

# DIGNITY:

creative expressions from  
the inspiration project



Spring 2013, Volume 3

# ABOUT:

The Inspiration Project is a volunteer collaboration between the University of Rochester and CP Rochester, a nonprofit organization that supports individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. During the spring of 2013, six writing students from the University of Rochester met weekly with six 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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The consumers and staff at CP Rochester, the students at the University of Rochester, Joanna Scott (Professor of English, University of Rochester), Glenn Cerosaletti (Director, Rochester Center for Community Leadership, University of Rochester), Deborah Rossen-Knill (Director, College Writing Program, University of Rochester), Richard Feldman (Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering at the University of Rochester), Saundra Peters (Reservation Coordinator, Wilson Commons Student Activities, University of Rochester), Jenny Boyar (Department of English, University of Rochester), John Michael and the Department of English at the University of Rochester.

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PREFACE:

“When you read these stories, I want you to hear what we have to say, and be Inspired for yourself.” Latrice Person, April 22, 2011

Composed by consumers from CP Rochester and transcribed and edited by students from the University of Rochester, the pieces in this anthology provide multifaceted insights into the joys and challenges of life. There are fictional stories populated with invented characters who, like their authors, find creative ways to turn their dreams into reality. There are poems and memoirs. There are letters inviting readers to think about the issues of gun control and Medicaid funding.

You’ll read about a deaf boy who is encouraged by his brother to befriend an angry schoolmate. A modern day beast is turned back into a prince with the help of a determined young girl, her brave mother, and a clever eagle. A woman imagines a perfect cake for her next party. A girl wishes on a star and wakes the next morning to find her wish has come true. A man remembers being a child in Saigon in 1975 and hiding under his bed while planes fought overhead. A boy is amazed by the technology of his friend’s DynaVox and then comes to accept it as something that “came along with my friend, like being tall or having brown hair.”

These are a few of the many treasures gathered in this anthology. Each piece is unique, but they share a spirit of candor and are offered to readers in friendship. As Toni Montgomery says at the end of her piece, “My gift for you is my storybook.”

Here is the new storybook from the Inspiration Project. It is vivid evidence of the truth that every person matters.

Joanna Scott  
University of Rochester  
April 22, 2013



TONI’S GIFT

ByToni Montgomery  
In Collaboration with Kelsey Burritt

Dear Reader,  
I have my big TV, my bed, my white desk, my closet with clothes, my laptop which isn’t working, and my mom’s dishes.

I sit at my desk and write journals about my past. I use pencils and pens. My journal is painted like a kitty cat. I get into bed between 9 and 9:30 and watch TV.

I went to Get Real today. After that, I came back and ate lunch. Then we had groups. We did math and spelling. Then we talked and went on the computer.

My mom’s name is Christine Williams. She is beautiful. She is special. She likes cooking. She taught me how to cook fried chicken, greens, pies, and cakes. She goes to church sometimes. Bernard Williams is my brother. He goes to church. He’s short. He looks good.

Dad was a fisher; he had a boat. He was deacon in the church, and an usher. He was tall, like a man, handsome. He was a good parent. I went to church with my dad. My favorite part about church was the singing. My dad sung at church in the choir. He had a good voice.

My parents read the bible to me. They’re up in heaven thinking about me.

Every day I think about God. God is an angel. I thank God for my family and friends, my sisters and brothers, my niece and nephew, and

myself.

God is good, special, love, and peace. I think about people. I think about faith. I think about selling my books about my story.

Dear Reader,

I played Gertrude in *Hamlet*. I loved acting because it felt good. I had a crown because Hamlet is the king’s son and I played his mother. I liked playing the queen because I’m beautiful. The crown was gold. The cup was gold; there was poison in the cup. I drank fake wine.

I decided to do the play because of JP Simpson, one of my staff. We had different days. He liked music, different shows—*Beauty and the Beast* and *The Grinch*. Susan Ware asked me to do the play. Susan Ware helped me with my lines a lot. She taught plays. She is my best friend so much. Susan Ware is a very, very good teacher.

We performed for the ARC of Monroe. People liked it. In rehearsals, we talked about Hamlet. We had swords; they practiced with fake swords. I liked dying. “The King Did It!” I liked it because I toasted my son; I drank. I said, “My Son, my son, I drink my son: Cheers.”

I was never nervous before a performance. I felt good. My stomach was a little bit tight. My staff came and saw me. Chrissy Powers, one of the staff, is a good lady. She is

my staff. She gives me some pocket money to go out for Christmas and birthdays, and holidays.

I had to memorize my lines. I missed one line, and got so nervous because there were a lot of people. I had to do it over again. I first memorized my lines with other people.

We had different actors. We saw a movie of Hamlet where Hamlet is mad crazy. He’s crazy. He hated his mom; his father married her. We watched the movie before rehearsals started. It helped me understand the story. I was able to identify with Gertrude. She is pretty too. I felt pretty when I played her.

We rehearsed in the dance room. The dance room is big and has pictures in it. At first, we rehearsed with scripts. Susan Ware directed it. She taught us Shakespeare, to think about Hamlet, to read a book, to watch Hamlet movies. She taught us to speak clearly, she taught us about emotions.

When I was playing Gertrude, I had to go through different emotions; I had to change. It was a challenge. There were a lot of actors. We used fake roses, red and black, a black scarf, and that’s it. The performance was two or three hours long.

Dear Reader,

I looked on the computer at my workshop. My staff helped me look

up an article about Lauren Potter. She stars in *Glee* and she has down syndrome like me. I want to write her a letter. The letter would say:

My name is Toni Montgomery. I am 45 years old. I live in Rochester, NY. What’s your favorite color? I want to meet you because you are my role model because you have the same thing as me: down syndrome.

I like pink, I love movies, I love cooking, I love Oprah, and I love Tyler Perry. I love puzzle books. I love shopping for clothes. I like going out to lunch and dinner. My favorite food is fried chicken and salad. Rochester is big. Advocate yourself.

What do you like? Do you have any favorite shows? Can you drive a car? Where are you working? Do you go to school? Do you dance? Do you like music? I go to the mall. What are your parents like? Do you live in an apartment? Do you have a boyfriend? Are you married? Do you have any pets?

I had a fish. His name was Goldfish. No more. He died. He’s in fish heaven.

Why do people bully? Bullies pull your hair, and hit, and call you bad names. Bullies are not good. A guy on TV said that bullying is not safe.

I think about things in life like my family. I want to write a story about my life. I think about good every day.

Dear Reader,

If you constantly compare yourself with others, you may become either unhappy or boastful, proud. For there will always be people greater or

lesser than you.

Do I want an apartment? Yes.

If I had a dinner party in my apartment, I would want beef stew with vegetables, potatoes, onions, and garlic. No bread. Pies with cool whip, double-layered cheesecake. Drinks: Diet Coke, Sprite, sherbet punch. I need dishes, pots and pans, and a toaster. I need cups. I don’t know if my plates are big or small yet.

In my apartment, different walls have different pictures with stars. I have not seen my bathroom, and I don’t know whether it’s big or small. The tub is small. I get a towel next to my bathroom: a different kind of pink, pink and purple together. I need soap and shampoo.

I don’t know if there is a couch yet. I have my TV and my TV is big. I have a full-sized bed. I need to buy sheets and a pillow. That’s it. My dresser is big. I have a desk in my room, also big. My mom gave me a chest with dishes in it, my knick-knacks. I keep it in the living room. I need a vacuum and a duster.

My kitchen is small too.

Dear Reader,

I would like to invite you to my birthday party. It is “Ladies Only” tonight. The time is six to eight o’clock on Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. We will go to Chili’s.

I will be the hostess. There will be lots of balloons. They will be pink because pink is my favorite color. There will be balloons on chairs for you and all of my other guests. Everyone at the party will have a placemat—the placemat will

be a star with their name on it. I’m making the placemats this weekend.

There will be a cake with my name on it. It will also say “Hollywood.” There will be pink stars around the cake, just like my journal. My name will be in stars, just like in Hollywood, because I’m a star! The cake will be buttercream, my favorite, with pink frosting.

My birthday is on May 20, which is a Monday. I would like to have LOTS of presents! Maybe you could bring me a gift card. I would like an iTunes gift card (maybe three...I REALLY like music!). If I had some iTunes gift cards I would buy some church music.

There will be no party hats at my party. People can dress up.

Dear Reader,

I got a letter from Suzanne, my friend, on March 23, 2013. I met Suzanne last year. She wears glasses. She’s a nice, sweet person. We wrote stories together. She helped me a lot; we talked about my stories and she taught me a lot. She taught me how to read my stories about my life. We had a good time.

She taught me how to write stories on the computer. I like her; she’s my good friend. I want her to send me a picture of her in New York City for my birthday. She just moved there. I will write her back soon. When I get my stories done, I will send them to her too. I will say Happy Easter to Suzanne! And have a good spring! I keep your letter in my heart and in my prayers.

Love, Toni.

I gave Suzanne my story to read.



With the story, there was a picture of me. The friends chosen are family. Good friends are never close enough. The true story: God is good, special, love, peace. I think people think about faith.

I’ve never been to New York City. I saw the 9/11 attacks in New York City on television. People lost families and friends. People were crying. Last time I saw that was a long time ago. I felt sad. That’s what I think about when I think of New York City. I don’t want to go there.

I want to go to Hollywood and

see a lot of stars, like Tyler Perry and Oprah. I want to go to LA too. There’s lots of shopping! I want to buy everything. There are pretty lights, and there are a lot of stars and restaurants.

I’ve never thought about being a movie star because it’s a lot of work and money. I want to send Oprah my books. I want to be an author. Oprah is a nice actor. She has two dogs. They’re cute! I don’t want any more dogs. They’re a lot of work. You have to get the fleas off of them, and clean up poop on the floor. I had

dogs a long time ago. They didn’t have tails. They were black and brown. They were big with big teeth.

I’ll get Oprah to read my story. I will put the copy of my book and pictures of me in a box and send it to Oprah. I’ll meet Oprah. It’ll be like a prize. I’ll wear a pretty dress with my hair done, with make-up, and a purse. I’ll look good! I’ll say, Oprah is special in my heart. Thank you so much.

Love, Toni.

I want Tyler Perry to read my story too. I’ll meet Tyler Perry. I’ll wear a

pink suit, and pink pants, and a tie. I'll give him my book. I'll say, I love your movie *Temptation!* I'll scream. I'll faint.

Dear Reader,  
I want more people to read my story about me. This is a true story. I like writing. I feel special. Miss Scott came to my house two years ago and helped me write more stories. She helped put my words together. My

first time meeting her, we were in the kitchen. She wrote on a computer and a notebook. She asked me questions.  
I feel proud of my work. I want to write stories about you. I want to know about other people's lives in the community. Other people's lives are different. People judge people, and judge people's race. It's sad. I don't know why.  
Why are you reading my book? I

worked on it a lot with my friend, Kelsey. I will autograph my name in your book.  
My gift for you is my storybook.  
Love, Toni



# THE VOLCANO STORY

By Latrice Person  
*In Collaboration with Cat Sbeglia*

Michael was new to the Hart Middle School of Learning, and it was his third day. His mom told him that going to this school would make things better, and that he would get the care he needed. Michael was born deaf. Over time, he learned to read lips and to speak, but most people had a hard time understanding him. He could not say his words to their completeness.

On that third day, two of Michael's classmates, Rebecca and Tommy, offered to show him around the classroom.

"Over there is the chalkboard. This is where we do math and writing. The teacher stands up there and writes on the board," Rebecca told him, pointing to the front of the room.

"These are the coat hooks. You can put your lunch box and coat here," Tommy said.

Michael asked, "What have you been learning in school?"

Rebecca answered, "Math, like addition and subtraction. And reading."

Excited, Michael said, "That's so cool. I can't wait to start learning addition and subtraction."

Suddenly, he noticed a boy in a wheelchair. "Who is that?"

"Oh, that's Brian," Tommy said.

"He's mean. Don't talk to him," Rebecca added.

But the wheelchair reminded Michael of his friend at his old school who had Cerebral Palsy, and couldn't walk at all.

Leaving his classmates, he went over to Brian and said, "Hi." But Brian said, "Leave me alone. Don't bother me."

Michael didn't yet understand that Brian didn't want to talk to him because he didn't want to talk to anyone because he was mad. He was mad at his mom who didn't really pay attention to him, and he wasn't close to his dad. His mom was a pediatric nurse at the Hope Hospital. Brian thought it was unfair that she spent so much time taking care of other children instead of him.

"But I just want to be your friend."

"I don't have friends," Brian responded, looking down at his lap.

"Okay, fine. I can go talk to someone else," Michael answered, disappointed.

Pretty soon though, Michael was having so much fun with Tommy and Rebecca that he forgot all about Brian.

By the time February break arrived, Michael had gotten used to the Hart School and his new friends. The Friday before break, all of the students were eagerly talking about the trips they were going on. But Michael was nervous. They were going to visit his older brother, Derek, who

was a freshman at Orange College in Rolling Spring, New York. Michael had never been on an airplane or in an airport before. He had only been in cars.

Michael and his mother and sister arrived at the airport. It was really crowded, and that made him uncomfortable. He felt as if the children were staring at his big glasses and his hearing aids. People were running past him, trying to catch their planes. They were holding their coffees and suitcases. It was chaos. He was able to hear the noise of the announcements, but it was muffled. His mom had to comfort him because he was panicking.

His mom signed to him, "It's okay. Calm down. The plane is coming."

He tried some of the deep breathing techniques that his mother taught him, but that didn't even relax him.

When the plane arrived, he boarded with his mother and his sister. He sat between them, so that his mother could comfort him. She held him close to her while the plane left the ground. He also had his favorite toys with him. One was a blue squishy ball that he could squeeze when he got nervous. He opened and closed his hand around the ball and it calmed him. Eventually, he fell asleep.

Suddenly, the plane jolted. Michael woke up in a panic, his muscles tight and his stomach



uneasy. His head started to hurt, but then he looked over at his younger sister, Daisy, who was sitting on the other side of him. She was listening to her CD player. Michael guessed she was probably listening to Pink! Because that’s her favorite. Daisy was rocking out in her chair, bobbing her head, and moving her lips to the music. He smiled and laughed at her funny dancing.

Before he knew it, they were landing in Rolling Spring.

They took a taxi to Orange College. The small campus consisted of a handful of brick buildings. Wherever he looked, students were walking briskly to class, books clutched to their chests. Some students sat on benches or beneath trees reading books and typing on their computers. Still others played soccer and football on big, green fields. Michael fell in love with college.

The taxi dropped them off at Derek’s dorm building. The building reminded Michael of an apartment complex, which excited him because it was all so grown up. Eventually, he too would have his own space.

Daisy knocked on Derek’s door, and the three of them waited anxiously in the hallway. Daisy began to bite her nails in anticipation. After a few moments, Derek opened the door and greeted them with a warm smile. He picked up Daisy in a big hug and spun her around. He then kissed his mom on the cheek and high fived Michael. Michael’s face glowed.

After lunch, Derek took Michael to the campus gym to play basketball in the basement. The shiny court was blue and green for the school colors, and there was a large painting

of the pit bull mascot on the middle of the floor. Some of the hoops were taller than others. They decided to play on one of the shorter ones, so that Michael could reach it.

“Why are there different size hoops?” Michael asked.

“Because some students are different than others.”

While they played, they talked. “So what’s up? How’d you like your new school and everything?” Derek asked, dribbling the ball.

Michael shrugged. “It’s okay.”

“Have you made any new friends?”

“I have two friends, Rebecca and Tommy. They’re cool, but there is this one kid that I want to be friends with. I tried to be friends with him, but he was mean to me for no reason. He ignores me. And one day at lunch he called me four-eyes and threw a ball of paper at me.” Michael caught a pass from Derek, and then threw it up at the hoop. He missed.

“There’s always a reason for those sorts of things.”

“What do you mean?”

Derek stopped dribbling the basketball and walked over to a wooden bench on the side of the court. Michael followed him, and sat down next to him. Reaching under the bench, Derek pulled out a water bottle, took a sip, and then handed it to Michael.

“Give him a chance. He might be struggling with something just like you are. If you’re nice to him and give him time, he might come around.” He paused and then went on, “Mom told me that you were nervous on the plane. But you wanted to come see me, so you forced

yourself to confront your fear. I’m proud of you.” He smiled. “Well, that’s kind of like Brian. There might be something that he’s scared of, and he just needs help to overcome it.”

“Well, I don’t really know him.”

“You can’t know if you don’t ask.”

When they were too tired to play anymore, they went back to Derek’s room and met up with their mom and sister. They had pizza delivered right to the dorm. Michael and Daisy were even allowed to sit on the bed while they ate, which was something their mom never let them do at home.

After a weekend that felt too short, they boarded a plane and went home. Michael wasn’t afraid this time.

Back at school, he told his whole class about his trip to Orange College. They all thought college sounded great. During recess, Michael spotted Brian and remembered the conversation he had with his brother. Taking a deep breath, he walked over to Brian.

“Brian, do you want to come to my house and play video games?”

“No, I don’t like video games.”

“Well, if you don’t like video games, do you like basketball? Because my family has an extra ticket to a game this Friday. Do you want to come with us?”

“Leave me alone. Stop bugging me.”

Disappointed, but not discouraged, Michael left Brian alone.

The next day, at the end of school, while the students were getting their things from the coat closet, Brain wheeled over to Michael and tapped him on the shoulder.

“Do you still have that ticket?”

Michael smiled, and held up his hand for a high five. Brian just looked at him.

“What?” Michael was confused and a little bit angry.

“I want the ticket.”

“If you’re not going to be my friend and come with me, you can’t have the ticket. You can’t use me like that.”

“If you don’t give me that ticket, I’ll make sure your time at this school sucks!”

Michael pretended that he didn’t care, but on the inside, he was filled with apprehension. Did Brian mean what he said? Would he continue to

bully him?

Brian’s threat was still bothering him that night. He hardly ate dinner. And he dreamt that all of his classmates were laughing at him. He woke up from this nightmare to find himself crying.

Hearing his sobs, his mother came into his room.

“What’s is it? What’s wrong?” She sat on the edge of his bed and put her arm around him.

He started to explain the situation with Brian using words, but then he got so upset that he switched to signing because that made him more comfortable. He told her that Brian

threatened him even though he was just trying to be nice. His mother nodded her understanding before speaking.

“This isn’t about you. Brian is obviously troubled. But if he keeps giving you a hard time, you have to let your teacher know or come to me. You can always come to me.”

The following week, during science class, the teacher paired up students to work together on a project. At first Michael couldn’t wait because they were going to make volcanoes! But then the teacher said that Brian and Michael had to work together. And what was worse was that Michael had to go to Brian’s house that weekend



to build the volcano.

When Michael’s mom dropped him off at Brian’s house, the first thing that he noticed was that the building was old and slightly rundown.

Brian’s Uncle Ryan answered the door and showed him inside.

“Brian’s in his room. Right back there,” he said, pointing down a hallway.

Brian was facing a television. Michael recognized the images on the screen.

“I thought you don’t like video games.”

Without taking his eyes off the game, Brian answered, “I really wish we didn’t have to spend time together.”

“I don’t know what you’re saying if you’re not looking at me. It’s easier when I can read your lips.”

Brian turned around. “I *said* I really wish we didn’t have to spend time together.”

“Well, I don’t like it either. I just want to get a good grade.”

“Okay, good,” Brian put down the controller and wheeled passed Michael, who was still standing in the doorway. “Let’s just start so we can finish it.”

Uncle Ryan was able to help the boys with their project. He cut out the newspaper for their papier-mâché volcano. While they spent a lot of time with him, Brian’s mom was only there just long enough to say hello. She had to run to work, and wouldn’t be back until late.

She kissed Brian on the forehead, but Michael noticed that he resisted a little, pulling back as far as the head rest of his wheelchair would allow.

After that, they worked in silence

for some time, but then Michael again thought about his conversation with Derek.

“You know, my dad left when I was a baby.” He didn’t look up from painting the side of the volcano red.

Brian looked up, squinting his eyes. “Why should I care?”

“I’m just letting you know something about me,” Michael responded, shrugging, “we might as well talk since we have to be here.” When Brian failed to respond, he continued, “Where does your mom work?”

“At the hospital,” Brian answered, and then after a moment, added, “she works a lot.”

“Oh, that must be hard.”

“Yeah. I’m usually home with my uncle and sister. Why did your dad leave?”

Michael thought for a moment. “I don’t know. My mom says he wasn’t ready to be a dad. He couldn’t handle it.”

“Oh.”

The boys didn’t talk much after that, but a sort of calm developed between them.

The two boys stood together at the front of the classroom, their completed volcano on a table in front of them.

Just as they were about to begin their presentation, Michael noticed that Brian’s hands were shaking. He bent down and whispered in his hear, “Stop shaking. It’s going to be okay.”

Brian just nodded, opening and closing his hands. Suddenly, Michael had an idea. He reached into his pocket, and pulled out his favorite stress ball.

“Here,” he said, putting the ball in Brian’s hand, “this always helps me.”

So while Michael began to recite the facts about volcanoes that he and Brian looked up together, Brian squeezed the stress ball to calm himself down.

Halfway through the presentation, Michael turned to Brian. “Do you have anything you want to say?”

“Well,” Brian began, looking around the room at his classmate’s faces, “we made the volcano by putting newspaper in flour and water and then putting it over the cardboard that made up the structure of the volcano. Watch this!” Brian then put vinegar and some drops of food coloring in the top of the volcano.

Michael added baking soda, and then suddenly the volcano erupted, splattering red bubbles all over the table. The students clapped and laughed.

When it was over, they looked to the teacher to see how they did. She smiled and said, “That was great. You guys worked really well together.”

Without thinking, Michael held up his hand towards Brian. To his surprise, Brian returned the gesture and his hand met Michael’s. Together, they returned to their seats to watch the next presentation.

# MEMOIRS OF MY LIFE AND FAMILY

**By Jeff Yarmel**

*In Collaboration with Taylor McCabe*

My name is Jeff Yarmel, and I was born on June 3, 1973. I grew up on Long Island, where I lived with my brother, Peter, who is five years younger than I am, and my wonderful parents. I had a happy childhood, because I loved both my family and my school, which was called Carmen Road.

When I was about twelve, I was in a program at the school for kids with different kinds of special needs, and was friends with a girl who talked with her eyes. She also had cerebral palsy, so she had a large DynaVox. It was attached to the side of her wheelchair and stretched across her lap. It could follow her line of sight and would say aloud the name of whatever she looked at. She looked up, it said yes. She looked down, it said no.

At first, I was amazed by this cool technology, but as time went on and we had class after class together, the DynaVox just became another thing that came along with my friend, like being tall, or having brown hair. The two of us were close for years. Because we both had cerebral palsy we understood each other, and understood the difficulties of communicating with other people.

We got through school together, like the one time where another kid from our class, who was a terrible bully, took advantage of the fact that my friend couldn’t use her hands, and started playing around with

her chair. Since he had messed up her chair she couldn’t stop him, so I rushed over to help. As soon as he saw me approaching, the bully started to run away, since he was only interested in picking on people that couldn’t help themselves.

My friend in the chair was relieved to be away from the bully and grateful that I’d chased him off. I was happy to have helped her, because I knew that when it was me in trouble, she would be there for me, too.

One of the things I remember fondly from my younger years is playing video games with my brother. Between the two of us, we owned a whole bunch of games, but my favorite was a car racing game. Playing video games was our after school ritual, and even though he was much better than me at video games, it was always a great way to relax after a long day at school.

Even though the games were still fun when I lost, nothing was as much fun as beating my little brother. Whenever I won, I would rub it in his face that *I* was the older brother, and he had better not forget it! Although I hate to admit it, even though he was my kid brother, he was still pretty cool.

Another, less competitive thing I did with my brother when we were younger was go fishing. We used to go fishing regularly, but one of the

trips was my favorite.

We were at our regular fishing spot, which was near my uncle’s house, which meant, of course, that my uncle was there with us. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining but it wasn’t too hot, the lake was a beautiful blue, and the air smelled like spring.

When we first got there and got all our equipment set up, all three of us were excited, standing on the edge of the dock, looking out over the water, eager for our first catch. As time went on, and no fish were biting, I started to get bored. But we waited and waited until we couldn’t stand it anymore, and finally we went home. Even though we never caught anything, it was still the best fishing trip I ever had, because I loved just having a quiet day with my brother and my uncle.

Often, when I was young, I helped my aunt cut her grass. She lived in New Jersey, and our whole family would go see her often. She had two children, one boy and one girl, Matthew and Jena. They were a lot younger, but I played with them a lot. Unfortunately, I don’t get to see them too much now, since they live far away.

When we were young, however, whenever my aunt and uncle needed help outside, I would help them. Anything they needed, I would do—cutting the grass, pulling weeds, rak-

ing leaves,anything. I loved being outside.

In fact, the most memorable time I ever had with my mom was on one of the trips we made to New Jersey to visit my aunt, uncle, and cousins.

We drove down from Long Island to spend a week helping my aunt tame her wildly overgrown yard. My mom and I were shocked to see what used to be my aunt’s yard transformed into a jungle. The grass was short and well-maintained, but weeds had sprouted up all over the place, and the branches that were strewn everywhere snapped under our feet.

Rather than deter me, however, the magnitude of the mess was exciting, because my uncle had a riding lawnmower that I was determined to try out. My mom wasn’t as excited as I was, but she was still good-natured about it, and happy to help.

Even though during that week we had a lot of work to do, my mom and I had lots of time just by ourselves. We would sit and chat out in my aunt’s yard, watching the product of our labors, enjoying the warm sun. We would be across from each other at my aunt’s big picnic table, and I can still picture how my mom looked, sweaty and dirty from all our yard work, but still really happy.

As happy as the week started out, however, it was interrupted by something shocking and terrible. After a few days at my aunt’s, I woke up to the sound of my mom shouting downstairs. I jumped out of bed and ran downstairs. As I skidded into the living room, I saw the appalling news on tv: a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York

City.

My mom and I sat glued to the TV, shocked and horrified, as my aunt frantically tried to get in touch with a friend to live in the city, to make sure she was okay.

We were too shocked to do anything, and just sat, feeling overwhelmed and scared, as we watched the second plane hit. It felt like we watched for hours, though I can’t say for sure how long it actually was. I almost wanted to stop watching, but knew that I couldn’t. The one thought that kept running through my mind was that we had to get home, but of course we couldn’t.

Thankfully, my brother called, and let us know that he and my dad were okay, but in the aftermath of something so horrible, I just wanted to be with my family. Late that night, my aunt’s friend arrived at her house. We were all downstairs together, eating and trying to distract ourselves from the terrible thing that was going on. The doorbell rang, and my aunt jumped out of her chair to answer. I remember the look of relief on her face when she saw for sure that her friend was safe.

Even though it had only been one day, when I went to sleep that night, I felt as though the whole world had changed. I don’t know how we ever went back to normal after that, but eventually we managed.

Even though we finished out our week at my aunt’s house, we couldn’t go back to the happy and peaceful times we had had before. We were doing the same yard work, and sitting at the same picnic table, but it simply didn’t feel the same.

Even though parts of the week were terrible, parts were good, as

well, and it is always a time I will associate with my mom.

Being a family means getting through both the good and the bad, and I know I couldn’t have gotten through that week without my mom.

My family decided to move when I was about 30, and we wanted to go to Rochester, because we have other family living here, my dad’s brother and his family.

When my parents first told me we were moving, I felt excited to be somewhere new and be near my family, but I also felt a little nervous about leaving everything I knew to live in a new city.

Before my family ever moved up to Rochester, we visited here a lot, looking for a place to live. The trips here made me feel a little better about moving. Each time we came, it was a six hour drive in each direction, and I hated sitting in the car that long, so I was happy when we finally chose a house and could get ready to move.

After we moved, I lived with my mom and dad for about a year. When we had moved, my brother had stayed on Long Island, so it was only the three of us. The first change I noticed about our new house is that we had a lot more room.

Also, when we lived in Long Island we had a tiny back yard, but now we had a huge one. I wished that I had had that kind of a yard to play in when I was a kid. Best of all, I had a room to myself, because when I lived in Long Island, I had to share with my brother. Even though I mostly got along with my brother, it was great to have my own space. I liked my new home, but it still was



slow getting used to it.

One of the disappointing things about Rochester was that there are so many hills and it was harder to ride my bike, and someone had to come with me to make sure I would be safe.

Back in Long Island, it was very flat and it was lot easier and more fun to ride my bike. I have a blue three-wheeler but I don’t ride it as much anymore because over the years it’s gotten harder to do it. I like riding my bike because it feels really good to use my legs; it feels free because it’s a lot easier than walking for me.

I remember the year I moved into

the group home. It was 2004. I talked to my parents and we decided I needed a change of scenery because I was getting older. Before I moved in, my parents took me to see several different homes so we could choose the best one. It was very hard for me to move into the group home because I had a lot of adjusting to do.

It’s hard for me to write about it, even though it was so long ago. It was challenging to move to such a different environment, where there were always staff members supervising us. I had a roommate but unfortunately he was a lot older than me and he couldn’t see very well so I had to help him do things.

I was used to having my own room and suddenly I was living with a total stranger. A lot of the time he had the TV and the radio on and it was so loud I couldn’t think. It was very frustrating. I also missed my family a lot since I didn’t know anyone. Making friends at the group home was a slow process.

On the second day, people started to be more friendly with me, and approached me to talk to me. For the most part, they seemed friendly and kind, and they showed me around. I started to feel much better, and some of the first friends I made were Jane and Betty. I help them with computers because that’s something I’m



good at, and we get along really well.

I still live there today. The house has 12 rooms, and one of those rooms is mine, which I share with my roommate Tom. I work with him. He's funny and I like him because it's easy for me to talk to him, and we laugh a lot together. He's a lot closer to my age and he's a great roommate for me, so things have improved a lot since I first moved in.

Two summers after I moved into the group home, I started going to camp, which was similar to the one I had gone to back on Long Island.

Every day there's a different fun activity there, but I really love the art and music classes, and the dances.

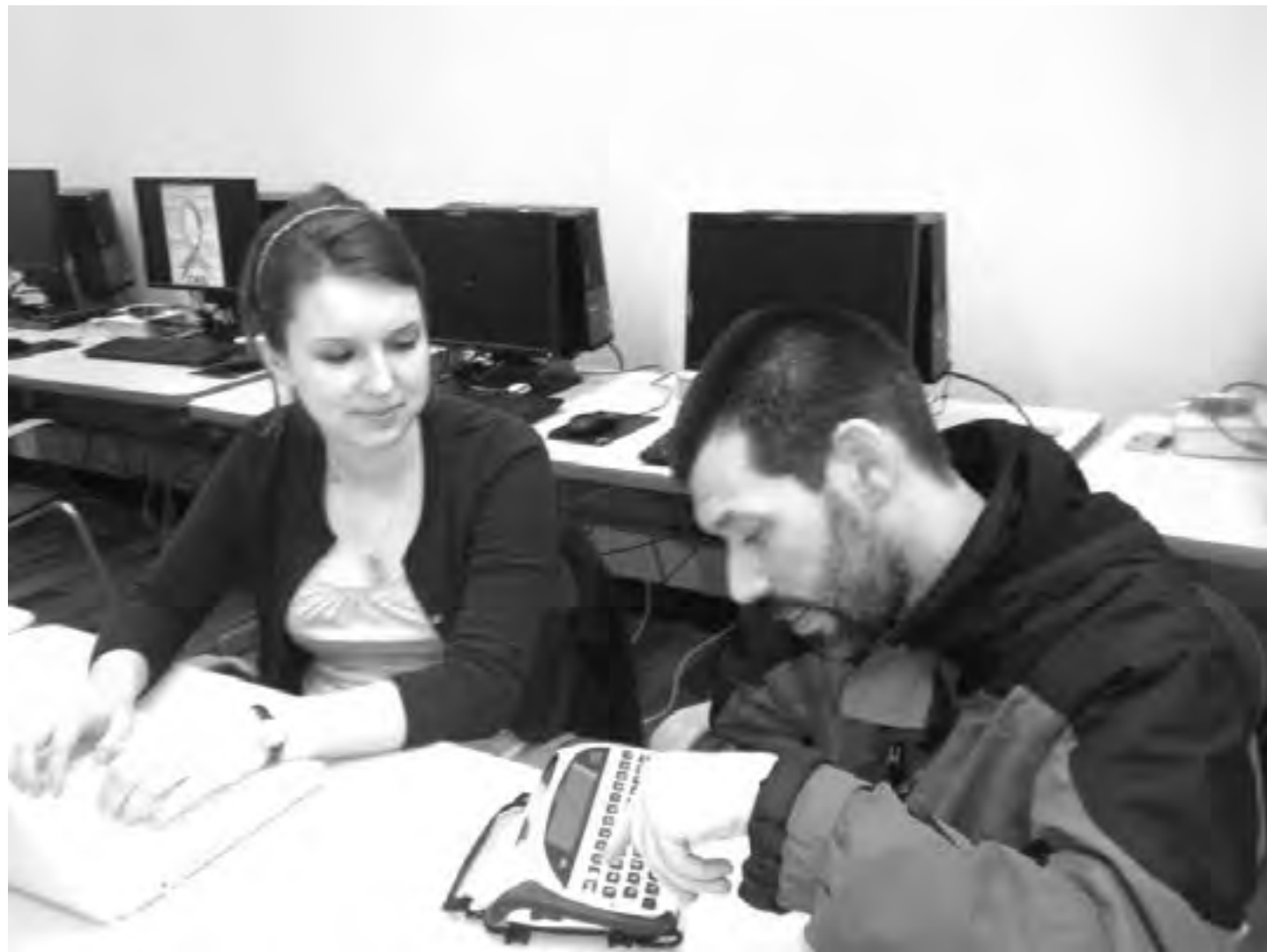
The camp lasts two weeks, but I only got to go for the first week. However, every year there is a dance at the end of the second week, and nobody knew it yet, but I was going to be at that dance. They hold the dance outside, and everybody gets really dressed up.

When I got there, one of the staff members saw me, and yelled to the crowd of my friends that I was there. While my friends looked up in surprise, all five of the staff members ran over and gave me a hug. It felt

good to know everybody had missed me, but it felt even better to be back.

After I had said hello to everyone, I had to eat something. The food was only okay, but I needed some fuel for dancing. As the dance went on, I tried to dance with everybody there, which was pretty easy because everyone was just dancing in a big, fun group.

Song after song played, but nobody wanted to take a break from the fun, so that when the night ended, we were all completely worn out. All of camp was fun, but that final dance was easily the best part.



DIGNITY: 16

One of the things that I love doing is anything that has to do with art. For about the last four years, I've been taking art classes through CP Rochester that I attend every Friday for an hour.

Although I've tried other kind of art, my favorite medium is painting, and my favorite thing to paint is animals, especially the cats, dogs, and birds that are people's pets.

One of the best pieces I've done is an etching into glass of a dog. If I could pick any kind of pet to have, it would definitely be a dog.

Whenever I think of pets, I can't help but think of my brother. When we were younger, my brother had an iguana that he kept in a tank in our bedroom. I remember the first time my brother brought the lizard home.

I looked at that thing he was bringing in and wondered what weird creature he was planning to keep in the room where we had to sleep.

"What is *that*?" I asked, staring at the scaly, green thing. My brother explained that this was new pet lizard, let me look into the tank, and then put it on his desk. The lizard lived on that desk for the next two years.

If I remember one thing about that lizard, it was that my brother had to feed it live bugs every day. I'm glad it wasn't my lizard, because I would have been much too grossed out to touch those bugs. You know how I said I would like a dog? Well, the *last* pet I would ever want to have is a lizard.

My parents have also always been important to me because they've al-

ways been there for me. Although I don't live with them anymore, wherever they are feels like my real home. Sometimes, living in the group home, I really start to miss my old room back in my parents' house. I'm really fortunate that we only live fifteen minutes apart, because I can go home to see them whenever I want. All I have to do is call them. Talking to them is the only thing that can cure my occasional homesickness.

My best and strongest memory of a time spent with my dad is the time we spent fixing his old car, which was an old-fashioned bug like the car in the Herbie movies. This was the car that my dad drove every day and he knew it well, so he could tell when something started to go wrong.

One warm morning, my dad called me down to the driveway, to help him test and try to figure out what was going on, since it obviously wasn't going right. Sure enough, when he turned the key, the car would not start. I was baffled, but my dad immediately knew what was up.

The battery was dead.

Even though we knew what the problem *was*, we didn't know how to fix it. So we settled down on the curb behind the car, and turned on Car Talk on NPR, and pretty soon we had our answer.

We hooked up my dad's set of jumper cables, attaching them to the dead battery and the battery in my mom's car. We turned my mom's car on to charge my dad's battery. We waited a few minutes in anxious anticipation, hoping that this would work. When we turned the car on, it worked!

My dad and I were both excited and elated to have taken something as big and complicated as a car from broken to working. When we took a test drive to make sure our handiwork would hold, it felt like more than a regular drive. It felt like an accomplishment. Building something with my dad was not only fun, it was something that he and I share, a memory just for us.

As far as my family goes, I've been lucky. My parents and my brother have always been there for me, and I know they always will be, and for that, I am grateful.

Sometimes when I reflect back on my past, I miss being younger, and miss the people, places, and times I know I can never go back to. There are some completed chapters in my life that I wish I could live through again.

But at the same time, I know that I have to move forward, and am excited to see what the future will bring. I have dreams and aspirations, and I hope they will come true. But I know that whatever may come, I can get through it, and anything, with help from my family.

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# CLARA’S SECRET WISH

By Victoria Bement

*In Collaboration with Zarah Quinn*

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

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

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

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

As she watches, a bird lands on the

windowsill. She opens the window, and the bird jumps on her finger. It is a bluebird, with a short beak, and it sings for her, with whistles and chirps. She is surprised. She listens. She strokes the bird on its head with the tip of her finger. The bird stops singing and closes its eyes.

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

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

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

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

Clara doesn’t like being in a wheelchair. She can’t walk or run or play with other kids. Instead, she reads. Fairytales like Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the

Beast. She likes fairytales because they take her away, away from her wheelchair.

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

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

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

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

The nanny comes bursting into the room. “It’s time to go to bed.”

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

Clara lies in bed after the tiring day. She wishes on a star that her

pink sparkling unicorn could be alive.

At night when she goes to sleep there is a storm. It is really windy. The next day when she wakes up, the new rain smell feels great. Clara is surprised to hear something clip, clapping on the hard floor. Then she starts calling out, “Who’s there?” Suddenly, her pink sparkling unicorn comes walking out and says, “Hi, Clara.” Clara screams, waking up the nanny. The nanny comes in the room. She has messy hair and her face is a mess.

“Clara. It’s too early for this.”

In a tiny voice, Clara says. “I’m sorry, I had a bad dream.”

Clara had quickly hid Pinky under her blanket. She is warm and soft against her skin.

The nanny leaves, grumbling, shutting the door. Clara quickly takes Pinky out from beneath the covers, eyes wide with excitement with a huge grin. Clara asks, “Is this real?”

“Yes,” Pinky says, “it’s very real, Clara.”

“How?” Clara asks.

“A fairy from another world heard your wish and came to grant it. These

fairies watch the clouds in their world and see what’s happening in this world. One fairy was interested in you because you still believe in magic.” Pinky scraped the edge of the blanket with a soft hoof.

“Oh, I love fairies!” says Clara.

Clara does everything with Pinky. Clara and Pinky play tea party in the room with a Beauty and the Beast tea set. They watch TV together. She makes Pinky a box of blankets and pillows underneath her bed where Pinky sleeps.





Clara keeps Pinky a secret because she doesn't want her mother to be scared; it's not everyday that you see a sparkly pink unicorn that's alive. Clara imagines that her mother would scream and take Pinky away from her, call the news or police.

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

One day they are in the backyard looking at the clouds. Pinky was on her lap. The sun was out, and it felt good to Clara to have the sunlight

on her skin; it made Pinky sparkle. Clara likes Pinky because Pinky stays put, she doesn't leave. Pinky listens to Clara talks about girl stuff, like crushes, or how she wishes her dad were home. Pinky talks about being able to walk or trot and run wherever she wants to go. Clara thinks she's lucky.

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

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

One night they build a tent in the room. Their light is a little flashlight

with a rose that lights up inside. Clara says to Pinky, "I wish I could walk."

Pinky says, "Turn around."

Clara says, "Why?"

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

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

"What was that, Pinky?" she asks.

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

Pinky hops up on the bed and curls up next to her. Clara holds Pinky tight.

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

Pinky says, "There is a lot of beautiful stuff in here. You should wear a pretty sun dress and surprise your mom." Clara puts on a pink sparkling dress with flowers on it and goes down to surprise her mom. When she walks in, her mother is making breakfast.

"Hi, mom" she says.

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

"Remember the pink sparkling

unicorn that I always carry around? I made a wish that Pinky was real, and it came true."

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

Clara says, "But why?"

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

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

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

Pinky says, "Tell her then. It's all right. I'm here. I will never leave."

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

"I've been taking physical therapy," Clara says. "Walking a little every day."

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

The nanny says, "Excuse me?"

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

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

Clara feels scared. She goes to her room, and takes Pinky with her. But

before she can go, the nanny rips Pinky out of Clara's hands.

"You're too old for this stuff." She pushes Clara to her room and locks the door.

The nanny goes downstairs and takes Pinky with her. She screams at the stuffed animal. "I don't know if you're real or not, but I don't know what you've done to her. I've seen Clara carry you around and talk to you. And now Clara can walk. If you are real, better hope you have a few lives."

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

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

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

The nanny says, "A child that age shouldn't be carrying around a stuffed animal."

The mother says, "If she likes it, she can carry it around! What's the problem with that, she's not hurting anyone!"

"Well, it's not appropriate."

The mother glared at her, and said sternly, "You're fired."

The nanny mumbles on her way out the door and slams it on her way out.

Clara starts crying. Her mother says, "Let's go pick up Pinky."

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

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

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

Clara gets up and goes over to the light switch. When she turned it on, her eyes get wide and she shouts, "Pinky!" Clara kneels down, crying, and gives her a big hug. "Mom! Come and see!"

The mother comes running out in her nightgown, saying, "What's wrong?"

"Mom, Pinky has come back to life!"

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

# INTRODUCING PATRICK HURLEY

By Patrick Hurley

*In Collaboration with Ripa Chowdhury*

About Patrick:  
Hello, there! My name is Patrick Hurley. I was born on March 14<sup>th</sup> in 1964. Oh boy, I am getting old. Can't help it! When ladies ask me how old I am, I just smile.

I just turned 49 a few weeks ago. I had a really good birthday. My family wished me happy birthday and my mom gave me a birthday card that sang Rock & Roll music when I opened it. I have a BIG family, ten siblings, and I love them very much. I also love my group home and the staff members that are always there for me.

They took me out to Applebee's for my birthday dinner. I had steak and home fries and to add to the awesomeness, we had ice cream sundaes. I also got to drink two glasses of Bud light beer which got me a little bit tipsy. Oh yeah!

But my favorite part of the night was when all the beautiful ladies came up to our table and sang "Happy Birthday" to me. Wait, it gets better... one of them gave me a kiss on the cheek. After the wonderful dinner, we got cupcakes for others at our group home which everyone loved! I was very happy I got to celebrate my birthday.

This reminds me of the time when I went on a trip with my sister Irlene and my brother Tim to California. It was during my 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. Yeah, it was long time ago but I still remember it.

We took the plane to fly there. Tim, my older brother, missed the flight but was able to join us later. It was summer there, very warm and sunny, which was definitely a change from Rochester.

After getting off the plane we went to pick up our rental car. We stayed at the Coast Hotel and it was lovely. We had comfy beds, nice furniture, and a big TV with too many options. We also had hot tub where I would relax when I got tired. But I really had fun swimming in the pool while the sun shined brightly.

During the evenings, we went out to various restaurants and tried new dishes. I definitely enjoyed doing that, who doesn't like eating out?

The fun part about this trip was all the wonderful places we got to visit. We went to the wax museum, the Irish Pub, and Universal Studios (Hollywood). I also got to see some celebrities. I saw the country singer Keith Urban when we went to see the Jay Leno's tonight show. Yes, I got to see it live! Keith was there as a guest artist!!! He is a great singer; I like his songs.

The next exciting and memorable thing for me was visiting the beach. I got to visit a particular one where the 90's TV show *Baywatch* was filmed. It is one of my favorite TV shows about a couple of lifeguards who patrolled the beaches of Los Angeles County in California.

Unfortunately, nothing was being filmed there when I went. But hey, they had one of those yellow trucks on the beach just like they did in the show. I am so glad I was able to take this trip to California. Luckily, I have been able to travel to other places as well such as Ireland, Miami, Florida, Canada (Niagara Falls) and Washington D.C. I wish to keep traveling so that I can see all parts of the world.

## An Interview with Patrick about Gun Control

Patrick is a great individual. Apart from traveling with his family, he works part time at his family business. In his free time he likes to go bowling, work out at the gym, go out to eat, go shopping with his mom, and take part in fun activities with his group home members. Most interestingly he likes to stay in tune with the current news.

### *Dialogue between Patrick and Ripa*

On our first meeting, he asked me: have you seen the news about the Olympian who shot his girlfriend? I said, no, but that sounds terrible. Patrick's immediate response was... that should have not happened! He continued to say that it is not safe anywhere. People live in fear not knowing what the future holds.



I was very impressed at his insight regarding this matter. I asked, so what is it that you want to write about and convey to your audience? He answered: gun control. Like many, the recent news regarding the mass shooting in public places such as schools, malls, college campuses, and the movie theater makes him demand for the president to take strong action to stop individuals from gaining access to guns so easily.

Patrick says he fears going outside and he is concerned for his family members who are living all over the

country.

The recent incident of the Newton shooting massacre is another prime example of how important it is to find a solution to regulating guns. Patrick said it saddens him to even think what those little kids must have gone through and what their families and loved ones are faced with. It is a tremendous loss for the family, he said.

He continued by saying, he has nieces and nephews going to college and sometimes he worries for them when he sees all the recent college

campus shootings coverage on TV.

Next I asked, so what do you think should happen? What you do think about guns?

Patrick responded, I want shooting to STOP. Stop killing people. Government should pass laws to prevent anyone from gaining access to guns. They can have it if they use it for the "right" reason. By right I mean, not shooting someone for just the sake of killing.

People can have it if they are protecting themselves. Anyone purchasing guns should go through a



psychological evaluation to make sure that they are not some “crazy” people thinking of harming themselves or others.

Then I asked, so why do you think people kill one another?

He replied, because they are mean, they want to take revenge, and maybe they want attention. He continued saying we as a society should look out for people that are psychologically or emotionally disturbed and get them the help they need so that they don’t commit such violent acts to get over their frustrations.

Do you think we can stop these events from happening? I asked.

He says off course! It won’t hurt to try at least. He continued...we can

stop such incidents from happening by increasing security in buildings and schools, by installing cameras to keep an eye out for outsiders, and by installing scanners like the ones they have at airport which will stop students or adults from bringing in harmful weapons. Parents should also be more cautioned about what their children are doing.

How so?

Patrick replied, well kids should not be allowed to play violent video games that have to do with shooting, killing, and hurting others.

Parents should always focus on their children and talk to them weekly and make sure they are not upset or going through any tough times at

school with their academic or with their social circle.

*Narrated by Ripa*

As it can be seen from our above conversation, Patrick is one of the many individuals who are affected by the daily unfortunate incidents that take place here in our country. His concerns are valid and provide some excellent insight into the matter. Our conversation came to an end with Patrick stating... though we can’t reform the system or the mentality of the individuals carrying out such acts, we definitely can pray and hope for the best for ourselves and others. AMEN!



# MARSHA AND THE BEAST, LETTER

**By Geraldine Copeland**

*In Collaboration with Sarah Winstein-Hibbs*

Once upon a time, there was a beast named Bobby, and a beauty named Marsha. Marsha had curly, bright gold hair. But Bobby was ugly: he looked more like an animal than a person, very furry. They met for the first time at a church at an evening service. They each were by themselves at church that Sunday, but when Marsha went up to take Communion, Bobby joined her at the wooden pew, and whispered, “Let’s go on many dates together!”

The minister overheard this, and he was not very pleased. His face became very red, and he said, “Would you please go somewhere else if you’re going to talk like that in my church?” So Marsha and Bobby left that church. They stopped on the sidewalk. They were admiring the grass and the trees, and then there was a blue moon. It was all round, and a dark clear blue.

Then, Clara and Dennis, Bobby’s parents, wandered out of the church. Clara was a strange woman: she was furry all over, like Bobby. But she had a dress on, with pink polka dots – the pink dots next to her brown fur looked very bizarre. It was hard to even imagine her putting a dress over such a tall, hairy body – almost six feet in total! Dennis, on the other hand, was only 5’4.” He wore a blue pantsuit, and his blonde hair was very long. This man had a very peculiar face because it was covered with

freckles. In fact, these freckles were all over his body and they looked like chicken pox. Marsha thought they looked strange together, and almost felt embarrassed.

Bobby took Marsha’s hand and led her over to where his parents were.

“Hi Bobby! Who’s this?” Clara asked. Her voice was beautiful, and songlike.

“This is my good friend, Marsha!” Bobby said.

“Hi! Nice to meet you, Marsha,” Dennis said. “Would you like to go to a restaurant with us?”

“Oh, that would be wonderful!” Marsha said.

They all got into Dennis’s car, which was a red and white limo with flags. Marsha knew that something weird was going on. “What a wonderful car,” she exclaimed, “I’ve never seen one like this before!” Marsha noticed that Clara had to curl herself up to get into the car because she was so tall and big.

On the way to the restaurant, they passed through the countryside, which was dotted with farms. Marsha saw the animals on the little farms, such as cows getting milked, and a few yellow cats.

They arrived at the restaurant, which was fancy. A waitress met them and said, “Follow me to your table.” Their table was round wood, with a bouquet of roses, and a red plaid tablecloth. There were stained glass

windows, and beautiful chandeliers that hung down from the ceiling. They all sat down at the table and the waitress asked what kind of drinks they’d like. Dennis and Clara each ordered a glass of red wine, and Bobby and Marsha ordered Mountain Dew. The soda bubbled in the clear glasses, and the wine was a dark red. Marsha thought it was very funny to see furry beasts drinking beverages like this: they had to use a straw so they wouldn’t get their whiskers all wet! Marsha decided to get a straw, too, to be polite – and so that the soda wouldn’t spill on her clothes.

They ordered steak, blooming onions, fish, and cheesecake. They shared this food and talked with each other and felt very happy. Soon, they were making plans to go bowling and to go to more restaurants. After dinner, they went outside. It was dark, nighttime, with another blue moon in the sky. You could see all the stars, and the planets. They looked at the beautiful planets together. They wanted to go on more dates.

The next week, Marsha and Bobby went another date, and they went to Friendly’s. This time, Marsha started wondering why Bobby was so furry. She looked and looked at him, even though she was sitting next to him. Bobby noticed she was looking at him and said “Why are you staring at me?” Marsha responded with another question: “Why are you so furry?”



“Well, I’m furry because my mom is furry. She’s under a magical spell, and so am I. The wicked witch came to our castle and put a spell on us by making us drink an evil potion. The curse of this spell can only be broken if you kiss me.” After he said this, Marsha said, “Ew! I’m not kissing you!” “But you have to,” he protested, “or else I’ll stay furry forever! Please kiss me! Then I’ll turn into a prince, and you’ll be my princess, and my mom will be our queen!” Marsha tilted her head to the side, looking at Bobby, imagining what he would look like as a prince. He definitely didn’t look so good right now. “Hmm....I’ll think about it,” she said.

Bobby dropped her off at home, and she immediately went to her mom, Karen, to ask her advice. “Mom, I think I love Bobby, but he’s under a spell. He says I can only break it by giving him a kiss. His mother is under a spell, too, and he says that her spell will be broken as well, if I do this. But I don’t want to do it!” Her mom said, “But you have to. Bobby and his mom will stay furry forever if you don’t do it.” Marsha sighed. “What should I do, mom? I think I’m in love with a beast, but I know that he’s a real person underneath. So is his mother, but – “ All of a sudden, a bald eagle burst into the open window, cutting off Marsha’s sentence with a loud, screeching “Caw, caw, caw!” and dropped a piece of paper on the floor right in front of her mother. The letter was addressed to Karen, and was written in fancy cursive ink. She unfolded the letter. Here is what it said:

Dear Karen,  
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My name is Clara. I am Bobby’s mother. As you know, I am very furry. For two years, I have been this way, because of an evil spell by a witch named Wanda. The only way to break this spell is if Marsha kisses Bobby.

But – there is one other thing you can do to break the spell. It is very dangerous, however. The only thing besides a kiss which can break the spell is the witch Wanda’s wand. To get this wand, you must sneak into her hut in the White Forests. Witches hate darkness, so you must extinguish all her candles. Then she won’t be able to see. But don’t let her catch you first!

Good luck on your task!  
Sincerely,  
Clara  
P.S. This eagle may be of some help to you.

After Karen and Marsha read the note, they felt very afraid. But the eagle suddenly spoke, and said, “Don’t worry, I’ll stay with you and take care of the candles. I’ll make sure they’re all out and extinguished so you can get the wand and bring it back to the castle.” Karen and Marsha felt a little better after this. “And you can sit on my back and I’ll fly you there,” he offered. Marsha grinned really big, excited by this possibility. Her mother, however, was horrified. The eagle said, “I’ll sit down so you can get on my back.” Marsha quickly climbed on, but Karen hesitated. She felt quite reluctant, but she decided to face her fears and slowly mounted the eagle.

The eagle gently lifted off the ground so that Marsha and her mom could hang on. They passed over evergreen trees, fuzzy green grass,

tall houses and apartment buildings, and then they came to the witch’s hut. It was made out of hay, and one window was lit up with a candle. Marsha, Karen, and the eagle crept up to one of the windows. Luckily, the window was cracked open just a little bit, and the eagle puffed his breath and blew out one of the candles. They all peered carefully into the window, and they saw the witch asleep inside the hut, wrapped up in a white fur coat to keep herself warm. Her entire face was green and wrinkly and scrunched up into a frown, even though she was asleep. Her straight blond hair was messy and all over the place. There was no heater or fireplace inside the hut, just two stray candles burning right next to her bed. Marsha decided to tiptoe indoors and blow out the candles. She was shaking all over, looking at the witch’s horrible face, but she managed to do it. “Pfff!” she blew out the flames gently and quietly, and then tiptoed back outside. “Good work, Marsha! That was very brave!” her mother and the eagle said. Marsha gasped all of a sudden. “I saw the wand while I was inside, but I forgot it!” she whispered loudly. “Shh! You’ll wake up the witch!” her mother hissed. “Don’t worry, I can do this,” said the eagle, as he reached through the window crack with his claws and snatched the wand off of the shelf. Marsha and Karen then quickly clambered on his back and they flew directly back to the castle.

The eagle swooped down to the castle, and before Marsha knew it, she was inside Bobby’s home. Her mother followed her inside, as well as the eagle, with the wand in his

beak. Inside the castle, multicolored floral wallpaper covered all the walls. They found themselves in a beautiful dining room, where Bobby was seated at a long, gleaming wooden banquet table. He looked tired and sad, holding his heavy, furry head in his paw. The eagle silently passed the wand to Marsha, and she tiptoed up behind Bobby. She grinned widely as she took the wand and performed the magic spell on Bobby so he could become a prince again. His woolly brown fur suddenly evaporated, rising into the sky and changing into sparkly gold dust. He turned around,

amazed, to find Marsha standing with the wand in her hand. Bobby stood before her as a handsome prince, smiling. “Marsha, thank you so much!” he exclaimed. “How did you do this?” Marsha told him the story of how the eagle came to help her get the wand to rescue him. Karen, her mother, came up and said, “Bobby, it’s very nice to meet you. You have my permission to marry my daughter if you want to!” Marsha laughed. Suddenly, Bobby’s parents strode into the room from a door on the other side. Marsha went up to Bobby’s furry mother and performed the spell

on her too. She changed back into a beautiful queen, with a long white dress and an imperial cape. Then Marsha waved her wand over Bobby’s father, Dennis, and cured his chicken pox. “Thank you, Marsha,” Bobby’s mother said, “I can’t imagine a better woman for my prince to marry.”

And so the story goes. Bobby and Marsha got married, went on a honeymoon to Bahamas, and had five children, named Cindy, Greg, Jan, Lynne, and Jinny. They all lived happily ever after in the castle. And as for the witch Wanda, well, she never woke up.



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Dear Vice President Biden,

My name is Geraldine. I live in a Cerebral Palsy group home, on Elmwood Avenue in Rochester, NY. I like computer games, baseball, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, cats, plays, and movies. I was born with a cord around my neck and it made me have epilepsy with seizures. As a child, I struggled in school, and as I became a teenager, I had to do all kinds of tests to figure out what was wrong with me. I felt upset, but I was hoping for the best. Today, I work at CAC and I'm very happy. I get to do lots of things, like music, crafts, art, quilting, and many other activities. Medicaid makes this all possible.

As it is, there's a problem in the U.S. with Medicaid, Medicare, and MVP. I depend on all three of these forms of insurance for my livelihood. I feel upset and concerned that these forms of welfare might be cut or reduced. Medicaid provides transportation, a place to live, enough food, a cane, and safety for me. I'm disabled and it would be very hard for me to get around and to live without these things.

I'm going to Albany to help advocate for Medicaid and to see Joseph Robock. I'm very excited and happy to go. It's a great honor for me, because I'm going to help other people advocate for themselves. I'll be able to meet other people and attend workshops about Medicaid, Medicare, and MVP. Going to these workshops is very important because it will help me, as a person with disabilities, learn to help myself, and to help others. I'm looking forward to going to Albany, and I know that seeing Senator Robock will make a great impression on me and inspire me.

I want to help people with disabilities in our community. I played volleyball at St. John's as a volunteer, and also went to a nursing home to play bingo with the elderly, and help them with their wheelchairs. Doing things like this is important, because others need our help. Nursing homes, disabilities group homes, and ARC group homes, all depend on Medicaid. Without Medicaid, we wouldn't have a place to live, or any healthcare.

We need to help our people, to push the wheelchairs, to spread more learning in the community about disabilities, and make sure that they're safe. Please talk to President Obama about not taking Medicaid away. And please talk to Joseph Robock. My workplace, C.A.C. (Arc Community Connections), is supported by Medicaid. Many people like me will be disadvantaged if Medicaid is reduced. I will have to be supported by my mother and father again if these funds are cut. We need your help. Funds are already being cut, and as a result, some of our programs and supplies have been taken away. I have hope for the future, and I know that if we work together then we can do it.

If you can, please pass this on to President Obama and Senator Robock.

Thank you for your support, and please write me back.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Copeland



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# THOUGHTS FROM THE INSIDE

By **Thaun Nguyen**

*In Collaboration with Jamie Kurtz*

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

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

I heard about the war. My cousin died because of the war. He served in the Vietnam Army and fought with South Vietnam. He was on the other side. I don't remember when this happened, but it was before the attack on Saigon. Saigon was attacked in 1975. There was airplane fighting. South Vietnam shot the airplane. I heard the airplanes every day and every night when I was little, and I saw them in the sky. I was not scared because I knew that the people in the planes were my father's friends. I didn't have to leave my house. I hid under my bed. I wasn't scared, though, because I knew that everything would be okay. I was with one of my sisters; my other sister was at her friend's house. I was worried about her. I saw lots of people fall to the ground on the TV

at home. I felt sad. My whole family was okay. So were my friends. Many of them left Vietnam with the US Army when the fighting started. The North won Saigon the first time. The South won Saigon the second time. I felt sad because everything was not how I wanted it to be when the US Army left. When the Army left, a lot of people did not have homes to live in. There were more than 300,000 US children because their fathers were US soldiers; they were taken to the United States after the war. My father was in Thailand in when the war ended. He couldn't come back to Vietnam because he went to the United States. The last time that he saw my mother, he told her that he would come back. My sisters went to the United States first for five years. Then, I came with my mom. I have not seen my dad since he was in Vietnam: April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1975. It makes me sad.

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

moving in with strangers. We became friends. In 1992, I moved again to another program with 15 people. I moved so that I could be in plays. At the program, they taught me how to write and act. I learned how to work on the computer, and I learned how to paint pictures. I sold the pictures; they gave me 17% of the profit. 83% went to the program. It didn't make me mad because I was helping the program. I sold A LOT of paintings. Every month I made between \$100 and \$200 from 1992 to 2009. I saved the money. Also, I would go out to the community with some new people to go to dinner or go to the museum. At the museum, I saw pictures. They were better than mine. I lived in independent living from 2000 to 2009.

In 2009, I moved to New York. They didn't let me stay in the acting program because I was moving to New York so I lived with a friend. When I got to New York, I broke my hip. I fell. They took me to the hospital. I was there for a long time. I couldn't talk. I almost died. I went to a nursing home for two months. The doctor and the nurse took care of me. I liked them. When I left the nursing home in 2010, I came to the home that I live in now. I was able to talk again. Someone talked to me, and I could talk back. I went back to the hospital so many times because I fall out of bed a lot. They know me by name.

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

I am in plays, too. One time, I yelled “Falling!” in a play. They told me to. “The wall is falling!” I sing in the plays. I dance. I learned how to dance in a play. The play was “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat.” I was in the chorus. I had to wear a costume; I wore a loose shirt. I had to wear make-up. In California I wore make-up for plays, so I was used to it. The play was three hours long. I sang the whole three hours, but I didn’t lose my voice. I have written a lot of plays. I like writing out how people should act, and it is fun. Sometimes I write my poems into the plays. Everyone gives something to the group. I give my writing. Sometimes my plays are political. In 2011, I wrote “The Angel and the Devil.” It is about the end of fighting with the devil. Some of my plays are musicals. One song from play is “Goodbye, my friend. I’ll see you again.” So far I have written 32 songs. They are fun to write. I have also been in concerts. I sing with 45 people. We practice every Monday and Wednesday. On Tuesday I go to play practice. I like them both. I like singing any kind of song. They taught me how to use my mouth for singing. I can sing low and high. There is a band that plays at the concert. I like all instruments. I know how to play the drum.

I haven’t been back to Vietnam. My sister said I can’t go back to Vietnam because the ticket is \$2000. And

there is no one to take care of me there. Two of my sisters have gone back to Vietnam, and one lives in the United States. If I could, I would go back to Vietnam. I would go back to see the people I left there. I miss my sisters, my nieces, and all of my friends.

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

**The day I met you**

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

**I open the door**

I open the door for you to come with happiness.  
I’m always thinking about you.  
I remember whenever we get togeth-

er.  
I go out with you in the ship by the sea.  
I’m always looking for the window.  
I look to see inside.  
There are different windows to see, to hear, and to talk.  
Talk from the heart.

We talk through the night.  
When the morning comes, the ship goes to the ocean.  
I look out.  
I hear the ocean song that the whales sing.  
They are singing a love song.

The ocean goes up and down.  
Looking up, I see the blue sky.  
I see the moon, the stars, and the light of the kingdom  
Where we live forever.

We hear the voice in the sky.  
It says, “Come to me! I give you the power to heal people.”  
We answer the voice.  
We say, “I hear you, Father.  
You call me to do something.  
We give you our faith.  
We thank you for all you’ve done.”  
I open the door to  
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



**When I met you, you made me happy**

When I met you, you made me happy.  
I go out with you to the morning blue sky.  
The morning sun rises.  
You give me happy from the inside out.  
You look like the beautiful red roses.  
I talked with you all through the night.  
When the morning came,  
We went to the garden holding hands.  
I smelled the pretty roses in the garden,  
And they smelled like you.  
When the sun sets again,  
We will sit by the table in the garden.  
The table will have a brightly lit candle that lights up your eyes.  
You make me full of joy.  
We will sit there till we sleep.

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