

Acadiana Writing Project 2006 Summer Institute Anthology

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THREE POEMS AND A FLASH FICTION
Toby Daspit

Shades of Katrina
(for Sheryl St. Germain)

for nearly one sluggish year
this city has been
melting, disappearing –

i honestly haven't known
what to say, to write
about absence –

about that stubborn blues,
slow, deliberate
rising from decay –

sticking to every
swollen eye that's
dared to blink.

From Spider Rock to Portland

i bet when you look at this postcard of
 these towering, sandy fingers
 nestled safely amid cliffs and tunneled valleys
reaching for the infinite blue sky

you see the hands of a Creator
 gently scooping primordial clay
 molding and painting the fanciest
damned sculpture ever –

and i know you'll smile
 throw a glance toward the
 misty Pacific coast
think of hurricanes

remember
 that i still
 believe they are just wind and rain.

*After the First Son, There Is No Other
(for Dylan Thomas)*

i really don't think
 he understands
 a thing about boxing

but every Saturday night
 he watches, HBO etching
 memories never handed down.

*Lawyers, Cigarettes, and Spare Change
(for Warren Zevon)*

Z. sat alone at his usual corner of the bar, fidgeting more than usual with the sweating, half-empty pint mug in front of him. Two cigarettes, smoked down to the filter, were snubbed out, the last one still smoldering. His nervous dark eyes darted between the amber beer, the ashtray, the open writing journal, the bartender's slow curves, and the side door.

"You still love her, don't you?" some voice rattled deep inside Z., sort of like the way spare change echoes when clinked onto the bar at the end of the evening. He thought about the only night he and the bartender, her eyes like gravity, spent together, fumbling with each other in the front seat of her car like spastic adolescents.

Then Z. thought about the lawyer, how her red hair always seemed to sweep her alabaster shoulders and her eyes, cobalt blue. He actually remembered the exact moment he first saw her walk into the bar, time frozen on the pages of his journal: "*1-9-06 Your red hair flowing through this bar is something I never calculated.*" Z. also recalled advice ignored, given by more than one acquaintance, and even his own mother – "lawyers don't have souls."

Z. smiled at the bartender, tapped his fingers over the empty glass signaling the need for another round, scribbled in his journal: "*You're no lawyer, but you're still soulless.*"

In My Heart

Adrienne Dominique

Among the formal gardens
Across many alleys
Of pine
Of oak
Above sacred ground
Beyond wooden galleries
With old rockers and chairs
For a graceful young girl
Amid pure white dresses
With double-heart ring
In hand
In procession
Following an alley of oaks
Beside family and friends
Considering education
Through the years
In goals
In criteria
Of the Sacred Heart
Becoming an independent woman

The Picture

Adrienne Dominique

Who is she Popa?
We don't know her-
She is not your little girl-
Her eyes are like almonds, not like yours, big and round-
I want to know her-
Ask her to come here.
The Ocean divides us with no way for her to cross.
Tell me more- I want to know everything about her.
There are no stories I can tell, Popa would say.
Stories are there-
But they are an ocean away.

(The picture was of my grand father and a little Japanese girl, when he was stationed in Japan, as a Marine, in WWII)

Magnolia Wilts

Adrienne Dominique

Swollen with tears were all eyes

A wonderful life disappearing

My lips had no comforting words or lies

Like watching sap tapped from a maple

So was this ever so slow agony

At the moment savoring thoughts and memories

A deliberate gesture as the end was here

As our feet sluggish to walk away

A guilty feeling of relief swept the blues away

Knowing she will soon be with him

No pain-no worries- only luxurious peace

Ode to Chocolate

Chocolate is sweet
Sinful
Tastefully tempting

Chocolate comes in many forms
Solid
With nuts
In caramel

Chocolate is desired
Lusted for
Fought over
Given up

Chocolate evokes smiles
Laughter
Happiness

Chocolate is sought after
Pushed away
Coveted
And Shared

Oh Chocolate
You addiction
You craving

I desire you
Darn Chocolate.

Margarita Farrell

My Husband's Arms

The sunlight peeped from behind the clouds as the pigeons perched along the electrical lines. I stared across the porch of my two-story Acadian style home at my husband standing in the front yard. His strong hands gripped his coffee mug as he quietly soaked in the beauty of our landscape. Eventually he caught my eye as I stared at him and the silent language between us told an intimate story. I felt so close to him, so safe. All my fears melted away as he walked toward me with a reassuring smile that all was well. The animals in the yard stopped moving and everything seemed insignificant for that brief moment. My heart began to pound in anticipation of his touch. He wrapped his big strong arms around me and held me close. I felt my body fall limp in his arms. It was such a form-fitting place. I realized I could make it; I was not alone.

Margarita Farrell

Silence

Silence is an empty room.

Silence is a bad marriage.

Silence is the rising of the sun.

Silence is the voice of the unborn.

Silence is the language of loneliness.

Silence is a grave yard.

Silence is a monastery.

Silence is a bobcat stalking his prey.

Silence is the eye of a storm.

Silence is golden...

I think not.

Silence is what we make of it.

Margarita Farrell

Mom's Baby

On a dreary day in September 1972, the year I began high school, I recall my mother having a hysterectomy. She had suffered for years with terrible cramps that made her bedridden at least twice a month. I really hated seeing her in pain. I was only 14 years old, the only girl and the baby. This meant that I needed to help Mom when she was not feeling well. Normally, my Mom would take care of everything around the house. I was spoiled to say the least. The surgery was supposed to fix it all for my Mom. Ever since I was a toddler, I can

remember being afraid of losing my Mom. The idea of a surgery and the even remote chance that Mom would die was terrifying. I remember the fear I agonized as my Daddy and I waited for the surgery to be over. After the surgery in the tiny country hospital in Church Point, my aunt, who was a surgery nurse, came to get my Dad and I to see Mom. They were concerned because they were unable to wake her up. I stood paralyzed by my Mom's bed as I watched doctors, nurses and my Dad try to wake her up. I was thinking how horrible it would be to lose my Mom. All of a sudden, I screamed, "Mom, please wake up!" Almost instantly she began blinking her eyes and squirming in her bed. Her eyes popped open and I gave her a big hug. At that moment, I broke down and cried. Mom stroked my hair and comforted me like Mom always had done. I was safe again and all was well...at least for that moment in time. Later, she told me that she could hear voices, but she did not want to wake up. Hearing my voice made her respond because it was a desperate cry for help. After all, I was her baby.

Margarita Farrell

Winding Staircase of Previous Life

My teaching career is like winding staircases going in many directions, but it is challenging, rewarding and exciting. I am helping children, who need their potential painted. The students are learning to read for enjoyment and pleasure. Being able to read has helped them make many steps through struggles and joys. The stairs have given vision and purpose to their lives. The stairs that I was inspired to take were pedagogical.

Mrs. Verret, a teacher who taught me in the fourth grade at Natchez Elementary, made a big impression on me. There was a boy name Michael Braxton in our class, his mother was deceased and he lived with his father. In the early 1970's when I was in school, it was culturally acceptable for parents to discipline their children as they saw fit. The repressed father hit Michael in the eye with a belt buckle. Michael came to school with his eye swollen as big a rock on the side of the road. He remained silent until the teacher asked him what happened. He said, "My father hit me with a long brown belt that he took from his work pants." Michael came to school with his eye like that several days until Mrs. Verret took him to the doctor. Mrs. Verret, a short Caucasian lady with brown hair and a heart of gold, took him to the doctor until the eye was well. When the steps in a person's life seem to be winding down the wrong staircase, God sends the right person to help them climb back to the top of the stairs. God allowed me to witness this event as a fourth grader. This event has made me strong and appreciative. I was inspired to be a teacher who makes a difference in the lives of students. A person's unfavorable childhood can help him go up the stairs or down the stairs of life.

Sandra M. Hutson

Dreams Live Long

Please keep your dreams from dying inside of you
Hope is a must to keep dreams alive
Let your dreams stretch inside of you
Dream big, Dream Long
Dream daily, Dream yearly
Dream right, not wrong
Dream inward and outward
Most of all just dream
Dream about good not bad
Dream forward not backward
Heaven is done so dream earthly

Sandra M. Hutson
You Do Death Well

You do death well,
You tell me

Even though death hurts

You still have life,
And or living

Be blessed in spite of how you feel

The empty spot will not be filled

Only God can touch this spot in your heart

It will be filled eternally

Sandra M. Hutson

The Kaleidoscope of Life
Linda Landry

Life twists and turns like images in a kaleidoscope.
Where does it start?
Where does it end?
Or does it?
Is it like a kaleidoscope with no beginning or end?
Just ever changing.

Has fate brought me here
To learn how to set the words
And thoughts in my mind free like the butterflies?
I feel like I was born with a passion to write,
But I was never quiet sure what to do with it.
It was trapped in a cocoon.

Writing helped me get through life.
Journal after journal, page after page
As I sought peace in the stressful moments of my life.
I wrote about every moment of hope and despair-
Almost losing one daughter to drowning and the other to the world,
My dad's death, divorce, on and on filling volumes of personal journals.

How can I now use my writing-
Learn from it, help others learn from it,
To have the passion for writing that I have?
Can I free my writing from the cocoon?
Oh, to let it become the butterfly that is free to fly
And move in the kaleidoscope of life.

Carrie- My Granny

One of my greatest teachers was my grandmother, Carrie Mae Moss. Granny looked like the typical grandmother of her time. Her thinning gray hair was twisted into a small round bun on the top of her head. She had a hair piece, a larger bun done in a fancy twist, that she wore for special occasions. A pair of spectacles perched on her nose. Granny was short and round with rather large bosoms (Granny's term for her breast). I thought it was strange that she never learned to drive a car. I used to giggle at the thought of her behind the wheel; I was sure she just wouldn't fit.

There were a few people who called her Mrs. Carrie, but to most everyone she was Granny. I remember long games of Yahoo and Canasta- adult games that Granny taught us at a very young age. My sister and I would sit for hours and play with her, but the main things I learned from my grandmother can't be taught in books or in a class. She taught us to respect others and to live by the Golden Rule, and she modeled it daily in her own life.

If ever a perfect woman existed, it had to be Granny. I never remember hearing her gossip, raise her voice, or speak in anger. This was quite impressive because she lived with us off and on for the first ten years of my life.

I remember her gently correcting me once when I was about eight or nine. In the heat of an argument with my sister, I called her a bitch. My grandmother told me quickly, "Young ladies do not talk that way!" The embarrassment of realizing what I had said in front of her was punishment enough. I felt like I had cursed in front of the preacher.

Granny made such an impression on my life that I named my first child after her, Cary. I changed the spelling because there could never be another Carrie in our family, but I hoped to pass on to her just a little of what my grandmother gave to me.

According to Cary, I have achieved that goal. In a Mother's Day letter she wrote, "You are honest, you focus on the positive and beautiful in life, you are not judgmental, you are just like Mamaw....."

Granny died when Cary was six, but she lives on through my mom, through me, and through my daughters-she keeps on teaching.

Linda Landry

From the kitchen of Linda Landry
The Love of Cooking

Start with a young girl eager to learn from her mother and grandmother.
Add a dash of holiday meals with her sister and sister-in-law.
Blend two daughters who shared her love for cooking.
Pour in a desire to please and gain acceptance.
Beat with a little bit of hyper activeness.
Season with a little spice of creativeness.
Mix with a soul mate who is also an adventurous cook.
Simmer with care for friends in times of happiness and hurt.
Sauté' with praise and a feeling of accomplishment.
Fold in techniques from Emeril and Rachael Ray.
Stir with a challenge to keep it healthy.
Bake with love while you enjoy your company.
Serve with total satisfaction.
Clean up so you can be ready to do it all again.

From the kitchen of Linda Landry

☺☺☺

Taco Soup

2 lbs. Ground meat
1 onion chopped
1 bell pepper chopped -I usually substitute a package of season blend .
2 cans Jalapeno pinto beans
2 cans stewed tomatoes (diced or chopped)
1 can whole kernel corn
1 can Rotel
2 cups water
2 pkgs. Taco seasoning mix
1 pkg. Ranch style dressing mix

Brown meat, onion, bell peppers and then drain fat.
Mix remaining ingredients (include all liquid from the cans).
Simmer for awhile.
Serve with chips and cheese. (Sharp cheese is my favorite.)

What Makes a House a Home?

One month from today I will be without a house. Five years ago, I owned two houses. It has really made me think about the importance of a house.

In thirty days, I will sign away the last of my single life when I sell my house- my home for the last two years- a home I picked out and bought on my own.

My friends call it the Dollhouse- quaint, small, Acadian style, with a big front porch. I had it decorated just for me, even hired a professional. I wanted everything to look just right.

Six months after my husband left, I sold the house that my two daughters had been raised in and moved almost 400 miles away. My youngest daughter, Valerie, and I moved into an apartment for the first three years of my single life. The apartment was a wonderful transition- no big yard or pool to keep up. I could let someone else do the work.

As Valerie approached graduation, I had the desire to have a place of my own again. The Dollhouse was the perfect place- not too much for me to keep up on my own, but I could enjoy more of the outdoors. I moved in the week Valerie graduated. She spent the summer with her dad and went to college in the fall, so the Dollhouse was mine and mine alone.

I should be sad to give it up. Oh, I'll miss it, but I'm building a new house.

I got married seven months ago. Darren and I are building an Acadian style house

on four acres of land. I will have a front and back porch. There are lots of windows that look out over our pond and our little cabin.

The cabin is a story in itself. Darren and I built it before we were married. I

wasn't ready then to commit to a permanent home with him. I needed time. Time to

be single after twenty three years of married life. Time to find out who I was and what I wanted out of life, and yes time to be selfish. I wanted it to be just me for a while. My rationale was- if I built a small house, I would only have a small commitment. Of course that never works in a relationship. For five months Darren and I parted. It was over---finished. I wouldn't commit to him and three young children, and he couldn't wait.

Only when I lost him was I able to find myself. What I realized --in my attempts to put ME first-- is that it is not about ME. It never was. That's why I was able to live contentedly for an extra ten years in a marriage that I knew wasn't going to make it. Then, it had been about what was right for my

daughters, and that had been enough.

Because of my faith, I knew I would survive with or without Darren, but thanks

to God and Hurricane Rita, we were brought back together again. Darren had called to check on me twice during the storm. My feelings about him had never changed, but I had. I knew that if I met the right man again, I could make it work no matter what. I realized that I was still on his mind also. I knew he was trying to go on with his life, but he had called to check on me twice. After much prayer and thought, I decided to call and let him know that I still loved him and would love to be his wife and a mother to his children. This time I was ready to commit. Now, it was about a man that I loved with all my heart and soul, and I knew that he loved me just as much. It was about my daughters who had already nicknamed Darren-Pappa D. It was about three children whose lives I

knew I could influence in a positive way. Two months later, we were married.

As I build this new house, even though I do want it to be nice, homey, and well

decorated, I realize it really doesn't matter what kind of countertops or light fixtures we have, or if there are enough electrical outlets. Those material things won't make it any better than the 40 year old house I live in now. What will matter is how I treat the people in that house, how I spend my time there, how I share it with family and friends, and how I make it a home.

Linda Landry

I Just Don't Get It

I showed you.
I told you.
I modeled it all-
From brainstorm to publish,
Now it's your turn
To run with the ball.

What?
What's that you say?
How do you start?
What do you do?
You just don't get it.
You don't understand.
Please, Mrs. Landry,
Please say it again?

I want to scream-
Pull out my hair.
How could they not get it?
My directions were so clear.
Oh no, what now?
Do I throw in the towel?
Do I scratch the whole project
And try something new?
What, oh what, am I going to do?

Wait! Look over there!
Hannah and Blake,
Who'd been quietly talking,
Have half a page written
No fussing or balking.
That's it! Work in pairs!
Let the kids share:
Their ideas, their frustrations
What's working, what's not.
Grouped with a partner
They can accomplish a lot.

Linda Landry

Giacomo's Grembuile

"I'm not wearing it," James announced, concentrating on tying his beaten-up, month-old Nikes. Glancing through a waterfall of golden hair he was neither outraged nor angry. Just firm and matter-of-fact. His six-year-old mind made a stand against this tiny change in his once-again upside down universe. No friends, cousins, aunts, uncles...again. His dog was in Texas. The marble and glass house was a spooky echoing maze. TMNT were not even ninjas, but hero turtles- and they spoke Italian. Pizza wasn't real pizza and there were no McDonald's. Today, another school, the fourth so far.

Not surprised at his resistance to the grembuile, I didn't push this one. After all, he had already learned his *Ah, Bay, Chays*, could count to *cento* and knew that the language had no Js- his name was Giacomo. And like James, I was also weary of adapting to strange new worlds. Kota Kinabalu, Manila, Tunis- now Ravenna- in less than two years. I sympathized with the ficus plants I had destroyed in my designing youth and wondered if I too would dry up with this transplant.

No, I would not initiate a grembuile conflict this morning. Even though the San Vincenzo grembuile wasn't that bad, it was a dress. And James was all boy – a Texan boy at that. Granted, it was a sober black dress with a narrow white collar, not a puffy Madeline-style white or the public school blue check. And true, beneath the cassock, James could keep his Dennis the Menace look- he'd really just be a faux Italian schoolboy. Good arguments in favor of conformity, catalogued and saved. But not worth this first day of school confrontation. Just in case he changed his mind about the uniform during the walk to school, I stuffed it in the baby's stroller. And just in case he didn't, I worked on a pidgin excuse for why he was not in uniform

It was a ten minute walk to Scuola San Vincenzo. For the first time, we lived in a city where walking around was not only possible, but necessary. James raced his brother's stroller down Monte Adamello. At the intersection, the wall surrounding Theodoric's tomb inspired a Mario-in-the-dungeon simulation. Hopping off the wall, he ran his new pencils along the iron gate surrounding Dante's Tomb.

On the other side of the tomb were a piazza and the school. Early morning sunlight filtered through the columns of the surrounding buildings and churches. In the middle of the piazza, hundreds of pigeons purred and groomed. I pulled out some crackers and gave them to James. At first, the pigeons avoided the freckled American boy who tried to chase and capture them. He studied the Italian schoolchildren children who petted and spoke to the birds as if they were pets. Determined, James put down his stick and rocks and sat patiently with the crumbs. Soon, two pigeons are feeding from his hand. They rested and cooed on his arm, showing no signs of leaving.

Close by, priestly clad boys and girls began trickling into the old stone school. "I guess I'll wear it now," he said, noting several boys racing for the door. I helped him into the dress and buttoned it up the back. For the first time, I noticed the front. In place of monogrammed initials or a polo figure was a small green and orange license plate. We smiled, recognizing the word "Texas"

embroidered on the Italian uniform. I felt the transplant begin to root when we walked to his classroom and I heard his brave, "Sono Giacomo."

Anna Marquardt

-from Sarah and Sybil

Leaning on his cane, Lenny plopped in his regular, partially hidden bench under the oak next to the monkey bars. Legs astride, he reached inside his coat and scratched contentedly. He fanned his red face with his greasy hunting cap. As the few scraggly hairs on top of his head dried and unplastered, Lenny carefully scanned the ladies loitering around the swings.

One arm draped over the bench, Lenny reached the other deep inside his coat pocket and fondled its contents. His fingers stroked the irregular surface of the wallet. Alligator, no - crocodile skin. Smiling at an attractive blond with shapely hips, he slipped his fingers inside the leather and counted the bills. There were ten. The probability that all ten were hundreds was slim, yet Louie loved a good fantasy. Possibly they were all ones, but he felt pretty good about the croc skin and figured at least one or two had to be twenties. Lenny swallowed, succumbing to fantasies of Jack Daniels burning his throat.

Distracted by his whiskey fantasy, Lenny didn't notice Viola sit down. She clutched her vinyl lunch bag tightly against her right hip. They grunted a greeting and sat in silence for a few minutes. "Is it already 3:00?" Louie asked. Viola ignored the request, studying the edge of the park, where the trees grew thicker and the trails kept secrets. A freckled boy in St. Anne's khakis and polo peered in her direction nervously and disappeared down a shaded path. Viola paused, then gave Louie a farewell nod. She tightened her grip on the lunch bag and began to head for the shaded park edge. She stopped suddenly. Louie froze too.

Simultaneously, Lenny and Viola were paralyzed by instant fear and embarrassment. Each was sure of exposure. Lenny searched desperately for a cop or the well-dressed owner of the wallet in his pocket. Twitching with paranoia and poised to make a break, Viola checked the playground moms, trying to decide who the undercover narc was. The strange feelings of being caught dissipated almost as instantly- leaving Lenny and Viola disoriented by the momentary fear. The park was only inhabited by moms with youngsters, one or two junior high school kids taking a shortcut home, and a caftan-clad girl with messy hair and an antique camera.

Puzzled, Sarah studied the two carelessly dressed, ordinary looking people she had just shot. She knew that when developed, the man's skin and eyeballs would have a yellowish discoloration and his fingers would appear long and spidery with suction cup tips. The woman would be wrinkled, with a black smudged nose and small trickles of blood dripping from the hand clutching the lunch bag. Sarah refastened a chopstick in her unraveling bun and ran her fingers along her coin and mimosa seed necklace, analyzing her camera adjustments. She glanced at the couple on the bench for a moment and then focused on the children climbing the jungle jim. Inside her camera, their cheeks were even rosier, their eyes sparklier, and their limbs sturdier and more graceful.

Sarah trained her camera back to where the strange couple were seated on the bench, but they had left.

Anna Marquardt

Silence

With thickened waist and thinning hair,
After long ago first steps and first haircuts
After forgotten training wheels and driving practice
Without shaving tips and car talks and wrestling matches
Without campouts, ballgames, birthdays, graduations,
And other noisy, messy milestones
Because of meetings and cocktails and other important stuff
After the waitress, after the secretary, after the corner office,

In the garage, room for parking now
Through the garden, plodding,
Without wonder at how it grew
Through the back door, shuffling
Without anticipation or anxiety
About dinner plans or report cards
Before 6:00 (p.m.) (now)

Through the kitchen- Strange
Without garlic or vanilla smells now
Across the den, sterile-clean and silent like a good hotel
Silent now - The silence
Beyond haircuts, shaving, driving, campouts, ballgames, birthdays,
Silence
Beyond graduations, waitresses, secretaries, or corner offices-
Silence
Beyond gardens, dinners, and report cards
Sterile-clean
Hotel room silence

Anna Marquardt

By Boat

I will see it by boat
Not by tour bus
Not with a group of Americans
Clad in Nikes and Astro's caps
Canon and traveler check armed.

My boat will be small and spare
An old Greek with wiry gray hair,
Sun-weathered and rivuleted skin
Will gouge for the lease of his fleet
Because I am an American
Who wants to see Greece by boat.

I will sail from island to island
Over the brilliant Aegean
Sometimes just soaking up the
Craggy white cliffs at a distance
Over the sapphire water
Sometimes docking with
Other sailors and fishermen.

I'll walk the ancient streets
In my salty sailor clothes
And get lost in the neighborhoods.
I'll watch the dark-eyed children
 laugh and play futbol
As their mothers sweep doorsteps
 and sing.
The men will gossip and gamble at
 outdoor café tables
And I will sit and order Ouzo.
I'll eat moussaka and olives and
 spinnaka
And drink the inky coffee with
 grounds in the cup
At cafes where they probably don't
 wash
The dishes or their hands very often.

Beside the ruins
I will sit all day. I'll watch
The Parthenon against the
Changing backdrop of rose,
Cerulean and glittering black
And I will float in the
Millions of skies that have
Come and gone as the
Graceful stones watched
Permanent as the hills around them.

I'll see it by boat with Jeff
Because he is a good sailor
And sometimes good company
And when we see it
He won't talk about oil or the
 Democrats
Because we are finally seeing Greece
And the densely blue Aegean, the
 cliffs,
The centuries old geometry,
 laughing neighborhoods,
Moussaka, Ouzo, and the skies
 Will only really
 Live when seen by boat.

Anna Marquardt

Eagerly Seeking

Rumblings of thunder – distant, faint
Soft raindrops dance silently on the grass
Dry grass stretching its thirsty tongue
Eagerly seeking relief

Quietly rocking, covered in a blanket of stillness
Faithfulness sits at my feet
Trembling, fearful of the harmless thunder
Waiting to be rescued from needless fears
Eagerly seeking relief

Soft gentle rain
Soft gentle strokes of assurance
Soft brown fur covers quivering skin
Soft trusting eyes, thankful for comfort
Eagerly seeking relief

Thunder fades, rain replenishes
Like a glass of iced tea on a hot summer day
Rest, quiet and peaceful, returns
Relief
Eagerly sought
Gently found

Lynn McElroy

The Old Singer

She sits alone now, quiet and still. Passing her daily, I casually notice how she silently fills the space in my seldom-used foyer. I fondly recount the space she once filled along the wall of my grandmother's bedroom, nestled beneath the window that overlooked the wooded area just beyond my grandfather's perfectly manicured lawn.

Oh, if she could talk, what would the old Singer reveal? Those tales would go way back – back to the difficult days after the Depression. Back to the days when my grandparents were young, raising five children – four boys and one girl, my mother. There would be the story of the traveling salesman who saw a need and willingly trusted a stranger. There would be tales of a young mother sewing

clothes for her family from old flour sacks. There would be tales of siblings fighting, of children playing, of family gatherings. Perhaps there would be the story of how the imprint of an old iron came to be a permanent part of the surface of the old Singer's cabinet. Did the young mother stop to tend to a child's cry? Was it a boiling pot that needed tending? Did a neighbor come calling?

As a child, I loved to visit my grandmother. She never said it, but I always knew – I was her favorite. A writer herself, she loved to share stories with me about days gone by. I can still remember staying up long past my bedtime watching TV with my grandmother, then crawling into one of the twin beds in her room. How perfect – one for her, one for me. I thought, at the time, she must have planned it that way. When the room was dark and all was quiet, her stories would begin. My grandmother would talk for hours until I drifted off to sleep, many times never hearing the ending of those stories.

Something in me was captivated by the story of how she came to be the proud owner of the old Singer sewing machine. It was back in the Thirties, and times were hard. My grandparents lived in the country with their five young children. My grandfather found work wherever he could, while my grandmother took care of things at home – the children, the chores, the garden, the cow, the chickens.

One day a traveling salesman stopped by trying to sell my grandmother a fancy new sewing machine. With five little children to clothe, she surely needed that machine. But there was no money for such a luxury. Just feeding her family was a challenge in itself. I can picture my petite grandmother seeing that machine for the first time. Her big blue eyes must have gazed longingly, knowing she had no way to pay for such a fancy gadget. How kind and trusting the old salesman must have been, for he left that day – his load one sewing machine lighter. He had insisted that my grandmother keep the machine and pay for it a little along. And pay for it she did! She gathered and sold eggs from her chickens, saving all of the money to pay for her new sewing machine.

Years later, with the Depression far behind them and the children raised, my grandparents' lives grew easier. They eventually retired to a comfortable home along the Amite River where my grandfather could fish anytime he wanted.

Now, my grandmother had an eye for nice things. Over the years she collected a house full of exquisite antiques, expensive jewelry, and a full-length fur coat. But the one thing she never replaced was the old Singer sewing machine. I can still see her sitting at that machine, her right hand pulling the wheel to get things started, her tiny foot on the pedal pumping steadily, as she stitched with such ease and perfection. And I can still feel the excitement and see the twinkle in her eyes as she created dress after dress for me on that old Singer.

Then one day the dreaded call came. My grandmother had quietly passed on. She was sleeping in that same twin bed when she died. The old Singer, still sitting under the window, was forever quieted. As the days passed and greed overcame grief, many hands were there to claim those expensive antiques and jewels. When finally asked what I would like to have, no thought was needed. My answer was clear. If I couldn't have my grandmother, then I wanted something that was dear to her. I wanted the old Singer.

So the old Singer now lives with me. Some days, when I am especially lonely for my grandmother, I sit quietly at the old sewing machine opening her drawers and gently caressing her contents – the old thimbles my grandmother wore, the colorful collections of threads and buttons, even the pin cushion she wore on her wrist. The old Singer may be quiet now, but my grandmother's love and the memories she gave me will forever dance softly through my mind and fill my soul with peace.

Lynn McElroy

'Til death do we part, they vowed that day
As they promised to love, cherish, obey
Blinded by love, did they understand
Would they walk through life hand in hand

She in white lace, he handsome and tall
Soon blessed with a boy, tiny and small
A few years passed, add boy number two
Then a girl arrived as their family grew

A lifetime they've spent as husband and wife
Through the good times, and through the strife
Raising their children, watching them grow
Seven grandchildren to proudly show

Retirement was planned, travel and such
Yet never too far from each other's touch
But a twist of fate interrupted their dream
Why did this happen to me, she would scream

We've had fifty wonderful years, he said
I'll be right here, you have nothing to dread
Through good times and bad, we pledged long ago
And the good times outweigh the bad, you know

Parkinson's has taken her mind away
Breathing, alive, but with nothing to say
Each day now a chore, her eyes a blank stare
Still wrapped in her husband's devoted care

An example to all their love has been
Staying together right to the end
The words they spoke on their wedding day
Now silently showing others the way

'Til death do we part, they vowed that day
As they promised to love, cherish, obey
Still walking in love, they did understand
For they've walked through life hand in hand

Lynn McElroy

My heart felt as though it would break, break into a hundred pieces. There he was, tall and handsome, looking much older than his years. His whole life flashed before my eyes. How could this possibly be? Surely someone had made a mistake.

I watched in silence as he slowly got out of the car and started to walk away. "Drive off now!" my brain kept repeating, but my foot wasn't getting the message. "Don't look back!" my brain advised, but my eyes weren't listening either.

He appeared to be so sure of himself, so happy to be free, free from the rules and boundaries that had surrounded his young life. Still paralyzed with pain, I continued to watch quietly from my car. "He seems just fine!" my brain continued.

And then it happened. He looked back. Across his handsome face, I saw a look that was unexpected, a look that spoke of uncertainty and aloneness. I desperately fought the desire to jump out of my car and run to him. "What good would that do anyway? It would only prolong the inevitable!" my brain reasoned.

With every ounce of courage I could muster, I smiled a confident smile and waved. As I began to drive slowly away, my breaking heart gave way to the waiting tears. The drive home that afternoon was long and full of thought. In my heart, I knew he would be just fine. "After all, it's a rite of passage!" my brain reminded me.

Leaving my youngest son at college that afternoon was, as expected, an event filled with deep emotion. "You've raised him well!" my brain reassured me. Slowly my heart began to listen as memories of our years together flooded my mind. From first haircuts to first heartbreaks, the events that had shaped and molded this child of mine flashed before me like a silent movie on fast-forward. Then, frame by frame, I relived the scenes that had led us to this day. Before me I saw a loyal friend and brother, a responsible and hard-working student, an honest and loving son.

As I neared home, the sadness and fear began to fade into peaceful pride, motherly pride, for I knew in my heart that my son had grown into a young man who was now ready to face the world with courage and confidence. Pulling from the vast collection of tools he had gathered over the past eighteen years, he was now prepared and eager to build a life for himself. He could now function just fine without my interference.

Suddenly, I realized that this day was never meant to be an end but rather a day for beginnings. Yes, my role had changed, but I would still have a part in the play. "Adjust the focus and enjoy the show!" my brain concluded. Amazingly, this time my whole body listened. Smiling proudly through my tears, I pulled into the driveway and parked the car.

Lynn McElroy

Hero

Dad was a war hero, WWII that is. He got a purple heart and several other medals. These were encased with a folded US flag that he kept on a table by his chair. This all occurred long after the USS Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese torpedo. The ship, unbeknownst to all but a few aboard, had just delivered the first atomic bomb that almost ended that war. (They had to drop second one to convince the Japanese to surrender.)

Dad wasn't a hero because he did something great and wonderful. He was a hero because he endured 4 days and 5 nights in shark infested sea water with nothing to eat or drink. Just bob up and down in the water and hope.

He survived and went on with his life. In 1946 he met and married mom. Mom's first husband had died in WWII on the march into Paris. Dad, Mom, and Joyce, Mom's only child, moved to Goober Gulch, New Mexico and began their lives together. Kids started popping out in about an 18 month cycle. Lewis in 48. Raymond in 50. Me, the day after Christmas in 51. Paul in 53.

I guess life went on smoothly while I was still in grade school. I don't recall any real disruptions. Dad was a nonentity for most of my life. Little revolved around him. Mom took care of everything. Dad just sat in his chair and read. He would tell the occasional joke. Sometimes they were funny, and sometimes we got in trouble for repeating them.

Wine slowed everything down. Dad would take a drink of a cheap local wine, La Copita. He didn't drink every day, but every day he drank he got drunk, and

quickly. He would come in from the garage and sit in his chair and slowly show all of those signs of drunkenness. Mom would fuss at him and then cry and leave the room. We were all too young to understand it all, but the tension was vibrant, like an overstress guitar string.

When I was in the sixth grade Dad went quail hunting with some friend and family members. I do not know if wine was involved, but... At some point in the hunt Dad, shotgun in hand, got out of the back seat of the four wheel drive truck. He accidentally pulled the trigger and blew a massive hole through his left boot. In went through boot, flesh, bone and boot. The hospital side of this story I'll save for another time. He lost his big toe. Climbing power poles was going to be tough.

For all of my young life he had worked as a lineman for the Roosevelt County Electric Co-op. I think he got paid every Friday. Every Friday he would go over to Spear's grocery and pay the bill that Mom had charged during the past week. Every Friday he would bring home a bag full of penny candy. We weren't so happy as to see Dad home as we were to see the candy. One of my favorite childhood memories.

The reality was that he couldn't go back to that job. He couldn't climb anymore. He could barely walk. This wasn't like the medicine of today where they can work miracles. This was a brutal, honest miracle. To fill the massive hole done by the blast, Doctor Miller had to use Dad's big toe. He removed the bones, the skin and the toenail and then he bent that flesh back into the cavity and stitched it up.

As I said, Dad lost his job and started drinking more often. It was about the same time, I was in the 9th grade that I started drinking on the weekends. It must have been a "family tradition." Dad and I were lucky alcoholics. That may sound odd to you. What I mean to say is that when we drank we got drunk. Dad and I didn't imbibe much because we got drunk too easily and either passed out or puked our guts out. That was what saved me. All that shit didn't stay in my system too long.

Dad had a variety of part time jobs after that. Eventually Dad got a job at Borden's Peanut Company. He prospered some there. He started coming out of his shell, but he was still drinking on occasions. Any time he thought he could sneak it passed Mom, Dad would buy that cheap bottle of La Copita Tokay. I tried it a number of times and found it to be profoundly bad. I thought almost all alcohol tasted bad, except Wild Turkey 101.

One thing that would bring Dad's real self to the surface was his love of dominoes. Family friends and relations would come over to play or Mom and Dad would go there, sometimes taking us. I always marveled at how great he was at the game. I swear he was psychic. After just a few plays he seemed to know what was in every player's hand. It was even worse if I was his partner. He would play a domino and expect me to respond with right one. Boy, the scowl I would get if I got it wrong. I learned the game, but to a lesser degree than the rest of the family. I only played because it was fun to get a little closer to the man who fathered me.

If Dad wasn't working, reading, fishing or drinking, he had walked to the smoky pool hall a few blocks away over on Main Street in downtown Goober Gulch. I'm not sure if he wagered on games over there, but if he did it was a small amount. Dad was now nearing 70 and he was coming around, breaking out of whatever it was that had held him back all this time. Let me insert this little caveat here. I can't be too sure about any of these dates because...

On January 1, 1977 I quit drinking some time early in that morning. I had to go back to my job at the liquor store with a massive hangover and little sleep. I saw those alcoholics who came in every day and bought a pint or a quart, a six pack or a case. I resolved not to be like them. All these years later, 29, and I still have kept that promise. I haven't even been tempted to take a drink.

I moved down to Ruidoso shortly after that and began my career as a radio announcer. One day I got a call that Dad had been taken to the hospital with a heart attack. I drove the long miles to check on him at Roosevelt General Hospital. He looked bad but I could see the sparkle in his eyes. This sparkle was something that I had never seen before. I knew somewhere in my system that he was going to survive and kick that cheap wine habit he had nursed for decades.

And this is true; this is exactly what he did. He never drank or smoked after that event. Dad often hid the pint of Tokay that he had been sipping from in some small alcove in the garage. To this day there is still a small bottle of Tokay sitting dusty in that spot where he hid it. He could have taken it down and thrown in

away. He might have finished it off to be rid of it. No, he kept it on hand maybe as a reminder of how badly things had gone.

Two Make a Poem

It takes two people
To have a poem.
I strive to create,
To find the right words,
And I then wonder
If it really says
What I intended.
Each author has
An idea about the
Point to be made.
But
The reader lets us know
If the thoughts actually
Flowed from the author's
Pen onto the page,
And then the second
The third and
On and on.
Each reader adds
Thoughts and interpretations
And a poem is made.

Richard Reeves
June 29, 2006

Grandpa Ed Archer

Grandpa Ed Archer, long gone,
Could sense the events of coming days.
He could hear the Sun's ray shining
That would either please or burn
The grasses of his pastures
That were the bare
Sustenance for sheep
Though I forget what type.

Slowly he tried to get
Me to hear the change.
Sometimes I could hear the change
When I was alone,
Ed off in the fields.

Often he would come back and say
"I heard what you were hearing."
I was amazed.
I became deaf in one ear
But sometimes when I'm off by myself
I can hear the Sun's rays.

"Can you smell the winds?" he would ask.
I can smell the burning prairie grass.
"No! Smell if there's a coming storm."
He said in raspy wrinkled voice.
I never managed to smell the winds,
But sometime I get hints that I ignore
Until it's too late to remember.
Maybe I can a little.
"Yes, maybe you can."

"Feel the sheep and tell me what you feel."
I said that I feel the wool and thorns in the hairs
"No: What do those things tell you about the future?
Close your eyes and only feel.
What is in the future?"
Seldom did I feel the future in my life.
One time in a hug
I knew it was over as
Sincere promises were
Whispered in my ear.
I usually ignored them.
Ed, I should have felt that.
I'm sure he did.

"A" Name

By Richard Reeves

June 20, 2006

I made a decision a long time ago not to get involved with another woman whose first name ended in the letter "A." I know you're asking yourself how that could be a valid criteria. Just take my word for it. If you're a female whose first name ends in the letter "A" I apologize, but that's a curse on a relationship.

Now I have to admit that my first marriage ended tragically, divorce. Helen is her name, and the breakup was all her fault. I was a wonderful, supportive

husband who let her live her life as she deemed appropriate. It was great, for a while. But the rules that she set for me did not seem to apply to her.

After her, all I met and got involved with were girls and women whose first name ended in the letter "A." I guess I was cursed. And it took awhile to figure it out.

After writing and rewrite this piece, it dawned on me, Joana. I had forgotten all about her. Helen and I were in the divorce process, and I had gone back to college to get my masters and teaching certification. There, in one of my education classes was Joana. She was a nice sweet girl who caused me years of grief that she probably knows nothing about.

Joana was about 10 years younger than me, and that was the source of some troublesome moments for me. We were just friends, so there was no problem. Our major area of shared interest was in bicycling. We both had nice multi-speed bikes that we loved to go out and ride of the llano of the eastern part of the state. One thing led to another, and we began to date and do the things that people do when they are exploring their compatibility. We were very compatible, especially since the divorce had been finalized. I was still hoping for reconciliation, but that didn't seem likely. That doubt and lack of commitment on my part caused major difficulties between us.

She fell in love with me. She told me; I had known it for a while. If there had not been that shred of hope I would have ask Joana to marry me, but it was too soon, and I was a fool. She finished her certification a semester before me and moved to a small town about 120 miles south of me. She'd come up and see me every now and then and see if she could rekindle the relationship. No luck and lots of tears.

About 6 months later she called me and told me that she had met a man and was going to marry him. She told me all about him. He strangely reminded me of me. I congratulated her. That was not what she wanted to hear. The die was cast, and she went with it. She even invited me to the wedding. Like a fool, I went.

I know what I should have done, but I didn't. I went on with my moronic idea that Helen still wanted me. Joana, I made the mistake and now the "A" names are punishing me. I was cursed.

Angela was this warm and lovely woman. She had two nice kids she was devoted to. She was a hardworking woman who had supported her ex-husband and her children at the expense of finishing high school. Here I was with a master's degree in education. It was my fault the relationship broke up. She felt "intimidated by my intelligence."

Patricia was an artist living in the mountains of northern New Mexico. It was all wild and fun while it lasted. But she was an artist with a wild free spirit, and she wanted to roam. I was a high school English teacher. Boring! The "A" strikes again.

Next came Cynthia, Carolina, Agatha (she tricked me by going by her middle name of Gail), Marietta, Maria and several others. They all ended because there was something wrong with me in their eyes. It was certainly not my fault. I tried very hard to make these relationships all work.

My brother's lady friend (I never did figure out what the real relationship was between those two) Susan had someone she wanted me to meet. Pamela and Susan had been friends in Midland, Texas, and then later on lived in the same apartment in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

I became too attached too quickly, my eyes not registering the "A" at the end of her first name. It was pretty nice for quite awhile. Pamela and I drove to southern Indiana once to visit her parents. This felt like the real deal. But it wasn't. She began seeing her old boyfriend on her back, I meant to say on the side. Some how, that was my fault. All I got out of the deal was a Dear John phone call.

Oh well! I realize that all this must have been the result of the curse.

I tried to live a monkish life for a long time. That was until I met a wonderful woman who was to become my wife. It's not really important how we met at this point, but it is a good story. I'll tell you all about it at some other time. She's smart, wonderful and highly educated. I cannot imagine life without Yolanda.

Ode to My Running Shoes
Michelle Salts

Sacred footwear,
There when I need you,
There when I need an escape,
An out.

Sweet Adidas,
Carry me away from chocolate chip cookies
Baking in the oven.
Propel my feet past suburban houses
Decked, arrayed, lavished
In Christmas lights, in holiday glitter.

Move me through the December rain.
Navigate me around pothole lakes and gutters
Filled with slick, wet leaves.
Stay between the road and me.
Never let me feel the full force, the complete impact
Of asphalt on heel or concrete on toe.

Walk with me when my lungs grow weary and sweat exceeds
My clothing's ability to wick.
Walk with me then.
Stay with me as I traverse the loop, change directions, and head home again.

How Not to Make a Cherry Pie
Michelle Salts

Get out the cookbook; turn to the page—easy to spot because it's gunked over
with sugar and flour and attached to the page beside it.

Flip back and forth from the filling recipe to the crust recipe, mentally listing and
sorting the ingredients. There is some overlap, you'll notice—there always is.
There is flour for the filling, flour for the dough, flour for the dough board.

Measure, but don't measure too precisely—let the flour fill the measuring cup,
spill over, dust your hand, dust the cookbook, dust the floor. Feel yourself getting
sneezy, turn your head, rub your nose on the shoulder of your Georgetown 10k
t-shirt, ten years old, fading fast. Remember that you haven't been on a run in
over two weeks now.

Look for the dough board—the sacred cutting board large enough to roll out a 9
inch pie. Look in the cookie sheet cabinet. Check under the stove. Find it in the
sink, knife hatch marks and brisket stains marring its once smooth surface.

Decide to skip the dough board and reach for the wax paper. Decide to roll out the crust the old fashioned way, the way your mother used to do it, the way you used to do it before you ever thought of buying the dough board.

Start clearing the counter of breakfast dishes. Contemplate the sink full of last night's dinner dishes. Decide that you're not really in the mood for baking after all.

Close the cookbook. Leave it on the counter. Walk away.

This Day
Michelle Salts

*And this is the way, the way,
to face the day, this day,
a day like this, a day like this day.*

It is a day that begins with a tug on her sleeve, a gentle pull, a barely perceptible tug—hardly anything, really—but the next thing she knows...

Maybe it happens when she heads toward the kitchen for that first cup of coffee? Yes, maybe it happens then, but she doesn't notice, doesn't pay attention until she is standing in front of the sink raising a cup to her lips. She doesn't catch sight of the loose string on her sleeve, the unraveling thread, until the heat is almost touching her lips, until bitter liquid is poised on the inside brink of the cup, not quite spilling over, not yet on her tongue.

And this is the woman who is facing the day—this leaning woman, standing over her stainless steel sink studying the thread pattern of her sweater like it is tea leaves, studying the thread pattern of her sweater as if by looking hard enough or long enough, she can extrapolate or rewind or discover faint yarn trails, barely discernible but still visible, like jet trails, like white rainbows fading into morning sky on a day like this day.

Sundry Places
Michelle Salts

Stonehenge, from the side then rear window of Dennis's car—a glimpse only. Sunset. Silhouette. He doesn't even slow down, dismisses it as a pile of rocks, nothing of interest. We have places to go, places to be.

The Grand Canyon, holding tight to my little girl's arm then picking her up, enduring the wrath of her pounding fists because I can not, will not, let her hang over the railing, peer into the abyss.

Bartlett Avenue, the enclosed side porch, windows on three sides, a leaning floor, a floor pulling away from the house. Light from the sewing machine, strong enough to read by, not strong enough to give me away. Sprawled on the couch, I become the kind of girl who might, if the right circumstances present themselves, sit on the kitchen counter, put her feet in the kitchen sink, and write.

Church Street, behind Kathy Miller's shrubs, Lost in Space. I am Judy, unless it's Kathy's turn, then I am Penny. Sometimes we take our adventure to the old brick icehouse, dimly-lit, nothing but boxes in sight, and I flail my arms like a robot, crying, "danger, danger, danger," until Kathy, laughing, becomes Kathy once again and collapses onto to the cold concrete floor.

Lake Forest Drive, in my little girl's room, inside Monet's painting, lying in the bottom of the wooden boat, warmed by the old quilt. Water laps at us from all around, rocks us, lulls us, until, at last, we are airborne, floating through a sea of brushstroke tears in the blue and green night sky.

An Excerpt from-13 Dresses
Simone Simon

The dress was full and burnt orange with ripe yellow, almost brown, swirls spinning around that gave the illusion of a deep, dusky sky. Sunset. She wore it the day she saw him for the first time across the diner counter.

The dress was barely beige and beaded with tiny teardrop sequins that made a design, a design much like the rushing tide of the ocean. Elegant, very Jackie O she said to herself when she spotted it among the others hanging on the rack. She wore it to a New Year's Eve party. First class. The champagne tasted so sweet especially after such a bitter year.

The dress was a pool of chocolate with thick, wide stripes of aqua and lime slathered across it in a bold pattern, one overlapping the other. Little dark lines floated about. She wore it the day she helped him pack and kept her silent worries close to her heart.

She felt like Dorothy from the "Wizard of Oz" that day in a gingham dress the color of the sky and kitchen counter white. It was ok for housework she thought. As she hung the clothes on the line, she tried to ignore the sudden cramp. Blood. She didn't think the fall was that bad. She was wrong.

The dress was cream with a diamond pattern on it from top to bottom. In the delicate array of shapes, were tiny flowers of random colors...tan, teal, tangerine and green. She wore it the day they went to test drive cars and decided on a convertible because you only live once.

The dress was form fitting, slender and its color was the color of delicate eggshells. The flowers tumbling about were a shade slightly darker than celery, perfect for the occasion, an afternoon tea. She never was boastful, but she did think her pansies, snapdragons and petunias were the best in town. She was clasping an award that proved it.

The dress, petite and pure, was also pale blue with small red flowers trailing up and down the simple frock. That day, she helped her get dressed, packed her lunch, put her on the bus, smiled a reassuring smile, turned around, never looked back and wept.

For: RGS

I Saw Him Today
Simone Simon

Watermelon man, watermelon man.
Holds the fruit in his hand.

Delicate.
Juicy.
Sweet.
Red.

On this day he is falling asleep.
Or is he wide awake and I am the one who is sleeping?

Trench Coat or the Night I Knew I was a Woman
Simone Simon

Beneath the weight of his stare
Out of her reach or so she thought
In a bar-dark almost dismal
Beside the stools and stench
Over she thought-get over it
Under he thought-under her spell
Between them only a few words
Against the backdrop of fading youth
Among the discarded ruins

For: JPD

Time
Simone Simon

I arrived late in life
her life
there was a web
a web on her womb

she could no longer smell the orange blossoms

decidedly so
said the doctor
no more

a decade passed

a november day

accident?
miracle?

arrival
to strangers
stranger among them
a foreign object
a criminal

no place
no place for me
except her heart

join
can't
didn't arrive on time

he was not raised
he raised pigeons
he has wounds
the pigeons were slaughtered

he lived on streets
named for trees
a boy
became a man

a father

daddy daddy I love you
daddy daddy I accept you

daddy daddy heal
daddy daddy forget

forget the pain
of the birds
of your dissected biology

forget
free

them from their cage and
you from yours

For: CMS

After All
Simone Simon

I wish someone would have *taught* me about Georgia O'Keeffe's "Two Calla Lilies on Pink" or Van Gogh's "Starry Night."

I wish someone would have *read to* me about different cultures and types of people and *explained* that we are each unique some how in this great big world.

I wish someone would have *made me knowledgeable* about Martin Luther King Jr. and *suggested* that I not to base my opinions about people on their skin color.

I wish someone would have *read* poetry to me or *let* me listen to classical music.

I wish someone would have *told* me I can do anything, be anything if I put my mind to it, if I believe in myself.

I wish someone would have *noticed* I needed a hug instead of a scolding.

I wish someone would have *convinced* me to try new things, not to say "yuck" and to always use my manners.

I wish someone would have *showed* me the beauty of books and how they can be your friends.

I wish someone would have *said* that kindness is always better than cruelty and that uttering the words "I'm sorry" is not so bad.

I wish someone would *have taken the time* to see me.

So I do.

I do it for them.

I am a teacher after all.

1/2 pound thick sliced bacon
1 (10 ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed
1 (8 ounce) container sour cream
2 (9 inch) unbaked pie crusts
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, finely diced
1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, finely diced
2 cups finely diced smoked ham
8 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
8 ounces Cheddar cheese, shredded
4 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated
8 eggs
1 1/2 cups half-and-half cream
1 tablespoon dried parsley
salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Place bacon in a large, deep skillet. Cook over medium-high heat until evenly brown. Drain, crumble, and set aside. Cook spinach according to package instructions. Allow to cool, and then squeeze dry.

Heat olive oil in skillet over medium heat. Sauté onions until soft and translucent. Stir in mushrooms, and cook for 2 minutes, or until soft. Stir in ham and cooked bacon. Remove from heat.

In a large bowl, combine spinach, sour cream, salt and pepper. Divide, and spread into pie crusts. Layer with bacon mixture. Mix together Monterey Jack, Cheddar and Parmesan, and sprinkle over pies. Whisk together eggs, half-and-half and parsley. Season with salt and pepper, and pour over pies.

Place pies on baking sheet, and bake on middle shelf in preheated oven for 40 minutes. The top will be puffed and golden brown. Remove from oven, and let stand for 5 to 10 minutes.

Enjoy!

1 (1 pound) loaf French bread, cut diagonally in 1 inch slices
8 eggs
2 cups milk
1 1/2 cups half-and-half cream
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)
3/4 cup butter
1 1/3 cups brown sugar
3 tablespoons light corn syrup

Butter a 9x13 inch baking dish. Arrange the slices of bread in the bottom. In a large bowl, beat together eggs, milk, cream, vanilla (and cinnamon). Pour over bread slices, cover, and refrigerate overnight.

The next morning, preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). In a small saucepan, combine butter, brown sugar and corn syrup; heat until bubbling. Pour over bread and egg mixture.

Bake in preheated oven, uncovered until golden brown.

Enjoy!

Simone's Artichoke Appeaser

I combined two different recipes and created an original.
This is exactly what I did:

In a small tin, place 2 slices (torn in two) of Pepper Jack cheese, 1 slice of American cheese (also torn in two) and a few pinches (about the size of your of palm) from a bag of Parmesan cheese at the bottom. Then crack two eggs over a coffee cup and pour into tin. Next, sprinkle in a little bit of fresh chives and place about 5 artichoke hearts on top of the eggs. Add just a dash of Tony Chachere's seasoning and 2 tablespoons of whipping cream. Bake at 350 for 25 minutes.

Enjoy!

They see you jotting down words
on the restaurant napkin
plucked from the silver holder.

When asked, you respond,
"I'm a writer," and offer a
fledgling smile.

Trying to compose a poem,
I stumble around in the dark
searching for light.

Why is it then, that when asked,
I cannot say,
"I am a poet?"

Ann Tobola

Traditional Music

We tried to stifle the sound by cramming our pillows over our heads, but the noise managed to muffle through the down feathers. Karen, my oldest sister, rolled out of bed and stumbled into the closet determined to shut out the noise. In a few seconds, she was back and declared, "It's no use. The floor is vibrating!"

My dad loved Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass Band, and my Mom was infatuated with old blue eyes, Frank Sinatra. I grew up in a household of blaring brass and sultry singing.

My dad was fond of family traditions, and one of his favorites was to use Herb Albert's music as our weekend reveille. My sisters and I knew that when we heard the instrumental music of "The Magic Trumpet" playing at 6:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, it was the signal that my dad desired our presence for the dreaded "yard work." He expected us to get up, grab a bite to eat and join him outside. When we were all present, the task was explained, and we typically had to haul, dig, cut, chop or mow. My dad had four daughters, and he didn't see gender differences when it came to yard work.

Mom, well she was in love with Frank Sinatra and her nickname for him was "Frankie Baby." We groaned out loud when we heard his voice, because she had all his records and an unlimited supply of songs. We knew the words to most of his songs, and our favorite ones to mimic were "That's Life" and "Fly Me to The Moon." We couldn't help it. We heard Frankie Baby almost every day. We pleaded with her to play something else, but were equally afraid we would hear Dean Martin. When we came home from school and walked in the door, we could always tell when she and Frank had gotten together. She would sing little snippets from various songs and roll her dreamy eyes and pretend to swoon.

As a child, I hated the early morning sounds of the Tijuana Brass Band booming through the floor and intruding into my dreams. Now, I do the same thing with my own two children. Instead of blasting them out of bed with trumpets and trombones, I irritate them out of bed with classical music. Hunter calls from down the hall, "Mom, could you pleeeeeease turn that stuff off?" I walk into his bedroom and remind him, "You should be glad it's not Herb. I, at least, have a little sympathy!" He makes a gagging sound and stuffs his head under the pillow.

Just the other day I passed by my daughter's bedroom, and heard a familiar tempo. Knocking on the door, I waited for her teenage authorization to enter. Katherine granted her permission, and I opened the door and stuck my head into her room. "Is that Frank Sinatra?" I asked incredulously. She was busy and I was interrupting in her life. She said, "Yup. I like his music. He's good." End of conversation. Slowly, I closed the door. Leaning against the wall in the hallway I felt the vibration of Frank Sinatra as he belted out, "That's Life."

Ann Tobola

The Disappearance of Dexter Jones

I remember the dress I wore the day Dexter Jones ran away from school. Homemade, light, airy cotton, gold threads intertwined in the fabric. When the sunlight caught it just so, the dress twinkled. A white slip was worn underneath with a small lace hem.

Dexter did not want to be in kindergarten. He cried, all day, every day, for three straight months. He was only four and a half when he started kindergarten. He had chubby cheeks that looked like a storage place for acorns. His hair was still baby-soft fuzz and he had dimples on his hands rather than knuckles. He was young and he wanted Mama, not me. I was young and this was my first teaching job. After ninety days of Dexter, I wanted my Mama, too.

He entered the classroom crying, and he left at the end of the day, sniffing with red, watery eyes. Everything I did to try and make him happy failed. Carrying him around the room was the only thing that seemed to calm him. That worked, until I had to put him down, and the whimpering and the crying would start up again. Guilt set in when I felt like throttling him to stifle the incessant crying. He cried. I pulled out my hair.

It was an unusually warm day in November. My class finished lunch and walked back to class. Somewhere between the cafeteria and the classroom, Dexter disappeared. He was not in the classroom. He was not in the cafeteria. He was not in the bathroom. He was not at school. He was gone.

Dashing into the main office, I shouted that Dexter was missing and asked if we should notify the police. Mrs. Charlotte, who had blond hair that didn't move, was filing her fingernails. She looked up and told me that Dexter probably walked home. She instructed me to get his brother, Julian, out of the fifth grade class, and he would show me where they lived. She went back to her filing. Her hair never moved. Without stopping to think of her bizarre unconcern, I ran down the hall and burst into the fifth grade class. Heads snapped in my direction, and I told the teacher that I needed Julian for a few minutes. Julian ambled over to me, and I snatched his hand, hauled him through the door and dragged him down the hall. Rapidly, I told him that Dexter was missing and that he needed to show me where his family lived. Julian, grateful to be out of class, was not alarmed at the news of his missing brother. Instead, he asked if he could stay home once we found Dexter.

Before leaving the building, I made another appearance in the office and quickly told Mrs. Charlotte that Julian and I were going to look for Dexter. Chatting on the phone, she glanced in my direction and shooed me off using the fingernail file to wave good-bye. The phone was tucked up under her helmet hair. I yelled to her that someone was going to have to keep an eye on my children as I yanked Julian toward the front door.

Walking quickly down the side of the highway, the woosh from the passing cars plastered the bottom of my dress around my legs. Julian and I alternated between walking and jogging, and after five minutes, he pointed to a place off the road. We jumped over a ditch, deep and narrow, landing safely on the other side. A dog was barking and growling in the distance. Dust poofed from under our shoes, and we swiftly ran up the road to the trailer park. Julian pointed to a mobile home that had dingy, dented aluminum siding. The silver garbage can, missing a lid, was on its side. Three concrete steps, with no railing, led up to the front door. The door swung outward, and there stood Mr. Jones, wearing a white, sleeveless undershirt and black baggy pants. His bare feet poked out from under the extra long hem. Before I could say a word, he told me that he was about to call the school. I quickly asked him if Dexter was in the house. He said that Dexter had arrived about 15 minutes ago and he had just finished making Dexter a sandwich. I walked up the three concrete steps, passed Mr. Jones, and strode into the living room.

Dexter was perched in the middle of the orange vinyl couch, chomping on his peanut butter and jelly sandwich. A little spot of red jelly was stuck to his lower chin. In two quick steps, I was in front of him, and I dropped down on my knees. Meeting each other eye to eye, I told him that I was glad he was safe. He nodded and continued to chomp. I told him I was scared because I didn't know where he was. He took another bite. I reached over, took his sticky, half-eaten sandwich, gave it to his father and announced we would be returning to school. His dad nodded his head and said, "But I don't think he likes it much." I grabbed Dexter's left hand firmly in mine and told Julian to hold Dexter's other hand. As I walked past Mr. Jones, he took a bite out of Dexter's sandwich and told Dexter to stay in school. Dexter nodded and his lip quivered.

Walking back down the dusty path, I contemplated what to say to the little boy whose chubby, sweaty little hand, was held tightly in mine. No need to worry. Julian came to the rescue.

"Dexter, do you hear dat big dawg barking that lives in dat field? He could've bit you and kilt you dead." Dexter's eyes widened, and he fearfully nodded. Dexter glanced up at me. I scrunched up my eyebrows, tried to look grave, and solemnly nodded in agreement. I thought that was an appropriate reason for not running away from school. Julian was not finished.

We walked further until we came to the ditch. "Dexter, do you know dat a big snake lives in dat ditch? It has big long fangs and it could've bit you and kilt you dead." Dexter nodded, and the whites in his eyes became more visible. His hand gripped mine. A smile began to tug at the side of my mouth, but I quickly suppressed it. I realized a master teacher was at work.

Eventually, we came to the busy highway, and I happily waited for the fifth grade teacher to take over and spout off another lesson on the dangers of running away from school. I wasn't disappointed.

"Dexter, do you see all dem cahrs? If one of dem ran you over, it would have kilt you dead." Dexter's eyes bulged, his hand tightened in mine, and he vigorously nodded his head.

And then the coup de grace. "Dexter, you better be happy you is alive, boy." By that time, I had a little skip in my step, and I marveled as I listened to the nine year old master teacher speak the language of a four and a half year old

boy. Any fussing, scolding or preaching from me could not have surpassed a brother's concern for the welfare of his sibling.

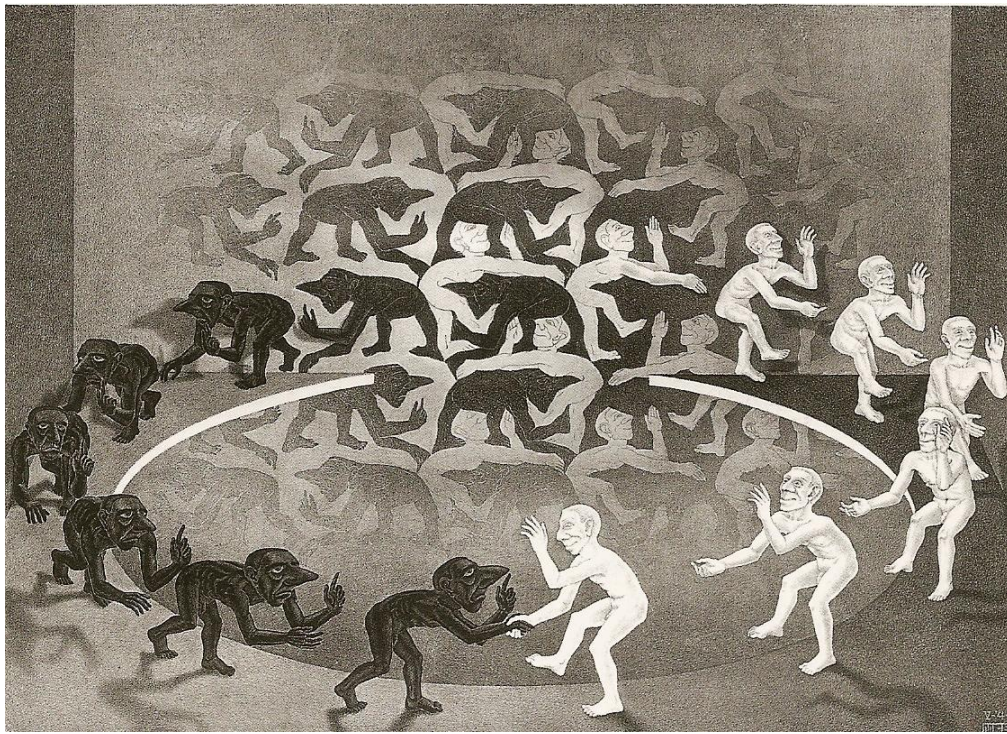
When we arrived back at school, Mrs. Charlotte greeted us with, "Oh, I see you found him. We won't have to call the po-leese after all." Dexter's eyes popped out a little further, and a look of terror appeared on his face. The "po-leese" were not considered a good thing in his neck of the woods.

The three of us, hands still interlocked, walked down the hall toward my class. Julian, Dexter, and I entered the room and the cranky librarian who had been asked to watch over my children stood up and placed *The Little Engine That Could* on the seat of the rocking chair. I thanked her for watching my children, and she sighed as she walked passed me on her way out the door.

Turning to Julian, I thanked him for his help and said he could go back to class. He turned, jumped up, and tapped the top of the doorframe. Landing on one foot, he twirled, waved at Dexter, and backpedaled out the door. I instructed Dexter to sit down on the carpet with the rest of his classmates. Instinctively, I stuck my head out the door to make sure that Julian had made it to his classroom. I didn't think he would skip out the front door; he was well versed in the dangers of the great outdoors. He was sauntering down the hall and stopped to glance at a bulletin board displaying student's work posted on faded construction paper frames. Finally, he wound up outside his classroom door. He glanced back and I waggled my fingers in his direction.

Sitting in the rocking chair now vacated by the tired librarian, I faced my class. Anxious voices bubbled out all at once. "Where was you?" "Where was Dexter?" "Why was Julian with you?" I wondered how to make Dexter's escapade into a meaningful experience. Patting my lap, I looked at Dexter and opened my arms. He crawled up and his fuzzy hair gently tickled my chin. I asked him if he would tell his classmates about what happened. He nodded his head and seriously said, "When you sees a cahr, snake, or dawg, you betta run because you be kilt dead." Needless to say, I was a tad startled by his summary. Looking into their upturned faces, everyone was nodding, completely understanding. He was speaking their language.

Ann Tobola



Lesson on Grey: a reflection

The three-ring circus. The black and white blend to become grey – no distinctions. But, this reminds me of Mr. Parker, a man full of distinctions, boundaries, blacks, and whites. He was so structured, so precise ... and I thrived in his classroom. Mechanical Drawing I, II, and III – a class only for pre-architecture students. I was the only girl bold enough to join the class.

There were no grey areas; there was right and wrong, and I was determined to always be right. I remember working on the biggest project of the year, soon to be shown to my parents. My finishing touch was the architectural lettering: Mestayer and Associates. I became so caught up in the moment, in the preciseness of the black, perfect, clean lettering on the pristine white board that I abbreviated Associates ASS! What a faux pas to make – the best student, the student with impeccable drawings, clean structured replicas of objects, and precise lettering had just written ASS on her project!

He chuckled! He actually chuckled and helped me change the second S into a C. The black and white became grey, and it was okay.

So, today I still function in a black and white world, but when my black and white run together and become grey, it's just a circus after all!

Colleen Mestayer Tharp

Happily Ever After

When I was young

I chased fireflies and watched flying squirrels.

When I was young

I made Mama check under the bed for boogie men
before I could get to sleep.

When I was young

I climbed the rope swing faster than my brothers,
and they were all older than me.

When I was young

I believed in fairies and love and happily ever after.

Now that I'm a mama

I check and double check the doors.
I sing made-up songs and weave fairy tales.
I whisper sweet nothings in my children's ears.
And I still believe in happily ever after.

Colleen Mestayer Tharp

Me

I caught a glimpse of me last night
From the mirror we call life.

Sparkling eyes where sullen used to be
Seeking interaction, engaging me so.
I thought I'd lost her long ago,
But last night she came back to me.
The door that once was closed and locked was slowly creaking open.
The struggle gone, the relationship secure:
Mother and daughter: friendship.

I caught a glimpse of me last night
In my precious first-born's soul:
My mother lost herself in me,
I found myself in her.

Colleen Mestayer Tharp

Memories of a Nine Year Old

New corridor in the same old school
Everything white and new, yet different.
A lone black boy appeared among the sea of white.
Approval-seeking white girl, ever smiling, wanting to be special.
"Could you help him get along in our school?"
Peter's keeper,
The title I longed for and the title I gained.

Acting like the tour guide: making introductions, gaining trust,
Holding a place in line, exploring library books.
Soon, we held hands, shared giggles and were best friends.
Reading groups, library time and tether ball,
The dreaded sing alongs on Wednesday afternoons:
"Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham ..." bursts through my memory.
Giggling and giggling over our teacher's large bosom as she led our singing.

Just Peter and me, childhood friends
Black and white blending to become grey.

Colleen Mestayer Tharp

Calico

After returning home, I kept the thoughts at bay,
except for in my dreams.
Dreams that left me, eyes and breasts weeping,
clutching at the empty space
where she should be.

The dream –
sitting in an overstuffed brocade armchair,
waiting for something...
Memorizing every detail of her tiny face,
the dimple in her left cheek,
the toes and fingers just like mine.
Blissful in my reverie.
Just me and her, as it should be.

Until being awakened to emptiness.

The dream –
the armchair, the scene repeated.
Only this time another chapter is added.
Three women enter the room .
They are here to take her.

Droning on and on
about what is best
and what is right
and what is necessary.

One reaches out to take her.
In my head, I am strong.
I fight.
I scream.
I win.

But my body and voice betray me,
just as the people in the room have done.

I say nothing, and she is gone...

Until the next night's dream.

Feline Calculation

In the beginning,
She was a pro
Interested, but not awestruck
Flirtatious, but not fawning
Engaging, but not exaggerated

At the end,
She was equally adept
Detached, and yet regretful
Unyielding, and yet victimized
Assured, and yet vulnerable

Her skills suited her
Like a leotard suits a dancer

They got her what she wanted
The passion, the heat, the desire of the new
None of the grind, the boredom, the dull of the old

She could get them
Whenever, wherever she wanted
Easily
Like plucking a leaf from a tree

And she would discard them
Just as thoughtlessly
As if they were nothing more than
Random scraps from the bottom of her purse

She would keep them around
For some reason
Some connection from the past
But then, she would not remember
What those reasons were

So out they went
Equally disregarded

Trash.

She proudly heralded herself to the world
A model for all women

Take.
Take.
Give - if it pleased her.
Take.
Take.
Leave.

The End.

She was so busy
Congratulating herself on her prowess
She, the lioness, the power of her Pride

But there is no pride
Just her and her skills

Trash.

Her Plight

"That slut," she whispered. Standing in the corner, almost hidden by a silk ficus tree, she watched, through narrowed eyes, the exchange. The woman and man, too involved in each other to notice that they were being observed, continued their playful, yet charged, banter.

The woman was blonde, about twenty-three, and of average looks. Her figure, however, shouldn't be allowed in the real world, and she knew how to show it off – black, skintight, halter minidress, low-cut of course, with a ruby pendant hanging at just the perfect spot between her perfect breasts. The man was entranced, whether by the blonde's words or boobs, the observer couldn't say, but she hated them both nonetheless.

She looked down at her own "ensemble" and hated herself even more. The silk blouse buttoned to the throat and the knee-length navy crepe skirt could have been taken straight from her grandmother Edna's closet. "What am I, twenty-nine or sixty-four? If only I had SAS shoes to complete the look..." she thought bitterly.

She moved silently from behind her perch and left the hotel lobby. While walking to her apartment, she recalled the scene between the couple. The woman had been so confident in her beauty and desirability. "I want someone to look at me that way," she thought dreamily, but she knew that she could never put herself out there like that blonde. Her body was a gift, the most precious, a gift she was saving for the man who would truly love her.

She had sworn to herself...and to her mother...that she would never be one of those "trashy" women who lured men into their lives and beds with too-short skirts and push-up bras. And, she had kept her word, always demure and virtuous, but so damn lonely...

Gifts of Sunday

Faith. Religion. God. Why don't I "get" it? Why don't I feel anything? When will I have my cathartic moment, my revelation in which all becomes clear?

And yet, despite my lack of connectedness with spirituality, I trudge on. I know of the importance of faith, and I need my children to grow up with a sense of something beyond themselves and the corporeal world. But it is difficult... always.

Yesterday, David, the boys and I woke up, and after a while started to get ready for church; I was dreading it. Then, when mass began, it wasn't our regular priest. It was a Vietnamese missionary. Oh great! Now, in addition to my regular doubts, questions, and discomfort, I wouldn't even be able to understand the words he was saying. I think my sigh was so loud that it reverberated throughout the church.

The choir began to sing, the opening prayer, the readings, the homily. WHAT is he saying? I couldn't understand, but could feel myself growing more irritated by the moment. I began to think of ways to feign illness and possibly escape.

Then, it was time for the presentation of the gifts. The choir again began to sing, a song that I did not know, but liked nonetheless. It was at that moment that I noticed, truly, the little girl of three or four who was in the pew in front of me. She was wearing a long white dress, made from an embroidered pillowcase, which was tied at her shoulders with pink grosgrain ribbons. Her light brown hair was shoulder-length and held back by a ribbon that matched the ones on her dress. Her little feet were smushed into white leather sandals, and her toenails were polished the exact shade of pink as her ribbons.

She, too, was listening to the music. Her right hand held on firmly to the back of the pew, as a ballerina would grip the barre. Her eyes were closed, and she gently, gently began to sway to the music. Slowly, her left arm began to rise – such a graceful, unselfconscious movement. I felt drawn to her – to the simplicity, the purity of her dance. Too soon, the song ended. "You are a beautiful dancer," I whispered to her when our eyes met. My heart was lighter because of her.

It was then that I began to notice other equally moving events occurring around me. My thirteen-year-old stepson, Cullen, a self-proclaimed atheist, was actually praying aloud. I stopped...and listened...sure that I must be mistaken. I glanced furtively over at him, marveling at his beautiful caramel brown curls and his slouch that I am forever correcting. He. Was. Praying. I wanted to smother him with hugs and kisses. Instead, I touched his pinky finger with mine.

Mass continued, benign. It was not rankling me anymore. There was a peace; something that I could not yet articulate, but I knew was there. I felt good.

When the recessional hymn began, I immediately recognized On Eagle's Wings. Apparently, so did my ten-year-old son, Connor. He began to sing from his heart, without any hint of embarrassment - a child's voice, ringing out – clear, proud, a little off-key, but full of love. I heard David, my husband say, "Good job, buddy," when the song ended.

On the ride home, I realized that my mood was much improved from earlier. Again, I had the thought of feeling peaceful and right. Maybe, I thought, "getting" God is not some huge revelation, maybe it is simply a desire to dance, an urge to pray, a need to sing.

It's a Tough Job

Being a big sister is a tough job. Being a little sister, while I've never actually done it, seems like it would be a HORRIBLE job. My sister, Deverelle, is three years younger than I. Growing up, wherever I was, so was she. If I wanted coffee milk in an American flag mug, she wanted the same. When I had created an idea for a fabulous Barbie adventure, she had to play too. I was forced to include herself; she was forced to be tortured by me in order to be included.

One day in particular stands out in my memory...

Mom had taken me into the bathroom and said, "Courtney, how many times do I have to tell you to be nice to your sister and to include her in your games?"

"I don't want her to play. She's so stupid," was my answer, all the while thinking that my mom could tell me a million times to be nice to her, and I STILL wouldn't want to.

"Now, go back out there and let your sister be a part of the game, or I will spank you," Mom threatened.

"Yes ma'am," I moodily agreed. I walked out, momentarily burdened beyond comprehension by my mother's demand. But, as we neared our room, the perfect plan was gifted me from the depths of my deviously resourceful mind. Once in our room, I set the rules – "OK, Barbie is dating Donny Osmond, and she is going to one of his concerts tonight."

"Can I be Barbie?" she asked in that squeaky little "aren't-I-so-cute" voice.

"Uh no, you don't know how to be a college girl," I answered, so completely superior, but required by parental constraint and refusal to understand to entertain this complete moron.

"Can I be Ken?" squeakier and more annoyingly asked.

"There is no KEN. He's Donny Osmond, and no, you can't be him either." I rolled my eyes for emphasis.

"Oh," her lip started to quiver, reminding me of strawberry Jell-O on a spoon. I hate Jell-O. But I, pure evil genius, was neither swayed nor frightened by this. I continued to work my magic. I explained. "You are going to be Marie Osmond, Donny's sister."

"Really?!" she squealed, looking as if someone had just given her the Incredible New Barbie Townhouse, completely furnished and with working elevator.

"Yes, but Marie is very sick. She is in the hospital, close to death. Here, take this doll and come with me," I explain.

I put my sister in the corner of the formal dining room, AKA the "hospital," and told her to stay there. "Now, just lie here," I instructed, providing a washcloth/blanket for the ailing Marie, just an extra little show of affection on my part. I flashed my "we're best friends" smile and skipped away.

About thirty minutes later, my mom happened upon her, still sitting in the corner. "What are you doing, Dev?" Mom asked.

"I'm playing Barbies with Courtney," she answered, smiling, so pleased with herself at this little coup.

"But, Courtney is outside playing Land of the Lost with the neighbors..." Mom's voice trailed off as she realized...

"COURTNEY!!"