

Dignity

Creative Expressions
from 10 Years
of the Inspiration Project

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10 Years of the Inspiration Project



THE INSPIRATION PROJECT

Introduction by Latrice Person

The Inspiration Project shows me that I can put words on a page and create something beautiful. We want to change the stereotype that says that people with unique needs can't really achieve their aspirations. We can work hard like everybody else, we just need a little assistance.

Early on, I felt kind of timid. I was afraid that I would be judged because I have a different ability. I had to face my fears and work with the students. The students showed me that I didn't have to be afraid. We all like writing, and we all wanted to learn from each other. We're a team and our goal is to go to the Olympics for Literature!

For me the Inspiration Project is a challenge because I have to come up with a different story every year and meet different people and work with them. And I like challenges. At the beginning of the semester we pair up in groups, and first we talk about our goals. Then we come up with what we want to write. Sometimes I write on the first day! I like the writing, it's very therapeutic, not only for me but for my friends who have been doing the project, too.

I think for all of us, we discover our writing voices and we learn to be free. We express ourselves by telling our stories. It feels cool because we are at a college, and most of us were never college students before. Being authors helps us narrate our lives with our imaginations. It is not always easy to write, just like now—I didn't know what the heck I was going to say! But it just proves if you work at it you can accomplish anything.

PREFACE TO THE ANTHOLOGY

by Joanna Scott

My initial assignment as a volunteer for CP Rochester was to help two women, Latrice and Toni, gain literacy skills. I had brought along two books by Dr. Seuss, and we sat at the kitchen table and took turns reading sentences aloud. After we finished the books, we got to talking. Thanks to Dr. Seuss, we found ourselves trading thoughts about the power of stories. Latrice and Toni suddenly wanted to tell stories of their own. I don't remember who began, but they both started telling stories that day. I listened, enthralled. Outside, the sky was darkening with dusk, but I lost track of time. I worried that I would forget the stories they were telling, so I opened my laptop and started typing furiously, recording as much as I could. When I didn't understand something, I would interrupt and ask for clarification. Sometimes I would venture to suggest substituting a different word or phrase. Latrice and Toni were open to suggestions. I kept typing; they kept telling their stories.

A couple of hours later, I was back in my car. I had promised to return the next week and to keep returning for as long as it took to record and help edit the two stories. As I drove home, I remember the feeling that something remarkable had just begun, but I had no idea where it would lead.

As it turns out, this promising beginning would lead from that kitchen table to the University of Rochester. It would expand from our initial exploratory conversations to new opportunities for writing, enriching collaborations, and experiences that would empower participants and transform lives. That beginning would lead to this tenth anniversary

anthology celebrating the partnership between CP Rochester, the University of Rochester, and our community.

The goal of The Inspiration Project is to give individuals with unique needs the chance to create polished literary works. Through a collaborative process involving interviews, recording, editing, and revision, we aim to honor the unique voices of our writers. Our formula may not be perfect, but the results are remarkable.

The pieces gathered in this book include memoirs, short stories, historical fiction, and fantasy. Some are playful, while others directly treat hardship. All reflect on the need for connection. “You opened my heart,” writes Thuan Nguyen, “when you opened the door.” They celebrate friendship. “Thinking about her friend makes her feel ready to conquer anything,” writes Latrice Person. They embrace curiosity. “Answers to questions always lead to more questions,” as Ann Kurz says—through questions, she is able to imagine what she astutely describes as “probable circumstances and sentiments” from the past.

Writing is a means of self-expression. Greg Junious concludes, “I hope that in reading this story, you got to know the real me.” Toni Montgomery writes joyously, “‘Be myself.’ I always remember that because I am awesome. I am Toni.” Thelma Barnes writes in the face of her challenges, “I can’t walk like I want to, but I just do what I can—and be happy.” Jeff Yarmel advises that when life is hard, “Take advantage of the people around you/ Make memories.”

Writing gives us the opportunity to imagine joys and struggles. “I’ve written and read things about other people, I read their interests like a common goal,” writes Yeats Chao. Writing is celebrated as a pleasure in itself: “I love writing, yeah I do!” announces Patrick Hurley. And writing helps us remember: “The wind was in my face, and the sound of the water, hitting the shore, everything was just beautiful,” recalls Tori Bement-Schramm about an extraordinary trip to Costa Rica.

After that once-in-a-lifetime trip, Tori went out and got herself a new tattoo. She writes about the tattoo that it is “of a girl in a wheelchair with waves above her and a pink surfboard on her head. It says ‘Surf Diva’ underneath it. When I look at it I smile. There’s the memory of a great

trip. It's not a symbol of only surfing. It's a symbol of all the things I thought I couldn't do but did."

Dear Tori passed away last year. She is deeply missed. We dedicate our anthology to her, in her memory, and in the spirit of her Surf Diva.

From Our Editor

My unbridled enthusiasm for agreeing to select and edit the creative pieces for this tenth-year edition faded into utter panic as Nick and I first sifted through eight anthologies piled before us. How would we read approximately 80 narratives by 20 authors in 10 weeks? How would we choose a fair representation? How would we attain a cohesive collection while staying true to the authors' individual voices? Nick and I divvied up the authors and picked our favorite works. At first, editing unnerved me. I feared putting my spin on each piece and losing the authors' stylistic preferences. However, as I read, edited, reread, and edited some more, I relaxed. The authors had strong voices that wouldn't easily be diluted. Near the end, while composing themes to categorize the works, I realized that the stories, memoirs, and poems had metamorphosized into a unified chorus celebrating the dignity of life. That was pure inspiration!

—Ann Kurz, January 2020

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TAPESTRIES OF LIFE



Thoughts from the Inside

by Thaun Nguyen

In Collaboration with Jamie Kurtz

(Spring 2013)

{The following is excerpted.}

I was born in Vietnam in 1966. My father was in the United States Army and met my mom in Vietnam during the war. My father was the captain of an aircraft carrier stationed in Saigon. My father went back to the United States, and I was born shortly afterwards in Saigon.

My father traveled all over Asia, including Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Cambodia. My mother stayed home with my two sisters and me in Saigon. My father went on the ship for 30 days. I felt like I wanted to see him every day, but I couldn't. I was sad when he went to another country. I felt happy when I saw him again.

I heard about the war. My cousin died because of the war. He served in the Vietnam Army and fought with South Vietnam. He was on the other side. I don't remember when this happened, but it was before the attack on Saigon in 1975. There was airplane fighting. South Vietnam shot the airplane. I heard the airplanes every day and every night when I was little, and I saw them in the sky. I was not scared because I knew that the people in the planes were my father's friends. I didn't have to leave my house. I hid under my bed, but I wasn't scared because I knew that

everything would be okay. I was with one of my sisters; my other sister was at her friend's house. I was worried about her. I saw lots of people fall to the ground on the TV. I felt sad. My whole family was okay. So were my friends. Many of them left Vietnam with the US Army when the fighting started. The North won Saigon the first time. The South won Saigon the second time. I felt sad because everything was not how I wanted it to be when the US Army left. A lot of people did not have homes to live in. There were more than 300,000 US children because their fathers were US soldiers; they were taken to the United States after the war. My father was in Thailand when the war ended. He couldn't return to Vietnam because he went to the United States. The last time that he saw my mother, he told her that he would come back. My sisters went to the United States first. Then, I came with my mom. I have not seen my dad since he was in Vietnam: April 9th, 1975. It makes me sad.

I was twenty-four years old when I came to the United States in 1990. I didn't know English for the first year while I lived with my sister. In 1991, I moved out to Los Angeles because I wanted a bed to sleep on. I don't know why I didn't have a bed at my sister's house. I started to learn English through a program a half an hour away from where I lived in a community with 150 people. I shared a room with three people who were strangers when I moved in. I wasn't nervous living with strangers. We soon became friends.

In 1992, I moved again to another program with 15 people. I moved so that I could be in plays. At the program, they taught me how to write and act. I learned how to work on the computer, and I learned how to paint pictures. I sold the pictures; they gave me 17% of the profit. 83% went to the program. It didn't make me mad because I was helping the program. I sold A LOT of paintings. Every month I made between \$100 and \$200 from 1992 to 2009. I saved the money...

...In 2009, I moved to New York...where I lived with a friend. When I got to New York, I broke my hip. I fell. They took me to the hospital. I was there for a long time. I couldn't talk. I almost died. I went to a nursing home for two months. The doctor and the nurse took care of me. I liked them. When I left the nursing home in 2010, I came to the

home that I live in now. I was able to talk again. I return to the hospital so many times because I fall out of bed a lot. They know me by name.

I like Rochester. Rochester keeps me moving forward. I go out to work in the community. I sort the mail for the postal service. I also put food in boxes for food pantries, but I never eat the food out of the boxes.

I am in plays, too. One time, I yelled "Falling!" in a play. They told me to. "The wall is falling!" I sing in the plays. I dance. I learned how to dance in a play. The play was "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat." I was in the chorus. I had to wear a costume; I wore a loose shirt. I had to wear make-up. In California I wore makeup for plays, so I was used to it. The play was three hours long. I sang the whole three hours, but I didn't lose my voice. I have written a lot of plays. I like writing out how people should act. It is fun. Sometimes I write my poems into the plays.

Everyone gives something to the group. I give my writing. Sometimes my plays are political. In 2011, I wrote "The Angel and the Devil." It is about the end of fighting with the devil. Some of my plays are musicals. One song from play is "Goodbye, my friend. I'll see you again." So far I have written 32 songs. They are fun to write. I have also been in concerts. I sing with 45 people. We practice every Monday and Wednesday. On Tuesday I go to play practice. I like them both. I like singing any kind of song. They taught me how to use my mouth for singing. I can sing low and high. There is a band that plays at the concert. I like all instruments. I know how to play the drum.

I haven't been back to Vietnam. My sister said I can't go back to Vietnam because the ticket is \$2000. And there is no one to take care of me there. Two of my sisters have gone back to Vietnam, and one lives in the United States. If I could, I would go back to Vietnam. I would go back to see the people I left there. I miss my sisters, my nieces, and all of my friends.

I started writing poetry in 1992. The program taught me how to write poetry. I write a lot of different poems, not only about the flowers. Everything comes from my heart. I think of everything on my own. Poems are different ways to talk to people from the inside, not the outside...

The day I met you

When I met you, you looked like a red rose.
I looked for the window to see from the inside if the sun was shining.
It was in the blue sky.
I went to the garden with you. The garden is a good time.
The flower opened when we came.
I talked to you through the day, and I felt happy.
You opened my heart when you opened the door.
I feel happy with you. You give happiness.
When night came, I sat by the table with the candle
I said I love you.

Kiwanis: This Is My Story

by Geraldine Copeland

In Collaboration with Siri Kanya Ganti

(Spring 2015)

Introduction

My name is Geraldine. This story is about me helping other people. I love helping other people. I help my Grandma, I help my friends, I help the hospital, I help women's shelters, and I help Kiwanis.

{The following is excerpted.}

Kiwanis is very fun! We do a lot!

I want to tell you about Kiwanis. Kiwanis is where people help each other and we have fun. I joined Kiwanis three years ago. Kiwanis is a group that comes to our house; we meet once in a while. A lot of people are in that group. We give the things we make to other people. We don't keep anything. Everything we make is my favorite. We do fun things. I'm happy to be in a club. I just want to be part of it next year and every year because I love it.

We are donating bookmarks that we make to the Brighton Public Library. We made 500 already and put

stickers on them. These bookmarks are for all the children that come to the Brighton Library— I would love to keep one for myself!

We are also collecting pop tabs for the McDonald House. Pop tabs are the little things that come off of soda cans. I've been getting some from work and putting them in a baggie. I have more than ten. I'm going to put the little bag into a bigger bag.

Last year we made \$200 collecting money for Strong Memorial Hospital. When people came around, we asked them for money. This year, we made \$250 collecting money for the hospital. And it felt good because we are doing a good job for a hospital.

Kiwanis also taught me how to make blankets by tying fabric into knots. The day we were making blankets, people were in a hurry because they didn't have enough time to stay there. I had to have two people help me, which was very nice of them! The blankets we made were all donated to a woman's shelter because they don't have their own blankets. When women get abused, they go to that shelter. When the women are ok, they can go home and take the handmade blankets with them — it's a piece of Kiwanis that they can take with them and remember to feel good and strong. I would also give blankets to people in hospitals because they need some warmth and love from a blanket.

Someday I wish I could help the lady, Jamie, who runs Kiwanis, and her husband by making something for them. Jamie is funny and a nice person. She has short hair and she always wears bright-colored sneakers—orange, and sometimes she wears blue. I would love to help Jamie by passing out the project materials, and by baking something for everyone in Kiwanis. I would bake cupcakes for them: chocolate and vanilla.

Kiwanis gives me responsibility. As secretary I take notes, check people's names off, and ask people for new ideas. I feel very good about that. Every time we win a contest, they give me a certificate I can put in my folder because I'm secretary of Kiwanis. I love being secretary.

I love doing the things that I do for other people. I didn't think there was going to be anything in Kiwanis for me. I didn't think I was going to be this interested in it. But I am. I love Kiwanis. I care about Kiwanis. I want to tell you that I love it.

I think everyone is wonderful and I think everyone is awesome. I think it's wonderful to help other people. When I help someone it makes me feel happy inside. This is my story.

The End

My Magical Trip to Costa Rica

By Tori Bement-Schramm

In Collaboration with Zarah Quinn

(Spring 2014)

{The following is excerpted.}

My mom and I went to Costa Rica in July 2013 for an amazing adventure with Ocean Healing Group. A famous surfer named Christiaan Bailey crashed on his skateboard and he was paralyzed from the waist down. It tore him up that he couldn't surf. One day he discovered a way to surf on his belly, lying down. And he started the Ocean Healing Group program for people with back injuries, spinal cord injuries, and disabilities. For people in wheelchairs.

We were in Costa Rica for five days, with two days getting there and leaving. We had a lot of fun. We flew out of Rochester to Atlanta, then to Costa Rica. We got a shuttle to the hotel with people all over speaking Spanish. At the airport, the guy flagging down the shuttles for people kept calling this one driver papi. I thought that was funny because it was one of the names in Beverly Hills Chihuahua. It's a movie. The first thing when we got in the hotel was we got unpacked. There was a big screen TV and two beds. We met one of the volunteers, Katie - she's about my age. We talked for a while about surfing, about what I could expect. I had no idea what to expect. I felt excitement; I was nervous, curious. Knowing I would be surfing and not knowing how.

The camp was four hours from the hotel. The next day we had to take a two-hour van ride to the boat. Luckily for us, the boat had a snack bar. I had banana bread and this super sweet icy with milk and sugar in it. My mom couldn't drink it. She just took one sip and the look on her face! It was so sweet, but I enjoyed it a lot.

Another hour in the van and we saw this restaurant outside that had wild chickens running around. It was beautiful. We had beans and rice every day and I had the chicken. My mom said, "Hey, you're probably eating someone's brother."

Me and the girls got to the camp, unpacked in our villa, and we just chatted and got to know each other in The Rancho. It's like an open hut where you eat. It had two hammocks.

There were two dogs at the camp. One dog I named Graham Cracker. He must have been from somebody's home, but he walked around the island like he owned it. He was a golden-brownish kind of dog. I thought he looked like a graham cracker. Also, the cook Cristalia had a dog named Pinta. Pinta was a little white dog with brown spots. In the morning, she would bark. Everything that went by the camp on the road she barked at. She was a good dog. Both the dogs would follow us to the beach.

That evening, we discussed our schedules and what we wanted to do. I signed up for everything. I'm a daredevil!

The first day, the girls and I surfed in the morning. I was the last one to surf, so I had the most surf time. The volunteers piggy-backed us into the water. I really liked it because I knew I wasn't going to fall with them. Especially the boys! Woo! They walked into the water and put us on the surfboard on our bellies. My mom was over in the water, taking pictures. But every once in a while a wave would push her down.

I was nervous. When they were pulling us out, every time a wave came the volunteers would lift up the front of the board, but I still got some water in the face. Before they launched us, they would count to three. One volunteer was on the back of the board, just to balance it out. And they had flippers on, and they were kicking. They waited for a wave, a good wave to push us back into the shore. They counted to three and pushed us to the wave. We rode it back into the shore. At first, I was just

lying on the surfboard because I was sick of getting salt water in my face. But when that wind hit me, I was laughing and smiling. It felt like I was flying. I was the only one who did not wipe out.

When we got back and cleaned up from surfing, we ate lunch. We talked and had a good day. That was the end of that day.

The volunteers were awesome. Tyler was one of the volunteers. I was pushing him in the hammock, making him fall asleep. The one volunteer I had a huge crush on was Daniel. He was tall, handsome, and had a buzz cut. We had good talks together. We talked about how much fun we were having. He was teasing me too! He teases everybody. His best friend was Tyler. All the volunteers would carry us and piggy back us everywhere.

We did adaptive yoga most mornings. I remember almost falling asleep, and some people did. We would lay on the pavilion ground. The volunteers would stretch us. Megan was the instructor. I was listening to the birds and the soft music. The music sounded like wind chimes.

One of the days, we rented quads, which are like four wheelers. They actually had special harnesses, so I was strapped onto my mom so I wouldn't fall off. The first time Larry, one of the guys who runs Ocean Healing Group, took us on a private ride. We rode through the jungle. There were trees everywhere. We saw some waterfalls. The waterfalls were very small, not the huge ones. They looked like tiny little showers for the birds. We saw wild animals. Of course birds, monkeys, and butterflies.

We drove through mud puddles, which I said looked like the dinosaur track from Jurassic Park. My Hello Kitty sunglasses flew off my head, but Larry picked them up.

Another time we went four wheeling, everyone that went to the camp came. Daniel, the volunteer, was driving a four-wheeler right behind us. Every time we would hit a mud puddle, he would scream like a girl. Because he was right behind us, I kept looking back and laughing hard. I was smiling the biggest smile, too.

Some days I would lay in the hammock that Daniel laid in. Not with him! Of course, that's a different fantasy story. I won't get into that.

For dinner we had rice and beans, of course. Everything rice and

beans. One day we went horseback riding on the beach. The cook, Cristalia, rode with me on the horse and helped me up. I love horses. The horse was kind of skittish. The guy who was taking us on the ride stayed next to my horse. After a while, that saddle hurt with all the bumps and the horse going back and forth. The wind was in my face, and the sound of the water hitting the shore, everything was just beautiful.

One morning I woke up so excited for zip lining. We ate breakfast. Me and the three girls got in the van. It was an hour-long van ride. The zip line workers helped us put our helmets and harnesses on. The harnesses were uncomfortable. It was beautiful in the trees. When we were on the zip line, and you looked down, you saw nothing but trees. On one of the platforms, my sock got stuck in the metal grid. And the monkeys are probably still playing with it in the trees. We were going so fast. It felt like I was on air. The third to last of the zip, some of the guys did a Spiderman pose. Like, went upside down. The last platform was still a zip line, but it was like a Tarzan swing. Every zip, one of the workers went with me. They just pushed me by myself. I was crying. I did not know what was happening. But the volunteer that I had was Daniel, my huge crush. He caught me on the Tarzan swing. He talked to me a little bit before he caught the other girls. When we were up there, my socks and shoes came off accidentally while they were on the platform. A zip line worker gave me his shoes, so he went barefoot! He was so nice to do that for me.

Then we got back in the van and went to this hotel where we could use their pool. We took over their kiddie pool! It was just the right height for us. About an hour after, we got out and got dry and headed back to camp. We took a shower, and dressed up in our dresses. We went to a fancy outdoor restaurant. I got a chicken vegetable something. We were taking lots of pictures. Pictures of the sunset. Pictures with the girls, and with the volunteers. Unfortunately, one of the girls wasn't feeling too well, but she still partied with us. We all had a great time. Then, back at the Rancho, we watched the Ocean Healing Group's video. It's about how they got the program going.

After five fabulous days of fun, it was time to go to back to the hotel near the airport. But before we left for the hotel, the volunteers and the

directors had us plant plants near the yoga pavilion, so a piece of us is always in Costa Rica.

After the long van ride back and the boat ride, we showered and went to dinner at the casino again. Some of the girls stayed and gambled. I was going to stay but I got too tired, so we all did our goodbyes. It was very cold in there, the air conditioner was right on full blast because it's so hot there. It was sad saying goodbye to friends I had made. But we said we would see each other soon and keep up on email.

The next morning, it was still dark. Jackie, a volunteer, was really nice. She got up in the morning and helped us with our bags. In the airport, we said goodbye to the volunteers. Mom and I got through security, went shopping a little in the gift shop. I got a seashell necklace. My mom got Aunt Kathy a seashell necklace and earrings, and we got Grandpa a cross. The cross looked like a sunflower was painted on it.

We had a long wait. The long plane ride was first. And then another long wait for a little put-put plane. They put me on the lift, and it got about halfway and they couldn't roll it. They actually manpowered it. They rolled it back down, took me off, and left me on the black top. And I don't do well in heat. I wilt. My mom finally said, "I'm taking her inside until you get it working."

My mom got tired of waiting. She took me out of my wheelchair and walked me up the airplane stairs. We had a grand old time in the airplane. All the passengers were friendly. We were talking and singing and stuff. I think some of them were Jamaican.

When I'm home, I think of Costa Rica often. My mom says we may go back someday. But until then, me, the surf divas and the volunteers keep in contact by group email chains.

Ocean Healing Group is for handicapped people. It's stuff I never thought I could do. Like surf, four-wheeling, and zip lining. It means the world.

On May 8th I got a new tattoo of a girl in a wheelchair with waves around her and a pink surfboard on her head. It says "Surf Diva" underneath it. When I look at it I smile. There's the memory of a great trip. It's not a symbol of only surfing. It's a symbol of all the things I thought I couldn't do but did.

I am very glad that they asked me to go. I hope we can go again someday.

Hang loose!

Opening the Envelope: A Peek into the Life of Tom

by Tom Cassata

In Collaboration with Jess Alexander
(Spring 2017)

The Handmade Cards

At a handmade desk in his bedroom of his house on King's Highway, you can often find Tom hard at work. What is his work? you may ask. He'll reply: making people happy. Tom's favorite thing in the world is to make people happy, and he knows many ways to do that.

Tom loves to send happiness in the mail to people all around—through the hundreds of birthday cards he sends each year. Ever since he was inspired at the age of 21, Tom has loved to send cards to everyone he knows, to help them in celebrating birthdays, congratulatory events, anniversaries, holidays, and more! He stamps and decorates every card with love, and sends them out. He is happiest when he receives thank you notes in return and sometimes even receives stamps, stickers, and card materials from people as well.

Tom has touched many hearts through his cards. Besides his family and friends, he sends cards to relatives as far as Wisconsin, staff at CP Rochester, staff who previously worked there, doctors and nurses, teachers and retired teachers, his physical therapist, priest Father Paul English, New York Senator Joseph Robach, friends at Saint Bernard's apartments,

and realtors at Remax Realty, Realty Group, Remax Plus, Hunt's Realty, John Geisler Realty, and Nothnagle Realtors. Every time he meets someone new, he asks for their address and birthday! Tom's card-sending is so large that he has to have five calendars to keep track of all the dates, and he was even interviewed by Don Alhart from Channel 13 for his kindness. Tom was more than overjoyed to be interviewed and to see himself featured in the Bright Spot! To Tom, the work of sending the cards is nothing compared to the joys and thank you's he receives. He loves the feeling of happiness that writing and sending the cards gives him and also says that the cards "keep him out of trouble."

Making a Difference for People

Besides writing cards that make people smile, Tom loves making a difference in other ways. By mailing out letters to realtors asking for donations for the Al Sigl Center Walk About, Tom was one of the most successful fundraisers of the event. The Walk About was an important event for CP Rochester and funded a lot of physical therapies at the CP Clinic. The Walk About is such a huge event that it's held at Eastview Mall each year, and Tom has been able to wheel around the mall in the event, having fun the entire time. Tom raised so much money for the Clinic in the event that they threw a pizza party in his honor!

At the Clinic, a physical therapy center at CP Rochester, Tom does many things to help out, including delivering mail for the Clinic. In Basic Education, also at CP Rochester, Tom sharpens pencils every week for classes, makes copies, collects folders to clean up after classes, does recycling, sends emails, and more! Tom's favorite place to volunteer in CP, however, is in the CP Wrap Around Program! In this program, Tom makes copies for an art class and helps out in the class, serves drinks at events, makes crafts and decorations for Valentine's Day and other holidays, and has helped to get kids off buses and lead them into CP. For all of his efforts at CP Rochester, Tom was given a "World's Most Magnificent Volunteer Award"!

Tom has liked helping people throughout his life but has done many other things as well. He was a boy scout when he was young and enjoyed

volunteering even as a kid! He also went to Cerebral Palsy on East Ave, where he was still too young to help out, but he liked being there anyway. He loved to learn even then and accomplished many things during his childhood and teenage years, leading up to getting his GRE from Jefferson High School. Tom went on to work at Bugaboo Creek, IBM, and MicroPro, doing all sorts of different things and working hard the entire time.

The Realtor who Raised Him

Tom's many family members have supported him and his kind efforts from the beginning. Tom's father, Gene Cassata, is a real estate salesman who is still working at age 89. He currently works under Nothnagle Realty (since 1991), but he had his own business for 23 years! He also used to be on the board of directors of the Greater Rochester Association of Realtors and was also elected as Director, Vice-President, and Treasurer of the Real Estate Board in different years. In addition, Gene served on the Rochester Preservation Board and was a member of the Genesee Corridor Task Force. He has won many awards, including "1968 Realtor of the Year" and "Realtor Emeritus"! He originally went to Syracuse University to become a Mechanical Engineer but got his real estate license in the middle of his college career, did not return to school, and instead worked under mentor Fred Kravitz for 15 years, going on to be extremely successful in real estate. Through real estate, he met his wife, made many friends, and stayed young and sharp. Tom often recommends his father to people looking for a realtor, advertising for his dad whenever he can.

Tom and his dad have always been very close, as Tom helped him during many real estate conventions and more! Tom liked meeting the presidents of the realty associations and realtors from all over New York State and enjoyed the traveling as well. He even got an award for "Honorary Member of the State Association of Realtors" at a convention at the Concord Hotel in Lake Placid! Tom and his father also bond outside of realty events. They often go to lunch, church, and shopping at Wal-Mart, Party City, and Walgreens. They meet up with the family for dinners at

Tom's sister's house. Tom's dad loves to go to the Genesee Valley Antique Car shows, and Tom likes to go with him and have ice cream. Tom was even given a special badge so that he could go to all the car shows.

Tom's dad, much like Tom, believes in giving back to the community and spreading kindness. He was a charter member, volunteer, and 17-year board member for Continuing Developmental Services, a home and service program for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He was also on the board for Cerebral Palsy and the Al Sigl Center in Rochester.

A Wonderful Mother

Tom's mother was a kind person and a supporter of Tom's humanitarian activities until she passed away. She was an elementary school teacher as well as a teacher at SUNY Brockport. She started to write a book but never finished. The fact that his mother never finished her book helped to inspire Tom to want to write one. She also encouraged and inspired Tom to start writing his birthday cards and later said that he "put his sister to shame" in the amount of cards he wrote and sent. Tom's mother also gave back to the community herself, completing volunteer work to help those with cerebral palsy through the program Chapter 3.

Family Matters

Tom is also very close to his sister Maria, who graduated from the U of R, Saint John Fisher College, and Nazareth College and studied nursing at all three. She was a nurse for 34 years and used to work at Elder One, where she would go to people's homes and watch nursing aides take care of people. She also has worked at Strong Memorial Hospital and Rochester Regional Health. Like Tom and his parents, Maria loves to help other people and make a difference. Now, Maria takes care of her husband's aunt Nancy, who is currently 99 and likes to speak her mind. Tom likes to go visit his sister for family dinners, to watch football and baseball, and to see his sister's cats, Buddy, Sarah, and Lucky. Tom wrote

an article about Lucky in ABE and had a great time telling the story of the little cat. Tom's sister feels "blessed" to have such a special, caring brother like Tom. She looks forward to getting cards and coupons sent to her in beautiful envelopes and loves talking to Tom every day. Tom admires his sister's enthusiasm and sweetness and loves spending time with her and brightening her day.

Tom's brother-in-law Sam works at a computer lab in downtown Rochester. In the past, he was a transporter at the hospital and went to Saint John Fisher College for his undergraduate and master's, studying journalism, communications, and education. Sam loves listening to music, biking, swimming, poker, and spending time with family including Tom and his dad. Tom likes to attend sports events with Sam and has recently watched an Amerks hockey game and Red Wings baseball game with him. Tom likes Sam's Camaro, his love for sports, his cooking (especially his homemade spaghetti sauce), and his sense of humor. Tom says Sam is "fun to be around", a good person, and is working in an exciting and interesting career. Through his job, Sam is also able to help many people. He works at the Rochester Educational Opportunity Center—part of the SUNY system—training at-risk individuals to give them computer skills. Sam will even go in on days off to keep working and helping people!

Maria and Sam have 4 sons, Robert, Steven, Paul, and Jason. Jason studies business at SUNY Brockport, and Paul studies Business and Accounting at SUNY Albany. Paul also plays Tom's favorite sport, football, and is the Long Snapper for the Division I Albany Football team. Tom likes it when Paul comes to visit and enjoys having sports-talk with him. Robert and Steven are both graduated and working, and Tom gets to see them both occasionally. Tom keeps in touch with all of his nephews, sending letters and cards a lot.

A Love for Friends

Tom spends time with and sends cards to many friends. John Geisler, a realtor with a company in his own name and a past president of the real estate board, receives many cards from Tom and is a friend to Tom

and his family. Tom has known John as long as he can remember and has gone to several conventions with him. John plays poker often with Tom's dad and brother-in-law and also enjoys going to casinos. He comes to Tom's birthday dinners and sends Tom many cards. John, like many, loves Tom's kindness and his cards.

Tom's close friend Chris Cardon is a basketball coach at West Irondequoit. Tom and Chris go to church together occasionally and also go out to lunch. Tom enjoys sending birthday and anniversary cards to both Chris and his wife Roxanne and is overjoyed to send them bits of happiness.

Another friend of Tom's, George Haines, volunteers at the hospital and is involved in the Honor flight for Veterans. George occasionally goes out to eat with Tom and his dad and often gets different cards from Tom.

Everyday Actions

Now, with the support of his family and friends, Tom likes to do things everyday to help other people and make others happy. Helping makes Tom—and many of his family and friends—feel terrific. Making a difference, according to Tom, is a unique, wonderful feeling that everyone should experience. He keeps his birthday cards and his desire to help in mind everyday, and he hopes to inspire others to help in the future.

Overall, Tom keeps his focus on learning all he can, helping others, making people smile, and sending bits and pieces of happiness to friends all over! So come say hello, and expect a piece of happiness in your mailbox soon!

(Untitled)

by Yeats Chao

In Collaboration with Illiana Garcia

(Spring 2012)

{The following is excerpted.}

I was born in 1950 in Taiwan. Back in the sixties, when I was only seven years old, I was electrocuted and started having seizures. It was a shocking moment when I was struck by lightning and I just can't remember anything whatsoever. All that I remember is everybody was coming out of the swimming pool, but I was still in there when I was struck and I passed out afterwards. I didn't know where I was, and all I heard people saying was "Yeats, Yeats, you all right?!" I remember people calling my mother's name, Lina.

My mother was in her middle-aged adult years. I can't quite tell you how old she was. She was a lot older than I was and was born in Taiwan. Now she is likely in her eighties. I remember going home with my mother and going to grocery stores to buy food – apples and cheerios, apples and cheerios. Pomegranates - they grow on trees in Taiwan. I wouldn't pick them though. I remember getting them from the store. I remember going to the store in her car. I was just a little boy. I remember a bread box in the kitchen. We put bananas and peaches in the bread box. I remember walking on my knees, walking on my hands and knees. Crawling. I tried going to the kitchen and reaching the bread box.

When I was younger, I was friends with Chinese boys and girls. We spoke Chinese; I could speak Chinese – Mandarin. I can remember words in Chinese, but I can't remember letters.

What I remember most? Drawing animals: a dog, a cat, a human being. Scenery. I still do. I do it to communicate with another person. When I was a small boy, I would draw animals. I would draw a human being with no clothes on. I would draw a person with no body. A Chinese woman once said, "This is so magnificent!" I remember seeing things out in the open, like someone helping me draw pictures.

Notes on piano keys—I just pushed on any keys, just fiddled around to see what it's like, and people asked, "Yeats, what are you doing that for?" I thought of the keys as A to Z. It sounded nice. I never got to take piano lessons. Something like E G A E, such and such; I would play desperately, like an animal. I can remember looking at the wall, and there being a face; I imagined keys and words to it.

My mother also speaks Chinese; she's alive in New Jersey. My father is dead; he died in the sixties from a heart attack. He worked in the United States for an engineering company. I remember being punished by my dad. He took me and belted me. Yes, that was my punishment when he did that. I was only six or seven years old.

My sister Alice works in New Jersey; she's a dentist, so she cleans out people's teeth. Floss! I floss because my sister says to. I was only five years old when I was taught how to clean my mouth. She taught me to open my jaw and floss each tooth, under and upper. Gerald, my brother, fixes cars, and Jeanie, my other sister, is married to someone, to an American. I'm close to them, but they don't remember speaking Chinese. They say to me, "We hate it when you speak Chinese." But I told them that you've got to stick with it to understand me in this country.

I can remember when it was easy to walk. I remember bicycles. As I grew up, I grew higher, larger. I can remember seeing myself walk in the mirror. I was born that way.

Yes, drawing. I would tell people: "Maybe someday, if you have time, you can write to me and I'll draw for you—as a favor." I would draw animals I saw. I just love to see small birds on a table. The birds grow

larger; I've seen them grow. I wouldn't want to get close to them though; I wouldn't want to scare the birds. I like squirrels. I love drawing animals the most. I can still remember what I see on the wall like birds, an eagle... What else? Chickens. Roosters. Small chicks. I watch them grow larger. Then I remember that when I was small, there was this little chick... wrens—if you don't scare them, they'll stay.

Writing a letter. I also have things that have been written. I've written and read things about other people, of their interests. I read their interests like a common goal, what it's like being on an airplane, going to places they've never seen before, seeing different objects, and seeing where airplanes fly.

We ate rice and vegetables. I remember when I was young, I would see things. I can remember things as far back as when I was small planting vegetables for my mom and dad. I would plant spinach. The chickens were scared of me. Then I would go to school. I used to go to public school and I used to walk as I did before the accident. After, I went to an appointment with a doctor. He gave me medicine to take, which was Tegretol. It made me walk unsteady and that's what made me walk lopsided. My body changed. But I still did drawings, sketching things to show how much I could draw and then I gave them out to people. This was also how I showed things I've seen before. I did pictures of animals: deers, fawns, dogs, chickens - just by imagining how they were done and multiplying them by numbers.

I went to school in Sonyea Developmental Center. Then it changed to Craig Developmental Center. Before it was closed, there were men and women; they worked together. I lived there for fifteen years. Now it's not a school and no one works there. It's a prison now. There are no residents there now. No one lives there. While I was there, I also wanted to know how to go to different places. When I moved out of Craig, I remember writing letters to some people like my niece, uncles, mom and dad. I stayed with my sisters, Alice and Jeanie, and my brother. At that time I went to an education program. We studied some math and reading. I also

did some drawing where I drew a picture of Christ. I loved drawing a lot. It was always on my mind, drawing. Now I live in an apartment with other consumers, and I do many other things. But I still draw . . . always.

A Story about Friendship

by Patrick Hurley

In Collaboration with Julianne McAdams

(Spring 2017)

{The following is excerpted.}

Mom's birthday is September 14, which is the anniversary of when I started working at Web Seal Inc. (Talking about birthdays, mine is March 14). This year, my mom will be 90. She still has the same personality, I know that. When I would go on vacation a long time ago, she would come, too, with me and my sister. She is outgoing, like me, and not shy. She reads books. Different kinds. I don't know the names, but I know she does. She's talkative sometimes, but not all the time. She likes to talk about family.

My mom is kind of short, and maybe has blue eyes. I think she does. She wears glasses, too. She wears casual clothes, like pants, and she dresses casual for church. Her favorite color is probably green. Her hair is kind of white. She likes watching golf, the news, and horse races.

I always make my mom laugh. On April Fool's Day, I tell her jokes. One time, I told her I was getting married. She didn't believe me. Another time, I told her she had a flat tire. Also, that the registration sticker on the front window of her car was expired. It was a joke. I wonder what I'll do this year. I'll think about it. I think I'm going to tell everybody that I have a wife, a kid, and a car. I will say Abby, from the Inspiration Project, is my wife. My kid is a boy, maybe named Chris. And if she was a girl,

she would be named Julianne. Maybe my car would be a green Chevy. My Mom and I like to tease each other, yeah we do. I'm so excited about April Fool's. I think people will laugh at some stuff in this story. I know they will.

I've got a lot of siblings. Like maybe ten? We all grew up in Mendon. We had a big house, all ten of us. It was me and my brother in bunk beds for a long time. The living room was bigger. In the living room, we had a couch and a fireplace on nice cold days. During the holidays, we had a real Christmas tree. It drank a lot of water. That's a way of losing weight, drinking a lot of water.

My mom did a lot of cooking, and we had pets. We had two horses, and two rabbits, and there were some cats and kittens, and we had a barn for horses. We had three dogs, Irish Setters. All three of them. What I liked was the pool. We had an outdoor pool and we did a lot of parties. I used to have to sweep, vacuum, and clean the pool. The water in the pool was a kind of bright, darker blue. We played games in the pool, too. Like Marco Polo.

This was a long time ago. We had a lot of parties, and we celebrated the holidays, when my father was there—he's not around anymore. He passed away. A long time ago, my father was the boss at Web Seal Inc., before he died. He started the company. We sold the house after he died to somebody else. It was a big house. And we had a pickup truck, a van, and maybe two cars. Like the blue Buick. We used the blue Buick for a funeral and a wedding. The bride and the groom rode in the back of the Buick. We also used it for my dad's sister's funeral. It was a good car.

What I liked was having a cookout with burgers and hot dogs. I've been doing the cooking on the grill at the group home. I learned from my father. In the old house, we had a porch. I loved the porch, and I would sleep there in the summertime. We celebrated Easter. We hid the eggs—not eggs that you eat but the ones with candy. My sister would hide so many outside, and we would try to find them.

I think we all miss the old house. I miss feeding the horses and the cats. The horses ate hay and oats and the cats ate cat food. One thing I do miss, but I don't do anymore, is shoveling snow and mowing the lawn. I would shovel the back sidewalk and the front sidewalk. And the

driveway. And raking leaves, too. I like shoveling snow. It's kind of like working out.

The change. My mom is only 89. Mom is not sick, just getting older. Sometimes, Mary or Julie will take me food shopping, and Mom will come with us. We buy stuff for dinner, and I eat with her at her apartment. They also take Mom to appointments, like the dentist or the hair salon or her book club. I don't know what kind of books she reads there. She's still doing that, so somebody needs to take her.

Like I said, I see her every Saturday. Sometimes, she doesn't go shopping with us when she has her shopping done. But sometimes we do go together, when the weather's good. I wanted to get my stuff, and I used my money, but when Mom was out of work once, I used my money to pay for her groceries. And why not? There's nothing wrong with that. She forgot to buy milk.

She doesn't work now at all. I think that is new. I think she likes being retired. She was working at a place for old people for a long time. She would do stuff; she would give people their food and wash the sheets for the bed. She liked working there, but she doesn't do it anymore.

One of my sisters helps her in the apartment she lives in now to wash her sheets and my sheets. I have a bed in her apartment. Sometimes, my brother Tim comes home from New York for the holidays, and he stays there, too. Last Mother's Day, I made breakfast for lunch for her and my sisters. I made some eggs and maybe sausage. They liked it. I know how to cook. And one of my sisters helped me to cook it.

I like my mom's apartment. It is brick. The outside is. Inside there is wood and a black and white carpet. The carpet was kind of gray before, but now it's not. We got a new one. Now it's kind of black and white. It looks kind of like a computer keyboard. She also has a TV, and so do I in my room in her apartment. We mostly have dinner together. Sometimes we have company there, like my brother and sister and their wife and husband. The apartment is a pretty good size. We do the holidays, too. My older sister, Mary, does Thanksgiving, and my brother John does

Christmas Eve at his house. On Christmas Day, we do it at my mom's apartment. For Christmas, we have beef, potatoes, and pumpkin or apple pie.

I want to write this about my mom because she's moving to a different place and she's important to me. Because she feeds me. But also because she's nice. Writing this is about friendship. We do a lot of stuff like going shopping, and I enjoy doing that because she's not allowed to carry heavy stuff and I can. I do help her because I don't want her to fall. I don't want her to get hurt because I care about her. She can push the cart, but I carry the heavy stuff like the milk. Or potatoes, those are heavy, too. Shopping is my favorite thing to do with Mom. I think it is one of her favorite things to do, too.

I thought a lot about what I was going to write. And it will be kind of sad, I know that. When she moves. It is kind of sad when you move. It just is. Like it was with me and Mom in Mendon. We moved and we packed a lot of stuff and furniture. A lot of stuff. We got rid of some things. But not the pool. You can't pack that. It won't fit. It's full of water. It was a big house, I know that. I was living with my mom and my father out in Mendon for a long time. My mom moving now reminds me of moving from Mendon.

This story is for everybody here, all of the staff, all of you. I like being here. I love writing, yeah I do! I like it because I like making stories. And being funny. This story is different because in the other ones I wrote, I was talking about my trips. This one's about me and my sister, and my mom, and her moving. And the rest of my family...

My Life

by Kathy Hendrick

In Collaboration with Taylor McCabe
(Spring 2011)

I was born in Rochester on December 10, 1953, but not in a hospital, in my parent's apartment. My uncle was there, but he didn't cut the cord—the doctor did. I weighed five pounds, a little tiny thing. I had six brothers and sisters. My brothers were named Tommy (the oldest) and Bobby (the sixth). My sisters were named Betsy (the fourth), Maize (the third), Patty (the fifth), and Chrissy (the youngest). I was the second oldest.

We had a lot of pets growing up: dogs, parakeets, one kitten, a lot of pets. I also had a guinea pig, named Rolling Paully, but it died. I had to put it to sleep because it had been sick. That was hard.

Now, Tommy has a wife named Robin. He has two kids named Mikey and Joe. My brother Tommy likes to hunt, which means there is always a lot of food at his house. Tommy went turkey hunting for last Thanksgiving, and my whole family ate turkey at his house.

Maize has a son named Danny and two daughters named Kim and Stephanie. Danny has a wife named Sue, and they have two children named Chastity and Crystal. Kim has a husband named Patrick who has a little girl, but I don't remember her name. Danny and his family come

up to Rochester every summer, so I get to visit with them. We always watch a lot of movies when Danny comes.

Betsy has a roommate named Linda, and Linda has two kids named Mikey and Robbie. Mikey is get-ting married soon. Betsy has a dog, named Bella, who had puppies who were born on February 26—there were seven boys and one girl.

Betsy always has puppies, but she always sells them. I go to play with the puppies every Easter. I love playing with them, since they're so cute! But they do grow up fast!

Linda is a chiropractor, so she helped me out when I had a problem with my back. I don't know how she did it, but it helped a lot. Her office is at Betsy's house since it's cheaper to have her office at home.

Patty married Steve and has two sons: Chris and Kyle. She has three daughters: Tracy, Jessica, and Jenny. Tracy has a husband, Aaron. Bobby has a wife, Cindy. They have two boys, named Robbie and Tommy, and a daughter named Chrissy. Chrissy has a husband named Matt. They had a dog named Zeke, but he died.

Patty used to work in a restaurant, but now she's a nurse. She hasn't been a nurse for a very long time, though. She has always liked helping people, even when we were young.

It was fun growing up with so many brothers and sisters. Sometimes we fought, but you know how kids are, everybody fights sometimes. The fights were always playful and a lot of them were pillow-fights. We went to the movies a lot and we went to the mall to go shopping. My favorite movie is Sleeping Beauty. We went to the Phantom of the Opera, which was good. I also like the movie and I own it. We saw it in Toronto, Canada. We stayed at a really big hotel when we went to go see it. The trip was fun.

We also went to Niagara Falls and took all the tours. We went up in the CN Tower, which was good. We went in the summer. I was about twenty years old. I went with my whole family.

I went to school at Longridge School in Rochester. I switched to a lot of schools to take Special Ed because they moved the program around. I don't know why. I don't remember the names of the schools, just Special

Ed and Longridge. I was on the honor roll three times. I was good in gym. I had a little bit of a hard time with science.

I graduated from Greece Athena School in 1973. My best friend there was Kathy Spring. We played games together like Twister. She was in Special Ed with me.

I was the school bus mail girl after I graduated, but in a different building, for extra credit. I stamped mail for the school. I had to quit because it was time to move on. Then I went to another school called Al Sigl 1. I worked there with camera parts, putting them together to make cameras. I didn't like it because it was hard for my hands. That's why I quit.

Then I went to UCP, which is where I go now. I live in a house for UCP in Irondequoit, on King's Highway. There used to be just one UCP house, but now they have seven. I live in one of the newer ones, but I used to live in an old one—but that's a long time ago. I like the new one better.

My favorite thing about living at UCP is that we go out. We go bowling, and we go out to play bingo. We go to the University of Rochester, and we go shopping. I like shopping for clothes. My favorite store is sometimes Target, but it depends. We go a lot of places. If you ask, they will take you where you want to go.

What I also like about UCP is that we celebrate holidays. On St. Patrick's Day we have corned beef and cabbage. On Christmas we have ham, and we have turkey on Thanksgiving. We exchange gifts on Christmas and have Easter egg hunts on Easter. On Valentine's Day, we make cards for each other and for our families. For New Year's we have snacks and stay up until midnight to watch the ball drop in Times Square on TV. It feels the same as holidays with my family.

I am the president of a club. It's called Kiwanis, and our group is called The Aktion Club. In the club, we have meetings, where we talk about where we want to go, and we have soapbox car races. The club makes the cars for us. I drove one, and it was fun, and I'm going to go to drive it again in June. The race will probably be by Lake Ontario. We go to ball games, and the club pays for it. My favorite team is the Red

Wings, a team from Rochester. We go out and have dinners. My favorite food is spaghetti, and sometimes I eat it when we go out—it depends on what I feel like.

One of the programs we do is art. I like to draw. My favorite things to draw are birds and horses. We do art every Monday, and we've been doing it for about a year.

We have a teacher to teach us math. I like math. We have another teacher who teaches us spelling. That's helpful when I use my DynaVox. My DynaVox is a machine I can use to type out words to help people when they can't understand me. The DynaVox will say out loud what I type. It helps me talk to the doctor and my teachers. I've had it for five years. I like having it. I can use it to send emails.

The teachers only sometimes understand when I'm talking, so I have to take my time when I'm explaining something to them. In our spelling class, we read about famous people and have tests on them. Frederick Douglass is my favorite famous person because he is from Rochester. I also like Susan B. Anthony, who is also from Rochester. I went a long time ago to see their graves at Mount Hope Cemetery. It's a really big cemetery. I went there with my old group home, which was called Elwood. Elwood was okay, but I like UCP better. I like the people I live with at UCP. We do programs together. I have a roommate named Rita; she's a good roommate.

About four years ago, I went to Florida with my family because my dad was going to die. We went because he wanted to see everyone. We went to Walt Disney World, which was great. My favorite part was the It's A Small World ride with the different countries singing. Then we went swimming. It was good. Then we went back home. We went in the spring, so it was still cold a little bit when we got back to Rochester. When we were in the airplane, my ears cracked. It hurt.

One time, I went to Hersey Park with Betsy. It was great. We took a tour there of the chocolate factory. At the end we ate a lot of chocolate. The tour was in a kind of train that worked almost like a roller coaster. They had games there, too, like throwing darts to pop balloons. I was pretty good at that, and I won a prize. It was a big, blue stuffed whale, and I still have it. Blue is my favorite color.

I use email to keep in contact with my family. I talk to all my siblings a lot, but I talk to Betsy the most. She lives in Irondequoit, and she comes to visit me a lot. When she comes to visit me, we go to the movies. I went to go see all the Harry Potter movies with Betsy and Chrissy. I like Harry Potter a lot—he's cute! We just went to go see Rango. It was funny,

I laughed a lot.

When I go to the movies with Besty, I usually just get Coke because I can't chew very well. My favorite actor is Johnny Depp—he's cute, too, but he's married. Too bad! I have seen his other movie, Pirates of the Caribbean, but only the first one.

There have been hard times and easy times, but as I get older, I realize that I am doing fine. I think about my family a lot—they're all I think about!—and I'm very glad to have them. I hope that the rest of my life is just as happy as my life so far has been—but I'm pretty sure it will be!

Greg's Life Story

by Greg Junious

In Collaboration with Kwanza Warren

(Spring 2015)

This is how my story will begin. When I was a little boy, I was really sick. I didn't have a lot of energy in my body. I was really bad off. I almost died. My mom and I had the same sickness. The doctors had to put blood back into my system. I don't remember the whole official story, but I almost wasn't able to live.

My mom passed away and my dad left my life. I have been through many surgeries. I have moved around from group home to group home my whole life. I moved into my first home when I was ten and lived there for 13 years. It was very unusual and difficult to adjust to the changes, to be around different people. Before that, I lived with my uncle. I have lived in the home where I am now since 2014.

Living in a house with nine people can be very stressful at times, but there are great advantages. I have friends I hang out with. I try to think of a girl I like at Edison. I think of her and that helps me. I have learned how to get through life struggles myself. My friend Jeffrey comes and helps me. He's a great guy. I really look up to him. I tell him he's my best friend all the time.

Some of the issues that I go through are stress, anger, hostility, or being unable to accept the way things are. I'm not used to annoyances or living with so many different people. I generally like a calmer house. If

you give the staff any lip, they will give it right back. I like to do my own thing and have quiet.

Once I got really mad and broke a lot of the stuff in the house. I broke the computer and yelled at the staff. I had to spend several hours at Strong Memorial Hospital that day. I didn't want to go back to the house after that. I am working through the anger issues, and I feel a lot calmer and like I can be more of myself now.

Money is satisfactory, but I can't always buy the things I want to get because I don't have a job. I did Project Search, which offered job training for hospital internships. Many of the people in the program were hired in the hospital after completing three internships. It was good for gaining job experience. I used to work at ARC Works, doing piece work from 2012 until late 2014. I put caps on bottles. I put bottles in plastic bags. I did different jobs every day, but they had to let me go. I am glad these problems happen because they give me a chance to grow and experience life. I can power through them and have family that really care about me.

There are many things that I enjoy that help me get through difficult times in my life. I like video games, girls, and watching TV. My favorite video games are on the 3DS. Mine broke on Christmas, the same day I got it. I had it in a stocking stuffer. I was going downstairs, step by step, and I set it down on the chair. I sat on the chair and broke my 3DS, but not on purpose! I wasn't paying attention. I should have been because that thing is no cheap little toy! It's a hand-held system. Now I have to wait months and months until the price goes down or at least until my auntie can find a new one.

My favorite TV shows are *Pretty Little Liars*, *The Fosters*, *iCarly*, *Henry Danger*, *Agents of Shield*, and any other shows with teen characters. I like *Two Broke Girls*—it's a funny show, a comedy. I consider myself to be a smart person. I also like watching movies. My favorite movies are the *Harry Potter* series, the *Hunger Games* series, *X-men Days of Future Past*, the *Twilight* series, *Marvel movies*, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, *Safe Haven*, *Dark Knight Rises*, *Fast & Furious*, *Immortal*, *Wolf of Wall Street*, and *Ted*. One of my favorite movies is *The Amazing Spiderman 2*. That was filmed in downtown Rochester on Monroe Avenue. I wanted to be an extra, but I didn't get down there in time!

Listening to music and having all of my family in my life really help me with my stress and aggression because they are always there for me. I enjoy going over to my uncle's house so that he can help take care of me. My uncle just bought me a new TV and I am very happy and thankful for it. I like going to festivals and amusement parks with friends. I like Darien Lake because there are a lot of rides. I like the Superman. You go up, up, up, and then you go down. You go down fast. One time on the Superman my buckle wasn't latched and I was scared for my life. I was lucky. Just before the ride started someone who works there came over and latched the buckle.

I like the Boomerang. You go up, and then you go backwards really, really fast. I like the Viper, but it's not my favorite because it gives you whiplash. I like the snacks, too, anything they have there. I have to say, the hamburgers are pretty good. But it's all really expensive. If you want a big soda in a special cup, it's seven dollars. Eight dollars with tax!

I like to eat popcorn at the movies. I joined a church group that meets on Sundays and reads Bible passages. I found out about the group through staff at my house. Her sister works at the church. We used to go to people's houses for dinner or pot lucks and read Bible passages. Now we just read at the church.

I met a girl at Edison who is really nice. I don't really know very much about her, but she is very beautiful and smart. She plays basketball and different sports with us at the gym. I wrote her a letter about my feelings and whatever was on my mind at the time. I want to ask her out. I also really like coming to the Inspiration Project program. My main focus right now is getting my life back together and then finding a special someone and to keep living life.

I am looking forward to being myself and looking past my behavioral problems. But I can see some changes happening in my life for the better right now. I'm really glad that I have family in my life. One of my other uncles is coming back into my life a lot more and wants to be a support system for me. He is going to do everything he can to make sure I get all of the services I need. My family is everything and helps with getting me through tough times. It is hard because if I ever got a woman, I don't

know how she would perceive me because I am in a wheelchair. It is rare to see women that date disabled men.

I am starting a new job called LDA (Learning Disabilities Assistance) program: it's a job training program. One day I hope to get a job that pays a lot of money. I am going through the process to gain approval to live in a supportive apartment. A staff member will come in once a month to help me with goals, so I will no longer be living in a group home. I am also getting a community staff that will allow me to get out more and explore the city. They will take me out and help me with my social skills, cooking skills, and finances. I met with one of the managers. She explained all that they can do for me. They can help with paying bills and more important, independent stuff. They can help me get a learner's permit. They will help me when I get my own apartment. That is beautiful for me. I think so.

I hope that in reading this story, you got to know the real me and my real personality. Having a good support system and doing things that I enjoy have helped me overcome my hardships. It is important to stay positive. As long as you have people that care about and respect you, things can always get better.

Dream Journal, Real Journal

by Toni Montgomery

In Collaboration with Rutul Amin

(Spring 2015)

I just got to my fancy hotel room in Hollywood. I am so tired from that flight! The first thing I am going to do is take a bubble bath. Then, I'll order in some breakfast. After, I am going to head to my store, Toni Diva. I will buy some fabulous clothes!

August 15, 2014

I live in an ARC house. I have an apartment upstairs and I have a roommate. My walls are blue. No pictures yet, but soon. Queen- sized bed, comfortable. I wish it was bigger. I have to share the bathroom. I hate it.

I just signed some copies of my book for these famous actresses and actors. I got to meet Tyler Perry, Oprah Winfrey, and my best friends Hannah and Ru-tul. I also met Mary, Mary, my absolute favorite gospel singing group! Jennifer Hudson came too. I went back to shopping and bought myself a custom-made pink short dress for my book's movie premier tonight. It has a V-neck and an open back. I bought a one-of-a-kind pair of pink, short heels with a matching pink and peach handbag. I went back to my hotel room. A lady named Sarah helped me get my stuff ready on my bed. She checked my

clothes, makeup, and hair.

August 18, 2014

My staff comes to knock on my door in the morning. "Time for meds, Toni!" they say. Then I eat breakfast. I like peanut butter. I put it on toast. I drink my coffee with sugar and cream. Now I'm awake! I get myself ready to go to Program. The first thing I do at (Program) is drink a second coffee. Class starts at 9:30am. We talk about how to find a job in the community. We talk about skills like dressing right, nice hair, filling out an application. I want a job writing more stories. I want to publish my book so people can read it.

I got dressed up. I called my chauffeur and drove to my book's movie premier in a pink limo. When I arrive, lots of people want to take pictures with all the different stars around me. I had two body guards named Tom Cruise and Will Smith. I walk onto the pink carpet that led all the way to my seat in the theater. A server comes and takes orders from the audience. I order shrimp with blue cheese and red wine. I also order strawberry cheesecake, my favorite dessert.

August 19, 2014

After lunch, I go to the computer, check my email, and just sit. My friends sent a picture of Latrice in it. My staff emailed me a baby picture of her son, Connor. Then class started at 12:00pm. We again talked about jobs. I really want to be a writer.

[The movie starts] I see myself on the screen. I play the girlfriend. Steven is the boyfriend. He gives me pink roses because he loves me! But I know he's cheating on me. I know because I can see it in his eyes. He has a lot of money. He buys me whatever I want. He respects me, I think. I ask him, "Are you cheating on me?" and he says, "Yes...I have a new girlfriend." I ask him, "Why did you do that? An affair? Now dating?" All he says is, "I'm sorry."

August 20, 2014

At 2:00pm, I leave the Program center in a van. I go back to my home on Brooks Avenue. I take my meds and relax. I watch some TV. I love Housewives of Atlanta. At 10:00pm, I lay down on my bed. I write about my day in my journal. I do this often. I write about meeting actors. I write poetry. I write to myself. Here's an excerpt:

Dear Tyler Perry,

I watch your movies.

Can you send me some pictures? Can you send movies? New movie.

Send pictures of you.

Good actor, that time you dressed like a woman

When is your next movie?

I really want to meet you.

Your girlfriend is cute. I hope you both are a happy couple.

You are a good person and are really funny.

My favorite role of yours is Madea. I also liked when you played Joe.

Write back soon!

p.s. This is Toni Montgomery

I say bye to him. "See you later, Steven." He says, "I apologize again." I moved on with my life. But his ex-girlfriend started stalking me. She called me everyday, at nighttime. I called the cops. They got a warrant to search her house. They found phone records, pictures, and emails of her stalking me. I felt sad. I moved to California. I'm on vacation.

August 21, 2018

I woke up and made breakfast. I toasted a bagel and put cream cheese on it. I drank milk. Program started at 9:00am. My bus came about a little after 8:30am. I drank coffee as soon as I get there. I did a word search like always. I put my stuff away, like my coat, in my locker. My friends and I met up at Program. Mondays and Wednesday we go to the

animal shelter, Goodwill, Meals on Wheels, and Moose Club. We had cooking class. I liked making stuff, like breakfast. We then look for more jobs. I really want to be a writer.

I think I'll wait for someone else. I'm going to go to the beach. I bring my journal to write in about my now ex-boyfriend and about his stalking ex-girlfriend. I feel good right now. There is no drama to deal with. I am going to start a new life here. My life as a writer.

August 22, 2014

I wait for the Trans bus with my friends. I hop on and head home to Brooks Ave. My staff made dinner – ribs, rice, and cabbage. It was yummy! I go to my room and write in my journal. I watch a movie. I cleaned my room. I love seeing my room clean. I feel independent. I relax. I watch a Tyler Perry movie. I am a huge fan of his. I talk to my staff about my day. They are nice. They leave at around 10pm. They will be back tomorrow morning. I love watching Housewives. I then lay down and think about my day.

I start writing at the beach. I remember feeling sad about him, jealous of her. I would never go back. I like it here. I can go back to my hotel. I get to use the hot tub. The nighttime here is pretty. I like looking at the stars. I get served drinks and grape juice and rum, all together. My travel agent had everything booked for me. I am going to stay here until this book is finished.

August 23, 2014

It's Saturday morning. I sleep in until 11am. I had some cereal. I go to Walmart and get my nails done. Pink nails, always. I head back home, go up the stairs to my room, and watch some movies. Guess which kind? Tyler Perry ones! Today I chose to watch Good Deeds. Oh! It was so good. I eat something sweet, like a banana. I relax. It's the weekend. Tomorrow, I will do the same thing - except I won't change my nails.

My book is about my life so far. I want my picture on the cover. My book talks about my dreams to be in Hollywood. I can't wait for people to know me as an author. Toni Montgomery. I knew this book would take time so I bought an apartment. I stayed in California for 3 years. My book is now finished. I'm ready to have it published.

August 24, 2014

Today, I will take a walk around my house, around the block. I like walks to get rid of stress. I come back home and eat dinner. Roast, potatoes, rice, and vegetables. I start writing in my journal. "Be myself." I always remember that because I am awesome. I am Toni.

I find a publisher. My book is finally done. People are going to read my work. I'm going to sell it. My picture will be on the cover. It will have a section talking about my life. I am so excited. I am so happy. I feel good. Nothing is stopping me now, not even God. Amen. [The movie ends]

August 25, 2014

I have another hobby that is not writing. I do word searches and crossword puzzles. They relax me. I also like to celebrate my birthday, May 20th. I take the people that I like to T.G.I.F.'s. My favorite thing to order there is burgers. The best part is when they surprise me with a birthday song. My real party is going to be on the 16th. A lot of people are coming to my house that day. There will be food and dancing. It will be my time to party. I can't wait for people to know about my life one day.

The Human Body and the Bus

by Jane Geffel

In Collaboration with Ellen Grinnell

(Spring 2017)

This story is about health. This is an important part of life. Everyone has to think about health. You only have one body so you better take care of it if you want to feel good in life.

When humans have a fever, we feel really sick. We drink water, take medicine, and take our temperature with a thermometer. When a bus is sick, it feels like it's burning. You turn it off, and you open the hood to see what's wrong. What is going on? You can use a dipstick to diagnose if the engine needs water and oil. When we go to the doctor, he or she uses a stethoscope to hear the heart and lungs. Humans have brains to think and walk, talk and feel, just like the bus has a computer that makes it run. The bus has a motor and transmission so it can drive; whereas, humans have hearts and blood so we can live. Now, a bus has no emotions; that's the only thing that's different from humans.

I'm going to give the bus a name - Bud the bus, the bus of health. One time I was in the doctor's office - I was on the Bus of Health. The Bus had many new ways of seeing into the body. Now I am giving the human a name - Micah. Unlike Bud, Micah has emotions that he has to deal with.

Now Micah, his health is going downhill. But Micah doesn't know what to do about his health. Micah is about fifty-seven. He is overweight

and he doesn't exercise. He is a smoker who smokes a lot - he smokes two packs a day. Over time, he has stopped eating as much and has started losing weight.

Now I will tell you more about Micah and Bud. Let us get on the Bud Bus. Most people can choose if they get on the Bud Bus because they have a free will. So in many ways Micah has many choices about his health. But believe it or not, he is more at risk when he decides not to go to the doctor because anything could go wrong at any time. So Micah needs to get on the Bud Bus. It is very important to get on the Bud Bus if you want good health. But when Micah is on his own, he doesn't have anyone to watch over him but himself. If you don't take care of yourself on your own, no one else will do it. When you get really sick, you don't always know what is wrong and if you don't go to the doctor, it may be too late. When you live on your own, you can decide everything that you want in life - whether it's good or bad.

But when you live in a group home, you can't decide everything in life and you have to go to the doctor. There's no choice not to go to the doctor. When you live in a group home, you are forced to work on stuff that Micah isn't forced to work on. But living in a group home in a way is a good thing because we are on top of our health. In a group home, we have people who watch over our health. So living in a group home has its good points health-wise.

Now I'm going to give another human a name — Jean. Jean is forty-nine years old. She lives a group home with nine other men and women. Her health is pretty good. Let's say that Jean puts up a fuss about going to the doctor every time just like the way Micah does. But, Jean needs to go because in the group home, life is different.

Now Micah, he has a wife. Her name is Min and she is a nurse. She tried to help Micah, but like a lot of men, he didn't listen to his wife. Before, she did not make Micah go on the Bus of Health, and that's not a good thing. Micah needs a lot of help like Jean, so his wife is having him go to the doctor now. He'd better take heed or else he won't make it.

If a bus's tire is running out of air, you need to get it checked before it goes flat. If Micah doesn't go to the doctor in time, he will run out of

air like the tire. It will be easy to put air back in the tire, but you can't put more air in Micah.

Now Jean, she is becoming more independent, but she still doesn't like to go to her appointments. Jean's nurse is named Yule. Jean is giving Yule a hard time about her health. Yule is really patient with her, but Yule is wearing down, and the doctor doesn't know how to get Jean to go to her appointments. Now the other staff - Jean's staff - are on her back. But Jean hides and goes for walks even though she has to be in their field of vision. She sneaks out.

Jean must sneak back on the Bud Bus through the back door because she doesn't want to be found. She is embarrassed because she doesn't like to give up her free will, but she wants to get the staff off of her back. Jean's got a hold of the steering wheel, and she's riding the Bud Bus on her way to get a tune-up. She's on top of her health now. She can't go backwards.

But now when Bud the Bus has a breakdown, Micah and Jean won't get help because the insurance won't pay. So, keep your eyes and ears open because times are changing under the Trump way. Before it's too late, you must appreciate the opportunity to get on the Bus of Health. Take advantage of the health care now!!!

Listen to the Bud Bus if you need help. Get on the Bud Bus and ride. Don't ever get off it.

TAKE HEED

From the Age of Seventeen

by Thelma Barnes

In Collaboration with Zarah Quinn

(Spring 2011)

{The following is excerpted.}

I left North Carolina at seventeen. I had an aunt living here in Rochester. She mailed me a ticket to come here. My sisters came here every summer, and I didn't get to come. I wanted to come too. I couldn't come. I was having seizures. So, my aunt, she mailed me the ticket to come. I was so surprised and happy. I was living with my mother and my grandmother. She didn't know I was coming. I just ran away. What I did was when I got here, I called my mom and told her where I was so she wouldn't come looking for me. And I told her why too. I was seventeen years old.

My aunt told me I would live with her. When I got here, my aunt met me at the bus station. I went straight to her house. She had a house of her own. It was a big house. It was really pretty good living with her. I started making friends and looking for a job, taking care of old people, grandmas and stuff like that. Going to their house and taking care of them. I did that kind of work. I went to school for that kind of work. In high school I was trained to be an aide. I was going to school and working as an aide. The more I learned how to be an aide, the more I learned how to

help people. I helped keep their house clean for them. My grandmother taught me how to houseclean, cook, all that kind of work.

Taking care of my cousins, taking care of kids. I worked as an aide until I started having more seizures. When they got worse, I had to stop. When I first started having them, I was twelve. The older I got, the better they got. And then after I got pregnant, they stopped for good. And then they started coming back little by little. My daughter's thirty years old. A lot of people ask me if my daughter has seizures. And I just tell 'em no. Now, every now and then, I have one. It runs through my family. I had a great uncle that used to have them. I was twelve years old when I got them. My classmates picked on me and laughed at me. I tried to walk away and pay no attention, try not to let it bother me. That's why I left home. I got out of school and came here. My sisters felt ashamed of me. They felt like they didn't want to own me or something.

I used to go out and drink with friends. There was a time - I used to drink beer, alcohol, stuff like that. A lot of times my friends would drink with me. They'd buy beer, wine, alcohol, and we'd sit and drink together. Laugh and talk and enjoy each other. To me, I didn't want to spend my money on it. That's why I never had drugs. I didn't believe in it. I had a good friend who died from drugs. It was an overdose. When I found out they died with it, I was in the hospital group home. I had some friends that came to see me, and they told me all about it. A lot of friends I had did drink. The other friend I had was an alcoholic. The guy that I was going with and been with, Frank, he didn't drink or do drugs.

I was told that by having seizures, I couldn't get pregnant. And when I got pregnant, my family was surprised, and so were the friends I made in Rochester. I met Darryl through a girlfriend. We were just friends. One of my girlfriends told Darryl I was pregnant. She was afraid of him, too. I figured that if I told him, he wouldn't believe me. A lot of guys, when they get you pregnant, they don't want to take care of the kid. I was glad I got pregnant because I was told I couldn't get pregnant. I had a lot of sisters. My sister ahead of me got pregnant at sixteen. I watched myself having sex. I started at the age seventeen. I didn't want to get pregnant too young. I couldn't afford to do it by myself. When I did get

pregnant, my aunt helped me while I was pregnant. She helped me do everything. When I had my daughter, my aunt helped me take care of her. She showed me and taught me how to do everything. I used to take care of her daughters, and so she helped me take care of mine.

Last time I saw Darryl, I was walking back out of the club. He saw me and ran. He knew I was pregnant. He knew my aunt, she was the kind of person who would fight men, you know? A couple times she ran men out of the house. If they were ogling me, if they tried to beat me, she chased them out of the house. That's just the way she was. She'd fight a man in a minute.

He knew her too good, too. Anytime I'd be with a guy, I'd introduce her to him. When I got pregnant, he didn't come back to my house. He figured that he wouldn't come back around no more. He knew my aunt would hurt him.

When I met Frank, I was living with my aunt. I met him through my aunt. When I met Frank, I was pregnant at the time. He was a real nice young guy. He was just a year older than me. We cared for one another a lot. He took me out a lot, he'd get me anything I wanted, anything I needed. If I asked him for anything, he'd give it to me. He cared for my daughter, treated her like a father. He made me love him. What he did, the way he treated people, he made you love him. That was the kind of person he was. He never hit me or nothing. All I could do was love him.

When I was about twenty-eight, I got shot in the back of my head... There was a guy who knew I had a boyfriend. Sam knew Frank. He knew that Frank and I cared for one another. He didn't want Frank to be with me. He was just a guy who wanted to have sex with me.

It was when I got with Frank that he started acting up. He liked me, but he didn't love me. He cared, but he didn't, you know? He just didn't want Frank to have me. He didn't want me, but he didn't want nobody to have me. He just wanted one thing; sex. He figured that he could come and see me when he wanted and then just walk away. He asked me to have sex with him because I was nice to him. I said if I got pregnant, I wouldn't know who the father was. He said, "If I can't have you, nobody will." I thought it was funny. I thought he was joking. Then I turned

to walk away, and he shot me in the back of my head. I woke up in the hospital and...

Forgot a lot of things when I got shot. It was a couple years later when I realized what happened to me. They had to shave all my hair off to get the bullet out. They told me if they didn't do it, I would die from the shot. I couldn't walk or talk. Neither one. Out of my head, didn't know nothing for a while. It took a lot to bring it back to myself. I lost a lot, you know? I was in the hospital ten years. Then I realized what it was. When my family at the time told me what happened to me, then I realized why I was in the hospital.

I was nice to everyone. That was the kind of person I was. I was kind to people, I had a nice friendship with people. And my grandmother always said, "Treat people the way you want to be treated." And I should have been careful, the way I treat people. I was too nice. They tried to ask me to do things that I didn't want to do. Take advantage of me. They tried to have sex with me, and I said no, and they would try and beat me. The neighbors would hear arguing and call my aunt. Someone would call my aunt, and she would come and chase 'em out.

Down south, where we lived there were a lot of white people. I didn't go by color. I didn't like that, you know? And then when I came here, I met a lot of people, black and white. I met all kinds of people. So if you nice to me, I nice to you. Mostly my own color took advantage of that. And I didn't like that. And I still don't like it, you know?

First he ran away and nobody knew anything. And then, he shot a girl in the mouth and killed her. And a friend came to the hospital and told me about it. And her boyfriend killed him. The same guy who shot me. You know, God don't love ugly. He dead, I'm still living. My grandmother would tell me, God don't love ugly. You can't run and get away.

So, my memories started to come back after a while...They moved me from the hospital to the group home. They didn't want me to get an apartment on my own. I couldn't get up and walk around the room or nothing. I couldn't do things on my own. If I needed help, I could call somebody. I need somebody around me, somebody I can call on if I need help. I've been in the group home ever since. When you're in good

hands and you're safe, no problem. And then when you need help, you got no choice, you know? The reason they let me go in the group home is because they didn't want me in an apartment on my own. They wanted me to be safe. I felt safe, too.

A friend of mine came to the group home and told me about Frank. I asked my friend about him, they knew I wanted to know about him. When I was in the hospital, he'd come and see me before he died. The last time I saw him, I was in the group home. He died when I was there. And my aunt kept it from me. She wouldn't tell me that he died. She knew he cared for me a lot. A while back, a girl set his house on fire, tried to kill him. Happened before he met me. He got burned real bad, messed up his liver. He died from it when I was in the group home.

My aunt tried to hide it from me because she knew how I felt about him. She figured I would get upset. But it made me more upset. When my parents died, after I got shot, my other aunt knew but didn't tell me. They kept it from me that my mother died.

I really don't feel too bad. I know I couldn't do nothing about it. I couldn't bring it back. I put a lot of things in God's hands. I ask God, "What can I do?" I can't call 'em or nothing. Just gotta live on, you know? I had a lot of prayer that helped me and touched me. He took care of me. Anybody that come to me, that I haven't seen in a long time. Come to me, speak to me, say they know me. I just give 'em a big smile, you know? Sorry that I forgot about 'em, but happy to see 'em. A lot of my family since I've been in this condition, they have been close to me, you know?... My daughter is the only one living that's close to me now. So I just be happy the way I am. I live the life I could. Can't walk like I want to, but I just do what I can – and be happy.

After I found out my aunt died, I really had no choice. My daughter wouldn't help. You know how they get when they're young? They get out there on their own. They ain't got time for you. Then they get married, then I can't depend on them, you know? They get older, and then they realize, "I should have helped my mother", and then it's too late. You know? "I wish I had did this and I wish I had did that", but it's too late then. With my daughter, I know she has a job, and two kids, that's why I don't depend on her too much. Before she got married, she could have

kept in touch more. And I feel bad about it, you know? Then the kids, and I said, "Well, what can I do?" I can live my life, I can't change it. My grandmother would tell me, if you do wrong, you pay for it. I thank God right now I'm still living..

I like going to church when I can, shopping when I can, being around people as much as I can. I enjoy meeting people, making friends. I love to cook anything. I'd love to take care of kids if I could. I used to love to do that. I can't take care of them no more like I used to, you know, being in a wheelchair and stuff like that. I used to get my hair done all the time when I was young, anyway I wanted. I miss that. It's a lot harder now.

I used to go to church. When I was young, I used to go on my own. I always believed in God, I prayed to God. My grandma used to take me when I was a little girl. Before I got hurt, I used to go to church alone. I take church wherever I go. Keep praying to God...

REFLECTIONS FROM THE BEHOLDER



Poems

by Charlene Furhy

*In collaboration with Ragyie Rawal
(Spring 2017)*

Spring

The birds return from the South, robins and blue jays and crows.
It's too hot down there.
They come up to the North, only to go back next winter.

The flowers will come out. Leaves and trees, too.
Little tiny buds. Roses and daffodils and the easter lily. Lilacs, too.
Dark purple, light purple, white even.

People plant seeds in the ground; there are new things growing.
It's spring.
We don't need to wear coats; the warm weather is coming.

Flowers are coming out.
They need water so they can grow. They'll get thirsty.
When the hot weather comes, use the rain to cool down.

Getting warmed up, we wear spring clothes,
Spring dresses, lighter fabric. Maybe shorts, but only cotton.
Sandals too - there should be no sneakers.

It's getting lighter, there's more daylight!
The days are longer. The sun is out.
It's not so hard to get up in the mornings.

When the sun comes out in the spring,
Who wants to sleep?

Doing Things Together

I live in a square building, surrounded by eight other residents. It's a
group home.
There are plants outside, living rooms inside.

I get to do these fun activities: Watch television, do my puzzles, color
adult books.
But it's not all indoors.
We go out on field trips and eat at Olive Garden.
I always say hello when I come back.

I've made different types of friends.
Some loud with energy, some quiet who hold my hand.
One girl listens to Spanish music.
My roommate watches movies up front, always cartoons or Walt Disney.
I'm mostly in the quiet back room, talking to people about ideas.

I try to do different things.
I help out by guiding people in writing.
I read for them and answer questions.
I go to art classes to make samples. They said I'll do more later.

I learn, too.
Math and reading and more.
I read *A Little House on the Prairie*, but I watched it on TV before.

We get papers about oceans and animals.
Keeping my mind busy...don't wanna lose it!

They help me get better, stronger and more independent.
I miss my family, but I see them on weekends.
I might go back for good someday,
But this is my home for now.

Summer

The kids play in parks with the dogs, fetch!
They're throwing frisbees around.
The little ones like to play in the sand, or the swing set.
Mother pushes them.

The hot weather comes...
We don't want to sweat in the summer.
Don't want to bundle up in heavy winter clothes.
Keep cool.

There's picnics, too —
Hot dogs, potato salad, mixed vegetables.
Put it in the cooler, maybe with something to drink.
Cook on the grill, flop it with tools.
It's a joy for everybody who comes.
We don't want any rain.

You can get sunburned at the beach, get blisters on your skin.
People lie down on their towels.
They wear sunglasses and bathing suits.
They listen to music on the radio.
Get changed for the summer.

I've been going to Virginia.
We went to Busch Gardens for the shows.
Acting, dancing, different costumes.

I went to Texas to see my nephew Nick.
He got married way back.
I remember the tuxedo.

Go out and get some fresh air. I'm on the porch with the staff.
I've been doing walking with my walker.

I'll be glad when it gets nice.
The days get longer and I feel joy.

My Walker

I hold it in my hands and slide with the two wheels.

It's gray with a little red knob.

You can fold it and park it.

It makes me more independent.

I stand up more with it and go on walks twice a week.

It gets me moving again.

We walk together, my therapist and I.

Around the physical therapy room and the hallways.

Looking at the pictures hung up or catching up with the others.

Sometimes I ride a special bike,

My feet are on the pedals and my knees bend back and forth.

The handlebars help.

I'm happy I can move around and keep going.

Don't wanna sit all the time, or lose my legs.

Don't wanna fall or lose my balance.

I have to learn to pick my feet up

Because it's rough on the sidewalk.

Poem

By Jeff Yarmel

*In collaboration with Sarely Licona
(Spring 2017)*

Introduction

This year has been fun. Every Thursday, I went to the Inspiration Project at the University of Rochester to work on a poem. I've been writing stories about myself for the past six years, but this year I wanted to try something new. I wanted a change from the usual story writing, so I turned to a poem. Poems are fun to write. They challenge you to put your thoughts into a different rhythm of speaking. This poem is about friendship, I chose this topic because I have a lot of good friends who are there if I need an extra hand. I started the poem with a definition of what I think friendship is. Then I describe specific friends who, I know, fit this definition of friendship. Friendship is important to me because life is great and it's nice to have people to share it with.

A friend is a person who hears what I'm saying
A friend is a person who is loving and sensitive
Someone who responds to my feelings.
They are always there for me.
We have things on our mind
We talk a lot

We work together and hang out.
I'm always there for them.

Laughter leads to happiness,
They make me happy.
Encouraging me to do the right thing,
Even when the right thing seems a little hard
They are trustworthy with secrets.

My friend Bill is a person who hears what I'm saying
My friend Bill is a person who is loving and sensitive.
One day it was really sunny,
I said, "Hey, Bill what's so funny?"
He came up behind me with some reindeer ears and put them on my
head.
We all started laughing.
He took a picture of me in them.
Bill also shows me his bike.
This isn't just any bike, it's a red motorcycle.
That's my friend Bill.

My friend Josh is a person who hears what I'm saying
My friend Josh is a person who is loving and sensitive.
He showed me how to set up a game,
It's called The Simpsons— Tapped Out.
The dad, Homer, blew up the town; and now I have to rebuild it.
But that's beside the point.
Josh and I go shopping for the room at CP.
We are always joking around,
He's a good friend.

My friend Kim is a person who hears what I'm saying.
My friend Kim is a person who is loving and sensitive.
She can hear me out,
If someone is driving me up the wall, I can tell her.

I can trust her.
One day I gave her her work mail,
She said "Thank you, Jeff."
Kim is cool, she makes jokes.
Her jokes make me happy.

My friend Ed is a person who hears what I'm saying.
My friend Ed is a person who is loving and sensitive.

He makes jokes.
He tells me, "Jeff, don't get in my way."
But I don't care, I keep getting in his way.
He drives six of us to work, five days a week.
Always playing music, all kinds and any kind.
If the bus has a problem he goes on the radio.
"2:10 to Pat the wheelchair lift doesn't go up."
And then someone comes to fix it.

He is a very funny guy.
If I'm not riding with Ed, he has to call in to Pat;
He says "Jeff is not going with me in the morning."

It's nice to have friends.
We have a lot of good times.
Make sure not to take your friends for granted.
Spend time with them.
We can lean on a friend if we are sad.
Life is hard, take advantage of the people around you.
Make memories.

UNICORNS AND DRAGONS AND BEASTS, O MY!



Princess Heather

by Heather Gloede

In Collaboration with Maggie Curtis
(Spring 2017)

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful castle that stood tall on a hill in Never Never Land. It was surrounded by a purple sparkly gate guarded by Peter Pan. Inside, there lived a wonderful family, whose daughter, Princess Heather, was an amazing cake decorator

Princess Heather's family was very big and she lived with all of them. Her mother, the Queen Jenell of Never Never Land, loved to eat the food and cakes her daughters made, and so did her husband, King Brady. The Queen also had a younger brother named Ken; he especially liked Princess Heather's cakes. Princess Heather also lived in the castle with her twin sister, Princess Holly, her older sister, Princess Joeline, and Joeline's children: Leah and Steven. Usually, when the family was done with dinner and dessert, her Grandma Rose would do all of the dishes. Everyone did their part.

One day, Princess Heather was making a gigantic cake for the Royal Wedding and she couldn't find her one cup. The Royal Wedding was for the future Queen and King of Never Never Land, the island nearby. The bride and groom were very excited for their cake, but they didn't know what it was going to look like. It was a surprise! Princess Heather looked high and low for her missing one cup. Until a drawer opened and

it appeared, and she said, "Thank you, Grandpa Joe."

Grandpa Joe's spirit was always helping her around the kitchen. He was her biggest supporter. The kitchen she had was designed by her grandpa and his spirit still lingered. Princess Heather was making a tie-dye zebra cake, and she needed to measure powdered sugar for the icing. The wedding cake was going to be six feet tall!

"Fiona, can you please get me some flavored fairy dust from the butterfly garden?" Princess Heather asked Fiona. Fiona was Princess Heather's baking assistant. "Of course, Princess Heather!" she said, and she went out to the butterfly garden to collect the fairy dust. The flavored fairy dust was what made Princess Heather's cakes so good. Suddenly, she remembered that she didn't tell Fiona what flavor to pick. She ran to catch up with her and saw Fiona in the hallway.

"I forgot to tell you what flavor to get! We need blue punch and radical raspberry flavor for the Royal Wedding cake."

Fiona smiled. "Sounds great!" Then they heard a crashing sound from the kitchen and looked at each other, surprised. They rushed back to the kitchen and there was something missing: the cake! Fiona looked out of the window and saw four of the Pterodactyl Dragons flying away with the cake in their claws. The Pterodactyl Dragons were born in the kingdom and Princess Heather had known them since they were babies. She couldn't believe the dragons stole her cake!

Princess Heather was very upset; she had worked so hard on that cake. A little while later, they heard a familiar sound. The dragons had come back for more! This time, they looked very different, they were tie-dye zebra-colored. Thankfully, Peter Pan was able to stop them at the gate so that they couldn't steal any more of Princess Heather's cakes.

Princess Heather went outside to speak to them. "Why did you take the cake I spent so long making?"

"It looked so good, we wanted to eat it," they replied. "But now we look pretty!"

"I know! You look like my cake!"

The dragons looked down guiltily, "We're sorry we ate your cake, but it was really good."

"What am I supposed to do now? The wedding is tomorrow!"

The dragons replied, "We can help you make a new one!"

The wedding was tomorrow, so the dragons helped Princess Heather make a new cake. They stayed up all night to make sure that the cake was done for the Royal Wedding. Her twin sister Princess Holly came in and said, "Heather, what are you doing?"

Princess Heather replied, "I'm making the wedding cake all over again! Because the dragons ate the first one!" Princess Holly noticed how dark it had gotten outside. "It's three o'clock in the morning. You need to go to bed."

But Princess Heather replied, "No, I have to get this done in time for the wedding."

The dragons continued measuring out the ingredients and stirring them together. After they finished mixing everything together, they poured the mix into the cake pans. Fiona helped the dragons put them into the oven to bake.

After the cakes cooled, Heather put them together and started decorating them. She made the zebra stripes out of crazy-colored fondant.

After she decorated the cake with the tie-dye zebra fondant, the Royal Wedding went on the way it should have before. The recent King and Queen of Never Never Land called Princess Heather up after the wedding and told her that the cake was delicious.

Princess Heather's sister Joeline was still training the dragons, who agreed to deliver cakes for Princess Heather's customers. If the dragons did a good job in training, they got cakes that didn't have the flavored fairy dust so that it didn't change the way they looked.

While Princess Joeline was training the dragons, Princess Heather was baking a cake for Princess Joeline's birthday. The cake was going to have blue flowers with red thorns on it since blue was Princess Joeline's favorite color. Princess Heather looked everywhere for her one cup, but she couldn't find it! This was the second time she couldn't find her one cup, which was strange. Eventually it appeared on the counter and she thanked her grandpa again. Grandpa Joe was the reason that Princess Heather loved baking so much. Grandpa Joe used to cook with Princess Heather and taught her how to measure things. Princess Holly also liked to work in the kitchen, except she preferred cooking. Usually when

the family had meals together, Princess Holly would cook and Princess Heather would bake.

The cake was just about done in the oven, and Princess Heather needed to make the Blue RazzleDazzle filling. She needed her one cup again, and again, couldn't find it!

This time she had to look everywhere for it. She was so worried she wouldn't find it. Princess Heather gave up and went outside to get the blue rose with red thorns for Joeline's birthday cake. Then she found the one cup next to the blue rose with red thorns.

Princess Heather was confused. "Grandpa Joe, why did you move the one cup to the garden near the blue rose with red thorns? Are you trying to show me something?" Princess Heather stood for awhile, watching the unicorns run around in their pen. When she couldn't think of a reason why the measuring cup was in the garden, she went back inside. She saw something shiny on the ground when she walked into the kitchen and she picked it up. It was a gold doubloon. "Where did this come from?"

Gimpy Gingy limped into the kitchen. Gimpy Gingy was the gingerbread man who had no leg. Gimpy Gingy was always around to help and make everyone happy.

"That came from the pirates. They were in here looking for something."

Princess Heather realized why Grandpa Joe hid her one cup. "They were looking for my one cup," she replied.

Princess Heather and her family went to talk to the pirates. Maybe they had a good reason for trying to steal her one cup. "Why have you been in my kitchen?" Princess Heather asked calmly.

Captain Hook was surprised. "We haven't been in your kitchen!"

Princess Heather replied, "Someone has." And she held up the gold doubloon. Hook turned and looked at a man with a striped shirt and red hat. "Smee, what do you think you're doing?"

Mr. Smee looked down in shame. "I just wanted someone to pay attention to me. I have been feeling blue lately, and I just wanted attention from somebody."

Hook said, "Stealing is not a good way to get attention. Why didn't you just tell us you felt bad?"

Mr. Smee shrugged. “I don’t know.” Hook turned back to Princess Heather and her family and apologized for Mr. Smee stealing. Captain Hook said that to make up for it, the pirates could help with delivering cakes.

Princess Heather had an idea. “Why don’t you go to Joeline’s dragon school? The dragons are helping us to deliver cakes too! They have GPS so that you can find your way to customers, and we can make saddles too.”

Captain Hook and his men nodded in agreement at the idea. “That sounds great, Princess Heather! You’re so smart, we’d be happy to help.”

With that settled, Princess Heather and her family headed back to the castle to finally finish Joeline’s blue rose with red thorns birthday cake. While Princess Heather worked on the cake, Joeline was deep in the woods training the dragons and getting the pirates ready to make deliveries.

The training was going well and everyone was having a ball. Tomorrow was Joeline’s birthday, so she only had so much time to train the pirates and the dragons. Thankfully, Princess Heather didn’t have any deliveries for that week.

The next day, Princess Heather’s family had big plans for Joeline’s surprise party. First, Princess Holly had to make Joeline’s special dinner, but when she was up in the kitchen, she couldn’t figure out what she wanted to make. Suddenly, the smell of Grandpa Joe’s beef stew filled the air. He never gave away his recipe before he passed away, so Princess Holly didn’t know what to do. Then, a voice whispered into her ear: “two pounds of beef stew meat...”

Once Princess Holly had everything ready, she headed upstairs to get Joeline. They were going to spend the whole day at the spa inside the castle. Princess Heather was in her purple sparkly footy pajamas, and Holly was wearing pink sparkly footy pajamas. They woke Joeline up and suggested that she put her blue sparkly pajamas on. Now they were all ready: the princesses, Joeline, the Queen and the King, Uncle Ken, Grandma Rose and, of course, Joeline’s children: Stephen and Leah.

They headed down to the spa, excited to be pampered. They spent the whole day relaxing and enjoying getting manicures, pedicures, and

massages. The family talked about all of the crazy stuff that had happened in the past week; they were happy that everything worked out. "I think you're going to have a great time tonight," Queen Jenelle said. Joeline smiled from ear to ear. She was happy to hear that she would be having a great birthday.

Later on, they headed upstairs for the party. Everyone was there! Peter Pan, Fiona, Princess Heather's assistant, Shrek, the janitor, Donkey, his girlfriend Ellie, and the unicorn from the butterfly garden. All of the dragons were there outside in the courtyard, and all of the pirates made it there too! It was time for dinner, and Princess Holly brought out Grandpa Joe's famous beef stew, enough for everyone. Joeline was so surprised and so happy that she could have her favorite meal on her special day.

When they were finished eating and chatting, they went outside to enjoy some cake. The dragons were very excited to have some more cake, and Princess Heather made sure that she didn't put flavored fairy dust in their pieces so they wouldn't change color again.

Everyone had a blast, laughter filled the air, and they celebrated the night with full bellies. Shrek's pants burst - he was so full, and the dragons giggled with glee. Princess Heather burst out with laughter, looking around at all of her friends and family, and they all lived happily ever after.

Clara's Secret Wish

By Tori Bement-Schramm

In Collaboration with Zarah Quinn

(Spring 2013)

It is midday in August in a small town. In the center of the town, there is a new house with lots of windows and white flowing curtains. Clara is looking out one of the windows on the second floor of the house. Her hair bun is messy. She is twirling a strand of hair around her finger.

There are people below walking on the sidewalk. She sees a man with a brown jacket talking on his phone. She sees a woman with long blonde hair riding her bike, her dog running along behind her, the leash tied to the handlebar.

She has just finished reading with her mother, and she is tired. Her mother is cooking dinner before she goes to work at the hospital. Her mother is a nurse. Her father is never there because he travels for work. He plays the organ and piano, travelling all over the world, to Paris, London, and Rome.

Her crystal blue eyes are full of sadness. She watches the birds soar through the sky. She is thinking how beautiful the sky is. And she wants a friend. A friend like in her books. A friend who is courageous and kind. A friend who will protect her from anything. Someone who is there to talk to, her own age. She hurt her back last summer and she can't walk. She is wheelchair bound and she feels far away from other kids.

As she watches, a bird lands on the windowsill. She opens the window, and the bird jumps on her finger. It is a bluebird, with a short beak,

and it sings for her, with whistles and chirps. She is surprised. She listens. She strokes the bird on its head with the tip of her finger. The bird stops singing and closes its eyes.

There is a knock at the door. Clara flinches, and the bird flies away. Her mother says dinner is ready. Clara watches the bird. It flies into the sky, disappearing into the clouds.

Last June, on a sunny day, Clara was running through the flowers in the field behind her house. She was just having fun. She was playing hide and seek with her friend Erica. Erica was counting. Seven, eight, nine....

Clara ran toward a willow tree. She tripped over a root. She fell. She hit her head on a rock sticking out of the ground. It felt like someone was slicing her head. She lay on the ground, not moving.

A few minutes later, her mother came out of the house. Cookies and milk were ready for the girls. Suddenly her mother heard screaming. Erica was running through the field towards her.

Clara doesn't like being in a wheelchair. She can't walk or run or play with other kids. Instead, she reads. Fairytales like Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast. She likes fairy tales because they take her away, away from her wheelchair.

Her mother is about to leave for work. The nanny arrives at their house. She is about the age of Mother. Clara doesn't like the nanny. She's stern with Clara, like a drill sergeant. She fixes foods that Clara doesn't like, that look like slop. But when Clara tells her mother about this, she says, "Nonsense. It's your imagination. She's just trying to take care of you."

"I want you in bed by nine," her mother says, hugging her and kissing her forehead. "Goodnight."

Her mother leaves. Clara goes to her room to listen to soothing music. She hugs her swirly, sparkly pink unicorn, Pinky. She carries Pinky all over. She is a good friend to Clara. She talks to Pinky because she always listens.

She tells Pinky about what she learns in her homeschooling. She tells her how she's feeling, like how she doesn't like the nanny, and Pinky listens and doesn't argue with her.

The nanny comes bursting into the room. "It's time to go to bed."

Clara feels what most kids feel when adults yell at them. She feels scared. She goes to bed. She sees a shooting star. She cries because her mom's not there. The nanny scares her.

Clara lies in bed after the tiring day. She wishes on a star that her pink sparkling unicorn could be alive. At night when she goes to sleep, there is a storm. It is really windy. The next day when she wakes up, the new-rain-smell feels great. Clara is surprised to hear something clip, clapping on the hard floor. Then she starts calling out, "Who's there?"

Suddenly, her pink sparkling unicorn comes walking out and says, "Hi, Clara."

Clara screams, waking up the nanny. The nanny comes in the room. She has messy hair and her face is a mess.

"Clara. It's too early for this."

In a tiny voice, Clara says. "I'm sorry, I had a bad dream." Clara had quickly hidden Pinky under her blanket. She is warm and soft against her skin. The nanny leaves, grumbling, shutting the door.

Clara quickly takes Pinky out from beneath the covers. With eyes wide with excitement and a huge grin, Clara asks, "Is this real?"

"Yes," Pinky says, "it's very real, Clara."

"How?" Clara asks.

"A fairy from another world heard your wish and came to grant it. These fairies watch the clouds in their world and see what's happening in this world. One fairy was interested in you because you still believe in magic." Pinky scraped the edge of the blanket with a soft hoof.

"Oh, I love fairies!" Clara says.

Clara does everything with Pinky. Clara and Pinky play tea party in the room with a Beauty and the Beast tea set. They watch TV together. She makes Pinky a box of blankets and pillows underneath her bed where Pinky sleeps. Clara keeps Pinky a secret because she doesn't want her mother to be scared; it's not everyday that you see a sparkly pink unicorn that's alive. Clara imagines that her mother would scream and take Pinky away from her, call the news or police.

Whenever her mother comes, Pinky freezes in her pose. During the day, when her mother leaves for work, Pinky comes out from under the bed, and Clara lifts her onto the bed with her.

One day they are in the backyard looking at the clouds. Pinky was on her lap. The sun was out, and it felt good to Clara to have the sunlight on her skin. It made Pinky sparkle. Clara likes Pinky because Pinky stays put, she doesn't leave. Pinky listens to Clara talk about girl stuff, like crushes or how she wishes her dad were home. Pinky talks about being able to walk or trot or run wherever she wants to go. Clara thinks she's lucky.

Clara said softly, "Even though you're a stuffed animal, you're my friend. I love you, Pinky."

"I love you," Pinky said. "You're my best friend."

One night they build a tent in the room. Their light is a little flashlight with a rose that lights up inside. Clara says to Pinky, "I wish I could walk."

Pinky says, "Turn around."

Clara says, "Why?"

Pinky says, "Turn around so your back is towards me."

Clara turns around. Pinky puts her horn on Clara's back. Clara feels a shock.

"What was that, Pinky?" she asks.

She says, "You will find out in the morning, Clara."

Pinky hops up on the bed and curls up next to her. Clara holds Pinky tight. When she wakes up, Pinky is gone! She sits up by herself, surprised. She turns to put her feet on the floor and stands up. "They are magical!" She stands there for a minute just looking at her legs with amazement. Then Clara hears some wrestling coming from the closet. Clara puts one foot in front of the other and crosses the hardwood floor. Walking feels amazing. She goes over and opens the white door and finds Pinky with jewelry and a hat on. Clara stands at the closet with her hands on her hips, smiling. Giggling she asks, "Pinky, what are you doing?"

Pinky says, "There is a lot of beautiful stuff in here. You should wear a pretty sun dress and surprise your mom."

Clara puts on a pink sparkling dress with flowers on it and goes down to surprise her mom. When she walks in, her mother is making breakfast.

"Hi, mom" she says.

Her mom says, “Hi, dear,” and does a double take. She screams and hugs her and whispers, “How did this happen?”

“Remember the pink sparkling unicorn that I always carry around? I made a wish that Pinky was real, and it came true.”

Her mother joyfully shouts, “Pinky!” Then she says, “You know we are going to have to keep her from the outside world.”

Clara says, “But why?”

“Everyone will be interviewing her and, worst of all, cut off her horn, so it will be Mommy and Clara’s secret.”

It is night and Clara is watching TV. She is lying on the ground on her belly, her hands supporting her chin. Pinky is next to her, frozen like a stuffed animal. Her mother is at work. The nanny is making dinner.

Clara whispers to Pinky, “I wonder what kind of slop there is tonight.”

Pinky says, “Tell her then. It’s alright. I’m here. I will never leave.”

The nanny calls dinner. When Clara walks in, the nanny says harshly, “How can you walk?”

“I’ve been taking physical therapy,” Clara says. “Walking a little every day.”

The nanny grunts. She tells Clara to sit down at the table. Clara peaks down at Pinky, who she set down on the dining room chair next to her. Pinky gives her a wink. Clara takes a deep breath and says, “What kind of slop did you make?”

The nanny says, “Excuse me?”

Clara stands up and pushes back the chair. “I don’t like your food. I haven’t been happy with you for a while. I don’t like how you hurry me or talk to me like a drill sergeant.”

The nanny says harshly, “Go to your room, young lady!”

Clara feels scared. She starts to go to her room, taking Pinky with her. But, before she can go, the nanny rips Pinky out of Clara’s hands.

“You’re too old for this stuff.” She pushes Clara to her room and locks the door.

The nanny goes downstairs and takes Pinky with her. She screams at the stuffed animal. “I don’t know if you’re real or not, and I don’t know what you’ve done to her. I’ve seen Clara carry you around and talk to

you. And now Clara can walk. If you are real, better hope you have a few lives.”

The nanny rips her legs with her sharp nails. Pinky stays frozen. Then her horn lights up.

Clara is in her room, crying and talking to herself. “Why did I do that to myself?” Then Clara hears the front door open and slam shut. She hears yelling downstairs. Then her mother opens her bedroom door. Still in her coat and hat, with her keys in her hand, they hug affectionately. Then the mother says, “Let’s go get Pinky.”

They go downstairs and find Pinky all over the place. The mother yells at the nanny, “What have you done here?”

The nanny says, “A child that age shouldn’t be carrying around a stuffed animal.”

Her mother says, “If she likes it, she can carry it around! What’s the problem with that? she’s not hurting anyone!”

“Well, it’s not appropriate.”

Her mother glared at her and said sternly, “You’re fired.”

The nanny mumbles on her way out, slamming the door.

Clara starts crying. Her mother says, “Let’s go pick up Pinky.”

They find her, sew her together, and leave her on a coffee table with a sheet over her for the night.

Clara goes to bed. Her mother sits on the couch, looking at Pinky for a long time, whispering and crying, “Please come back.” Finally, her mother goes to bed.

Something happens that night. Pinky’s heart starts to beat, and all her scars are gone. She slowly opens her eyes. She looks around. She pushes the sheet back, wanders up to Clara’s room, and opens the squeaky door. Clara suddenly wakes up and says, scared, “Who’s there?”

Clara gets up and goes over to the light switch. When she turns it on, her eyes get wide and she shouts, “Pinky!” Clara kneels down, crying, and gives her a big hug.

“Mom! Come and see!”

Her mother comes running out in her nightgown, saying, “What’s wrong?”

“Mom, Pinky has come back to life!”

They all hug. That night they all fall asleep on the couch together.

SPORTS MANIA



Game Day

By Chris Thornton

In Collaboration with Zach Arnold

(Spring 2014)

I wake up with a smile on my face. It is game day. I change into my clothes to begin the day, just like every other day. I walk down the hall and sit down at the kitchen table. My waffles are presented in front of me and I pour my favorite maple syrup on them. After I slowly enjoy my waffles, I take my medications to keep myself healthy throughout the day. Now I begin to prepare for my game.

I get into my game jersey to start my routine. After I am all changed, I place my headphones on my ears to listen to my radio. The music of 100.5 gets me pumped up and I turn my music up loud enough so that I cannot hear anything else. After my tunes get me excited, I watch a little TV. I put in *Everybody Loves Raymond* into the DVD player, clearly one of the funniest shows ever to be on TV. Whenever Robert makes funny faces at Raymond. I laugh out loud because it is just so funny. Every once in a while, I start one of my silly dances. It's easy to say my dances get me excited the most. I grasp my hips and swing them around with a few arm twirls into the air. Although funny, the dances are the special pre-game routine to prepare me for basketball. To make sure I don't get hungry during a game, I eat my special bologna, cheese, and ketchup sandwich. No one else in my house eats that kind of sandwich, and that's what makes it my special "Chris" sandwich. My sister picks me up at the house and we begin to drive to the YMCA in Webster.

I bend down to climb into my sister's small white car. I put my water bottle next to me in the front seat. My sister and I like to talk on the way there. My sister is beautiful and we are really close. We tend to talk about a lot of things. To start, we talk about how everyone in my house is doing, then about the different events at the house, and finally how my family is doing. I love talking to my sister because she knows me best and always finds a way to cheer me up.

After a while, my sister turns on her radio. I usually plug in my personal radio to tune it out. On my trip there, I see things like the McDonald's and gas stations. The sun is usually shining on my eyes and I love the feeling.

It is one of the warmer days and I tend to stick my head out the window. The wind rushes on to my face and it tends to make my sister laugh. Sometimes, the other drivers on the road go too fast and cut us off. I don't enjoy those other people who are driving. I usually take that moment to talk trash and a few select words that I am not supposed to say. Finally after about a 10-minute drive, we make our way to the YMCA in Webster.

We pull into the parking lot and as soon as I open the door, I can feel the heat. I grab my water bottle from the cup holder and we make our way to the front door. On the way there, we see lots of things like other cars, the playground, and the slide. I even see people like my teammates and other people who go to the YMCA. We make our way to the front door and the first thing that I see is a soda machine. I like soda, but because it is game day, I do not drink it. Before the game begins, I take off my sweatshirt and sweatpants so that I am in my game clothes. Then I see the courts and I get excited. It is almost time to play. We start by doing some warm up exercises. Some of the drills we do are practicing layups, passing a ball against the wall, and shooting the ball at the net. Once we are done with our warm ups, our coach talks to us. He tells us our positions for the game so that we all know where to play. Then we take our positions on the court. The game is just about to start.

We do the tip-off. The ball is thrown up into the air, and I try to tip the ball towards my team. Since I am one of the bigger players, I usually win and pass the ball right back to my teammates. Right away we are on

offense. I ask for the ball and put my hands up in the air. They pass it to me and I make my way to the 3-point line. I have someone defending me with their hands up, but I move to the side and take the shot. It goes straight through netting. Lucky for me it goes in! Now we must play defense.

The other team begins by passing the ball inbounds. My teammates are usually the ones who try to steal the ball from the other team. I stay back on defense, and as the team comes down the court, I go towards the net. The other team tries to shoot a jump shot in the paint. They miss and I jump up and I grab the ball with two hands and pass it to another teammate. My teammate dribbles up the court and passes the ball back to me. I get the ball, take the shot, and make it. I've made two shots in a row, and I am really pumped up.

The game continues on this intense pace, and then we get to half time. This is the time when my team takes a water break. Everyone goes out into the hallway to the water fountain, but I've got my own water bottle that I have filled up before the game. I do this because there are other teams that play basketball at the same time. When I watch the other teams, I learn a lot from the way the teams play. Soon my teammates get back from the hallway and we all watch the other game together. It is much more fun to watch with my teammates than when I watch by myself. My teammates and I tend to tease each other and call each other names. Even though we tease each other, it is all in good fun! Then, the coach comes and talks to us. Our coach is very serious and calms us down after all of our teasing. He talks to us about what we need to focus on and where we are playing on the court. Halftime is over; the second half has begun.

The second half begins with the ball being passed to my team. My teammate passes me the ball and I get the ball into the offensive zone. I take a shot right near the free throw line. The result is not the same as my previous two shots; I miss. I do not get mad, sad, or disappointed; I just focus on playing defense and move on to the next play. By not getting mad, I am able to redeem myself on the next play.

The other team gets the rebound off my missed shot and brings it into our zone. They make a few passes to bring the ball up the court. I am in

place defensively against the shooter. The shooter stops walking towards the net and takes a step back to try the shot. I put my left arm up in the air and block the shot. I hug the ball in my arms to show that I have it. As soon as I can, I get the ball out of my hands and pass it up the court to my teammate. He gets the ball and scores on a breakaway layup. The game goes on for quite some time and then suddenly it ends. I end up shooting 3 for 4 and I collect 5 rebounds. We end up winning the game. The game is a lot of fun, but it is one of many so I am not sad.

I grab my water bottle and change into my other shirt. My game jersey has gotten wet with sweat. I need to change so that I can go out to eat. I go out to my sister's car in the parking lot and we make our way to Pontillo's Pizza. We grab 2 pizzas, a 7-up, and 2 giant cookies. We go back to my sister's house and we eat. Eventually I make visits to my father's friend's house, my father's friend's neighbor's house, and lastly to my aunt's house. I am a busy guy after a basketball game. It is all the same old stuff, but time with my family and friends is important because I care about their feelings. It's always good to see everybody, and by the end of the day, I make my way back to the group home.

It's the end of a long day, so I take a shower, have a snack, and get ready for bed. I'm tired and I climb into my bed. It is the end of my day and I simply fall asleep.

Motorsports, Football, Hockey, Wrestling, Basketball, and Disney World

by Russell Hill

In Collaboration with Emily Corpuz

(Spring 2018)

{The following is excerpted.}

Wrestling

I love wrestling. I like to watch everything about wrestling on TV, and it comes on around two o'clock or three o'clock. I started watching it at the group home on King's Highway. No matter what night it's on, wrestling always has a name like "Monday Night Raw". That one is on TV on Mondays, and that's when the superstars come out—John Cena, Randy Orton, the Big Show, and the Undertaker!

One of my favorites is Rey Mysterio. You want to know why he is one of my favorites? I got his shirt, and his hat! I got them at a wrestling shop, which I visited in person. I also have another favorite—Triple H, and I have his shirt. And Stone Cold Steve Austin's shirt. I also have Batista's shirt. I also have an NWO hat (which stands for "New World Order").

I also have a hat that says "Tap Out" on the front and "My Fight Matters" on the back. It's got a little symbol on it—it looks like a 'T.' There's also a "Tap Out" logo on the tag, inside the hat. There's some

more words on the tag, and on the back of the tag, too. I got the hat at a wrestling match, one I saw in person.

This wrestling match was in the Rochester Royal stadium a long time ago. I went there with one of my staff from King's Highway. It was just me and the staff. I saw the match in person. I was sitting right there! I wasn't that close, but I was towards the middle. You could see the whole ring. Wrestling always happens in a ring.

The match began with the national anthem. There was an American flag dropped down from the ceiling. (I actually have four shirts with the American flag on them, and one has the American eagle.) The match was a "Smackdown Live", which comes on Tuesday. The ones who wrestled were all superstars. I also saw Kurt Angle. He's a manager at the matches, and he gives out the titles. He used to be a wrestler. He's in the Hall of Fame. I saw Shane McMahon and Stephanie McMahon, brother and sister, and their father, Vince McMahon. I saw Triple H in person—he's an old wrestler! I also saw "TNT" Savio Vega—he does all the wrestling. I always watch him every Wednesday, about 8:00 pm for "Wednesday Night Wrestling".

I got two titles—wrestling belts—at the match! They were from one of my staff, who got it from the wrestling shop there. Wrestling belts are big belts, and they say something like "Wrestlemania" on them. My staff bought the belts at the match and gave them to me for my birthday later. The belts are something light, not that heavy, and they're silver and gold. You can hold it over your shoulder. My staff also gave me a wrestling piggy bank. It looks like one of those superstars, like Roman Reigns and John Cena. It is a triangular-shaped piggy bank that is red on top and gold and silver all around.

On Thursdays and Fridays, there isn't any wrestling, and on Sundays, wrestling is called "Wrestlemania". There's Summer Slam, but that's just during the summer. There are also the NWO matches—a wrestling event with all the superstars. It happens during summer, spring, or winter—it's kind of a year-long thing.

There are also two wrestling groups, the WWF and the WWE. They stand for "World Wrestling Federation" and "World Wrestling

Entertainment.” The WWF is kind of old, like old time wrestling. I like both of them the same.

I like reading about wrestling. I checked out a book from the library about wrestling. It’s about 100 wrestling matches! It talks about all of the wrestlers and TNA, which stands for “Total Nonstop Action”, a style of wrestling. Also, the library just got a new book that’s about wrestling champions. I haven’t been able to read it yet because others have always been reading it, but I’m excited to read it!

FIGMENTS OF FUN IMAGINING



How the Whale and Giraffe Became Friends: A Children's Story

by Caitlin Weir

*In collaboration with Maggie Perry
(Spring 2018)*

This is dedicated to my new niece.

Once there was a little giraffe who didn't like how she was so tall. She tried so hard to talk to the different animals, but she was unable to. She didn't have many friends.

The giraffe tried to talk to the monkeys but everytime she came close, they would swing away and laugh. She would try and talk to the frogs, but they were little and would look up and say, "What? We can't see your face!" She tried to talk to the zebras, but they galloped away because they couldn't hear her! The giraffe got so upset that she started to cry and run away.

The giraffe started to run because she wanted to get far away. She came upon the sea. She thought that nobody would be in the sea because she wanted to be by herself.

When she reached the shore, she saw something shimmery and moving around in the water. She got a little nervous to go in because she was afraid that whoever was in the water would also make fun of her.

Meanwhile, there was a whale who was all alone. She was a little lonely and always hoped that one day she would have a friend to play with. She thought that one of the reasons why she didn't have friends was because she didn't like being in the water.

The seahorses thought that she was too big and couldn't play with them. The dolphins laughed because she couldn't jump around like they could. The turtles were always faster than she was and they could go on land. It just wasn't fair!

The whale always thought that the only way that she could get friends was if she could somehow get out of the water. But, she thought that that would be impossible. She figured that the best way to meet friends was to swim as close to the shore as possible.

When the whale got close to the shore, she saw a giraffe. She tried to say hi to the giraffe, but at first the giraffe ignored her. The whale kept at it until finally the giraffe yelled out, "You don't want to get to know me!"

The whale went, "Why?"

The giraffe said, "I'm too tall, so you can't hear what I'm saying!"

The whale exclaimed, "All I have to do is look up to see your face! But I don't need to see your face to hear what you are saying! I just need to focus!"

The giraffe asked, "Really?" The whale insisted, "Yes!"

The whale asked if the giraffe had always wanted somebody to focus on what she was saying while she talked. She said, "Exactly. When I talk all of the other animals are too busy to listen to me, and they don't hear what I'm saying!" The giraffe asked the whale, "Do you have any friends?"

The whale said, "Not really. All of the other sea animals like being underwater, but I don't."

The giraffe inched towards the water because she was nervous. She had never been in the water before. She wondered what it would feel like. She put one of her legs in the water and went a little closer. The water was a little cold at first, but she went further in. She started splashing around, then realized that being in the water was fun! She exclaimed, "I don't have many chances to be in the water. But now that I met you, I can be in the water more!"

“I wish more animals would go in the water because I get really lonely! It would be fun to have friends that don’t know how to swim!” The whale said, “I wish I could meet more animals from different kingdoms!”

The giraffe splashed around and said, “Other animals don’t realize how much fun it is to be in the water! I’m jealous! You get to have fun all day!”

The whale said, “If I were as tall as you, I would see everybody in the Animal Kingdom and be able to yell out to them!”

“Oh, I’ve never thought about it!” The giraffe exclaimed, “I guess you are right. That would be fun!”

The whale said, “Why don’t you try that? Why don’t you try and make some friends and bring them down to the water! We can have a party! Maybe I can try to get my own friends!”

The giraffe said, “Hey! If you wanted to, you could stay underwater for a long time because of how long you can hold your breath. You can play with all of the animals, and then you could invite them up for the party!”

The whale said, “I’ve never thought about that before,” she paused and then exclaimed, “We’re going to have a party!”

The giraffe went back to the Kingdom; she was able to get some of her friends like the monkeys, the frogs, and the zebras. The whale went under the sea and was able to get the fish, the dolphins, the turtles, and the seahorses.

The seahorses made music by playing on shells, the turtles decorated the sea with coral, and the monkeys brought bananas for their sea friends. The zebras showed the dolphins how to dance, and the dolphins were doing backflips. They all had a great time playing around at the party. They all became friends!

The giraffe and the whale realized that they should love themselves and be happy with what they have, as well as always being open to trying something new!

Murder at Moonstone High: The Rumor Mill Story

by Ann Kurz

In Collaboration with Anna Alden
(Spring 2017)

The spot shines center-stage on the lifeless body strewn as a prop on the dusty floor. Six cops and a crime lab photographer are doing a seemingly choreographed milling around the stage. Gasps silence the actors' chit-chat as they file into the high school auditorium while echoes of whispers fill the cavernous space.

"Who?"

"What?"

"Why?"

"How?"

"How could it be?"

"Suicide? So sad!"

"Really, murder? You think? Like that?"

"Brent? You mean - our stagehand - Brent? Brent Kincade?"

"Oh, dear God, no!"

As the actors gather in small groups, they see Director Simon Montgomery sitting on the edge of the stage with his head hanging down. Brushing his auburn bangs to one side, he stands and is met by an officer from upstage. Facing the auditorium, he lifts his arms into the air.

“Settle down, folks! Could everyone please be seated? I have some sad news to share. Unfortunately, as you can see behind me, I discovered Brent Kincade dead onstage about two hours ago. I called the police who are finishing their initial investigation now. From first glance, it seems an apparent suicide. But, because we were probably the last to see Brent last night, the police would like to talk with each of us to see if we can shed any light on the circumstances surrounding his death.”

Amidst the idle murmurs from the cast, a strikingly tall, ultra-slender woman stands, swishing her waist-length, coal black hair over her shoulder. Her patrician voice cuts through the increasing chatter like a bolt of lightning. “What a revolting development! I can’t be expected to dawdle around here all day, waiting to answer questions about someone I hardly knew. I have things to do, places to go, people to see. I should go first. After all, I’m Rav-”

A gaggle of chorus girls interrupts, mimicking the woman. “I’m Raven Valentino, heiress of the Italian publisher Valentino Volumes, and the star of the show.”

Simon sighs, his shoulders drooping in disappointment over his wife’s callousness and the girls’ bratty ways. “Good grief, Raven! Ladies! Show some respect. A man has died here - One of our own.”

“Pardon me. Ms. Valentino,” says the officer. “Our intent is to make these preliminary interviews as quick as possible. However, we’d like to start with the last person to see the deceased alive.”

“And that would be the stage manager, Charlie Parker...unless, Raven, you stayed to help Charlie and Brent adjust the rigging last night,” Simon smugly interjects.

Raven slumps contentiously into her seat as Charlie kisses his wife Hannah comfortingly on her cheek before rising to join the officer. All eyes follow Charlie as he rubs his palms on his jeans and walks dutifully down front to the piano where the officer has set up a makeshift office.

Uncontrollable weeping draws the actors’ eyes away from Charlie into the middle of their group where they find Ashley Stevens, a featured tenor soloist, distraught, cradling his face in his hands. “Why? Why now? It’s appalling...Just when we...”

Hannah, who is in the row behind Ashley, hands him some Kleenex and wraps her arms around his shoulders. “Oh, Ashley, I’m so sorry. Is there anyone I can call or anything I can do to help?”

The more Hannah tries to comfort Ashley, the more his sobs heave him forward and make him gasp for air. “I think I’m going to be sick!”

With that, Raven flings herself around in her seat. “Geez! Enough with the theatrics already! Yeah, we’re all shocked to see someone in our midst die, but who was Brent anyway? You hardly knew him. In fact, none of us knew him that well. He mostly kept to himself. He almost always looked so down and out, so dismal. Perhaps killing himself was his way out, a way to gain happiness.”

Ashley stands, his face a runny mess, and hurls the wad of Kleenex at Raven. Wagging his finger at Raven, he snaps, “How can you suggest that? Yeah, you’re right; you don’t know him. But, I do! I know for sure that he has more heart and more love for life than most people. He just doesn’t show it. I can’t believe he’d kill himself. Someone murdered him, and when I find out who did, I’ll...I’ll...Simon, I’ve got to go.” Without waiting for Simon to respond, Ashley grabs his coat and scurries up the aisle, letting the doors clang shut behind him.

Charlie’s wail of dismay pulls the cast’s attention back toward the piano. “What? Murdered? You think I murdered Brent? No!”

* * * * *

Over the next few days, how Brent Kincade died becomes the main topic of conversation for the Moonstone Follies’ actors and stage crew, all alumni of Moonstone High.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe Brent died! He was such a nice guy.”

“Why would he commit suicide?”

“You think he killed himself?”

“Yeah, I do. Don’t you?”

“Simon said that it was an apparent suicide, so that’s what I believe.”

“Raven was adamant that Brent fit the suicide type. A pathetic loner, she called him.”

“C’mon now. What does Raven know?”

“I don’t know?”

“I think he was murdered.”

“If he was murdered, where’s the smoking gun?”

“Did he leave a suicide note?” “Does everyone who kills himself leave a suicide note?”

“But what if it wasn’t suicide?” “Ashley sure doesn’t believe Brent killed himself.”

“Who’d kill him then? I can’t believe it’d be one of us.”

“Oh you can’t, can you? Like none of us has axes to grind?”

“I heard that the police suspect Charlie.”

“He doesn’t have an alibi.”

“Wasn’t Hannah with Charlie and Brent that night?”

“Yes she was, but Charlie sent her to the car to wait for him.”

“What about Raven? She claims she went out to the bar after rehearsal, but I don’t remember seeing her there until later.”

* * * * *

A few days later, after a late rehearsal night, Simon and Raven chat about the Follies while sipping their morning coffee and munching on breakfast bars.

“You know, Simon, you could stick up for me - your wife.”

“It seems like you do a good job of that yourself. You don’t need me.”

“You’re always recognizing Hannah. ‘Good timing, Hannah!’, ‘Awesome projection, Hannah!’ or ‘Hannah, could you go over the tap number with the girls?’ It’s like you have a crush on her - like when you were juniors at Moonstone.”

“Really, Raven? We’ve come a long way since then. That’s a lot of water under the bridge. I would never break up a happy marriage. As far as Hannah’s concerned, she’s a natural, picking up choreography right away and adding her own flare. Yet she doesn’t get the credit she deserves. It’s my responsibility as director to draw out and nurture that talent.”

“I’m just saying...”

“If you want to go that route, I could ask you about all your fussing over Ashley. It’s ‘Ashley, this’ and ‘Ashley, that’, ‘Ashley, Ashley, Ashley!’ Not only does your swooning make me feel like Rhett Butler vying for Scarlett’s attention but it makes me wonder what the former Moonstone homecoming king and queen are up to these days.”

Placing her forefingers on her cheeks where dimples should be and smiling brightly, Raven impersonates Scarlett’s southern accent, “Well, fiddle-dee-dee! I do declare! Simon Montgomery, you’re jealous!”

Simon waves off Raven’s contrived cuteness. “Seriously, Raven. Ever since we learned that we can’t get pregnant because of me, you’ve been extremely distant with me, but you can’t seem to get close enough to Ashley. That is, until the morning we found Brent’s body...when you lam-basted Ashley. You couldn’t have been much colder to him.”

The ringing of the phone silences Raven’s retort as Simon draws out his cell phone from his jeans pocket to answer it. “Yes...Yes, I see...Huh-huh...Ashley, Raven, and Charlie...Right.”

As Simon hangs up the phone, he sighs tiredly, throwing his hands into the air and casting a concerned glance at Raven.

* * * * *

“It’s official!”

“What’s official?”

“Brent was murdered.”

“Murdered?”

“Murdered.”

“By whom?”

“They’re investigating it now.” “They must have suspects.”

“Yeah, Ashley, Raven, and Charlie.” “I can’t see Ashley killing him.” “He doesn’t fit the type. He also doesn’t seem to have a motive in my eyes.” “Raven probably has some kind of motive.”

“But would she want blood on her hands?”

“Maybe it’s Charlie...” “Charlie?”

“Charlie.”

* * * * *

Meanwhile, at the Parkers' home, Hannah is tidying the kitchen after getting their two sons and daughter off to swim practice. Sitting at the table, Charlie yawns, rubbing his eyes in an effort to wake up. Joining him at the table, Hannah raises her eyebrows in concern. "Rough night, Charlie?"

"I tossed and turned all night, having a recurring dream that you and the kids were visiting me in jail. I could see you in tears and raggedy clothes, but we couldn't hear each other. I couldn't comfort you."

Hannah reached across the corner of the table to caress his cheek and then took his hand. "Honey, how terrible and exhausting! But, it's just a dream. That's not going to happen."

"But murder, Hannah? It's been a week and there's still no evidence clearing my name."

"And, as far as I know, there's no evidence that you did murder Brent. It's only been a week."

"I just can't fathom that they think I, of all people, killed Brent! Me, a murderer? I can't even kill a fly!"

"If only I'd stayed with you in the auditorium that night, you'd be cleared. You weren't even in there two minutes before you came out."

"Yeah, the only thing that we had left to do was turn off the house and some back stage lights. It gets pretty dark in there, so I wanted you to leave while you could still see. Brent and I were just about to turn off the last lights when we heard a rustle. I was going to check it out, but Brent said that I shouldn't keep you waiting and that he'd check that everything was secured. So, I said good-bye and left. That was the last that I saw him."

"Hmmm... You didn't mention hearing the rustling before. What kind of noise was it? Did it sound like paper crinkling or some beads falling to the floor?"

"No, it sounded more like a long skirt swooshing against the curtain - like when all you girls coming running offstage after your Shall We Dance number."

Just then, Charlie's phone vibrates loudly on the table, jolting them away from their thoughts. Picking up and looking at his phone, Charlie furrows his brow.

"Ashley? What's up?"

Listening to Ashley, Charlie walks quickly upstairs to dress. When he comes down, he grabs his coat and car keys and kisses Hannah brusquely on her cheek. "Hon, I'm meeting Ashley at the Princess. He has an idea about how we can clear our names. I'll fill you in later."

* * * * *

At the Princess, Charlie surveys the diner, finds Ashley at a back booth, and quickly slides onto the bench opposite him. "Hey, Ash!"

Ashley fumbles with his water glass, nearly spilling water across the table. "Hey, yourself. Thanks for rushing over to meet me. Are you as jittery about this murder investigation as I am?"

Charlie covers his face with his burly hands and rubs his eyes feverishly. "I'm exhausted, I can't sleep, I jolt awake at the slightest noise. I never thought I would be a murder suspect."

"Yeah, me neither. I feel like I'm all alone. There's no one to defend me."

"Ash, I seriously doubt you're really a suspect. You're probably just a decoy. You don't seem like the murdering type. I'd never peg you for a murderer."

"Yeah, you either. That's why I called you here. We're both desperate to clear our names, so why don't we hire a P.I.?"

"That's a great idea. Do you have anyone in mind?"

Ashley hesitates and winces like he's afraid to tell Charlie. "Urrr... Yeah...Sparky."

"Sparky? Are you kidding me?" Charlie slams his fist down on the table, making their silverware jump and clang together. "She's such a bumbling idiot!"

Ashley holds out his hand to calm Charlie down. "She may be bumbling but she's no dummy. Remember, she was salutatorian of our class?" "But Sparky? She's..."

“Well, if it isn’t good ol’ Charlie Parker?” Dressed in a form-fitting, red spandex dress and platform shoes, Sparky swaggers titillatingly towards their table until she twists her ankle and topples with a plop next to Charlie in the booth.

As he reaches out a hand to steady her, Charlie’s eyes throw daggers at Ashley. “Sparky! Long time, no see! You haven’t changed a bit!”

“You either, muscle man. I see you’ve kept your football player physique,” Sparky says as she squeezes Charlie’s biceps and Charlie leans away from her.

Following a few awkward seconds where the threesome takes turns glancing at each other and then into space, Ashley breaks the silence. “So, Sparky, what d’ya think? Will ya take our case?”

“Honey, I was on it from the moment you called. I already got my connection with the cops to snag copies of the crime photos and police report. After looking at them, I sense there’s something fishy going on with the stage floor immediately surrounding Brent’s body. Whereas the rest of the floor is dusty - as most are, the area around his body looks dust-mopped or like someone dragged a damp towel on the floor. Yet, there seems to be something granular in that area, something metallic that reflects the spotlight in places?”

“Could they be sequins? They’re always falling off costumes,” Ashley suggests.

“No, there are too many of them to be a random piece from a costume. They’re not blingy enough. They look more like metal filings from a drill or saw.”

Charlie nods. “Yeah, the other day when I was sweeping up, I saw something like what you’re describing. I’d wondered what the set designers were working on this soon before the performances. And, they’re usually meticulous about cleaning up after themselves.”

“Sparky, did the police report say anything about how Brent died?”

“It suggests he fell - possibly from the catwalk - but they didn’t find any segment of the catwalk around him. So, they’re supposing that he fell or was pushed over the railing.”

Charlie sighs, puzzled. “I find that hard to believe. The catwalk railing is pretty high for someone to fall or be tossed over it. And, Brent

knew what he was doing working up there. I don't buy that he'd just fall accidentally."

Sparky rolls her eyes at their naivete. "Neither do the cops - since they've ruled his death a murder. Has anyone inspected the catwalk since Brent's fall?"

Charlie shrugs, "I thought that the school would, but I don't know if they've gotten around to it yet."

"Well, it's high time that we mosey over to the auditorium and have a look-see. Who knows that you've hired me?"

Ashley shakes his head. "No one." "When I left to come here, I promised Hannah that I'd fill her in afterwards. Other than that, I don't need to tell anyone else."

"Good, let's leave it with only Hannah in the know. The less people who know, the easier it'll be to flush out what actually happened. I'll let Simon know that I'll write a piece about the Follies for The Post - my other freelance job - and tell him that I'd like to observe a rehearsal. How can he turn down free publicity?" Sparky gathers up her purse and coat and blows kisses at the guys as she saunters towards the door. "Toot-a-loo, peeps!"

* * * * *

Sparky strolls to center-stage and circles the area where Brent's body had lain, oblivious to the cast entering the auditorium for the last week of rehearsal.

"Who is that on stage?" "Is it a new cast member?"

"How could they add a new actor so late in the game?"

"She doesn't look like an actor the way she's surveying the stage. You'd think she's never been onstage before."

"Wait a minute..." "Could it be?"

"I'd know that strut anywhere." "Sparky?"

"Sparky?"

"Oh my gosh, Sparky!"

"Well, if it isn't Mildred Sparks," Raven said coolly as she sashayed up

the stage steps. "I wouldn't think you'd want to put yourself back in front of an audience after your disastrous attempts as a cheerleader."

"Nah, unlike you, I've learned to avoid the spotlight, working behind the scenes instead."

"So, what brings you center-stage now?"

"What? Oh, oh..." Sparky falters as other cast members greet and hug her. "Hiya, guys! My, it's like being back on the ranch!"

Raven reels Sparky back in. "Were you feeling lonely and thought you'd meet up with some ol' friends here?"

"Me? Lonely? Never! I'd heard that Follies ticket sales had gone south since the murder, so I'm dusting off my freelance writer hat and offering Simon some free publicity."

"Ah, I see. Still jack of all trades and master of none?"

"It's better than lounging around, eating bonbons all day long."

Sensing a cat fight brewing, Simon steps in. "OK, people, let's get situated. We've got a long tech rehearsal ahead of us. Sparky here is going to be observing, collecting facts and quotes for an article in The Post. OK, places for the opening number. Charlie, curtain down. Main spot on. Incidental music starts."

Backstage, Charlie gazes upwards, pulling hand over hand on the thickly twisted, coarse rope to drop the curtain. An unusual sparkle embedded high up in the rope catches Charlie's attention. His eyes affix to it as it descends, streaking a trail of light like a shooting star. Charlie slows his pulling and stops the rope on its circuitous route when the glittering thing is just above his head. Waving Hannah over as nonchalantly as possible on the dimly lit stage, Charlie whispers loudly to her, "Tell Sparky she's needed backstage."

Meanwhile, Simon shouts from the house, "Charlie, the curtain needs to be lowered about a foot more."

"Yeah, Simon, technical difficulties... Just run with it for now."

As Simon responds, Sparky appears next to Charlie. "Hey, what's up?"

Charlie points up at the rope. "Found a buried treasure."

Sparky squints and stands on her tiptoes. "Can you bring it down a

bit more? But, be careful not to touch it.” As Charlie tugs gently on the rope, Sparky searches her purse for her cell phone, tweezers, and a plastic bag. “Do you have any tape?”

“Yeah, electrical?”

Sparky nods, “That’ll do. After I remove this beauty, mark the rope with a piece of tape.” With the sparkling item now at eye level, she snaps a few shots, extricates it with the tweezers from the hemp and slips it into the bag.

Flipping the bag over and staring at the object, Sparky and Charlie look like kids who have just discovered the prized scavenger hunt clue. Charlie shines his flashlight on the bag and says, “Well, well, well! What do we have here? A dangling gold heart earring, surrounded by a cluster of moonstones and engraved with a ‘V’. Hmm, ‘V’? Va- len- ti- no?”

Raising her eyebrow, Sparky looks quizzically at Charlie, amazed at his forte with jewelry description. “Right! But, not only that, look what else we nabbed...A few knotted strands of long, black hair.”

“Bingo!” Charlie starts to reach for his phone.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“Calling the cops. This proves that...”

“Not so fast, Hercule Poirot! This proves nothing - except that Raven has been onstage for rehearsals. How far up did this earring come from?”

“Pretty high. I’d been pulling on the rope for a while. Probably the catwalk area.”

Charlie’s and Sparky’s eyes widen. “Then, let’s go!” Sparky pulls Charlie towards the stairs as he instructs a stagehand to raise the curtain.

At the top of the stairs, Sparky pushes ahead and Charlie grabs her shirt. “Whoa! Whoa! Not in those stilettos, Miss Marple! Take those heels off! This is my territory; I’ll lead. You can follow, but slowly! We don’t want any other mishaps here.”

Charlie steps cautiously onto the catwalk, shifting his weight gently from one foot to the other to test its stability. Satisfied that they won’t plunge to the floor below, he turns to look at the proximity of the curtain’s draw-rope to the catwalk. There, staring him in the face was the piece of yellow electrical tape that he’d used to mark the rope moments

before. “Sparky, look! There it is, and the rope practically grazes the railing.”

“If someone was leaning over the railing, her earring could have easily caught in the rope, especially if the earring was loose after a struggle. Let’s go on,” Sparky nudges Charlie further onto the catwalk. As Charlie walks slowly onward, testing the railings and scrutinizing the riggings, nothing appears to be tampered with until he reaches the point above centerstage. He immediately stops cold, grabbing the back railing and flailing his other arm to the side to prevent Sparky from squeezing by. “Geez, the center section of the front railing has fallen away and is hanging down. It’s only attached at the bottom. I’m going to look at the end of the railing where the part broke away. You stay here. Not another step, you hear?” Sparky nods solemnly as he edges carefully forward.

Charlie peers suspiciously at the railing and rubs his thumb over the end. Kneeling, he swings up the hanging piece of railing, studying how this end joins the end that he’s just felt. After using the detached piece to barricade the section with no railing, he returns to Sparky. “It’s been jaggedly cut. The ends are serrated and there’s gritty filings clinging to the sharp edges. When I butt the ends together, I can see slivers of light where the metal has been gnawed away.. The top of the railing near the ends are all scratched, too. I’d say that someone did a horrendous job cutting through this railing - someone with little experience using a saw.”

“In other words, someone did a hack job with a hacksaw?” Sparky snorted, trying to lighten Charlie’s grim mood.

“Would ya cut it with the puns already? What are we going to do now?”

“Spin a web and wait for our fly to fall prey.” To Charlie’s confused stare, Sparky continues, “C’mon, let’s get down from here before my acrophobia gets the better of me. Then, I’ll tell you my plan.”

* * * * *

“Something odd was going on during our rehearsal yesterday.”

“What d’ya mean?”

“Charlie wasn’t on his A-game.” “Yeah, he seemed distracted.” “By Sparky, no less!”

“I thought they couldn’t stand each other in high school.”

“They couldn’t... or at least Charlie couldn’t stand her!”

“But, they were pretty buddy-buddy last night.”

“Do they have a thing?”

“Nah.”

“If Sparky was there to write an article about the show, why did she spend so much time backstage with Charlie?”

“Yeah, on the catwalk, too!” “That doesn’t make sense.” “Maybe she’s writing an article about the stage crew?”

“What if her writing an article is a ruse? I have her card: ‘Mildred Sparks, P.I.’”

“Oh, that makes more sense.” “Seems like they found something?” “Yeah, a piece of jewelry.”

“A bracelet?” “A necklace?”

“Some kind of charm?”

“Did you see Raven try to sneak a peak?”

“They wouldn’t let her.”

“She stomped off, smoke streaming from her ears.”

“I wouldn’t want her for an enemy.”

* * * * *

As Simon gives the cast instructions at rehearsal the next day, Sparky strides in, trailing two police officers. “Sorry, Simon, to interrupt. We’re here on official business - to arrest Charlie Parker for the murder of Brent Kincade.”

“What?” roars Charlie amidst gasps from the cast. “No, Sparky, you said you’d clear my husband’s name!” Hannah cries, hugging Charlie in support.

“Sorry, Hannah. Sorry, Charlie. You had motive. You admitted to me that Brent was an excellent stage hand. You thought he had the expertise to replace you as stage manager - a job that you love.

“Simon gave you the perfect opportunity to be alone with Brent the night he died. You couldn’t have planned it better yourself.

“And, you had access to the tools to set and then cover up the murder. The only thing you didn’t have were the smarts to hold it all together. You started to fall apart when Simon discovered Brent’s body before you had a chance to remove all the evidence from the stage.”

Spotting Raven chomping at the bit to add her two cents, Sparky takes a breath to allow her facts to sink in, thus giving Raven the opportunity to blurt out, “Charlie’s just a dumb football player. I saw him yesterday pointing out all the clues he left. He probably even led you to the saw he used to cut the railing.”

“Excuse me? I didn’t hear you clearly. What did you say?” Sparky leans forward, calmly egging Raven on.

“Uh...Charlie probably led you to the saw?”

“But how do you know there was a saw? Charlie and I only learned that the railing was sawn last night. I’m pretty sure that neither of us told you.”

Raven pulls her hair off her forehead in an effort to cool her beet red face. “Well... well... umm... It was a lucky guess.”

“No, Raven, you know more than you want to admit. You don’t have an alibi for the night Brent died. You showed up at the bar an hour late, upset because you lost one of your earrings.”

“How do you know I lost an earring?”

“A friend of yours mentioned it in her statement to police. Charlie and I found that earring embedded in the curtain’s rope last night. An educated guess would be that you lost it while struggling with Brent.”

“What motive would I have to kill Brent? I hardly even...”

Unable to keep his emotions in check any longer, Ashley jumps from his seat and points accusingly at Raven. “Don’t play that Little Miss Innocent routine now! I know of a darn good reason for your killing Brent. A few months ago, you tried to rekindle our high school romance because you’re desperate to have a baby and Simon’s sterile.”

The cast gasps, but with hot tears streaming down his face, Ashley pushes on. “You were upset with me when I wouldn’t oblige, but you

totally lost it when I confessed my love for Brent. These past few months, you've been trying to drive a wedge between Brent and me, probably hoping that I'd eventually drop him for you. When we wouldn't budge, I suspect you took a more drastic route to get rid of him permanently."

Raven's eyes dart from Ashley to Sparky to Charlie and Hannah, seeking some support. Finally, her eyes come to rest on Simon, her unfailing refuge. "Please, Simon, do something! Stop them from making these ridiculous accusations!"

Simon shakes his head, his face ashen with disbelief and sorrow. "Sorry, Raven. Not this time. I've been there for you from the first time we met, but you're always running to others for help. I'm done." Simon's shoulders sag as he turns away.

Raven sobs uncontrollably as the officers approach her. "Raven Valentino, you're under arrest for the murder of Brent Kincade." Reading her the Miranda rights, they lead her away.

As the lights fade and the curtain descends, the cast begins gossiping one last time.

"I can't believe it! Can you?" "That's what desperation can do." "But how heartless!"

"What will happen to Raven?"

"Do you think she'll be sentenced to life?"

"Maybe she'll enter an insanity plea."

"I don't really care."

"Me, neither."

"Say, did you meet that new stage hand?"

"Yeah, he seems a bit high-strung." "What's up with him?"

"Well, I heard..."

The curtain reaches the floor, and the audience applauds, rising to their feet, satisfied that the murder mystery was solved and no harm came to the rumor mill at Moonstone High.

HONORING SPECIAL PEOPLE



Gary

by Ruthie Emens

In Collaboration with Justina McCarty
(Spring 2015)

Hi, Gary,

How was work? And how is Connie? I miss you. I remember when we used to go to school together. We would wait for the bus and talk about birds. The birds were pretty; we watched them from the windows while they talked. I made a birdhouse, a red one. I built and painted it in school, with no help. We had to get nails, a hammer, and paint. After we got our supplies, we went outside to build the birdhouse. I put the pieces of the birdhouse together, and then bang, bang, bang, I hammered the nails until it was finished. Then I opened the paint and started painting. My teacher had me put on a smock so that the red paint wouldn't get on my clothes.

When I was finished painting, the birdhouse was mostly red with blue stripes and a white roof. Since the paint was still wet, I put it in the sun to dry. Then the teacher said it was lunchtime and we went to the cafeteria.

At the end of the day, the teacher said we could bring our birdhouses home, and I was very happy. At home, I showed the birdhouse to Mom and Dad. They liked it, and you did too. Afterwards I put it in my room, where I could always see it.

That birdhouse fell off the windowsill and broke, but now I have a green one in my room. It sits on my nightstand, and whenever I see it, I remember waiting for the bus with you when we were kids. It is very cold right now, and snow is on the ground. Sometimes I think about putting the birdhouse outdoors so that penguins can move in.

I like your new blue car. I remember last year when you and Connie picked me up in the new car and brought me to Pizza Hut for my birthday. When we got there, we had cheese and pepperoni pizza and pop. Later, Lisa, Nick, Baby Nicholas, Brian, Jenny, and David came over, and you gave me a big white bag.

I picked up the bag, emptied it on the table, and opened the presents inside. There were two new shirts, both short-sleeved. One was yellow, and the other was many different colors. When I was finished opening my presents, you all sang “Happy Birthday” and we had chocolate cake, ice cream, and pop.

There were two candles on the cake, and as I blew them out, I made a wish. I wished that I could be a nurse like Connie. If I were a nurse, I could help doctors and help them make people feel better. I could give people shots and medicine, and if they were in the hospital, I could help move their beds and make them more comfortable. Even though I would like to be a nurse and do all of those things, I’m in a wheelchair, so it would be hard for me.

I’ve been in a wheelchair for a long time, and it makes me feel sad. In my own room, I can’t make my bed; the staff have to make it. I can get in bed on my own, get up and get dressed, get in my wheelchair, and wheel myself out to the kitchen. Once I get to the kitchen, there are more things that I need help with. Things like unloading the dishwasher, pouring a cup of coffee, and making breakfast. For breakfast on the weekends, I usually have scrambled eggs. Since I can’t make them myself, Pat and Chris help me out. They get out a pan, then crack the eggs into a bowl and beat them up before pouring them into the pan. I sit at the table and watch them. I think about cookies—we used to get a snack with breakfast, but now we don’t.

After Pat and Chris are finished making breakfast, we all eat together. My new friend MooMoo also eats with us. She’s very nice, but she can’t

talk. I know she's nice because I watch TV with her at night. We sit and watch talk shows and laugh together at the funny things that people say. When MooMoo laughs she covers her mouth with her hands. I love hearing her laugh. She cries sometimes too, when she's unhappy. She doesn't cry when her friend comes to visit her over the weekend, but during the week, she cries. I can't ask her what's bothering her since she can't speak, so instead, I sit next to her and rub her back.

Sometimes when MooMoo and I are feeling bad, Pat comes into the living room and dances. Watching him makes me happy. One time I laughed so hard that I almost cried. I met Pat at the house when he moved in a few years ago. When I first met him, I thought he was really cool with his leather jacket. From the time that I first met him, he has always been good at making other people happy. He tells really good jokes and always knows what to say to make me feel better.

My other good friends at the house are Geraldine and Chris. Geraldine and I have lived together for a while, but Chris was new last year. Geri gave me some new clothes the other day. There were new shirts and two new dresses. My friends at the house make me feel happy.

Today I wore a hat at work even though I didn't want to. It was for a contest. I made it with finger paint and then wore it when the paint was dry. I wasn't happy about wearing it because I don't really like to wear hats. The only reason that I wear my pink hat every day is because Heather gave it to me, and I like Heather. Heather used to live in the room next door to mine, but she moved out last year and I really miss her. So, I wear the pink hat every day to help me remember her.

At the house, we had a really big dinner on MooMoo's birthday. All of MooMoo's family came: her dad, her brothers and sisters, and her friend Paige. The staff made Chinese food and ordered a birthday cake from Tops. I love when we have big dinners at the house; the food is always good. I get to spend time with my friends and family, and I even enjoy helping clean up afterwards!

I like it here at the University of Rochester. Every week I go through the computer lab, and come to a small room at the end of the hall. I come here with many of the people I live with at the group home: Pat, Geraldine, Chris, and Greg. When I am in the small classroom, I get

to write. It gives me something to do and makes me feel happy. I write about my family and friends because I am always thinking about them, and that is how I started to write this letter to you, Gary.

I miss you, and Connie too. We danced at Elmwood tonight, and I wish you had been there. Geraldine was the one who wanted us all to dance. She borrowed a Michael Jackson tape and a radio from Erica and then made us all come down to the living room. She turned on the tape, and we danced. I sat in my chair and moved my arms all around, smiling the whole time. Dancing makes me happy. I don't know why; it just does.

I think that dancing would make you happy too. I wish we could still spend time together like we did when we were kids, but I've also made many new friends at Elmwood and the Inspiration Project. I miss you, and I hope that I can see you and Connie soon.

Love,
Ruthie

Roots to Home

by Ann Kurz

In Collaboration with Katie Cowie-Haskell
(Spring 2016)

Fifteen years ago after my Uncle Charlie showed my mom and me the deed to the house at 19 Broad Street in Clifton Springs, NY where my grandfather was born, I began researching my mom's paternal family. In genealogy, every researcher knows that answers to questions always lead to more questions, so I was soon hooked and became the family historian. My second great grandfather Richard Murphy/Morphy morphed into a mythical character, who sailed to "America" as an infant, grew up in Canada, moved to the US, changed his name, sailed around the Horn, lived in San Francisco, and settled in Clifton Springs, where he worked as a mason. Thus, for this year's Inspiration Project, I decided to imagine probable circumstances and sentiments surrounding known facts about Richard. The following are fictional letters from my second great grandmother Alice Nugent Morphy to her sister Ann Nugent Muldoon about the first few years of Richard's and Alice's life together. While these letters are arranged chronologically from June 1866 to June 1872, gaps of times exist between each letter, representing letters that would most probably be missing from an actual collection. How I'd love to stumble across real letters like these! Enjoy!

Clifton Springs, New York
June 24th, 1866

Dearest Ann,

Hearing about my niece's and nephew's latest antics tickled me so much that tears trickled down my cheeks. How I miss them, but my charges at my boarding house keep me entertained. Last week when Nate and I walked to the pond to feed the swans, he caught sight of a frog and as quick as a wink, he was scrambling to catch it. He jumped onto a slippery rock and fell headfirst into the water. I had to pull him out by his boots - weeds and all. He looked like a drowned log. I could hardly keep from laughing. Needless to say, we're working on his thinking before leaping.

I've nursed many interesting patients at the Sanitarium lately. Several come from New York City and are amazed at how quiet Clifton Springs is - likening it to a piece of heaven. Truly the peace and relaxation seem to console them. Thank goodness that Mama and Da decided to leave the city and move to Chautauqua after we emigrated from Ireland. The hustle and bustle of NYC would get on my last nerve.

Remember that man I was telling you about in my last letter? Richard Morphy. Yes, Morphy, not Murphy. Much to his parents' dismay, he changed his name from Murphy to Morphy so that it would sound less Irish. Anyways, last Saturday he met me at the Strawberry Festival at church. He came over to where I was standing with my friends and presented me with a dish of chocolate ice cream topped with strawberries. Whoever heard of putting strawberries on chocolate ice cream? Alas, I ate it anyways! He stayed by my side the whole evening, speaking about how Clifton is growing. He's excited to help build the new block of buildings on Main Street. We both agree that the village's success is due to the healing wonders of Dr. Foster and his Water Cure Company. As Richard walked me home afterwards, he sang "The Banks of the Bann". It was all very sweet but now he seems to think that he has my permission to be my escort. He keeps making excuses for stopping by the Sanitarium when I finish my shift. I've been thwarting his efforts as best I can, making excuses as to why I won't spend time with him; however, he remains

undaunted. He's driving me away with all his pleasantries. If he thinks he can win me over that easily, he'd better reconsider.

Well, give Mama and Da a kiss for me. I think of all of you often.

Your loving sister,
Alice

Clifton Springs, New York
October 2nd, 1866

Dearest Ann,

I so wish you were here so that I could cry on your shoulder and talk face-to-face with you. I'm at my wits' end with Richard. Why did he have to ruin everything - pushing me to become more serious? How can I enter into another relationship after what happened to me last time? Yet, I don't want to lose Richard's friendship.

I apologize. I'm so flustered and not making any sense. To start at the beginning: We had a wonderful evening at the Strong's harvest celebration, and being his usual lighthearted self, Richard sang "Seeing Nellie Home" while walking me home. In the park, he suggested we sit a spell on a bench and enjoy the soft autumn breeze and the bright harvest moonbeams dancing on the pond. We bantered back and forth for a while, each of us feeling at home with the other, giggling like silly school children. Then he became quite serious, clearing his throat and talking about the future. My heart sank when he proposed that we start courting for real. I laughingly asked why, why couldn't he leave well enough alone? After all, I, for one, am very pleased with our friendship as is. He wanted more of an explanation. Why invite trouble? Why give people something to gossip about, I asked. That really riled him. He called that the weakest explanation that he's ever heard. Furthermore, he suggested that I'm afraid to admit my feelings for him. The nerve of that man to call me a coward! It was like a slap in my face. Stung, I blurted out that he has no

right saying that when he hardly even knows who I am. Then I began to cry and stood to run away. As I left, he hollered after me, "Alice, you're a pretty, fun-loving lass who I'd love to know better - if only she'd allow me!"

Oh, Ann, what am I to do? My friend Bridget thinks I'm a ninny for keeping Richard at arm's length. She says that anyone can see what an upright and caring man he is - "a fine catch for any woman". Honestly, all of you are right - perhaps I am scared. Surely I have every right to be timid - especially after the way Thomas treated me. I thought that the love I felt for Thomas was true, and then he upped and left me for that houghty-toighty jezebel with ne'er a word. Thanks to him, I'm doubting every feeling I have now. How can I open my heart to Richard? How can I risk being hurt again? Yet, do I want to wait? At 25, neither Richard nor I are spring chicks anymore...

As I write, I already miss the mischievous spark in Richard's eyes and his contagious laughter. I guess I'll never know what Richard means to me until I relent and let things fall where they may. Perhaps I'll start by enjoying his company and invite him to dinner tomorrow.

Thank you, dear Ann, for letting me pour my heart out to you. What would I do without you?

Your loving sister,
Alice

Clifton Springs, New York
February 20th, 1867

Dearest Ann,

What a delightful surprise to see you all on Valentine's Day! I thought only Mama and Da were coming. Opening the door to see you, Paddy, Mary, Charlie, and all the wee ones brought tears to my eyes. I hadn't realized how much I've missed everyone. It was so much fun joking with

the family, and Richard fit right in! Playing that prank on Charlie took me back to when we were youngsters. I loved seeing that look of astonishment on his face again.

Speaking of surprises, why didn't you tell me that Richard had visited Da? We'd been discussing marriage, but I had no idea that Richard would act so quickly. At dinner, when Richard stood up to propose a toast and then got down on one knee, my heart leapt into my throat. I was agog that he chose that night to propose in front of all of you. But, I was thrilled to have everyone's immediate blessings. Richard truly understands how much family means to me.

What you don't know is later that night Richard and I walked up the hill to the old beech tree where lovers carve their initials. At first, I was a bit wary, not wanting to profess our love to the whole village that way. However, Richard's carving is inconspicuously placed, mostly tucked away in a limb's crook. After he showed me our initials surrounded by a heart, we stood silently before the tree and he gently took my claddagh ring off my right hand and slid it onto my left ring finger. I'm blessed to have met such a kind-hearted man. I don't know why I ever doubted him.

Once the threat of snow is over, Richard and I will travel to Grimsby, Ontario, so that I can meet his parents and some of his siblings. Imagine growing up with 11 sisters and brothers! That's more than twice as many as us. Richard said that his parents ran a tight ship. Everyone was expected to pull his weight, but there was still time for fun. I hope that I can keep everyone straight.

When we return from Grimsby, Bridget and the other "San girls" will be after me to complete my trousseau. They're so excited about having an impending wedding to plan for that they sound like a full hen house with all their chatter about what they'll embroider and cross-stitch for me. You'd think that they were the brides!

Of course, I can't wait for Richard and me to start our lives together, but my excitement is somewhat tempered by the fact that I've lived alone for a few years now. I'm used to coming and going as I please, so will I be able to give up that independence? I'll definitely miss meeting my friends after work at the soda fountain, but giving up nursing will be the

hardest. What will I do with myself all day? Surely, Richard and I won't make that much of a mess to keep me house-cleaning all day long. If only I could continue nursing, it means the world to me. Dr. Foster has mentioned that doctors in San Francisco have made advances in holistic medicine that might benefit his patients here. He is toying with having a doctor-nurse team from the San travel there to learn the new practices. Perhaps I could accompany them? I heard that San Francisco is growing by leaps and bounds. Much construction is happening there, so as a mason, Richard would have plenty of opportunities for work.

Enough about me... How are you? How does Paddy like being Detective Muldoon? He must have his hands full with the criminal activity in Rochester. Please write soon. I'll want your advice on my wedding plans.

As always, your loving sister,
Alice

Clifton Springs, New York
December 31st, 1867

Happy New Year, Dearest Ann,

Can you believe it? Christmas has passed and only 37 more days until Richard and I are wed! My heart beats with excitement while my stomach does its own Irish reel! February 6th cannot come soon enough - although I'm sure that time will tick quickly away now that we're setting off on our journey to San Francisco the week after our wedding. Richard is beside himself with joy, having always dreamed about sailing around the horn. His eyes sparkle merrily these days, and I often tease him that some of that twinkling best be because he's marrying me! As for me, although I vowed never to embark on a ship again once I'd set foot on American soil 15 years ago, Richard's adventurous spirit won me over. I only hope that he isn't disenchanted when we encounter storms at sea. Unlike me, Richard was only a wee one when he sailed with his parents from Bray, Ireland to Canada, and hence he has no memory of the horrid

bouts of seasickness that can accompany sailing. Well, we'll handle it, come what may!

Enough daydreaming! I must start thinking about food for the bridal breakfast and whom to ask to bring what. Many of my friends have offered to bring baked goods, which I appreciate. I just need to coordinate with them so that I don't end up with 10 loaves of soda bread!

Another spot of trouble that I must stop from brewing is Mrs. O'Neill's objection to Richard and me staying in the village for our wedding night. She thinks it's scandalous. Who is she to judge? We'd go away if we weren't leaving for San Francisco the following week. Honestly! I sure won't miss the gossip and supposition that goes along with living in a small village!

Ann, I know that money is scarce for you and your family these days. Please don't fret about dressing up the youngsters for the wedding. Have them come as they are. I'll be thrilled to have all of you present for our joyous occasion.

May God bless us with many happy days this coming year!

Your loving sister,
Alice

At sea, nearing Panama
April 26th, 1868

Dearest Ann,

I truly don't know which is worse: being homesick or being seasick! The first two weeks brought us wonderful weather - clear blue, cloudless skies, golden sunshine, and aquamarine waters. We strolled around the deck during the day and the evening often found us storytelling and singing with other passengers. We befriended a delightful couple, Joseph and Maggie Shea, and their five-year-old daughter Katy. We're a good match for each other as Joseph is a carpenter and Maggie's a nurse while Katy reminds me of your daughter. They're en route to San Francisco,

hoping to find construction opportunities as well as to see a piece of the world. We enjoy each other's company so much that we've decided to try and settle in the same neighborhood in S.F. Having friends aboard helps to relieve my heartache for friends and family back home.

However, as I hinted above, all hasn't been smooth sailing. Steely gray skies darkened our days from the third week on. Blustery winds and pelting rain dampened our spirits as raging waves pummeled and hammered the hull, threatening to ravage us to bits. The ship creaked and clanked while the people moaned and groaned. We frequently didn't know which way was up. Many cried to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to save us all. When we felt able, Maggie and I fetched wet rags to wipe people's faces and held buckets for those who were sick. Just as we thought we'd catch respite from one storm, another would loom on the horizon. We were all so seasick! The Sheas, Richard, and I found that if we stayed amidships, we were better able to manage the reeling and nausea. In the thick of it, I told Richard that I have half the mind to jump ship in Panama and take my chances traversing across the Isthmus of Panama and meeting him on the other side! I can't decide which is better: staying aboard and risk being drowned or hiking through the jungle, only to catch malaria or be bitten by a poisonous snake. What choices I have! Of course, I'd never leave Richard - after all, I promised for better for worse, and, the good Lord willing, we will come through the worse of this together!

I hope you receive this letter. The captain told me that they would leave a mail bag at Panama's port for the next ship sailing North. Please pray that we have a safe journey. I miss you.

Your loving sister,
Alice

San Francisco, California
October 30th, 1868

Dearest Ann,

We finally arrived at the San Francisco Port in August. As my feet landed on solid soil after disembarking, I fell to the ground, weeping and thanking the saints in heaven for delivering us safely to shore. Rounding Cape Horn was rough and we were often thrown off course into the icy Antarctic seas, freezing us nearly to death. However, once headed North again, we fortunately had fair weather most of the way. The Sheas, Richard, and I spent two weeks in a noisy, rundown boarding house while we searched for a place to live. Happily, we found a quaint house near the port where Richard and Joseph were hired as tradesmen.

Meanwhile, Maggie and I have set up a cozy little home. Each couple has their own bedroom and Katy can squeeze into a loft above the shared living area and kitchen. We're learning our way around town and discovering the best stores from which to buy dry goods and food. We have become parishioners of St. Patrick's Church, where we've met many nurses involved with holistic medicine. Although hospital officials frown upon married women working as nurses, they permitted us to become volunteers so that we can learn more about the new methods being practiced. I can hardly wait to start sending reports to Dr. Foster.

Just as we had gained our land legs again, an earthquake struck San Francisco around eight o'clock in the morning of October 21st, making me briefly believe that I was at sea again. For what was actually one minute but felt like ten, the ground trembled, the house creaked, and bricks tumbled off partially constructed buildings. The men had just left for work, and Maggie and I froze in terror as Katy, wide-eyed and pale with fear, slid down the loft's ladder and sought safety within Maggie's skirt. I don't know which was more deafening - my heart hammering in my ears or our dishes crashing to the floor. Not knowing what to do, I pushed Maggie and Katy under the table where we held one another and prayed that Richard and Joseph were out of harm's way. When the shaking stopped, Maggie comforted Katy and I crawled to the window to see a scene of pandemonium amidst a dusty haze. Many people, bloodied by toppling debris, were running to get wagons and wheelbarrows while others hastily pulled loved ones from rubble, and still others screamed that the Judgement Day was upon us.

My thoughts flew to Richard and Joseph. If they were out in the streets, wounded or worse, I had to go find them. Wrapping my shawl around my head and shoulders, I swung the door open and barged right into our husbands. Never had I been so happy and relieved to see Richard that I crumpled in a heap of woes into his arms. Their hair and clothes were powdered with dust and blood dripped in rivulets down their faces, but their injuries were minor scrapes and bruises. They'd been in the street when the quaking started and had run into a grocer's for shelter. They were amazed to see whole buildings sway, glass shatter, and bricks crumble so readily. They likened the buildings to those in a diorama - fragile and easily destroyed. Aftershocks occurred into the late afternoon and panic seemed to be the norm.

Over the past ten days, our jittery nerves have settled. Although we've resume our daily routines, we still tread lightly and wonder when the shaking will strike again. I'll be only too glad when events of this fateful day fade into the fogginess of distant memories. I won't ever want to wipe the dust off this reminiscence.

Please pray that the Good Lord will hold us safe in his tender embrace.

Your loving sister,
Alice

San Francisco, California
August 24th, 1869

Dearest Ann,

You were right! My recent malaise is morning sickness. Maggie finally convinced me to go to a doctor and, lo and behold, I'm expecting in March. Richard and I always wanted children, but after a year and a half of marriage, I began to think that perhaps I couldn't become pregnant. I suppose that I needed to recover from the stress of the trip, the earthquake, and settling a new home.

Expecting a baby brings on a new set of worries. Richard and I love living with the Sheas, but how practical will it be when the baby arrives? A cradle will hardly fit in our bedroom - to say naught about a crib. Perhaps we should look for another home, but I'll miss Maggie's and Katy's companionship - not to mention how much we save by sharing a house.

Richard is beside himself with joy. He misses wrestling with and teasing his younger brothers and sisters, and although he plays with Katy, he doesn't feel that he has the same liberties that he'd have with his own child. I thought that women were bad with wanting everything ready before the birth, but men are worse. Richard has already enlisted Joseph's help in building a toy chest and plans to fill it with all sorts of playthings. He keeps referring to the baby as a "he" and I keep reminding him that it could also be a she! I watch Katy mimicking Maggie wherever they go, and I love the idea of a little girl following me around. But, seeing how much Richard enjoys sharing his trade with apprentices, I know that he'd be ecstatic to have a son. Meanwhile, Katy just wants a baby to take care of and dress up. I warned her that if she dresses the baby, she also has to change the baby; however, she insists that task falls only to mamas!

I've dawdled too long and the husbands will be home, demanding dinner soon. Richard and I are collecting name suggestions, so please send yours! I miss you!

Your loving sister,
Alice

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
MARCH 15th, 1870

ATTN: MRS. P. MULDOON, 169 FRANK ST, ROCHESTER, NY

JIGGING FOR JOY! {STOP} A SON BORN LAST NIGHT ON
MY BIRTHDAY! {STOP} NAMED WILLIAM JOSEPH {STOP}
WILLIAM FOR MY FATHER {STOP} JOSEPH FOR OUR FRIEND

{STOP} WEIGHT 7 POUNDS {STOP} ALICE STRUGGLED BUT
IN FULL HEALTH {STOP} LOVE TO ALL, RICHARD {STOP}

{FULL STOP}

San Francisco, California
May 8th, 1870

Dearest Ann,

Your knitted baby blanket arrived today. What a beautiful example of your needlework! The blue in the blanket matches William's eyes. I can't stop looking at him and believing that he is mine. Ten fingers, ten toes, and a button nose - he's perfect! How I wish you were all here so that I could compare his features with yours. He is a real blend of Richard and me, having Richard's dancing eyes and my smile. But, I also see Da in him when he's studying some object intently. Perhaps Richard and I can splurge on having a photograph taken of him. I want our families and friends in Clifton to see him before he's all grown up.

Now that I've bragged about William, I'm looking forward to returning to my volunteer work at the hospital and choir practice. Motherhood can be a lonely business and even lonelier in a booming city where everyone has little time for anyone but themselves. San Francisco sure isn't like Clifton Springs or the little villages nestled into Ireland's rolling hills. Back home, friends would be dropping by most every day for tea and a peek at my precious wee one. But not so here - if you want to socialize, you must get out and about.

Oh, look at me - on top of the world one moment and blubbering the next! I know in time I'll have a routine and all will be right with the world. Now, I must wipe away my woes and kiss William for all of you.

Your loving sister,
Alice

San Francisco, California
November 11th, 1870

Dearest Ann,

I'm so bleary that I can't see straight. William has woken up every hour of the night for the past three days. The abysmally gray, windy, wet weather has turned his nights into his days. The wind howls through the cracks of this wretched house while rain streams through the window like water through a sieve. Everything is so damp and dank that we're likely to catch our death from pneumonia.

Ever since we rented this house a few blocks from the Sheas, I've had little companionship. It seems as if I only see friends after Church on Sundays. Maggie and I had hoped that we could meet once a week at the quilting bee, but our schedules hardly ever coincide. When I can get away from William, Maggie needs to be at home with Katy. To see friends, other young mothers have told me that they take their wee ones for a walk in the park after lunch, but the chaos of the street overwhelms William. Plus, the wind picks up the dust, making him sneeze constantly. I don't feel like a capable mother because I can't make William happy. I feel so alone.

Meanwhile, Richard isn't his usual jovial self either. After work, he stews in his chair, practically ignoring William's babbling pleas for play. And, instead of singing after dinner, he sullenly leaves the house to go for a walk, only to go straight to bed when he returns home. Richard always dreamed about having his own masonry, but he doesn't feel like his supervisor recognizes his skills and talents. I see him becoming more and more disenchanted with his job as time passes.

San Francisco might not be the place for us. We both grew up in small villages and perhaps they are more our speed. Richard and I really need to weigh our options and decide what will be best for us.

Please keep us in your prayers.

Your loving sister,
Alice

Clifton Springs, New York

June 18th, 1872

Dearest Ann,

Home again, at last! The ten-day train ride was much more enjoyable than sailing the seas. Although chasing a two year-old up and down the aisle presented challenges, that was nothing compared to turning green with seasickness! We stopped for a week in Grimsby to see Richard's family. William loved playing with all his aunts and uncles. I definitely see some resemblance to Richard's father in William. Richard was the proud father, bragging about all that William can do. Listening to him, I'd have guessed we had a five-year-old instead of a toddler!

While I spent a lovely time with Richard's mother and learned some of her recipes, Richard helped his father repair the barn. I loved how he smiled as he worked alongside his father, and I see his joy carry over to his work here in Clifton Springs. He hasn't enjoyed working in a very long time, but now he's excited to help build the Parsons Block. He feels that he's in the thick of things and will know when other proposed village buildings go up for bid. His dream is to leave his mark on this village.

I'm overjoyed to be an integral part of a community again. Nate, the little boy whom I cared for when I was a boarder is quite the young man now. He offered to take William to the park the other day, saying that it's payback for all the times I pulled him from the pond. Additionally, my good friend Bridget, who has a three-year old, and I have arranged to watch each other's children one day per week so that each of us can pursue our interests. I'll be able to visit patients at the San and work on Dr. Foster's social committee. We're in the midst of planning a Fourth of July picnic for the patients. Additionally, I've been invited to many luncheons to tell of my adventures in San Francisco. Like sitting at home working on a quilt is really adventurous! Honestly, although I'm mostly busy keeping house and rearing William just as in San Francisco, reconnecting with my friends and past coworkers has made me happy and much more confident as a wife, a mother, and a neighbor.

As I rode through upstate New York's rolling farmland on the last leg

of our journey, glimpsing the San's square steeple through the tall trees and having that pungent sulphur odor permeate my nose, an inner peace kindled deep within my soul. As family and friends have surrounded me in the weeks since our return, that peace has enveloped me in a definitive warmth of hearth and home. I can finally say that I am truly home.

May the Good Lord still our wandering feet and fill our home with friends to treasure and treat!

Your loving sister,
Alice

Epilogue

For the next 35 years, Alice and Richard lived in Clifton Springs, where they purchased a house on Broad Street and reared two sons William Joseph and Charles Frederick. By renovating the Sanitarium and winning contracts to construct St. Felix Catholic Church, the public school, and other buildings, Richard certainly left his mark on the village. Alice died on September 5th, 1908, at the age of 67 and is buried in St. Agnes Cemetery outside Clifton Springs. On May 12th, 1909, Richard married Alice's nurse Martha Manley. They lived in Clifton Springs for another seven years before moving closer to Martha's family in Alba, PA. On July 2nd or 3rd, 1925, Richard died at the age of 84 in Watkins (now Watkins Glen), NY and is buried in East Canton Cemetery in Canton, PA.

Ann Nugent Muldoon spent the rest of her life in Rochester, NY and died on December 27th, 1900. Unlike the letters suggested, her husband Patrick was just a common laborer, but her son Charles actually became a detective on Rochester's police force.

Dr. Henry Foster remained involved in the operations of the Clifton Springs Sanitarium and the growth of the village until his death on January 15th, 1901.

Lastly, Joseph, Maggie, and Katy Shea and the rest of the Clifton Spring villagers live on as figments of Richard and Alice's second great granddaughter's imagination.

The Magical Gift of Friendship

By Latrice Person

In collaboration with Morgan Farrow
(2019)

This is dedicated to the best writer in the whole entire program, the best illustrator that you could imagine, and the best friend. Her birthday was April 23rd. She will always be in all of our hearts forever and ever. For those of you who don't know her, her name was Tori Bement-Schramm. She was my best friend. She was all of our best friends. As long as we have this project, her story can be told through me and through all of us that write.

Once upon a time there were two friends. One was a Gargoyle named Daisy and one was a Witch named Sunshine. They met in a unique magical school that taught them numbers and letters. They had special classes together like art and music. They flew around with magical scooters because they couldn't walk. They are very opposite because one likes to cast magical spells and turn the kingdom into a place. The other is more realistic and likes quiet things and helping around the kingdom, but they are very similar too. Sometimes the Gargoyle, Daisy, gets a little upset, but the Witch, Sunshine, and her assistants help her calm down. But the nice thing is how the witch's imagination intrigues the Gargoyle. Instead of always thinking bad things, the Gargoyle now tries to look at the brighter picture.

Daisy, the Gargoyle princess, lives in a blue and green castle and loves to help people. She is green with blue hair, orange eyes, pink shoes, and an orange dress. Her cape is purple, red, and pink. Her favorite color is red. She has a pink bed and an orange chair. She drives an orange magical scooter that flies. She loves listening to gargoyle country, rock, and pop music with her housemate, Midnight, the Peacock. They both like art and going to the movies. They both have jobs and like to make money. Midnight the Peacock can walk. She is quiet, independent, and is very artistic. She likes art and making bracelets. They both like to help around the castle.

Daisy the Gargoyle likes helping people and working for the kingdom too. The Gargoyle has ups and downs, but she knows that things can change, and life is not a box of chocolate pretzels but you can always have a new perspective in life. She doesn't like when people disagree with each other, but she learns from one of her wise advisors that you can't change people; you can only change yourself. This advisor is a wise owl named Autumn who is always nice and stern, but she tells it like it is.

The Owl, Autumn, has been working with different characters with special needs for many years. Autumn is very funny, strong willed, and calm. She is green and black. She has a family with two boy owls and knows how to be very patient. Autumn the Owl says that you can always choose your friends. She says you can't change your past, but you can change your future for the better. You can't change your family, but you can choose who to be around. She also says that sometimes you just have to let things go. She says that there's always a rainbow after it rains. You can't always be friends with everybody, but you've got to believe in yourself that you're a good person. She always says to worry about yourself, and not others. She says to stay calm. She says to listen to yourself.

The Owl's friend is an Elephant named Raven. She's laid back, bubbly, and helpful and works with everyone in the Kingdom. She likes reading and she's very funny. She is quiet but she has a big personality. She tells Daisy and Sunshine not to take everything so seriously, as she tries to bring a sense of humor into their lives. The Elephant helps them to live their lives independently by helping in their homes and taking them out on adventures. Whenever Daisy gets off track, the Elephant is there to

bring her back to reality and tell her not to dwell on things. Since the Elephant is young, Daisy can relate to her. They like the same music and they like to dance and go shopping in the kingdom. She teaches Daisy lessons about how to talk to people and how to stay kind. Raven the Elephant is fun and Autumn the Owl is more of a mentor. The Owl makes sure Daisy is responsible and achieving her goals.

There's also a magical pink bunny rabbit named Miracle who helps everyone. She is a role model, and Daisy really looks up to her. She is kind, sweet, driven, and motivated. The Bunny Rabbit says to never say you can't. She tries to bring up everyone's spirits with a smile on her face. The Bunny Rabbit has a new job helping other people achieve their life goals but she comes to see Daisy at her castle. The Bunny Rabbit is goofy and loves carrots and celery and chocolate. She has a bunny brother who likes horses and a bunny daughter who likes swimming. She tells the Gargoyle that you don't have to be a product of your environment; what matters is how you change your life. The Elephant, Owl, and Bunny Rabbit all work together at the Lifehouse Agency where they all help to take care of the magical creatures with special needs.

There is also a turquoise Dove named Spirit who looks upon the magical kingdom. She is funny and brings everyone joy. She always encourages the characters to write about how they feel. She brings light to the whole entire kingdom. Spirit taught the Gargoyle and the Witch how to read and write. She taught them how to express themselves through words. She started a magical book program called The Imagination Project which helps all the characters with special abilities to express themselves through writing and telling stories. She taught Daisy how to be open and honest and to be comfortable expressing herself. She has the biggest personality, is always happy, and cares about all of the individuals in the kingdom. She always wants everyone to achieve their goals. Without her, the Kingdom wouldn't exist, the project wouldn't exist, and Daisy wouldn't be as confident as she is today. Daisy the Gargoyle wouldn't have written the stories that she did. Daisy really looks up to Spirit the Dove. She loves the way the Dove comes up with words. She is like the older version of the Witch because they have bright bubbly imaginations and kind hearts.

Daisy's friend is a Witch named Sunshine and together they fly around to help the people in the kingdom. They know they can't bring peace to all, but they always try their best to be bright sunny people and bring light to the kingdom. They use their scooters because they can't walk. Sunshine has a pink and purple pixie haircut, blue eyes, pink shoes, and a purple sparkly dress. She has magical powers and can turn herself into a bat. She is always brave and carries around a pink unicorn that shoots fire. She has a big imagination and uses a magical wand to turn things into rainbows and butterflies. Together they love to have fun, live life to the fullest, and help people. Sunshine has changed Daisy's way of thinking with her bright personality and kind heart.

Daisy really loves Sunshine. They are very best friends and they're like sisters. Sometimes Daisy gets nervous around other people, so she carries around a stuffed dog to help. When she gets nervous, she starts laughing. Most of Daisy's friends laugh at her, but Sunshine never does because she knows that Daisy is a good person inside. Sunshine always helps Daisy not to be nervous and tells her to be brave and confident. Daisy has trouble expressing her emotions, but she has writing, Sunshine, and her mentors to help her through it. Sunshine also tells Daisy not to let the townspeople get to her. Sunshine thinks that friends are important and always wants to be happy and to take care of the people around her. She knows that every day is not the best but she tries to find the best in every day. Sometimes Daisy gets upset and cries, but for the most part she can think of different things to make her happy again. Because of Sunshine's spirit, Daisy feels better about herself and becomes confident. She knows to always be thankful for her friends.

Sunshine and her mommy named Sunset go on adventures together to other towns in the kingdom. The mother and daughter witch live together. They love to go exploring and shopping. They go to the beach and to fly around different kingdoms on their brooms. They like to visit other family members. The Witch also has a husband and they were married in a faraway, magical kingdom with animals and rides.

Daisy the Gargoyle has a disability and lives in a special house. Her mom and dad can sometimes be friendly, but sometimes they are not, and this is why she moves out on her own. She leaves her past behind and

starts a new chapter for her life. She has a sister and two nieces and two nephews. Her family members all live in a nice cave. Some of the people in the town are her friends, so they help take care of her. Sometimes she goes to the cave to see her family.

There's also a Fairy named Skylette who helps Daisy and Sunshine if they need it. She is their little sidekick. She used to live with the Gargoyle, but now the Peacock lives there. Skylette has orange and purple wings with a rainbow dress. Her eyes are purple and her hair is orange. She loves to watch plays and cartoons. She is laid back and helpful, but she can be snappy, too. Other times she's very happy. She can always make people laugh.

The fairy has a twin sister named Moon. They love to be together and sometimes they argue but they are pretty much inseparable. They love to shop, watch movies, take pictures, and go bowling in the sky. They are total opposites, because one is very laid back, and the other is very bubbly and happy, but they both feed off of each other. They are tighter than a rubber band that doesn't snap. They live with their mom in a red fairy kingdom of clouds. They really like to live life and have fun.

There's a tricky Warlock named Baltimore who is a king. He says he likes everyone, but he actually tries to destroy the kingdom. He is sneaky and turns into a pitbull that likes to scare all of the nice people in the kingdom. He tries to lock everyone up in the dungeon. The thing about the Warlock is that he was not always like this. He used to be friendly, but life happened and now he is mean.

Baltimore the Warlock is a shape changer and changes into a clown, a guy, a pitbull, and a lot of other things. He doesn't like that the witch and gargoyle want the kingdom to grow and he wants it to be destroyed. He is afraid of everyone being happy because he is insecure so he tries to put a spell on the kingdom to make people mad at each other. At first, it works, because they drink a magic potion that they think is water which makes them fight with each other. Then the Witch and Gargoyle come with their scooters, and the Witch casts a reverse spell with the Gargoyle's help to take the curse away.

Then the Warlock turns into a dragon, and tries to blow the kingdom away, but Daisy the Gargoyle fights him with the strength of her wings.

Sunshine the Witch uses the magic wand to fight him, and they both fly on their scooters. Then Baltimore the Warlock throws Sunshine and Daisy in the dungeon. Skylette the Fairy goes to save them. They all try to fight the Warlock. Daisy wants to calm the warlock down, not destroy him. After she calms him down, he becomes happy again and wants to join the kingdom. The Wise Owl is proud of everyone for doing a good job. The Wise Owl was proud of Daisy the Gargoyle for trying to be understanding and not mean to the Warlock like other people in the kingdom.

Baltimore the Warlock was very mean, but Daisy knew to be nice to him. Eventually Baltimore had a change of heart and became nice too. Daisy knows that just because someone is mean to you doesn't mean that you have to be mean to them. She learns that from her advisors. The Warlock has a family of his own, which shows that you can change the way you think and act no matter what.

After a year passed, the Gargoyle and the Witch moved away. The Gargoyle knew it was best to move away because she had difficulties with her Gargoyle family. It made her feel scared and brave and nervous at the same time, but she knew that she was an adult and needed to be in a safer environment. She was very scared that her Gargoyle dad would be frustrated with her, but knew that it was the right thing to do for her safety. Daisy loved her family and her mom always made her laugh a lot. She knew she needed to leave the situation, but she would miss being around her nieces and hearing "Auntie Daisy!" She would miss teasing her nieces and nephews all the time. She would miss cookouts, mac and cheese, and birthday parties. She would miss listening to music with her family and having get togethers. She would miss being in their presence, miss being a unit. She was scared of where she would live and who she would live with, but she knew that the new townspeople would help her be independent and successful in her life. She knows to always find the positive in the negative. The Gargoyle was also excited because she could live by herself and have her own room. The Gargoyle now can go to a mall in the clouds, a dragon theme park, get magical ice cream, go to a movie under the stars, and write fictional stories about magical kingdoms. The

Gargoyle writes stories with her friend about castles, dragons, witches, and magic. The Wise Owl helps the Gargoyle to be independent and she also helps the other people in the kingdom with special needs.

Then the Witch and her mom move to another kingdom in the sky to live with her grandmother. The Witch is very sad to leave her friend the Gargoyle, but she knows that they'll be friends forever. Sunshine the Witch knows that even though she is sad, it will be good for both of them in the long run. The Witch and the Gargoyle fly back and forth to see each other and stay with each other. They always try to be together.

One day the Witch gets sick and the magical wizard doctor gives her an orange potion to feel better. The Witch's mom takes her to the doctor, who says that the Witch has green spot disease. Then the Gargoyle gets worried and frustrated for the Witch. The Wizard doctor's medicine makes the Witch feel a little better, but not all the way better. The Gargoyle feels glad that her friend feels better, but she is still scared for her friend because they are like sisters. One magical night they both fall asleep and when the Gargoyle wakes up, the Witch doesn't wake up. The Gargoyle doesn't believe it at first, and tries to shake her friend but she realizes that the Witch is in a new dimension without her. When the Gargoyle realizes that her friend passed away, she laughed at first because she was nervous, but then she thought about how much she would miss her friend, and she cried too.

After a couple of months pass, the Gargoyle thinks about her friend and about how brave and happy she is. It makes her feel braver and ready to do things for herself. Thinking about her friend makes her feel ready to conquer anything.

The end.

Latrice on "Spirit" the Dove: "I look up to everyone in the story, but I look up to Professor Scott the most. If it weren't for her, this program wouldn't exist and the University of Rochester too because it all helped to make this dream come alive."

