

dignity:

creative expressions from the
inspiration project



about:

The Inspiration Project is a volunteer collaboration between the University of Rochester and CP Rochester, a nonprofit organization that supports individuals with special needs. During the spring of 2016, a group of writing students from the University of Rochester met weekly with writers from CP Rochester. Through extensive one-on-one conversations, the UR students and CP Rochester adults have produced the creative works assembled here.

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preface:

The ancient Greeks were great storytellers, and their stories have inspired writers through the centuries to keep telling stories. One of their stories, as it happens, is about inspiration itself. It goes something like this: On Mount Helicon, there is a magical fountain made by the hooves of the winged horse Pegasus. It is said that the water bubbling out of the earth gives poetic inspiration. If you drink from this fountain, you will be inspired.

If you don't want to climb up the steep, rocky slope of Mount Helicon in Greece, you can make your way instead to the back rooms of the IT Center at the University of Rochester. Every Thursday evening during the spring semester, there is plenty of inspiration to go around. Creativity and learning mix together in a potent concoction that inspires all participants. Words take shape as sentences in a collaborative process involving brainstorming, interviews, and editing. Memories are given careful form in narrative and poetry. Stories are shaped and refined. The end result of all the fun work is this anthology.

The lovely Latrice Person, who gave The Inspiration Project its name, has this to say about the value of the work we do together: "This program is very special. It not only opens people's minds. It changes people's lives. It taught me not to be afraid of telling people what I want and what I need. This program taught me that it's good to speak up and good to tell your story. If you don't tell your story, nobody else will."



My Day

By Jeff Yarmel

In Collaboration with Zachary Arnold and Isabel Drukker

Cleaning My Mind

At the big house on Benedict Road, someone wakes me up at 6:45. I do not like getting up that early, but I still feel good. To get ready for work I wear whatever I want to. For breakfast I eat hot cereal and drink some orange juice. I eat breakfast with my other friends, but we do not talk because it is really early. After breakfast I brush my teeth. I put my tablet in my red bag along with the charger. I also pack my lunch, my lunch varies but pizza is my favorite. To get to work I wait for the bus with my 6 friends, it can take a while for all of us to get on the bus. It takes about 20 minutes for us to get to work. On the way, the bus driver Ed makes knock-knock jokes and music is playing on the radio; it's like a party bus. We get to work at 9.

When I first get to work I take off my jacket, put my lunch in the fridge, and check the weather on my tablet. Then I go to Bill's office to say hi and ask what we are doing today. Bill is my boss and he is funny to work with.



Bill carries some of his tools around. But sometimes he loses some tools too! When he loses a tool he says, "Jeff we have to find them!"

One day, when I went into Bill's office, he was looking something up on the computer.

"What are you looking up?" I asked.

"I'm looking up new parts for my bike," Bill said.

Bill is crazy. If he is in his car it takes him 20 minutes to get to work, if he uses his bike, it takes him 15.

Then we go to see if the pool is okay. The pool is big and long and blue. We test the water with PH strips to make sure it isn't dirty. When we're done, we take a break and watch TV in the break room. We watch anything.

If Bill doesn't have a job for me, I play cards in my room. If Bill does have a job for me, he finds me and says "I have a job for you."

Workshop is in a big room that has tools. In Workshop, we're in a big group. It's me and Tony, Henry, David, John, and Pat. We

make a lot of things. One time, me and Tony made a lot of wheelchair tables.

"If I paint pictures," I asked Pat. "Can we make a frame?"

"Yes," Pat said.

We did. We cut the wood using saws to the same size as the pictures, then glued the wood together. The next day, we put the pictures in. We hung them up in the rooms at work.

My friend Cheryl from work had lost her dog. She had the picture on Facebook and she gave me a copy. I wanted to paint her dog because I wanted to make her feel better. When she was at lunch, I left the painting by her computer for her to find. Once she found the painting, she wanted to find me. She said thank you and gave me a hug.

Painting makes me happy, it cleans my mind. I paint a little. My paintings take me three weeks usually. I've also painted pictures of birds, cats, and flowers for fun!

Me and Dave, sometimes Henry, clean up the floor if it is dirty with sawdust. Sometimes we clean the saws out. One day I looked at one saw, it had a lot of sawdust in it. It was hard to see the metal, it had so much sawdust. I cleaned it with Tony.

John is in my workshop group. Sometimes he lets me use two tools if he has any jobs. Together, we make wood mailboxes. John is great. All my friends are great.

I eat lunch with all my friends in my classroom.

I usually bring my food in from home. We just eat, watch TV, and do not talk. One member of the staff drove me crazy for a while. He gave me a pink cup to drink with and a pink plate. It was a joke.

On Wednesdays we go to the gym. Val lets us play with a punching bag.

At the end of my day I put away my tablet, put on my coat, and I wait by the door with all of my friends at work. We wait for the same bus we take in the morning. I get excited at the end of the day to see my bus driver. He greets us by jokingly saying, "Don't get in my way please." After that he helps us get on the bus, puts the radio on and the joking continues all the way home.

Once I get home I charge my tablet and see if I have any messages on my home phone. When I am home I like to listen to the radio. I prefer 101.3 because they play soft rock, anything too loud can be annoying. The radio helps me relax after a long day at work. And I use my tablets to play games.

I like writing stories; it's fun. It cleans my mind. It makes me feel happy.



Wanda's World + One

By Victoria Bement

In Collaboration with Natalie Ziegler

INTRODUCTION

We have a friend named Eric Weinberger, who is a playwright in New York. He has done a lot of amazing things. He's a big supporter in AT (Ataxia-telangiectasia, the disease I have). He puts on the Benefit New York every year for AT. He's a great friend and has done countless things. I saw a great play of his called "Wanda's World" when it was only in previews. It wasn't open to the public yet but he let us see it first. I remember Leo, who played PJ, being the first one down the aisle. I have a picture with him! I keep it in my room. This story is inspired by "Wanda's World." A BIG thank you to Eric! For everything that he has done. As a side note, we did receive permission from Eric. This story is dedicated to him. Thank you for letting me write about your characters. I love you. I hope you will enjoy "Wanda's World + One."

My mom and I just moved to Cheese Valley. On the first day of school, I was terrified. I am in a wheelchair, I can't walk, and I have tremors. I was a loner for the first day. I saw a boy bully someone in the hall. He wore a backwards brown hat, ripped jeans, and a brown t-shirt. He was yelling at a girl who had a birthmark on her face and wore a long purple shirt and purple leggings. I felt angry and sad.

He looked at me, and said "What are you staring at?" And then walked away.

I made my way over to the girl and asked "Are you alright?"

She was crying and whimpered "Yes."

I'm Victoria, or Tori for short. Victoria Bement. What's your name?"

"Wanda Butternut," she answered.

"Nice to meet you, Wanda," I said. "Who was that bully bullying you?"

"That's PJ," Wanda answered. Then the bell rang for her class.

Wanda and I became great friends because it turned out we were neighbors. She came to my house a lot to study and talk about boys. We would watch movies and paint each other's nails. And we had a lot of slumber parties. At school we had the same classes, sat next to

each other, ate lunch together, and rode the bus together. We were inseparable!

One time, PJ kept teasing Wanda about her birthmark and calling her "Blotches" until Wanda ran away crying. I turned around and said to PJ "Why?" and I rolled after Wanda.

Wanda was in the bathroom for a long time crying her eyes out. I was outside her stall. I kept talking to her. "It's alright," I told her. "I'm going to find out why PJ is so mean—some way or another."

The next day there was an announcement that a dance was coming up. We looked around the next couple weeks at everyone getting dates—except for us. So we decided to go together!

Wanda and I went shopping. She got a purple dress that flowed. I got a pink dress that sparkled. Of course we both got tiaras. Our moms ordered a white limo for us. We felt like princesses.

The dance was held in the gym. The decorations were very pretty. There was punch and soda and water to drink. There were also cookies and cupcakes. They played good music! But halfway through the dance, PJ and his friend got riled up and started popping the balloons and generally being jerks. He was asked several times to stop, but he kept popping them until a teacher came over to him and started yelling sternly. He ran away out of the gym. I started to roll after him, but Wanda grabbed my arm and said, "What are you doing?"

"Wanda, someone has to help him."

"Just be careful. You know how mean he is."

I rolled away quickly anyways. I found him in the courtyard outside. He was crying.

TORI: What are you doing out here alone?

PJ: Just leave me alone.

TORI: No! I want to find out what's bothering you.

PJ: Why do you care? No one cares about *me*.

TORI: I care, PJ. Now what's wrong?

PJ: I know my parents love me, but I don't feel like they're listening. I hear them fighting downstairs when I'm trying to sleep. You won't tell anyone, will you?

TORI: No, I won't tell anyone. Are you alright?

PJ: I think so.

TORI: Come on, let's go back to the dance.

Everyone in the whole gym got quiet when PJ and I came in together. Wanda came up and whispered "What are you doing with him?"

"I just worked a little *girl* magic, Wanda," I said.

The whole evening afterwards, PJ and I talked. When the dance was over, I said a long goodbye to PJ. In the limo going home, Wanda said to me "Do you have feelings for PJ? I saw that look in your eyes."

I said, "No. I don't know. I'm so confused."

The next day PJ did not pick on us all day. When he saw me, he just smiled and waved. At lunch, he was looking for a table and asked if he could sit with me and Wanda.

I said, "Yes, PJ!"

Wanda grabbed me on the arm and whispered "Are you crazy?"

I said quietly, "No, he's just looking for some friends."

PJ sat down and said, "Thank you again for helping me through the other night."

"Yes, of course," I said.

The table behind us was the cheerleading table. I could hear them laughing at us. One of the cheerleaders got up and shouted "Hey, look at PJ! He's over with Blotches and the new girl!"

PJ got up and shouted at her, "Hey! Leave them alone." And he threw the dinner roll off of his plate towards their table—and started a food fight! By the end of lunch, there was milk on the floor and food all over the place. It was a mess!

During the food fight, PJ guided me out of the cafeteria, but when he tried to help Wanda, she was unsure and did not accept his hand. Instead, she hurried out of the cafeteria on her own.

When PJ and I were out of the lunch room, I turned around, looked in his beautiful green eyes, and smiled. I reached up and pulled a piece of pasta out of his strawberry blonde wavy hair—and we both laughed.

I said, "Let's go get cleaned up."

As we were walking to the locker room, a teacher named Mr. Lemmings approached us and said in a stern voice, "Mr. PJ Dunbar, I heard you were responsible for the food fight. Is this true?"

I started to say "No, he wasn't!" when PJ interrupted and said, "Yes, I am responsible."

Mr. Lemmings said, "Detention after school!"

When he was gone, PJ asked "Did you see those cheerleaders' faces?"

"Yes," I said, "but I hate that you got in trouble because of Wanda and me."

"Don't worry about it. I'm used to getting in trouble."

After his detention, I was waiting outside by the tetherball court when a popular cheerleader named Jenny came up to me.

"What do you want?" I asked, trying not to look at her.

"We were jerks to you," she said. "I want to invite you to a party at my house. You and PJ."

"But what about Wanda?" I asked.

Jenny said, "I suppose she can come too."

"We'll be there."

"Great! I'll see you tomorrow night."

When PJ came out of the building, he yelled "Tori!" and he ran over to me. "I thought you would be home by now."

"I wanted to wait for you."

He sighed happily. "Come on, I'll walk you home," he said softly.

As we were walking home, he said "You know it was really sweet for you to wait for me."

"No problem."

We kept talking as we walked home. Well, he walked, I rolled. At my front door, I asked "Would you like to come to a party with me tomorrow night at Jenny's?"

He said "Yes, okay."

"Great. I'll see you at school tomorrow, PJ."

When I came in, my mom asked "Where have you been?"

"Oh, I was just hanging out with a friend."

"Wanda is here, Tori. Wanda is in your room."

I said, "Oh, shoot," under my breath, and went to my room.

When I got to my room, Wanda started asking questions about me and PJ. "Why did you leave the cafeteria with PJ And why didn't you come find me?"

I said "PJ did offer you help. He was trying to help you, Wanda. Why didn't you take his hand?"

"I was scared. I know PJ."

I had no response. She got off my bed, and left my room, slamming the door on the way out.

Later that evening, I called her and apologized, saying "Do you want to go to a party with me tomorrow?" I decided not to tell her that PJ was going too.

“Yes,” she said, “And I forgive you.”

The evening of the party, PJ and I arrived at Jen’s house, and Wanda wasn’t there yet. Everyone was there—there were lots of kids from school. Then we saw Wanda coming down the sidewalk. I felt nervous when I saw her, since I hadn’t told her that PJ would be there. I shouted “Hey Wanda!”

“Hi Tori.” Then she looked over at PJ, and asked “What’s he doing here?”

I whispered to Wanda “Give him a chance.”

The three of us walked into the party. They had music blasting, decorations all over, and kids were talking. We all had a blast.

PJ said, “I’m gonna get a drink. Do you two want anything?”

I said “Water, please.” And Wanda didn’t respond. So PJ headed towards the kitchen, and we stayed in the living room.

Meanwhile, Jen found PJ, and said “I want to talk to you.”

She led him into a room and shut the door.

Jen said “I heard some rumors that you like-like Tori, PJ.”

“What?!” PJ said. “I’m just being nice to her.”

While that was happening, I was wondering where PJ was, so I rolled towards the bedrooms just in case he was over there. I heard a loud thump! coming from Jen’s room. I decided to investigate. Just as I was opening the door, Jen was kissing PJ. My heart sank.

“PJ, how could you?” I shouted and then I rolled away from the bedroom and I locked myself in the bathroom, with tears pouring down.

PJ knocked on the door, and said “Come on, Tori!”

“Go away, PJ,” I said.

Then I heard Wanda yelling at PJ “What did you do?”

PJ didn’t answer. Then Wanda said, “Tori, it’s Wanda. Can I come in?”

I opened the door for her and said “How could he do that to me?”

“Calm down, Tori. Let’s go to my house and we can hang out with Spangles, my dog, and watch horror movies.”

So we decided to go to her house for a sleepover. While we were headed to her house, she asked what had happened.

WANDA: What happened?

TORI: I caught PJ and Jen kissing.

WANDA: Boys! You can’t trust them.

TORI: I thought PJ was different. I felt a spark between us.

WANDA: Let’s go watch movies and forget all about PJ.

And so we spent the night watching movies and talking. On Monday, Wanda and I were inseparable. I could tell PJ and I were both miserable, and whenever he would try to say something to me or make me feel better in the morning, I was unresponsive. I could tell it was going to be a really long day for me.

When it came time to go to Ms. Dingleberry’s class, I sat far away from PJ—which was unusual. I stayed late in Ms. Dingleberry’s class. She noticed I was sluggish and not out of there fast like the other kids. She asked, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “Oh, nothing.”

She came and sat next to me and said, “I can see something bothering you.”

“You might think it’s stupid, but there’s a guy I liked, and he disappointed me.”

Ms. Dingleberry said, “You’re young, you’re pretty, you’re full of life. Just give it time.”

Then the bell rang for the next class. And when I went through the doorway, I bumped into PJ.

PJ said, “I’ve been calling your cellphone like crazy.”

I said, “Oh. I’ve been busy. Excuse me. I have to get to class.”

When the bell rang to go home at the end of the day, I was so relieved. I went home to listen to Wanda’s talk show, where kids call her and tell her their problems. I always listened to Wanda’s talk show.

I was surprised to hear PJ calling in, trying to disguise his voice.

Wanda asked, “What’s your name, caller?”

“Chuck.”

She asked, “What’s your problem, Chuck?”

“My problem is that I have a friend who is mad at me.”

“Oh, that’s a bummer. What happened?”

“This girl forced me to kiss her, and my friend saw. I think it upset her.”

“That’s a hard one,” Wanda said.

“And worst of all, my friend’s friend completely

doesn't like me."

Wanda said, "I think you should go to talk to your friend who saw your kiss."

PJ said, "Easier said than done. She won't even look at me in the hall!"

Wanda said, "Well, Chuck, I think you have to go talk to her," realizing who was on the phone. "And about your friend's friend—if you just give her time and show that you care, I'm sure it will be okay."

Later that night, my cell phone rang. It was PJ! I picked up the phone.

TORI: Hello, PJ.

PJ: Hi, Tori. What have you been up to?

TORI: I've been hanging out at home, watching TV.

PJ: I just wanted to apologize to you. My kiss with Jenny didn't mean anything. She forced me to kiss her.

TORI: I'm really happy to hear that. I do forgive you. Well, it's getting late. I'm going to go to bed, and you should too.

The following morning, when Wanda and I got to school, PJ was waiting outside by the entrance, sitting on a bench. PJ got up and ran to us.

"Hey, Tori AND Wanda!" He shouted happily.

"Hello, Chuck," I said, and giggled.

Wanda said, "Yeah, I know about that too."

PJ said, "I knew you would figure it out sooner or later. You two are smart. What are you two doing after school?"

"Nothing, PJ."

"I just would like to invite you two to dinner," he said.

I smiled and said, "Yes," latching on to his arm. PJ reached out his hand. I said, "Please, Wanda. It's okay."

She didn't seem to believe me, so I said again, "Please, Wanda."

"Okay," she said, and put her hand in his.

"I hope you guys like Bill Gray's, that's all I can afford."

The bell rang for school to begin. The three of us went in together. As we were walking in, everyone was staring at us.

Jen came up to us and asked PJ what he was doing tonight.

"I'm going to Bill Gray's with these two," he

said.

"Really? Those two? Those two *freaks*?" She

said.

PJ said in a very stern voice, "Yes, and they're not freaks. They're my friends."

In homeroom, PJ, Wanda and I all sat together. Ms. Dingleberry came up to PJ and said, "I see you've fixed up some friendships. Congratulations."

She then did attendance and Mr. Udderfield, the principal, did the morning announcements, then we moved to visual arts class.

PJ was on camera duty, Wanda did the cue cards, and I'm a computer geek so I worked on the computers. Jen was hosting the school news channel, and she had a bottle of water on the desk. At first, the show seemed to be going well, but Jen kept giving me dirty looks and clenching her water bottle. It finally got so bad that she squeezed the water bottle so hard that it burst! Water spilled all over the class laptop. She shouted, "Mr. Leming, Tori broke the water bottle!"

Wanda and PJ both shouted, "No!" And they ran over to me.

PJ said, "She didn't do it, Mr. Leming. Jen did it! We saw it!"

Mr. Leming turned to Jen with his hands on his hips. He said, "Jennifer, you know better. Go to the principal's office right now."

He knew I didn't do it. He knew I wasn't a liar.

Our day went fantastic after that. Wanda and I got to PJ's around five o' clock. It was a warm, starry night. Wanda knocked on the door and PJ answered, wearing a red shirt and jeans. We all headed to Bill Gray's. Wanda got a burger and fries. I got a grilled cheese and onion rings and a rootbeer. PJ got the same as thing as me, but with french fries. We all shared the fries.

On the way home, Wanda said, "I gotta get home and take a shower. I gotta get ready for school tomorrow."

I said, "Okay, Wanda. We'll see you tomorrow."

Then PJ and I went to his house, but we went into his backyard. He got a lawn chair out and sat with me. He put his hands on mine, surprisingly. And he asked, "How did you have the courage to become my friend?"

"When I see someone not happy and bullying someone, I'm just the kind of person to help."

PJ said, "You're very sweet."

I said, "I wish I could get up and dance with you."

He gently giggled and said, "There's no music."

“Just make the crickets and the wind your music,” I said.

He got up. I took my seatbelt off and put my arms around his neck. And PJ lifted me out of my chair. I laid my head on his soft shirt. As the stars twinkled in the sky, he whispered, “You’re very pretty.”

I looked into his beautiful green eyes and said softly, “Thank you.”

As we were looking in each other’s eyes, PJ slowly put his lips on mine. And when we pulled back, he whispered, “I really like you.”

“I always really liked you, PJ. Even from the first day I saw you.”

We kissed again.

The next day, in the courtyard at school, PJ, Wanda, and I talked about last night. Wanda asked what had happened after she left. PJ and I looked at each other and started to smile, and then giggled.

TORI: Can I tell Wanda?

PJ (puts arm around Tori’s shoulder): Yes.

TORI: We’re together.

WANDA (hugs Tori): I’m happy for you.

(Turns to PJ): I never thought you had it in ya!

PJ: Well, turns out I did have it in me!

WANDA: I’ll be keeping my eye on you two!

TORI: I wouldn’t have it any other way!

As we walked into school, we walked in together with hooked arms, and we three were best friends from then on.

10 YEARS LATER

PJ and I have two kids who we adopted. Wanda watches the kids sometimes. Our kids call her Aunt Wanda. PJ and I help our kids get through school especially when they’re having trouble with bullying. He tells them all about when he was a bully, and we remind them that bullies are all people, and that they are just looking for friends. He’s a great father to our kids and a great husband to me. PJ, Wanda, and I live a happy life together.

THE END



A Day in the Life of Geraldine

by **Geraldine Copeland**
In Collaboration with Siri Ganti



Chapter 1: Morning (Debbie, Sharon & Momo)

I wake up at 6AM. I am happy inside my room because it is warm.

Lots of times, I don't want to get up, but I get up and I get dressed anyways. Always, I use my walker. My walker is next to my bed. I put my leopard shirt on. The leopards have jewels on them. I put on my sweat-shirt from Cape Cod because it's cold in the CAC. CAC is where I go for my day program.

I have a very nice room. It is mustard yellow. It is special because it is my favorite color. I have my own computer with games. I'll play those when I get home.

I have a lot of stuffed animals in my room too. My favorite right now is the one I got from Syracuse. I call him Syracuse. He's a pillow I can hug. He sits on my bed. He's an orange pillow with eyes and a baseball cap. And I hug him every day!

I went out of the room to get breakfast. I walk with my walker. I go down a narrow hallway. Then I go straight and by the kitchen with the black refrigerator and then I'm in the dining room. Sharon made chocolate chip pancakes and eggs.

Sharon is great and wonderful. Her hair is purple now; she dyed it. It used to be blonde. She is tall.

I met her when my other advocate left. She was part time first, but then someone told her I needed an advocate. So, she became my advocate.

Sharon is an awesome advocate. Sharon does a lot for me. She takes me out into the community whenever I want to. We have coffee together. She likes taking me

shopping and taking me to the spa. Also, we are going out to brunch next weekend - just me and her!

I really like my advocate. She is so great. I don't ever want to see her leave. She's a special one. Very special!

A lot of people are at the table with me: Ruthie, Debbie, Chris, Erika, Jim, Nomi and some others. Some people are not at the table. Some people are in the living room watching TV. They woke up earlier. And some people are still sleeping.

Debbie is sitting at the head of the table next to Ruthie. Debbie moved in a year after I moved in. Debbie has light brown hair; it is very long like my hair. She's very nice. Debbie is a fine person.

She likes playing cards with me and listening to country music. She's in a wheelchair and blind in one eye so I try to help her out. When she drops things I pick them up. Sometimes she helps me out by smiling at me. I really like Debbie.

Ruthie is sitting next to me. I ask her, "What are you going to do today, Ruthie? Would you like to go out for coffee with me at Tim Hortons?"

Tim Hortons is up the street from us, past 7-11. We don't walk there, the staff take us there in the van.

Ruthie says, "Oh, I'm so happy that we are going!" She is so excited.

After breakfast, I go to the bathroom and brush my teeth, wash my face, and use mouthwash. My toothbrush is blue and electric.

Then I go to the dining room and wait for my van. Everybody is with me waiting for their vans, sitting in the waiting room. Momo is with me, waiting, and she shakes my hand. Momo can't talk, but she can yell, and sing.

Momo is skinny and short. She has brown hair. She really likes music. She is a wonderful person. She just had her birthday and we all sang happy birthday to her and had cake. Her family came too.

Momo is in a wheelchair. The first time I saw her was last year. I was at the table, and she was scared. We all tried to get her to like it.

Momo likes to hold my hand. She likes to smile at everybody. I like hanging out with her.

Chapter 2: CAC (Yoyo, Kim & Shauna)

Now I am going to the day program at CAC. I get in a van with two people, Lauren and Jeffery Nelson.

I would never leave CAC; I love it and that's the truth. The drive to CAC is *snap* - like that! It only takes a few minutes and we are there!

CAC is a great brick big building! The doors are automatic and I walk in. The basement room is nice. The paint is in all different colors: dark blue, light brown, beige, and mustard yellow. (That's my favorite color!)

The floor is a carpet all over. I put my stuff in the locker room. The locker room is by the art room. Then I go to Kim's office. I talk to Kim every day. I like Kim. After talking to her, I go to the conference room on the right of the elevator.

My friend Yoyo is already sitting in the conference room. I say, "Yoyo, what are you going to do today?"

She says, "I'm going to eat my lunch." She says that in a very cool way.

I say, "Ok, well, I'll talk to other people too."

My favorite class is Shauna's class. She has the first class. She said "Geraldine! All the supervisors tell me that you're on time for class. Good job!"

I say, "Shauna, I am glad." I get very excited and have a big smile. I love that! It's true!

In Shauna's class, we do art. Today, we have little wooden boards. We put tape on them and then paint around the tape. When we take the tape off, it now has pretty designs. We get to do paintings and collages, and then we talk about things we want to do next time.

At 11am, Shauna says it's time for lunch. We go to the conference room. I am sitting with Nancy next to me.

"What do you want to do today?" I ask Nancy.

"I want to play Uno at the end of the day." She says quietly.

"Sure we can do that. I am gonna ask others too." I say.

Yoyo joins in and Shamaine is sitting on the other side of me. I ask them, "Would you like to play Uno with me after lunch?"

Yoyo says, "Oh, I'm too busy right now. Maybe some other day." I say, "It's alright, Yoyo; just do your work!" I really like Yoyo.

At 1pm, after lunch, we play games. We go to the dance room to play. We played twister, Simon Says, and hangman. I won first place in twister and tic-tac-toe. We don't get anything, but I'm still proud, very proud!

At 2:40pm, we leave the dance room. Everyone goes to the locker room. So I wait in the hallway with friends. After everyone left, me and my friends go the locker room. I get my bag out of my locker. Then we go back to the conference room.

At 3pm, my van is here. Then I go home and I play on the computer.

Chapter 3: Dinner (Ruthie)

When it's close to supper, I go out. I bring my purse for when Ruthie and I go to Tim Hortons after dinner. I ask if I can help with dinner. I'm very happy because cooking makes me happy. Tonight is taco night.

On taco night, we put meat, tomatoes, sour cream, all kinds of cheese, lettuce, and onions in.

When they're done, we clear the table, and put things in the dishwasher. Then I help put things away. I ask them "Could I help you put this stuff away in the refrigerator?"

And they said, "No, that's alright, but thanks for asking!" I ask if I can have leftovers for lunch tomorrow. They said, "Sure!"

After dinner at 7pm, me and Ruthie go to Tim Hortons.

Ruthie is beautiful. She likes going places and she likes going to Tim Horton's. Ruthie is a very nice person. She is very wonderful. She is short and she has glasses. She has blonde hair.

I can't remember the first time I met Ruthie. I think, two years ago, because she was there longer than I was. I moved in two years ago. I remember all the old staff was there when I met Ruthie.

Ruthie and me like drinking coffee together. I have hot coffee but Ruthie has cold coffee. We talk about good things like playing games together. I like asking Ruthie to do a puzzle, play Chutes & Ladders, play Candyland, or Uno or War! Ruthie is a very caring person; I like her very much!

I asked Ruthie, "What do you want at Tim Hortons?" She says "A cookie and a medium coffee."

I order an everything bagel and a large coffee.

We didn't talk in Tim Horton's. We didn't eat in Tim Horton's either. We talked in the van and then we talked at home. I drink my coffee with Ruthie and save my

everything bagel for breakfast. Ruthie puts her food in her lunchbox.

Chapter 4: Kiwanis (Pat, Sharika & Chris)

Now it's time for Kiwanis. Kiwanis is where people meet as a group and do fun things like picnics, car washes and arts and crafts. Only Ruthie, Jim, Chris and I went to Kiwanis. Pat is in Kiwanis too. He goes to Kiwanis with us. He's a great person, and a great friend.

Pat is very caring person also. He gets things for people. He helps people, and he is very helpful. And he is an awesome person. Pat looks handsome and great. Pat goes to the gym. He does running, like for the Turkey Trots. I hope he gets first place! Pat likes country music. We both like this one band - The Dady Brothers. I saw them in person when I was at my old group home.

I met Pat a year ago. He moved in right after I did. Pat just had his birthday! Pat and me also like getting coffee together. He is very silly with Chris. They both want women, but they're very hard to get!

This week, Kiwanis is coming to our group home. Sharika is at the Kiwanis meeting with us. She is there to help the people from other houses because they're in wheelchairs.

Sharika is very nice; I like her. We don't see her very often because she's got another job. She's medium height with brown hair. She likes everyone. She has a great laugh.

Sharika is only part time. She started recently. Sharika is funny. She makes me laugh. I don't remember a joke right now, but even her smile makes me laugh.

In Kiwanis, we are raising money to make a wheelchair swing. We are making magnets and going to sell them at the Spaghetti Dinner in May. To make the magnets, first we start with the glass part of magnets. Then we put glue on. Then we put the sticker upside down so the picture will show.

Chris made a very pretty magnet-. It had red, white and blue glitter. It was very beautiful.

Chris is very nice and very handsome. He has short brown hair. He has brown eyes. Chris came last year right before Christmas to the group home. When I saw him first, I was by a door. He came up to me and told me a joke. It made me laugh.

"Knock, knock"

"Who's there?"

"Banana."

"Banana who?"

"Knock, knock"

"Who's there?"

"Banana."

"Banana who?"

"Knock, knock"

"Who's there?"

"Orange."

"Orange who?"

"Orange you glad I said orange instead of banana?"

Chris is very nice and helps me and Ruthie out. He cuts our apples and puts them with peanut butter on a plate for us. Chris and me became boyfriend and girlfriend a week later. He jokes with me and gives me things. And I give him things too. At Christmas, I gave him hot chocolate and a mug. The mug was really huge and silver. When he got it, he opened his mouth real big. He was really happy. He said thank you and uses it even now. For Valentine's Day, he gave me a mug too. It had hearts on it.

Chapter 5: Nighty-Night (Nomi)

After we finish, we go home. I see Nomi in the hallway going to her room, listening to music. She looks nice. She is in a wheelchair. She has long brown hair, and she can put it up too. She is a short person. Nomi likes playing her DVD player.

Whenever something falls, I pick it up for her. She calls people's names to help her, and she especially calls me. I like Nomi a lot, so I like helping her. Yes, I do.

She asks me if J.P. Simpson says hello and I say "Yes! A big hello!" And Nomi says "Oh, she used to go to CAC."

Nomi has a keyboard. She plays good music, and goes "bum bum bum." She listens to music on her DVD player while she plays music! She makes her music match the music she is listening to. I like listening to her music; I love her music.

This time when I got to my room, I read the Clue Books. Miss. White is cooking meals for them. Sometimes she feels left out because no one is helping her. It's kind of sad. She needs someone to help her in the kitchen. If I was in the book, I would help her! Colonel Mustard is in his room reading. I love reading just like Colonel Mustard! I started reading the Clue Books at CAC when I was in Mysteries. Mysteries is a program the CAC does where we solve clues when we read several mystery manuscripts. We have Mysteries just on Fridays, and today is Monday.

I read a lot. Then I closed it up, took my shower, and then watched TV. While I watch TV I play computer games at the same time. I like to play Mahjong. When nothing else is on, I watch Law and Order. I go to sleep at 11 o'clock.

I'm glad I'm at this new group home now, I like it much better. No I love it - I love it a lot!

I'm glad I came-- I love this group home!

THE END

The Blue House

by **Chris Thornton**

In Collaboration with David Vandermeer

Angie is my friend's neighbor from across the street. She lives in a blue house. The garage door is white. There are big green trees in the yard. I see her some weekends. We celebrate my birthday in July and her birthday in August. I go with her to help with her three kids. Her youngest daughter is a cheerleader. She has a coach who teaches her and the rest of her cheer group all sorts of moves, some using pom-poms. She is always the first one on the team to learn the moves. When her high school has football games, her cheer team comes out with music playing, they sing and do their cheer. We take her to school and pick her up. Both her sons play soccer. They like to run on the field. When they score in practice, they like to tell their mom about it. They play defense on their team. When the other team tries to score on them in a game, the coach tells them to get back on defense. They stop the ball and the other team from scoring. I don't see them play, but I come with Angie to pick her sons up after the game. Although the boys are exhausted from running on the field, they are always willing to share what happened on the field with me.

The puppy is Gizmo. His birthday is the same day as mine. I walk him, feed him, and clean up after him. Angie and I walk him around the block together. I taught him to sit and to give me a paw. I taught him to speak. Speak, I say, and he starts talking. He says, "Mama!" I taught him to say Patrick's name. Gizmo

calls him, "Patty!" Gizmo has blond fur with a white patch on his forehead. One day I am going to teach Gizmo to do more tricks, like jump through a hula hoop.

I said "sit" and then I gave him a treat. And he sat!

I have my own dog named Lacey. Lacey is brown with a white belly. I taught Lacey to talk, too. She says, "Mama" and "Grandma" and "Love you." My sister Molly taught her to say, "Give me dog treats."

Sometimes with Angie we go shopping at Wegmans. We buy things like milk, fruit, and macaroni and cheese. I love Wegmans. When I'm there I get pizza. I like to look at the prices of things. I don't know why.

Sometimes I go with Angie to the car wash. The car wash is fun. First two men spray the car with a hose. Then the car goes through a tunnel. The water and soap spray from all sides.

I met Angie when I was a little boy. I went to my friend's house and I went across the street and said hi to her. She was cleaning the carpet with a vacuum. She turned off the vacuum and I gave her a hug. She was very nice. She offered me a soda and cookies and cookie cake.

Now when I go to Angie's I play with Gizmo. Last time I saw Gizmo I taught him to jump rope. He jumps

side to side over the rope. I tie one end of the rope to a chair and the other end to the leg of a table. I am teaching Gizmo to jump so he'll be ready for the dog show. He is going to get first place, and he'll be happy. When the judge gives him his ribbon, he is going to say, "Mama!" and people will be surprised that a dog can talk!

Have you ever heard a dog talk? Probably. When dogs talk, it's hard to understand their words. It sounds like barking. They need help to learn how to talk clearly. When I tell them to speak, sometimes they don't do it. They just bark. It takes a lot of work. Here's a secret way to teach a dog to talk: Turn on the radio! They want to sing songs. Dogs will start saying what they hear, like, "Mama" and "Patty." It's funny when a dog learns to talk. Gizmo had never heard the radio before we taught him to talk. He like the songs better than the commercials. Gizmo's favorite radio station is 100.5 FM, which plays hip hop. When 100.5 is on, Gizmo dances like my friend Pat does, which is like how I dance. It's all in the hips.

I teach dogs to talk because they've never talked before. But I tell them to speak. I can understand them. And I think other people can too.

Angie taught her dog to talk, and I learned from her. Gizmo started talking when she first got him four years ago. Angie first met Gizmo in a pet store. Although there were so

many dogs in the store, Gizmo drew all her attention. Gizmo barked to say hello whenever a customer came in the store. When Gizmo talks, he and Angie talk to each other. Other people can understand them talking to each other. He can do a lot of dog tricks too.

My favorite foods:

donuts
Cheeseburgers
pasta
macaroni and cheese
ribs
pizza
french fries
muffins
brownies
cookies
cookie cake
chicken
lobster
shrimp
sloppy joes
corn beef and cabbage
pot roast
stew
sandwiches
soup
chili
broccoli
tomatoes
ketchup (yeah, I eat ketchup, right out of the bottle)
yogurt
applesauce
oranges
m&ms.

I want to marry Angie because she's a beautiful, kind, pretty, gorgeous woman. I'd get down on my knees and give her a large wedding ring, with a diamond in it, I think. I'd propose when I'm over at her house. I know that if I asked her, she would say yes. She loves me. I wouldn't do anything silly like people do in movies; this time it's serious. I'd invite all my family and friends when

we have the wedding, which we'd have in her backyard. And then we'd go on a honeymoon with a cruise to Hawaii and stay on the beach. Neither of us have been on a beach before. We'd get nice drinks and go out to dinner and see fireworks. Even though we're not married yet, we should still go out together to watch fireworks sometime. I'd also like to take her to see baseball games, go dancing, watch movies, go to the park, and go to the science museum here in Rochester, and go fishing. I haven't asked her to come with me to do these things, but I will.

She likes to golf, so I think I'd try it with her. She has a pool table too. She plays a lot of sports. I like to play basketball, baseball, soccer, tennis, and frisbee. I'd like to play two-hand touch football with her (I couldn't bring myself to tackle her). I'd like to have all my meals with her: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and then a milkshake and some ice cream for dessert. I want to go to a barber shop to get my hair cut. I want to see the fire trucks at the fire station, sleep in a nice hotel, and go see a movie. So far, my favorite movies are *Home Alone*, *Dr. Doolittle*, *Santa Clause*, and *Little Women*.

I spend a lot of energy on holidays: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, Saint Patrick's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day. Birthdays too. For Halloween I decorate, for Thanksgiving I help set tables and make food, for Christmas I do both. For Easter we go out for breakfast and stay in and invite others over for dinner. For birthdays we go out to dinner to celebrate and eat birthday cake. My favorite holiday is

Valentine's Day because Angie is always my valentine. I stay over at her house and she cooks breakfast. I give her a present and she gives me one. I usually get her a gift card for Starbucks, which she likes very much. She has one cup of Starbucks coffee each morning. She often gets me more movies, or CD's and new headphones, or soda. I love 7up. She makes me macaroni and cheese sometimes.

I help Angie with all sorts of things. I help her trim the bushes and trees, and rake leaves and pick up dog poop to keep her yard nice. I help her use a snow blower and shovel the driveway. Sometimes in the winter it blizzards and the snow can pile up and block her in, so I shovel her driveway and try to dig her out. Sometimes I help her water her flowers in the summer. When she's sick, I cook her soup, feel her forehead and if it's hot put a wet washcloth on it. Even if she's puking, I just get her a pan, and wash it out before she has to use it again. I walk her up to her bed too. I help her clean her house. Clean her windows and tables and the other hard tops, clean around the front door and the basement. Dust off her pictures. I help her organize the furniture. I run the dishwasher and fix the TV, that sort of thing. One time I even fixed the clock. I bake cookies for her, sometimes muffins too. On her birthday, I make her birthday cake. When I can, I make breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks throughout the day. I bake waffles, bacon, bagels, and oatmeal for breakfast. For lunch I make cheeseburgers and sandwiches like grilled cheese. For dinner I make chicken, asparagus, steak, ham, potatoes, broccoli, or cauliflower. Snacks are applesauce, yogurt, bananas, and grapes. When we bring food back from the store, I carry bags in. Sometimes I make her bed. I do dishes, take out the garbage, and clean the garage. She's very happy that I do these things for her.

She takes me to the barber shop to get my hair cut. She takes me to the mall, movies, out for breakfast, lunch, dinner sometimes. I want her to take me to the beach. I want to go to a hotel room and use room service even though it's expensive.

While I was at work today, Angie came over and dropped off some cookies and cookie cake for me, before leaving. I didn't see her because I was on lunch break, but when I came back, my co-worker Tiffany let me know Angie had been over and showed me to the cookies she left for me. They were very good. I was very happily surprised that she came to visit. She brings surprises for me a lot of the time. It's one of many reasons I love her. She's kind because she does a lot of things to help me. I'm always happy around her, and excited to see her. She's my #1 person to see. She's also very beautiful. Her hair is the same brown color as mine.

We get a lot of exercise together by walking around the block. I'd like to

go with her to the gym and play basketball on their court. I'd also go swimming and run on the treadmill. I like to exercise. I have strong muscles that everyone can see when I flex. I've noticed there are a lot of ladies at the gym working out too, but I don't look at them like I look at Angie.

Thankfully, Angie never gets jealous of the other ladies at the gym.

When I'm at Angie's house, I know what the rules are and I follow them. I know her house and that she has these rules for a reason. Rules are things like "don't answer the door, don't answer the phone, don't go in the fridge, don't mess with the TV." She has a rule that when someone's not home, don't go through their stuff, because it's their stuff, not mine. She has a rule not to drink the milk right from the carton because it might get someone sick. I usually follow all the rules, but one time I broke that one. I didn't get caught because I was very sneaky. Another rule is don't eat all the food in her house. I follow that one. Here's another rule: don't go in the

cupboards, and do not feed her dog when she isn't home. Not feeding the dog is hard sometimes when he begs. Most importantly, don't hurt people's feelings: be respectful. That means respect their feelings. Don't hurt other people's feelings so they won't be mad to the world. Another rule: keep the coffee table clean. No swearing, no hitting, no spitting. No hitting the doggy. When we go out shopping, don't run off. Don't invite yourself to people's houses. Wash your hands before you touch food.

Chores:

- Make your bed
- Clean the basement
- Mop the kitchen floor
- Clean the countertops
- Clean the refrigerator out
- Change the lightbulbs
- Clean the closets
- Vacuum the floors
- Clean the windows
- Clean the cupboards
- Clean the bathrooms
- Put things left outside back in the garage



Roots to Home

by Ann Kurz

In Collaboration with Katie Cowie –Haskell



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 kindhearted 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 housecleaning 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 enroute 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 or 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 wag-

ons and wheelbarrows while others hastily pulled loved ones from rubble; and still others screamed that the Judgment 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 blubbing 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.



Courageous

by The Lovely Latrice Person

In Collaboration with Ryan Vislosky and Stefan Zhang



Part I: Cubs Will Be Cubs

Noble liked to help everyone around the Savannah. Especially, he liked to help his family and friends. He led a tribe of other lions. All of Noble's family and friends, as well as all the other animals, lived in the Savannah. If the animals of the two tribes, or any animals for that matter, ever had problems with one another, then he was always there to help.

Now, one day Noble's two sons were fighting over food after a game of soccer. It got physical, each cub putting up his paws.

Matt growled, "This is my food, punk!"

Cory was shocked that Matt yelled at him, but then yelled back, "Oh, no you don't. Give me back my food!"

Matt responded by saying, "I'll take it from you!"

Cory said, "You couldn't even if you wanted to!"

Then, the first cub sprang on the second cub and they started to wrestle.

Noble noticed that they were fighting and came out of his cave and said, "What's wrong?"

The two boy cubs were so busy fighting that they don't hear him.

Realizing this, Noble roared, "STOP!" which shocked the cubs and they stopped fighting immediately.

"What's wrong?" Noble asked breaking them up. "Why are you two fighting?"

Cory quickly said, "Matt stole my food! He won't share the meat with me." Then he punched the air.

In response to this, Matt declared, "I found that food first, thank you very much." Then Matt pushed Cory down the hill into a pond

Chasing him down to the pond, Noble said, "Oh my boys, there is more than enough food to go around." Then he fished Cory out of the pond

"Okay, dad!" the cubs shouted in unison. "Do you want to go play soccer?"

"After we get home to Mom," Noble replied.

The three went home to their mom, Sunflower that evening, and they ate dinner. While his family was eating, Matt went to his room. Then he decided to run away from the tribe. He didn't feel like his family wanted him and he thought that running away would make his family miss him. Noble did not notice until he saw the soccer ball standing alone on the ground in the dark. He began to wonder where Matt went. Nobel had to find him. He noticed, beside the lonely soccer ball, a set of alligator

tracks. The alligators had captured Matt after he'd ran away and Noble had to find him.

Part II: Adventure Time!

Noble went through a forest with some other lions from his tribe. He was going to find his son, so he went to a different part of the Savannah where danger was, with alligators and other creepy animals. He had fight off leopards and tigers on his way. He also traveled through many dangerous elements like, rain and mud.

He eventually arrived where the alligator tribe lived, but to Noble's surprise the alligator tribe wasn't there. Upon inspection of the ground, Noble found tracks. He followed the tracks to the dangerous skeleton swamp.

On Noble's journey, he brought some other lions from his tribe. When these lions discovered that the alligator tracks led to Skeleton Swamp, they abandoned Noble and went back home. They claimed they were going to get other animals to help with the search, but they were actually just scared and nervous.

Noble had to make an important decision, whether he should follow his buddies home or keep looking for his son Matt. Since he was brave, he decided to get his son out of alligator dungeon in Skeleton Swamp.

Noble got to Skeleton Swamp. He needed to come up with a strategy to save his son. While Noble was thinking, he saw a little alligator girl coming out from the swamp castle. Noble was scared at first, and tried to sneak away, but then he realized she was very friendly. She was curious and asked him, "Where are you going? My name is Abby. Nice to meet you." Noble ignored her and kept going. Abby followed him, just like a little sister always following her big brother.

Noble came up with an idea in his mind—be friends with her so that he could get into the swamp castle.

He stopped and talked to Abby.

"Sorry for the rudeness. I didn't hear you. My name is Noble, and I'm looking for my son. I believe he was kidnapped and is kept in the Alligator Castle."

Abby was shocked, because she didn't know that someone was captured in the castle. She was angry at her father, the king, because she never knew that her tribe kidnapped anyone. She wanted to get back at him, so she decided to help Noble.

Part III: The Rescue

Abby's plan to break out Matt was to pretend to capture Noble and bring him into the castle. After doing this, Abby knew that Noble would be brought to the dungeon. Once in the dungeon Abby would help both Noble and Matt escape and then take a boat across the moat and to freedom.

The plan happened perfectly. The alligators brought Noble to Matt in the prison. Matt was in a watery underground cave and shackled to a wall. At night Abby helped Noble break free of the prison with his son. She did this by giving the guards poisonous food that put them to sleep. After Abby did this, Noble used his teeth to pick the locks. Abby led them to her father's boat and they stole the boat from her father. Everyone was asleep or doing other things, because it was dark. She used the boat to get them through the swamp. The boat's motor woke up some of the guards though. The guards chased them as they made their way back to Noble's home, but they got lost. Abby joined Noble's tribe and family, because her father was overprotective. When they got back home they had an animal party!

Based on a true hero Latrice knows.



Surprise!

by Caitlin Weir

In Collaboration with Hayley Chang

For my birthday, my parents gave me and Jimmy, my boyfriend, a trip to Aruba. I was so excited because it was the first time I had gone anywhere with Jimmy. We tried to get my aunt and uncle to come, but they weren't able to because they had to work. Even though I was sad that they weren't able to come, I was still happy to be going somewhere warm with Jimmy.

When we got to Aruba there was a gentle breeze and the palm trees were swaying. It was like paradise. When we got to the hotel we looked around the lobby. It was open and airy. There was a big patio in the back of the hotel that guests could lay out in the sun on.

We could see the pool and the ocean from our room. The ocean was a bright aqua color. It was so beautiful, but Jimmy wouldn't get off of his phone to appreciate the scenery. I was getting really annoyed, especially when we went to get coffee at Dunkin' Donuts. While I was looking at the menu I asked Jimmy, "What do you want, babe?" I got no response. I saw that he was on his phone once again. I tried to glance at what he was texting, but he pulled away.

"Why are you always on your phone?" I asked.

Jimmy looked up from his screen for once at me, and shyly responded, "I don't know."

"Who were you texting then?" He gave me a shrug, which only made me more annoyed. We came all the way to Aruba, so Jimmy could text on his phone all day.

After we had coffee, we decided to go get dinner on the beach. It was going to be really romantic, so I decided to forgive Jimmy for ignoring me earlier. He distracted me from missing my aunt and uncle. He kept me laughing with all his funny jokes about us. Even though it wasn't perfect, I was still happy to be there with Jimmy.

I wore a pretty orange and grey dress. I felt more beautiful than I ever had before. I wished that my aunt and uncle could've seen me.

I asked Jimmy, "How do I look babe?" Hoping for a nice answer, but all I got was silence. Jimmy's eyes were once again glued to his stupid phone.

"You look pretty," said Jimmy, but I noticed he didn't look up at me from his phone. I frowned disappointedly, but didn't say anything.

The restaurant, which sat on the beach, was all lit up like a small city. From where we were sitting I could see the sunset. The beach looked so pretty because of all the different colors in the sky, a mix of blue, yellow, and red.

The sun was just going down. Our food was just arriving. I ordered shrimp, and Jimmy ordered steak. The food looked delicious. There was a live band playing jazz music. I bobbed my head along to the beat. I almost forgot about Jimmy and his phone because I was just so happy to be having a romantic dinner on the beach with him, but no sooner after our food came Jimmy was on his phone once again. Jimmy and I were sitting side-by-side. I tried to reach for his hand, but he moved it away and kept texting.

"Geez Jimmy why are you still on your phone? We can't even enjoy an hour without you texting," I said angrily. My parents paid for this beautiful vacation for the two of us, and I really wanted to enjoy it with him, but he didn't seem to care. We'd been together for seven years and never traveled anywhere together. He was missing this opportunity.

"I was doing something," he muttered. I couldn't imagine what he could be doing. He didn't have to work, his friends could wait until after dinner, and he didn't have to call his mom. Everything was perfect except for him being on his phone.

“What could be so important that you have to be on your phone?” I asked. Jimmy shrugged. I tried to grab the phone away, but he thought I was just playing around and started laughing. I frowned, he didn’t realize that I was serious. I decided to ignore him after that.

There was an awkward silence while I ate my food, and he continued to text on his phone. I looked around me and everything was looking dark and bleak. The restaurant no longer lit up like it did before. My food was cold and yucky in my mouth. I was no longer excited to be there. I had been hoping to have a romantic week of fun with my boyfriend, but he was already ignoring me. I just wanted to go home.

Jimmy tried to grab my hand, and I just sat there, my hand limp. He noticed that I didn’t respond and asked, “What’s the matter babe?” I said nothing. “Are you upset because your aunt and uncle can’t be here?” He asked.

“Yes,” I responded, “but I am really annoyed that you’re on your phone. Why are you always texting?” I demanded. “We can’t even go on vacation without you being on your stupid phone.”

He turned to me and smiled, “I’ve got a surprise for you.”

“Yeah right, what could the surprise be?” I said sarcastically.

“Turn around,” said Jimmy.

I turned around and saw my aunt and uncle walking towards us. I started laughing and screaming, “What are you guys doing here?”

“You didn’t think we would miss your birthday in Aruba?” My Uncle John said, and he gave me a hug.

“How did you get down here? I thought you couldn’t get time off,” I replied.

“Jimmy kept texting us about how sad you were that we couldn’t come. Your dad was able to get us last minute tickets to fly here,” my Aunt said. She looked at me and said “Wow Cait, I really like your dress.”

“At least somebody noticed my new dress,” I said jokingly. I looked at Jimmy and gave him a big hug because I was so excited. “Sorry, babe, for being mad at you,” I said.

Jimmy laughed, “Don’t worry about it.”

That week we had such a good time. We went on the beach. We went in the water. It was really fun. We even took a raft called the Big Mable that was pulled by a motor boat. It was kind of bouncy. Even though I was scared, it was so much fun. I was so happy my aunt and uncle convinced me to go on it. I was glad that Jimmy was able to get them to come and that my dad was able to get my aunt and uncle tickets to fly down. Without them it wouldn’t have been the same. The best part was that Jimmy wasn’t on his phone for the rest of the vacation.



Pat and His Family

by Patrick Hurley

In Collaboration with Scott Mistler-Ferguson



I really like traveling because I love going on vacation. I like going everywhere! Visiting different towns and places is so fun.

There are some things that are different about being on trips and staying home. You walk around a lot more on trips. You get to go swimming on trips, too. I love the pool and the hot tub.

I go home every Saturday. My mom comes to the Group Home to pick me up. Then we go to Wegmans to get my two bagels and a magazine with ladies on it. On Sundays I start with breakfast at the apartment, then I get dressed, shave, brush my teeth, and put on deodorant. I like to use Old Spice because the ladies love it! After that, we go to Church out in Mendon. After Church we go home and I have my lunch. Bologna sandwiches are my favorite lunch with some bananas and a bagel from the Mendon Markets. Everybody knows me there and they know my usual order: two bagels, two bananas, and a sub for dinner. The sub is always ham and cheese because I never get tired of it. Not me! To start my week, sometimes my sister will call me and I'll go help her out at her house. We get rid of her old carpets in the house so she can get a new floor. Once I'm done helping my sister out, my brother and I stop to get my sub for dinner. On the next day I do it all again!

We help Mary take out the carpet in the basement and upstairs so she can put in a new wooden floor.

Being home is great too because I get to do outside work. I kind of miss that from the old house in Mendon. I can't do outside work at the apartments because it's not allowed. I can still do it at my sister's house when she calls me up but I do miss being able to do it at home. I was doing outdoors work for a long time. I used to mow the lawn. I used a push mower because it's a great workout, especially when you're going around the trees. My father had a big lawnmower that he drove around. We also had an outdoor pool. I would sweep it and this was a big pool so that took a long time. I vacuumed it too with a special pool vacuum. I liked having the pool as my responsibility and I kind of miss that, too.

We used to have a lot of parties there. I would help set everything up for the parties and that was really fun. I would rake the leaves and during the winter I'd shovel the back sidewalk and the front sidewalk. I was the handyman at the house! I even shoveled between the garage and the garage doors. Those outdoor parties were really fun, though. There was dancing and sometimes we did graduation parties for my sisters and brothers. Those were the best because we stayed up all night having fun. My Dad

taught me how to make burgers, hot dogs, and cheeseburgers on a grill. This was all back in Mendon. We had a porch back there and tables to eat outside. We weren't really outside because it was a screen porch so the bugs couldn't get to us and we had nice furniture out there. There were two couches, some chairs, and two tables. Sometimes I would put logs in my wheelbarrow to bring around to the porch. We didn't have a fireplace but there was one in the living room where we used all those logs. We even had two horses! One was Chester and the other was Ginger. I don't know if they were boys or girls but we had a lot of pets so it was hard to keep track.

We had a rabbit, three dogs, and some kittens. One of the cats was named Maisie. We had to keep the cats and dogs separate though. I remember one of the dogs was named Dairy. Actually all of the dogs were boys named Dairy. We had them tied up with a chain by their dog house but sometimes I played fetch with Dairy #1. My father had an old car that he stored stuff in. Eventually he got another old car as a gift. That one was really old too, but it was nice and blue. We had a lot of cars. Four, I think. My mom had a medium-sized car and the other car was the blue Buick I talked about before. The third one was a Chevy van. It was green and white and we used that one for trips. The fourth one was a grayish-blue pickup truck with a top on it. When we were growing up all the kids bought their own cars but they shared when they were learning how to drive.

My father used the pickup for work. He was the President of the Downtown Web Seal Inc. Branch. When he passed away my brother John took over. John is the oldest of us and he's in his 60s. My father died in 2006. I miss him a lot. I miss spending the holidays with him. There was Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day, Christmas, his birthday, and my birthday. For my 50th birthday my sister Eileen set it all up. We all went downtown to the place where she worked. We danced, played karaoke, and played games. We even had a DJ playing all different songs! Some were rock and some were country and we danced the Macarena. I miss celebrating my dad's birthday with him, too. His birthday was on May 1st. We used to get the family together to give him some gifts and have a family dinner. Easter was great with the family, too! One of my older brothers or sisters would hide little plastic eggs with candy in them all over the yard. All the kids would hunt for the eggs while we waited inside. It was fun to watch them from the window because they really liked the candy. I liked celebrating Father's Day, too. I used to buy him the Old Spice he really liked. We both liked Old Spice and he's where I get that from.

My mom's name is Betty. She has the same last name as me! We do a lot of stuff together. She comes to my meetings with me. Her favorite thing to do is shopping. She doesn't listen to that much music but she likes to listen

to talk shows. When we're in the car together we play my station, WBEE, a really good country channel. They play a lot of different country songs.

I help my sister, Eileen, a lot. Sometimes we take outdoor walks. We go downtown so we can walk around there. I help her set up tables and chairs at a community church. I love doing that stuff because I like helping everybody in the family. It's part of Eileen's job to set up tables and chairs. She takes the trash out, too and I help her with that. I've done a walking race with her before for an event. I think it was a walk to cure something. Eileen is really nice and I like helping her. I help everybody in my family with stuff. Sometimes I'll help them move when they're switching houses.

My brother Tim works in New York City. He works helping in Broadway shows. He's in charge of setting it all up and getting people for the shows. Tim is 50 so he's just a little younger than me. Of course, I'm better with the ladies than Tim. Tim calls me sometimes for my birthday. We catch up and it's pretty nice. One of my other brothers is Jerry. Jerry lives in Canada with his wife, daughter, and dog. It's a nice big white dog. Jerry's a good guy and I like when he and Tim visit for holidays. I have a lot of brothers and sisters. There are actually ten of us. My sisters are Mary, Eileen, Bridget, Julie, Noel, and Anna. My brothers are Tim, Jerry, John, and then there's me!

I really like travelling because I love going on vacation. I like going everywhere! Visiting different towns and places is so fun. There are some things that are different about being on trips and staying home. You walk around a lot more on trips. You get to go swimming on trips, too. I love the pool and the hot tub.

Now let me tell you about my trips! I love traveling and the outdoors. My last trip was to Toronto, Canada. The first hotel we stayed in was the Delta Kingston Waterfront Hotel. It was a good hotel with nice breakfasts. My view was nice because I could see a lot of the city from our window. The hotel even had a pool that we got to swim in!

In Toronto we went to the J.Deer's Restaurant. I got the meatloaf and it came on top of all the mashed potatoes. I loved the food and drinks. Especially the beer! I really like Bud Light. They also had nice waitresses at J.Deer's. Afterwards we went back to the hotel and watched some movies.

We went to a lot of Broadway shows in Toronto. Before the first show we ate dinner at Frankie Pesto's Italian Eatery. We had some drinks there too. After that, we went to see the show "Legally Blonde". I loved the dancing and the singing. I loved all of the songs, really. Elle Woods was my favorite member of the cast. I was dancing along during the show because it was so good. My favorite song was "Oh My God You Guys" with Elle and her friends. My favorite type of music is still country but I liked this song because it was so upbeat like a rock song.

Legally Blonde wasn't the only show we went to see. We also saw "Dirty Dancing" at the Broadway in London. I really loved the songs and obviously they did some good dancing in this one too. This one was really cool because at the end the two main characters had a kiss. You can see it on the cover of the playbill with the title in pink. My favorite song from this show was at the beginning. "This Magic Moment" was really fun because it had a nice beat.

The third musical we went to was "Jersey Boys". This one had a lot of songs. I think the songs were from a long time ago. The actors sounded so young when they sang them, though. I think it's because the notes were so high. I think these Broadway songs were better than country in general. I like country but these songs were all so good. "Legally Blonde" is still my favorite. There are some ladies in it, after all!

We also went to the Toronto Zoo while we were in Canada. I saw a lot of animals. I remember the elephants, monkeys, giraffes, polar bears, and pandas. The pandas really like the cold and you can even vote to name them. If I could name one of them I'd name it after me! It was nice to see the pandas. I didn't touch any of the pandas but I looked at them and I think they had some cubs there, too. The bigger ones were almost as big as the tigers we saw before. The tigers had been circling around in their cage.

Some of their cage was outside and some of it was inside. It looked like a jungle but they didn't climb on anything. They just walked around the ground. I loved the color of the tigers! I didn't know what kind of food they eat because we didn't get to see that part, but we looked up what they eat and it turns out they eat deer and pigs. I didn't know that!

I got to see elephants, too. I know what they eat, it's hay. They had about enough hay to fill a table. They would pick up the hay with their trunk to put it in their mouth. I think they do that to drink water, too. They had a lot of space and water. They put their long noses in and drank from it. They were all adults and I think they were all the same size, too. My sister came with us to the zoo and I was pushing my mom in the wheelchair the whole way. I was tired but it was still fun. Eileen didn't tell me her favorite animal but she loved the trip. I think she liked driving the best. Eileen really likes driving. She's a good driver so she got to drive my mom's car. She did all the driving with me sitting up front with her. I was playing my CD the whole way. It's a country CD and I've got a lot of country songs. I don't know what my mom's favorite animal was but I know she had fun too.

We visited Cathedrals in Toronto, too. They're basically bigger churches and we got to walk inside them. I liked the

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inside more than the outside because you could see the colors. The colors are on the windows and there were a lot of different ones. It sort of looked like a mix of stuff. [Eileen and my mom liked the churches (and I know I did!).] We didn't get to hear any singing, but there were some people there. I think they went to church there. We went during a church service so we had to be quiet. I really loved the windows because the lights made them even cooler. This time Eileen helped me push our mom in the wheelchair. That was good because I had pushed her around the zoo all by myself.

I remember when we were at the Cathedral we walked around a lot and looked at old pictures from a long time ago. The pictures were of people dressed in all red and their hats were black. They were all on horses, some men and some women and all these pictures were up on the wall. I don't know what year they were from but I know it's a long time ago. I think they had a statue of a horse there. I think it was made out of metal. It was all black and really shiny. It was almost as big as a real horse. The horse statue had a statue of a cart hooked up to it, but there wasn't a statue of a person in it. I don't know how they got it all inside but it was cool to find that while walking around.

When I took a trip to Niagara Falls I went with my sister, Eileen, and my mom. We went in 2012. Eileen drove us and I was sitting up front playing my country music. I like to sing along in the car on any kind of trip. I like to dance, too. At the hotel they had kind of an indoor beach. They had a wave pool that made the water go back and forth and a water slide. It was really good. I liked the wave pool better because it felt like I was at the beach! It was even better because I didn't have to worry about sunscreen because it was inside. Talk about ladies! The women there were great. The waterfall was great, too. I could see the whole waterfall from my hotel window. I liked the way all that water was falling down. I don't think there were any boats in the water. In the mornings we ate breakfast at the hotel and later we'd go out to lunch. We ate out for dinner, too and I think we went to a bar afterwards. One of the days we stayed at the hotel so we could watch the waterfall from our window. I think that was my favorite day but the day we went walking around the town was also fun.

These were all good trips! The best part about them was how fun they were, of course! And that I get to take them with my family. I love my family and am I'm really thankful for all of them.



Ask Toni

by Toni Montgomery
In Collaboration with Sally Patel



Signs that you are settling for less than you deserve in a relationship:

Number One: The relationship brings you down. Your significant other doesn't inspire you to do your best. They are overly focused on their own needs and can't be supportive of you.

Toni's friend Tyler is getting married to his fiancé Gilela. Toni was in charge of planning the event. She chose the centerpieces which were framed pictures of the bride and groom with pink flowers on the frame. Toni also had to give an important toast. She was very excited to be in the wedding and support her friend on his big day. She was hoping that her girlfriend, Kelly, would be her date so that she has company. Toni was nervous about asking Kelly to go with her. When she asked Kelly, her response was disappointing. She said she would not attend and did not even think about the amount of effort Toni put in to making the event happen.

Number Two: You feel you have to change yourself- your values, goals, or dreams- in order for them to accept you.

Toni grew up watching Tyler Perry movies and Oprah on television. She still watches them now. These individuals inspired Toni and became her role models. Both Oprah and Tyler Perry overcame many problems. Tyler Perry was homeless and they both were abused. Toni dreamed of being an actress too. Growing up, Toni was in plays but she still wanted to be in the movies. After going on an audition, she got a role as a clothes stylist in the movie. After months of filming, it was time for the opening night. This evening had big stars walking in on the pink carpet and getting their pictures taken. Toni asked Kelly if she would join her. Kelly said no! She thought Toni would embarrass herself. Toni wanted to be an actress but she also wanted to make Kelly happy. She thought Kelly was not giving her the same support that she was giving her back.

Number Three: You give in to accommodate their expectations, needs, and desires.

Kelly expects Toni to do everything. Toni has to cook, clean, and pay for everything in their house. Toni

works very hard to support herself. She wishes that Kelly would help, but she doesn't want to. She is a bum- she doesn't have a job and doesn't want to get one. Once, Toni came home from work and was very angry. She noticed trash like food, food boxes, and cigarette butts all over the floor and couches. Toni was very disappointed because she likes to keep her house clean for when she has parties, book signings, and friends over to visit. It was so disgusting that she knew she needed help. She called a maid service and chose the nicest of the eight employees that they had. It was so much work that it took three whole days to clean it. She knew she needed to say something to Kelly because this happens all the time. She felt like telling her to take all of her things and leave the house.

Number Four: You have been cheated on repeatedly and keep giving them chances, even though they have proven to be untrustworthy.

Toni was out getting ready to open her new Diva store. While she was doing that, she noticed Kelly holding hands with another girl walking down the street. Toni went outside the store and saw them kissing each other. She was very confused. Toni was very upset. Because Toni was opening her store and wanted to cut the opening ribbon, she went back inside. Later, when Toni saw Kelly again, she asked why she didn't call her first. Kelly said, "I'm sorry, I don't know why." Toni was scared because she didn't want to lose Kelly, but she also realized that she couldn't trust her because it wasn't the first time she did this. Trust is very important in a relationship and Kelly lost Toni's trust.

Number Five: You hide how you're being treated by them to your loved ones, putting your partner's needs before your own.

Toni was writing her feelings out in her journal while she was sitting at her desk. She wrote a letter to God about how her feelings were hurt because writing to God helps her stand up for herself. Her feelings have been hurt by many people. Kelly hurt Toni's feelings because she keeps lying. Toni didn't want to tell her family about this because they worry about her and would be upset. She felt bad for keeping a part of her life from her family. Even though the relationship was tough at times, Toni learned a lot from her time with Kelly. She learned that you need respect, trust, and support in a relationship. Toni wants to share this story with others to help them understand this too.



“I Like the Weather to be Happy”: A Collection

by Ruthie Emens

In Collaboration with Wendy Owens

I. Lucy

It was a hot summer day at the Elmwood Group Home, and Chris and Geraldine were in the kitchen making lunch. Chris and Geraldine love to eat together! They usually eat at the table, but on this day they decided to take their food and go on a walk. They packed chocolate chip cookies and applesauce into a paper bag and headed to a nearby forest with a nice path.

While they walked along the path, they saw a lot of nature. There were squirrels eating nuts on the ground and robins tweeting and flying between the trees. The robins were bigger than usual, with beautiful red tummies. Chris and Geraldine were also happy to see two deer slowly walking around and eating grass from the ground--but they were nervous to see a skunk because it might spray and make them stink! The forest had more than animals, though. It also had a tall apple tree with yellow and red apples, and shorter green plants near the ground.

Chris and Geraldine had been walking for a little while when they started getting tired. They found a nice patch of dirt to sit down on and eat lunch out of their paper bag!

Meanwhile, close by, there was a bear named Lucy. Lucy was brown and gold and small, and very hungry. When Chris and Geraldine got out their food, Lucy smelled it and looked around. She really wanted some! She got up and started walking toward the smell.

Chris and Geraldine were eating their applesauce and cookies when they heard a growling, “grrr!” They stayed calm even though it was scary, and soon the bear arrived.

“Hi, my name is Lucy!” the bear said.

“Hi, my name is Geraldine,” Geraldine said, “and this is my friend Chris.”

“You’re beautiful, Geraldine!” Lucy the bear said. “And Chris, you are very handsome.”

Chris and Geraldine both love to talk, so they started talking to the bear. The three talked for a long time, until the sun was almost down. Near the end of the conversation, Lucy finally told them why she was there.

“I am very hungry. May I have some applesauce?” she asked, excited at the prospect of eating.

“Yes you may!” Geraldine said. She gave Lucy both cups of applesauce and their cookies. Bears are big

and need a lot of food! This food made Lucy very happy. She took the applesauce in one paw and lifted it to her short mouth. Chris and Geraldine suspected her nose might not fit inside the cup, but it did, and she used her big bear tongue to lick the cup clean.

“Applesauce tastes good,” Lucy said. She had applesauce stuck in her fur. “Mmm!”

Lucy decided not to eat the other applesauce, in case she got hungry later. But she did eat the cookies, holding them on her paws and eating them more neatly than you’d think a bear would. She crunched them between her teeth and her mouth made loud noises, “smack smack smack!”

“It’s getting a little dark,” Geraldine said. “Chris and I need to go home, Lucy.”

This made Lucy sad, because Geraldine had taken care of her and Lucy didn’t want her to leave. Lucy started to cry. She was teary but very quiet, and Geraldine wiped her tears away.

“Thank you,” said Lucy.

Geraldine hugged Lucy. “Go home and lie down,” she said. “It will make you feel better!”

Lucy left, happy because her tummy was full of applesauce and because Geraldine had been so nice. Chris and Geraldine waved goodbye.

“I’m hungry,” Chris said to Geraldine once the bear had left. “Let’s go to Subway and get subs.”

“That sounds good!” Geraldine said. She and Chris got up and headed out of the woods, just in time for the sun to set. They were very happy.



II. Mumu is My Good Friend

Mumu's friend was wheeling her into dayhab at the hospital when it started to rain.

Mumu has long black hair and a happy face. She uses a black wheelchair and likes to wear her pretty clothes, and she is very quiet and nice... but she doesn't like rain.

The rain was warm and went pitter patter! pitter patter! all over the road and the cars. Mumu and her friend began to speed up to keep from getting wet. Once inside, her friend gave Mumu a pink duck to make her happy.

"Goodbye Mumu! Have a good day at dayhab," her friend said. "I'll come back to pick you up later."

A doctor wheeled Mumu down the hall to her room. The walls of her room are light pink and covered in flowers. Right in the middle of the room is a big bed with pink sheets and a green blanket and fluffy blue pillows. There are lots of colors in her room! She also has a TV--Mumu likes to watch cartoons--and a closet full of clothes. It is a very pretty room.

There are also many windows in the room. Most of the windows look outside, but one window looks into the hospital hallway. When Mumu arrived at her room, she turned her wheelchair to face this window. Through it, she could see doctors coming to work and looking at patients, and nurses typing at computers. She could also see sick people. The sick people made her feel sad because she wanted to help them feel better, but she couldn't. Mumu didn't like to feel sad--she was usually happy.

Later, as Mumu was eating spaghetti for lunch and still feeling sad, her friend Joy appeared. Joy has short gold hair that goes to the bottom of her neck. Her face is happy like Mumu's and she smells pretty and has very soft skin. Mumu likes Joy a lot and it made her happy to see her!

"Hi," Joy said. "How are you doing?"

"I feel sad," Mumu said.

"What's the matter?"

"I am sad about the hospital. The sick people can't help themselves!"

"It will be okay," Joy said. She looked out the window. "Everything is wet!"

"I don't like it," Mumu responded. "This room keeps me dry."

"That's a good point, Mumu," Joy said. "Guess what? I have a surprise for you. I think it will make you happy."

"Thank you!" Mumu said. "What is it?"

"Your birthday is on Monday," Joy said. "And today I am throwing you a party!"

Joy pointed to the window facing the hospital hallway. Outside, Mumu could see her dad, her sisters,

and her friends waiting to surprise her.

"Wow!" Mumu said. She felt very happy to see everyone.

Everyone gave her hugs and presents. The presents were books, like a novel about *I Love Lucy* and a picture book about a duck. These books made her feel even happier! Afterward, everyone went with Mumu to the cafeteria to eat dinner. They were serving ham and potatoes, and chocolate cake with chocolate chip ice cream for dessert. Mmm! Everyone sang "Happy Birthday" to Mumu.

After the party, it was time for Mumu to go home. Her family said goodbye and blew Mumu kisses before they got in the car to go home. Joy left at the same time, but not to go home--she was going to meet Mumu back at her group home and tuck her into bed.

At last, Mumu's friend who dropped her off came back to dayhab to bring her home too. He went into her room to get her gifts and folded up her wheelchair to put into the car. Then he helped her walk to the car. The parking lot was wet but the rain had stopped. That made Mumu feel happy. She and her friend got in the car and drove home as the sun went down. It had been a good day.

I love you, Mumu.

III. I Like the Beach

One warm November day, George and I went to the beach. George is my friend -- we met ten years ago in the group home where we both live along with our other friends Geraldine, Jim, Mumu, Chris, and Ed. George is handsome, funny, quiet, and nice to me. He is a good friend to have.

George and I wanted to go to the beach because we both love to feel the soft sand with our feet and make sand castles. It's just a short drive from our home to Charlotte Beach on Lake Ontario, so we packed a picnic of hot dogs, burgers, potato chips, and pop, got in our van, and headed down the road.

Once we got to the beach we opened the van doors, got out, and started looking for a picnic table. After a little while, we found one on the grass under the shade of a tree and we set our picnic supplies down. It was our first time at Lake Ontario so we wanted to look around. There weren't many other people there, but we did see a puppy having a birthday party! There was a dog cake! We also saw some birds flying around and some cats walking across the ground. There were only a few trees and flowers, but there were a lot of sharp bushes that would hurt to touch. Most special of all was a short rainbow up in the sky!

Surrounded by beauty, we decided to eat. George helped me out of my wheelchair and onto the bench of the picnic table. We opened our picnic basket, took the food

out, and put it onto the table. First we poured the pop into our cups, which have handles to help us hang on. The pop was root beer! I had never had root beer before and I was surprised by the bubbles, but it tasted good. Then we ate our food. George and I each had one hot dog and one hamburger. My hot dog had a little ketchup on it and George's had a little bit of ketchup, mustard, and relish. I'm not sure why George and I like different things on our hot dogs - we just do! We both had just ketchup on our hamburgers, though, so we are the same in some ways. We also had small bags of sour cream and onion chips. The chips were crunchy and salty, mmm good!

After eating we cleaned up the picnic and George helped me back into my wheelchair. On the way to the lake we had seen a sign about boat rides and we wanted to go in a boat! We were already close to the lake so we took a short walk over to the water, where there was a small building with another sign saying "BOAT RIDES FOR SALE." But when we got to the building they told us all the boats had already been rented out! We had to wait for a little while, so George wheeled me

to a bench and sat down next to me and we talked to pass the time.

"Hi," George said.

"Hi," I said back.

"I like you. We are good friends."

"I think you're handsome."

"I think you're beautiful!"

We talked for a little while more. It was a nice conversation. But soon there was a boat available for us to take on the water! It was a small pink rowboat. I helped myself get from my wheelchair into the boat and left my wheelchair on the shore. George and I rowed the boat way out onto the lake. On the water, we saw little waves from the breeze. We also saw a lot of birds - some more robins and bluejays, singing "tweet tweet tweet! tweet tweet tweet!" and big white seagulls flying over the water.

Eventually the sun began to go down and we had to come back to shore. We picked up our things and got back into the van to drive home as it got darker and darker. George and I had a very nice day. It made me feel very happy.



Follow the Kindness

by Thuan Nguyen

In Collaboration with Brigid Hogan



I go to a self-advocacy meeting, where people are being trained how to work. The job is called CA, where they work with people like me to help. They show the video where the helpers assist people in lying down, going to the bathroom, and turning the shower tap. At the meeting they talked about hiring people, and also about higher wages for the people who work there. Everybody needs the training to know how to talk nicely. You know how some people get upset, working with someone? But everyone has to learn how to talk, to solve the problem. Sometimes people, like me, and like you, act out to solve the problem. They have to learn a different way to solve the problem. Number one, if I have a problem with someone, I tell the person to go outside and I go with them. The people who work with me sometimes get upset for no reason. I've had a problem with this before, and then I act out in response. Sometimes they get angry at their home, and then they get to work, they take it out on people. If I talk to my boss, they can get fired. One time, I talked to my boss, my boss talked to the person. But mostly, I have to talk to the person to solve the problem first. So many times, not only one.

One kind of behavior is throwing everything on the table, or fighting, or yelling, or hitting your head on the wall, and in that case, the aides have to take a person down. But before they do that they tell everyone to go out so that they don't get hurt. Sometimes, when a person is having a hard time calming down, it will take one, two, or even three

people to help them. Sometimes the people who handle the situation have to keep themselves safe from the behavior, and sometimes they get hurt. Sometimes the behavior goes on for thirty minutes, sometimes, for an hour. Something I learned is to go outside when people are having behaviors. At the meeting they show two pictures of the same person talking. First, they show the picture where they are talking mean, second they show the picture where they are talking nicely. In the mean picture, nobody asks how the person is feeling. You see this in their face, they're not talking to the person sitting, they're talking to someone else. The other person who is nice, talks to the person sitting in front of them.

These people will help me when I go in to work. I have a safety checking job, looking at all the systems, the lights, and the speakers, to be sure they're working right. Last Tuesday I took a picture of a table to see how low it was, in case they needed to raise it. I also took pictures of the sink, the vacuum, and the door, to see if there are problems that need to be fixed. They give me a different assignment every morning. At the mail run, I go pick up the mail, and go to somewhere else, to an office belonging to the person the mail is for, and I put the mail in the mailbox. I do that every Monday. Every morning I go do the attendance for work. I break down the boxes. I clean the windows.

Poems

I go outside, I see the falling star, I know the father took someone.
The father says, What do you do when you're still alive?
Are you helping people?
The father opens the book to see what's wrong.
My left hand feels the bad, my right hand feels the good,
I am balanced between them.
Giving to the homeless,
Giving to the people who don't have families,
Giving power to the people who don't know him, by talking to him.
Follow the good. Follow the kindness.
The father says Help someone like you help yourself.
The father says Love someone like I love myself.
But also, love someone who hates you.
Help someone who gets into trouble.
If someone hits one side, give another side to him.
Turn the other cheek.

Willing to Help

Her name is Amy Mitchell, she takes care of all the people
who need her help, across eight different programs. She's lovely,
from the inside out.
I had a lot of problems, with my second program.
They told me to feed myself, but
I can't hold a spoon in my hand. I don't want to hurt myself,
trying to eat, hitting my mouth with the metal.
My old program asks me a lot of questions
"How do they treat you?"
"Are you happy?"
I tell them, "I am not happy there."
I have to advocate for myself, to let people know what I need.
I want to let people know where I am coming from.
Amy - I talked to Amy, in November of 2012.
Amy called my case worker on the phone, she said,
"Set up a meeting."
She let someone know that she was going to get me back.
Amy and my case worker came to my house
they talked to each other, and talked to me.
On January 28th, 2013, Amy brought me back.

The snow falls from the sky
Makes me remember the year
I came to New York
Makes me remember the people skating in the snow
Up and down the snow
I remember the second year
I go outside, I go to work in the van
The freeway is crowded because of the snow

I have to go inside, they call me in
I come in, I come in,
And I'm making a ball, to practice for the play.
There's an angel, and a devil. I play the angel, and I fight him.

Can I tell you the story about Vietnam?

In my home there, in a small town, I live with my mother. I hear something. I hear a knock on the side of the house. I look outside. I see a long black fork, who is holding it? I do not see. I hear a groan, my own voice. I sit on the wooden bed, the room is lit with one kerosene lantern. My mother is not home, I am alone. But I am not scared. I have something to protect me. The devil comes to the side of my bed, by then the war is over, but I am ready to fight. The holy ghost keeps me fighting, the holy ghost saves me from the devil. The father of the church comes out to see what is making the sound, he keeps me saved.

The first time the father woke me up from the dead, my head was shaking on and on. I sat at the bed, for twelve years. The father gave me holy oil. He kept me safe. Then he woke me up again. I had fallen from the shower chair, and broke my hip. I went to the hospital, and I stayed there for a long, long, long time. After that, I went to the nursing home, where people took care of me. Finally, the United States calls me—"Come from Saigon."

On June ninth, I moved to my house, the house I live in now. At first, I don't know the people I work with, they took me to shower in the bathtub. When I came to Lifetime, the place I work, they gave me a bottle of soda water to throw out, they give me the envelopes to sort.

More Poems

You came to make me happy
From the inside
I open the door
My friendship begins
I remember
We go out to the garden, we're in this place together
When I open my heart for you to come to happiness

You look like a flower when I come to you
When I come to the flower, the flower opens,
When I look into your eyes
I see to the inside
When I talk to you I go to the garden
Sit by the table, eat dinner with you
Light the candle, I think about you
I talk to you through the night
When the morning comes we go to the boat
When the morning comes, and the sun shines
I met you.
We go out to the sea
To the ocean, the blue water
We came to the ship
We hear the water's sound, up and down
We hear the sound of the whale
I went to hear the kraken
The dolphin sound throughout the water
When the night comes we will sit by the table
And light a candle
We talk, we communicate
All through the night,

We say "see you later."
When the morning comes,
We will see you later.

The boat goes to Thailand

I visit the city

Bangkok

The people let me go to the United States

Not only me, three hundred thousand more

I look at the city, and see the plants, I see the people work

Writing the papers to let people travel

I come back to the Philippines, traveled four hours

I come to a small town, and go to school there, inside white walls

I'm looking for the outside

The teacher, he teaches me English

I go out every night to play games with my friends,

playing hot potato with my fellow travelers

When the time comes to say goodbye

The United States calls me to come

Seventeen hours in the air

Before coming to the United States in 1990

The boat goes to Thailand

I visit the city

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The United States calls me to come

Seventeen hours in the air

Before coming to the United States in 1990

1991 I go to a new program in LA, learning how to act

1992 I lived in a small town, that had little to do

I moved again, and from 1992 to the year 2009

I worked. I got paid.

This was another acting program

In the play, there are the people reading lines,

I remember my lines, for every play

I was there for sixteen years, and changed the program when I moved

I was with three programs, but this was the longest.

I worked from 8:15 to 9 in the night every year at the acting program.

They taught me about the computer, taught me how to write a script

I worked with nineteen people to write down the script of the play

I learned how to solve problems

Two people have to talk to each other

They just have to talk, to act it out, to voice the problem in a skit.

They have to act out the problem, and then they solve it.

Thank you so much for helping everyone.

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