okay. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Grandpa's breathing had slowed even more. Mom had stepped outside, into the hall. She was talking to a tall, older man with a white coat. This must be the doctor; he'll make Grandpa feel better. But he looked so sad. He put his hand on my mom's shoulder.

Becky Weeden was born and raised in Lodi, California, and was always taught how important family is, especially one's elders.

“The cancer has spread to his brain; there’s nothing else we can do.”

Cancer? What was cancer? I didn’t understand. Mom came back in the room, crying ever so slightly, and dabbing her nose with another tissue. She looked up at me, and the look in her eyes told me that cancer was a death sentence. I squeezed my eyes shut, and suddenly reopened them. That’s all right, I prayed. I had already made a deal with God. Nothing could happen now. The doctor was wrong. Why couldn’t Mom see that?

“I need you to go wait outside, Becca.”

“Okay. I love you, Grandpa, and don’t worry.” I jumped up on the bed and hugged him tightly. A good hug would help him. I hopped down, and walked out of the room. Everything was going to be all right; I knew that now. Just wait, he’ll want that root beer float in no time.

“Oh, Grandpa,” Mom whined, and then she began to sob — a heartbreaking, body-jerking type of sob, and it echoed in the near-empty hall. I was confused. Grandpa was going to be

fine. Why was she crying so hard? I peeked in the room. Mom had moved to where I had just been, sitting on his left side. She was holding his hand in between her own, next to her face. The tears that had covered her face made it shine in the light. She was shaking from head to toe. Grandma was standing, still on Grandpa’s right, stroking his matted hair. A red light had begun to flash on the machine next to his bed. Mom had seen it too. She started crying so hard that I couldn’t even hear her anymore.

“No, no, please no,” she blubbered. Grandpa wasn’t moving. His chest was still. He was gone. I started to shake. Tears of disbelief poured out of my eyes, down my cheeks and onto my sweater. This can’t happen. I made a deal! Weren’t my blanket and my puppy dog good enough? They were not.

Grandpa was not going to have even one last root beer float; he was not going to wake up; he was not coming back.

God’s answer to prayers is not always yes.



A Circus

~by Cary Farruggia

Farruggia family gatherings are like attending the Circus. A Circus comes through town only once a year. Every holiday, birthday, and reunion is an opportunity for a view of the Farruggia family circus. There is a Ring Leader, Magician, Lion Tamer, a pair of Acrobats, Clowns, Animals, and a Snack Vendor at our Circus. At first glance, it appears we are all calm and tame beasts. After a few minutes in the house, the family falls into their natural roles and the fun and excitement begin.

The Ring Leader of our family Circus is Matt, my husband. Happy or Grumpy, Matt's moods determine how the family behaves. When Matt is in a happy mood the family knows their role before the event begins. If by chance Matt is a little grumpy, the family takes a different role tiptoeing around on a high wire until he relaxes. Our Ring Leader is known for getting the party started and sparking the giggles from the kids. Matt directs the family in an orchestrated manner and makes the gathering flow smoothly.

My sister in law, Lisa, is the family magician. Somehow, she always has a bag of tricks up her sleeves to keep the children entertained. Lisa has an animated voice that carries through the house. Reactions are thrills and shrills, as tricks appear from her sleeves, which keep the noisiest audiences entertained. When our magician whips out a trick oohh's and Aww's can be heard from the crowd. Shockingly, Lisa's talents are

unlimited, allowing the rest of the family to continue with their roles.

Next in line we find the family lion tamer, juggler, and head clown, otherwise known as Grandpa Chuck. Chuck has many talents and plays a dominant role. One minute he tames the grandchildren, the next he juggles a story. Grandpa always has a few gifts hidden up his sleeve to spoil the wildest of beasts. Grandpa has special identities like the chicken man, fish lips, and the wild bronco. Without Grandpa, there would be no show.

Children fall into the acrobat, animal and clown categories. Running, jumping, climbing, and soaring, our children entertain all who watch. Fearlessly, the kids try new acts on our family each time they play. Sometimes they are cranky beasts resembling lions and tigers. Then they can be entertaining, dancing and singing like poodles. Beware as naptime or bedtime inch closer, miniature monkeys begin jumping from the furniture. Mimicking Grandpa Chuck, the head clown, our kids can be heard giggling and screaming as they try to repeat his funny tricks.

Then there is the captive audience. Friends and family that come to experience a Farruggia family gathering are always entertained. Sometimes they hold special roles and other visits they sit back and watch. Waiting for what will happen next can be quiet enter-

Cary Farruggia is a married mother of three children. She is recently returning to school after serving in the Navy. This is her second semester attending Delta College.

taining and with this group of people no one will be let down. Unexpected surprises pop out at every gathering

Supporting roles, are acts I perform the best. My best supporting role is as the snack vendor. When needed I am a contortionist. If somebody is not satisfied I can bend any direction to please. Janitorial duties are always my responsibility. Running around the house, I pick up toys, food, and messes the family finds themselves in.

Unlike a “real” circus, popcorn, peanuts, and cotton candy are not usually found here. Depending on the event, I supply traditional meals and untraditional snacks. Traditional meals include Italian dishes: Linguine and Baby Clams, Ox Tails, Ravioli, and

Linguica. Untraditional snacks are Blue’s Clues treats, Graham crackers, goldfish crackers, Tang (nicknamed “monkey juice” in our house). Occasionally, you will find circus treats for special occasions like birthday parties. Snow cones are the favorite summertime treat, and hot buttery popcorn will be eaten all year long.

A circus is not a traditional term used to describe family functions. Somehow I find the term applies to the Farruggia family gatherings. Holidays, birthdays, and reunions are sure to be entertaining. If people sit still long enough they too will find a part in the Farruggia family circus. Come one, come all, to our home where you will feel like you are under the “big top” every time.

