

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 2014, ten writing students from the University of Rochester met weekly with ten 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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table of contents:

I'm Happy--Ruthie Emens	page 4
My Magical Trip to Costa Rica--Tori Bement	page 6
A Special Friendship--Latrice Person	page 9
Gaining Relevance--Ann Kurz	page 12
Game Day--Chris Thornton	page 23
Geraldine's Favorite Trip--Geraldine Copeland	page 26
Going the Distance--Patrick Hurley	page 28
The Bestseller--Toni Montgomery	page 31
Home Runs--Jeff Yarmel	page 34
Poems and Letters--Thuan Nguyen.	page 36

preface:

Happiness is an elusive condition, as poets and philosophers like to remind us. Given the uncertainties that fill our lives, the attainment of happiness tends to involve a lot of wrong turns and backtracking. But those of us who have watched the work being done on Thursday evenings in the back rooms of Rush Rhees Library have seen happiness in action. We've seen how it can arise through resilience, determination, and courage. We've watched it spark and change, impelled by spontaneity. We've seen it achieved in the face of significant challenges. We've learned that it takes as many different forms as there are individuals to experience it.

In the pieces collected in this anthology, you will read about all kinds of happiness. You will read a description of dancing, running, even surfing: "When that wind hit me, I was laughing and smiling. It felt like I was flying," Tori Bement writes. You will read about the thrill of walking. "I'm not going to give up. So even though walking is difficult, it makes me happy because I know it will make me better," reports Ruthie Emins. You will read about the tenacity it takes to achieve happiness when life isn't always accommodating. "I can't just phone home and escape this cruel world," says the main character in Ann Kurz's play, but she quickly makes it clear that she won't give up: "If I keep showing people that I'm capable and can make valued contributions to the welfare of the community, attitudes will change and I will be accepted someday."

Together, the stories, poems, plays and memoirs collected here have much to teach us about happiness. They are the result of conversations that have continued for months. They express perceptions that deserve to be shared. They will make you laugh. They will get you thinking about some of life's most difficult predicaments. They are sure to inspire.

Joanna Scott
April 24, 2014



I'm Happy

By Ruthie Emens

In Collaboration with Justina McCarty

Ruthie wants me to tell you that she told me what to say, and that I typed it on my computer. Ruthie called this story "I'm Happy," because she is always smiling.

When I wake up in the morning I see pictures of my niece and nephew. They brighten up my morning and make my day good.

I live at the group home on Elmwood Avenue. It's a big, brick house with a yard, and trees with flowers. I live with eight people there. Their names are Geraldine, Pat, Chris, Jim, Frank, Greg, and the staff like Lucas and Leanne. Sometimes the staff changes because they go to new jobs. The staff cook for us and give us our medicine and showers. There are other people who come to the house to work with us. Their names are Jessica, Kim, and Sharon. Jessica comes in and helps us cook, Kim drives us to appointments, and Sharon is our nurse. She'll be leaving soon, and we'll be getting a new nurse.

The new nurse is a guy named Bean, like what you eat. Before I met him I was nervous because I had thought our new nurse would be a woman, and I didn't know what to expect. I didn't think I would like him, but I was wrong. When the front door opened, Bean walked in and introduced himself, and I realized that he would be a good nurse. His voice was calm, and after introducing himself he went downstairs to work.

After we wake up, we all get dressed and eat breakfast together before our rides come. Sometimes I don't have breakfast in the morning, just a cup of coffee. I can't pour the coffee myself, so my friend Patrick helps me. After breakfast our drivers come, and I go to Day Hab at a big building in Fairport, with a steep ramp that you have to go up to get inside. The ramp is so steep that I cannot push myself up, instead I need to have someone push me up the ramp, and into the building.

There are many people who go to Day Hab. Some people can walk on their own or with walkers, but others are in wheelchairs. Usually I'm in a wheelchair, but at Day Hab I have a walker, which I named Betty, and a gait belt to help me walk.

I use Betty and the gait belt in the gym, where Peter, Grace, and Bonnie help me to walk. They put the gait belt around my waist, and then I lock my wheelchair, put up my footrests, lock my walker, hang on, and stand up. After I stand up, I can unlock the walker, and begin to walk. Peter and the others take turns helping me walk by holding on to the gait belt.

I can't walk very well. It is very hard for me sometimes. One day after physical therapy, Robert, my afternoon driver, looked at me and asked "What's wrong?"

My foot was hurting awful bad, and I think that I looked upset that day when I left Day Hab. I told him "My foot hurts, and it won't stop

hurting."

I think it was because of the new white sneakers that I had to wear that day. When we got home, he told the staff what had happened, and Leanne said that she wanted me to wear my black shoes instead because I was used to them.

Even though it makes my foot hurt, I have to keep trying to walk so that my legs can be stronger and better. I'm never going to give up. So even though walking is difficult, it makes me happy because I know it will make me better.

After physical therapy I eat the lunch that I brought from home. I usually make my own lunch; sometimes it's tuna fish, and other times it's a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I also bring a banana, orange, or apple. I need help cooking, and usually Jessica and Tiffany help me make lunch. Sometimes they even give us pizza at Day Hab, and I don't need to bring a lunch.

I eat my lunch with the other people in Room 3: Ricky, Linda, Joanie, Shelly, Steven, and Pete. They are my good friends, and I have known them for a long time. I started going to Fairport after I left my other job at LAI because it was boring, and they never had any work for me to do. My friends and I color together, and go out for coffee and bowling. We also go to get our nails done sometimes, but Ricky, Steven, and Peter don't come along for that.

Fridays are special days for us at Day Hab. Sometimes we go out

dignity: 4

to dinner, and other times we go bowling, or watch movies together. I love bowling, that's my favorite thing that we do on Fridays. When I bowl, the staff put the bumpers down, and give us ramps to help us roll the ball. The ball is heavy, yellow, and shiny. They put it on the ramp for me, and I push it down. I like when it rolls down the alley towards the pins. When it hits the pins, it makes a sound like thunder.

All of the pins fall down, and I get a strike. I usually get the most strikes in my group, and when we finish bowling we get a surprise: pizza and pop. Last time Geraldine got pens to color with, and I got a blue Easter egg with a picture of a hen on it. I also get trophies-- I think I have a million by now!

At Day Hab we also have a pet. He is a bunny named Arthur, who lives in a cage in the nurse's office, but we're talking about moving him to Room 3 soon, so that we can take care of him. We have to feed him, give him his water, and clean his

cage. He is big, with gray fur that is very soft.

On Thursdays Geraldine, Chris, Pat and I come to the Inspiration Project after dinner and cleaning up. It makes me happy to come here for the Inspiration Project, because I get to see many different people that I know. The first person I see here is Marilyn, who helps me get out of the van and come into the building. I go into the library, past the place where I get coffee, and the computers, and then to the room where I see Justina and Jenny. Justina and I talk about my nephew, the baby, who is really cute.

I like it here because it is quiet, and different from home and Day Hab. I just like being able to come here to write. When I was a little kid I liked writing and drawing, and I still like to color.

These are many of the things that make me happy every day. But I'm not always happy. Sometimes I get sad, angry, or frustrated. For me happiness means not crying.

Sometimes things happen that make me start to cry, like when I don't get to see my brother. I'm working on not being sad when that happens.

Instead of crying, I think about parties. I see angels at the party. They wear white dresses, and have white wings. At the party they fly, and bring me rainbow candy. I think about the food at parties, and about seeing clowns and paper decorations. I see streamers and balloons there, and tables with pink tablecloths. On the tables there are plates of spaghetti, cauliflower, stuffed peppers, and bacon and eggs.

At this party people are all dressed up. The women wear blue and pink dresses, and the men wear suits. I wear a dark green pantsuit and little clip-on earrings that are shaped like bells. The bells are quiet, and do not make noise while I walk. Justina was at the party, pushing me in my wheelchair.

We listen to music by Elvis, the Beatles, and the Monkees, and everyone dances, even me!



My Magical Trip to Costa Rica

By **Tori Bement**

In Collaboration with Zarah Quinn

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

We were in Costa Rica for five days, with two days getting there and leaving. We had a lot of fun. We flew out of Rochester to Atlanta, then to Costa Rica. We got a shuttle to the hotel with people all over speaking Spanish. At the airport, the guy flagging down the shuttles for people kept calling this one driver *papi*. I thought that was funny because it was one of the names in *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*. It's a movie.

The first thing when we got in the hotel was we got unpacked. There was a big screen TV and two beds. We met one of the volunteers. The volunteer Katie, she's about my age. We talked for a while, about surfing, about what I could expect. I had no idea what to expect. I felt excitement; I was nervous, curious. Knowing I would be surfing and not knowing how.

Then we went down to the pool.

When I got in the pool, the bottom was too slippery. Even with my water shoes. I floated around with the inner tube. It was relaxing. I liked being out in the sunshine. One of the girls that was in our group was playing games on her phone, lounging in the shade.

Then we went inside. My mom took a nap in the hotel room. I watched the TV in Spanish. It was *Monster House*, a movie about a spirit caught in the house, and the house goes crazy. But I knew what they were saying, I watched it like a hundred times in English. When my mom woke up, the other guests who were meeting us called and asked if we would like to go to dinner. We went to the casino across the street. They had the air conditioning on full blast. So it was very cold in there for me. That's where we met the rest of the volunteers and the other girls who have my disease who would be surfing with me.

The first thing I said in Spanish was *Banyo por favor mama*. I listen very well to other people around.

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

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

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

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

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

The first day, the girls and I surfed in the morning. I was the last one to surf, so I had the most surf time. The volunteers piggy-backed us into the water. I really liked it because I knew I wasn't going to fall with them. Especially the boys! Woo! They walked into the water and put us

dignity: 6

on the surfboard on our bellies. My mom was over in the water, taking pictures. But every once in a while a wave would push her down.

I was nervous. When they were pulling us out, every time a wave came the volunteers would lift up the front of the board, but I still got some water in the face. Before they launched us, they would count to three. One volunteer was on the back of the board, just to balance it out. And they had flippers on, and they were kicking. They waited for a wave, a good wave to push us back into the shore. They counted to three and pushed us to the wave. We rode it back into the shore. At first I was just lying on the surfboard because I was sick of getting salt water in my face. But when that wind hit me, I was laughing and smiling. It felt like I was flying. I was the only one who did not wipe out.

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

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

We did adaptive yoga most mornings. I remember almost falling asleep, and some people did. We would lay on the pavilion



ground. The volunteers would stretch us. Megan was the instructor. I was listening to the birds and the soft music. The music sounded like wind chimes.

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

We drove through mud puddles, which I said looked like the dinosaur track from *Jurassic Park*. My Hello

Kitty sunglasses flew off my head, but Larry picked them up.

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

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

For dinner we had rice and beans, of course. Everything rice and beans. One day we did horseback riding on the beach. The cook, Cristalia, she rode with me on the horse, and helped me up. I love horses. The horse was kind of skittish. The guy

7:dignity

who was taking us on the ride stayed next to my horse. After a while, that saddle did hurt, with all the bumps and the horse going back and forth. The wind was in my face, and the sound of the water hitting the shore, everything was just beautiful.

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

Then we got back in the van and went to this hotel, and they said we could use their pool. We took over their kiddie pool! It was just the right height for us. About an

hour after, we got out and got dry and headed back to camp. We took a shower, and dressed up in our dresses. We went to a fancy outdoor restaurant. I got a chicken vegetable something. We were taking lots of pictures. Pictures of the sunset. Pictures with the girls, and with the volunteers. Unfortunately one of the girls wasn't feeling too well, but she partied with us. We all had a great time. Then, back at the Rancho, we watched the Ocean Healing Group's video. It's about how they got the program going.

After five fabulous days of fun, it was time to go to back to the hotel near the airport. But before we left for the hotel, the volunteers and the directors had us plant plants near the yoga pavilion, so a piece of us is always in Costa Rica.

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

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

like a sunflower was painted on it.

It was a long wait. Then, the long plane ride was first. And then another long wait for a little put-put plane. They put me on the lift, and it got about halfway and they couldn't roll it. They actually manpowered it. They rolled it back down, they took me off, and left me on the black top. And I don't do well in heat. I wilt. Then my mom finally said, "I'm taking her inside until you get it working." They finally did. My mom took me out my wheelchair and walked me up the airplane stairs. She got tired of waiting. We had a grand old time in the airplane. All the passengers were friendly. We were talking and singing and stuff. I think some of them were Jamaican.

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

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

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

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

Hang loose!

dignity: 8

A Special Friendship

By Latrice Person

In Collaboration with Kate Cowie-Haskell

R^{ebbecca}

I am sitting on the sunny lawn playing cards with my best friend Amber, who has been my next-door neighbor since I was young. I lay out the cards in front of her in rows of different shapes and colors. As I place the last one down I look up at her. “You ready?” I ask. “One minute until I flip them.”

Amber bobs her head and continues to pull at the grass as her eyes scan quickly over the cards. I flip them all over so that the shapes are hidden. “Okay Amber. Show me the magic.” Amber turns one card over and can easily remember where its match is at the end of

the row. She continues doing this, quickly flipping the cards over with one hand as she pulls at the grass with the other.

Usually I love watching her play her favorite game, but today I’m distracted. I keep checking over my shoulder to see if the mail truck is coming up the road. A car passes and I feel the butterflies rise up in my stomach again.

I hear excited sounds from Amber and turn my attention back to her. She is clapping her hands, all of the cards turned over in front of her and matched up in pairs. “Awesome job, Amber! I think that’s your fastest time yet!” I raise my hand for a hive-five, which Amber

happily returns. I always feel special whenever I receive a high-five from her—it takes her a long time to let anyone touch her, and I’m one of the few people whose high-fives she will return. Just then I hear the sound of a familiar engine rumbling up the road. This is it! I give Amber a tug on the hand and she stands up and jogs over to the mailbox with me.

I can barely contain my excitement as I watch the mail truck slowly make its way up the street to my house. As soon as the truck moves away from my mailbox, I reach in and pull out the letter: a big envelope from the Apple University Medical School. I pause for a moment before I tear open the flap. I am so nervous that



start to giggle. I read the words that I've been waiting to read for a while:

Congratulations, Miss Rebecca Flowers! We are pleased to offer you admission into the Apple University medical program beginning in the fall.

Amber looks over my shoulder. She can tell that I'm excited and she gets excited too, clapping her hands when she sees my smile. I am so happy that I use my gymnastics training to do a backflip on the sunny lawn. "Come on, Amber—let's go get a snack," I say with a smile.

Amber's mom Rosa greets us at the door of her house and brings

us into the kitchen. Amber runs to the fridge to prepare a snack. There are pictures all over the fridge, step-by-step pictures that show Amber how to prepare some basic foods. She chooses the pictures that show her how to make her favorite food, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and starts humming and she gets everything together.

As she's working on her sandwich, I pull out the letter and show it to Rosa. She gives me a big hug. "I'm so proud of you, Rebecca—this is so exciting!" We talk for a little bit about the medical program and what it will be like, but soon we have to ask the question that is worrying

us both: How do I tell Amber that I will be leaving?

Amber and I have been best friends for years—we share a backyard, after all. But besides the fact that we have been friends our entire lives, our friendship is unique because Amber is severely autistic. She is uncomfortable with people touching her, she hates loud places and bright lights, and what I think is most difficult for her is that she doesn't know language well enough to communicate her feelings.

Really the only way she can express herself is through basic gestures and movements—a very personal language that only a few people can understand: myself, her mother Rosa, her behaviorist Molly, and a few people at the day program she attends. Since I have been such a big part of her life for so many years, it will be really hard for Amber to understand what it will mean for me to be gone for months at a time.

Rosa and I decide that the best thing we can do is call Molly, the behaviorist who has been working with Amber for nine years. Rosa picks up the phone and dials her number.

Molly

I rescue my phone from my purse and answer it on the last ring: "Hey Rosa, how are you?"

"I'm doing all right Molly, but Rebecca and I have a small problem—Rebecca just got accepted to college and we don't know how to tell Amber that she will be leaving. Can you come over to help us?"

My stomach sinks a little bit. I've been working as Amber's behaviorist



for nine years, and in that time I have seen the connection between Rebecca and Amber grow stronger and stronger. It won't be easy for Amber to go without her best friend for months at a time, but I think I know a way to help her prepare for the day Rebecca leaves. "Sure Rosa, I'll be over in a few minutes."

I walk into Amber and Rosa's house with an iPad and a calendar. On the iPad are some of the apps I use with Amber to help her work on her speech, like ProLoquo2Go. Using this app, Amber can construct basic sentences using pictures and symbols. The app has even allowed Amber to build her spoken vocabulary. Years ago if she wanted an apple she would tap the picture of the apple, but now she has learned how to use the word in speech. In this way, Amber has slowly learned some basic spoken communication that she uses with her motions and sounds. She even has her own iPad now.

Amber's grin greets me as I walk in. She gives me a quick wave from the floor, where she sits with Rebecca working on a puzzle. I give her a smile and a wave back and head upstairs with my supplies. I prop the calendar up against a blank wall in Amber's room. It's not a normal calendar—it's about three times larger and on each day there is a patch of Velcro. Right now it's blank, but soon it will become a tool to help Amber prepare for the day Rebecca leaves.

Once I've finished setting up the calendar, I head back downstairs. Rosa is in the kitchen and when she sees me I give her a nod. She

crouches down next to Amber, who is still working on her puzzle with Rebecca. "Amber honey, come upstairs, we have something to show you." Amber looks at her mom and Rosa points at the stairs while tapping the Proloquo2go button for "bedroom" on the iPad lying next to her.

Amber shakes her head "No" and turns back to the puzzle, determined to fit in the last few pieces. I can tell she is nervous about going upstairs with all of us—this is a strange situation for her. But once Rebecca stands up and pulls gently on her hand, Amber follows us up the stairs to her room, where she is immediately confused and upset about the new calendar in her room.

We've decided that this is the best way to prepare Amber for Rebecca to leave. I hand Rebecca the special pieces of the calendar I've made: a picture of Rebecca's face, a picture of a plane (which Amber uses on the iPad as the sign for "leaving"), and a picture of Amber and Rebecca together. All of the images have a Velcro backing. Rebecca stands next to Amber in front of the calendar. "Hey Am, I want to tell you something. I'm going to be leaving for college in a few months, but I'll be back." She then continues talking and speaking in basic sign language about what it means for her to be leaving and how she will stay in touch with Amber and come back to visit. While she talks, she uses the Velcro images I gave her. She puts the picture of her own face on today's date, and the picture of the plane on May 31st, the day she will leave for Apple University. Rebecca explains

how each day Amber should move the picture of her face to the current date, and on the day that Rebecca's face and the plane are in the same box Amber will know that it is time for Rebecca to go. But just a few months down the calendar, on the date of her fall break, Rebecca puts the picture of her and Amber together and explains that she won't be gone forever.

As Rebecca talks, Amber watches her move the pictures and listens to her words. She is very still and quiet, but when she sees the picture of the plane she begins to make the high humming noise she makes when she's upset. But when she sees the picture of herself and Rebecca together again in October she stops humming and becomes quiet again. She's handling the news well so far, and she keeps touching the picture of her and Rebecca together. Her eyes move between this picture in October and the picture of the plane, and we all watch her to see how she feels. She surprises us with what she does next. Amber walks over to her desk and takes out the scrapbook she made at her day program a few summers ago. It's filled with pictures of Rebecca and Amber through their lives. She hands it to Rebecca and takes out her iPad, and presses the heart button for "I love you" on Proloquo2go. She then gives Rebecca a hug, which is the most contact I've seen her have with anyone in the nine years I've known her. I've never seen a friendship quite like theirs and I know it will last even with hundreds of miles between them.

Gaining Relevance

By Ann Kurz

In Collaboration with Natasha Sacato

Cast: Ann, Narrator (As Ann's inner voice), Terri, Strange woman, High Society Customer, Young Mother, Child #1, Child #2, Cici, Andy, Annamaria, Theresa, Teacher, Student, Karl, Mom, Tanna, Receptionist, Adoption Counselor, Roxie, Chef Debra, Customer #1, Customer #2, Evan's Mother, Evan

Ann: A 23 year old woman, vibrant, happy for the most part, unless she's stressed about her thesis, hard working student in graduate school. She is living independently for the first time. She's happy about living on her own, but it can be a little overwhelming at times. It's a time when she's learning to deal with different systems and learning to be on her own, and being safe. A time when she is adjusting to the responsibilities.

THE KISS

TERRI and ANN are in the elevator coming home from grocery shopping. TERRI and ANN are talking about the day, making small talk

TERRI: What should we make for dinner?

ANN (trying to be funny): Pasta? Or Chicken? Or pasta and chicken?

Elevator doors open. STRANGE WOMAN comes in. She is short and Italian and in her 50s. She is kind of dressed up, on her way to dinner.

STRANGE WOMAN (speaking in a squeaky, high voice like she would talk to a baby): Oh you're so cute!

STRANGE WOMAN comes up to ANN and hugs and kisses her on the cheek. ANN pulls back. ANN smiles and tries to act normal. She doesn't want to further encourage her to do anything else. STRANGE WOMAN steps back a little bit.

NARRATOR (when ANN pulls back): What just happened?! Who are you?! OK, gross, she's kissing you! Yuck! Hurry up, elevator, get to the 6th floor. Smile. Don't think about it...

STRANGE WOMAN (addressing TERRI): Oh, she's so sweet!

NARRATOR (makes a gagging motion): Oh come on! You're not a baby. Can't she see you're an adult? If only she knew that you are a graduate student! I wonder how many other graduate students she goes around kissing. Does she think your disability gives her permission to invade your personal space?

Doors open, TERRI and ANN leave. TERRI and ANN shrug at each other as they exit. ANN rolls her eyes. TERRI waits until the doors close

TERRI (confused, wondering why ANN stood there and let the STRANGE WOMAN approach and kiss her): Why didn't you say anything to stop her?

ANN (taken aback by TERRI's line of question, ANN feels like she's done something wrong, like she needs to defend herself): I guess I don't know how. (pause) My parents taught me to just accept people who are acting strangely towards me because they don't know any better.

TERRI (vehemently): You have the right to say no if you don't like something that someone is doing to you.

ANN (wanting desperately to be let off the hook; uncomfortable with TERRI's confronting her. ANN feels like she's the one that was treated inappropriately, so why is TERRI blaming her?): Saying "no" is one thing, but what if I need to say more? Advocating for myself when I've never been taught to is scary enough - let alone when I'm concerned that people won't understand me. I would rather say nothing than say something and be misunderstood. Then where will I be? I don't want to make a scene.

NARRATOR (with certainty): Terri's right. You have to find a way to speak up for yourself that people will understand. You say that you don't want to make a scene, but what scene are you creating by doing nothing, by just allowing something to happen to you? Wouldn't you rather people learn to see the real you than to think of you as this meek, lowly soul? Don't let people walk all over you. You won't become who you want to be by being a doormat for others. Tap into your inner strength, and you'll find the courage to stand up for yourself. Really, all you need to do is

dignity: 12

believe in yourself.

ANN (hesitant and doubtful): I'll try, I don't know...but I'll try.

NARRATOR (gesturing as she speaks): You have to do more than try. You can make a scene and get your point across without making a real big scene. Take that kissing thingy back there. Shout "NO!" Turn your head away from puckering lips. Hold your hand out like you're stopping traffic. Better yet, offer her your hand. If she kisses it, make her believe you're her royal highness and reign over her - (pause to giggle) just kidding. But seriously, offer her your hand and if she shakes it, maybe she'll take a little more notice of you as a capable individual. Whatever you do, you have the power to be who you want to be. You shouldn't settle for whom other people make you out to be.

END OF SCENE

SHOPPING WITH ATTITUDES

TERRI and ANN are at East Ave Wegmans. They are grocery shopping from a list. They are making small talk about what groceries they need to get, what looks good in produce, and probably meats. There are various other customers walking around in the background silently pretending to grocery shop.

TERRI: I want to go down this aisle to get pasta.

ANN: Oh, we forgot the bread. I'll go get it.

TERRI and ANN split up, TERRI goes down one aisle, and ANN down another to get different things. ANN is now out of ear-shot and exits. A HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER notices that TERRI and ANN were together and that they had now split up. The HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER marches over very confident about her feelings and her opinions ready to tell TERRI what she thought about her leaving ANN alone. The HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER is dressed to the nines. Dress, hair, make-up, and jewelry are impeccable.

HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER (primly and properly): You shouldn't let your friend out of your sight. Something could happen to her. You're being irresponsible!

TERRI (insulted by HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER, TERRI responds with a straightforward, no nonsense attitude):

Pardon me! My friend is 23 years old and is working on her Master's. She doesn't need me to hold her hand.

HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER (unprepared for and taken aback by Terri's boldness): Well, I never...Young people these days have no respect!

TERRI (looking miffed and muttering under her breath): To say nothing about rich, older women in mink coats.

The HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMER storms off and exits, muttering to herself, angry because TERRI told her off and put her in her place. ANN re-enters and comes upon a harried, YOUNG MOTHER and her two CHILDREN, ages 5 and 6, shopping down the aisle. TERRI rounds the corner to see the scene take place. CHILDREN are pointing at ANN and tugging on YOUNG MOTHER'S clothes or arms, trying to get her attention.

CHILD #1(screwing up her face): Mommy, what's wrong with her?

CHILD #2 (rudely inquisitive): Why is she using that thing?

YOUNG MOTHER looks embarrassed and attempts to shush her children by covering their mouths. Trying to ease the tension, ANN approaches, smiling, hoping to show them that she's a person just like them. As she speaks a drop of drool dribbles down her chin.

ANN: Hi! How are you? My name's Ann...

CHILDREN stare and nervously giggle. Then finding their words, they taunt ANN.

CHILD #1: You talk funny.

CHILD #2(a touch of "baby talk" enters his voice near end of tease): You talk like a baby. Baby talk!

CHILD #1(looking at YOUNG MOTHER but also keeping a wary eye on ANN): Mommy, why does she talk like that?

YOUNG MOTHER is beside herself, exasperated, pulling her hair out. She grabs each of her CHILDREN by the arm as she scolds them.

YOUNG MOTHER: Shh! Shh! Be quiet! Don't point at her. You're being rude!

YOUNG MOTHER ushers CHILDREN off stage. TERRI approaches ANN as ANN lifts her right arm, shrugs and rolls her eyes.

ANN (sarcastically): Yeah, right. Like I don't know that I have cerebral palsy. I've only lived with it for 23 years.

TERRI puts her arm around ANN'S shoulder and they start to smile. TERRI and ANN begin to exit. The lights fade. TERRI exits but ANN turns to go downstage. Both ANN and the NARRATOR enter spotlights on either side of stage.

NARRATOR (posed with one index finger pointed in the air like she's making a speech):

Rochester: (pause) Home to Susan B. Anthony, (pause) Frederick Douglass, (pause) and George Eastman. (pause) All opinionated, outspoken leaders, (pause) all wanting to change the world, all making a difference. Susan...

ANN(crossing her arms and tapping her toe, impatient with the **NARRATOR**, **ANN** clears her throat to get the **NARRATOR**'s attention. **NARRATOR** keeps her finger raised in the air and looks at **ANN**. **NARRATOR** is annoyed at being interrupted and jerkily lifts her other arm, elbow bent, turning her palm upward as if asking "What?"): Excuse me. Can we dispense with the history lesson and get to the point, please?

NARRATOR (at first still aggravated with being interrupted. She looks at her finger still pointed in the air, makes a "what's the sense of continuing" face, and lets her hand drop to her side.): My point is... With all these forward-thinking, against-the-norm people hailing from this area, you'd think Rochesterians would be more open-minded and willing to give people the benefit of the doubt. It's ridiculous that you keep running into these ignorant people and their prejudices.

ANN (exasperated with the **NARRATOR** for pointing out the obvious): Yuh, like I don't know that.

NARRATOR (waving her hands saucily and then putting her hands on her hips): But, it's the 1980's - for goodness sakes! What you're experiencing - people treating you like a baby, people not accepting you as a member of your community, people behaving like you're an alien... (emphatically) That is NOT (brief pause) totally awesome!

ANN (sassy at first and growing more matter-of-fact): Yeah, well, I'm not ET. I can't just phone home and escape this cruel world. Unfortunately attitudes don't change overnight. I don't know how long I'll have to deal with others' prejudices. All that I know is that I can't get discouraged. I have to stay visible and live each day knowing that I have the right to be a part of my community. If I keep showing people that I'm capable and can make valued contributions to the welfare of the community, attitudes will change and I will be accepted someday.

NARRATOR (impatient with the thought of needing to wait for attitudinal changes): Well, if you ask me, that day can't come soon enough!

ANN: Amen to that.

END OF SCENE

A GIRL JUST WANTS TO HAVE FUN

ANN is coming out of her dorm room as CICI is passing by. CICI comes from "high society," the daughter of Cecelia Simmons for whom the college's Simmons Hall is named. CICI lives with a hoity-toity air about her like she's above everyone except her hand picked entourage. The college is all abuzz with the upcoming spring, semi-formal dance.

CICI (talking down her nose at Ann): Lovely weather we're having, huh?

Looking up from her motorized wheelchair, ANN is slightly surprised that CICI has stopped to speak with her. ANN draws her chin and head back and scrunches her eyebrows, looking at CICI as if to ask "You're talking to me?"

NARRATOR (whispering to ANN at the same time as ANN reacts, suspicious of CICI): What's her angle? Ah... Be careful here. I smell something fishy.

ANN (noting the **NARRATOR**'s caution, answering hesitantly): Umm... yes... I hope it's this nice for the dance.

CICI(snooty): It'd better be nice. I'm planning to wear my new strapless chiffon dress.

ANN: I don't know what I'm wearing yet.

CICI's eyes widen with a look of disbelief and her body gets stiffer. She turns to look at ANN who has now gotten CICI's full attention with her comment.

NARRATOR (still whispering to ANN as CICI reacts. **NARRATOR** regrets ANN's response, putting her hand to her head as if to say "Oh no, why did you say that?"): That may have been the bait she was fishing for...

CICI (still snooty but with shock in her voice): Oh, are you going?

ANN (in a matter-of-fact tone): I'd like to. I just have to find a date.

CICI is incredulously dismayed/shocked by ANN's response

CICI (very snotty): I'm surprised that you're even considering going - let alone looking for a date. What's the sense in your dating? You're never going to get married.

ANN's jaw drops in disbelief. She closes her eyes trying to hold back the tears stinging her eyes. Opening them again, ANN sees CICI waving and mouthing the words, "See ya later", but ANN can't hear CICI over her inner voice.

NARRATOR(blown away and enraged by CICI's comments. Shock reverberates in her voice.): What?!? You've gotta

dignity: 14

be kidding me! She didn't just say that, did she?

ANN nods. Tears stream down her face.

ANN (sobs): How can anyone be so spiteful?

NARRATOR (still angry): What gives her the right to proclaim such a thing? She has no clue as to who you are.

ANN (still teary but feeding off the NARRATOR, starts to push back, not wanting to carry on a "woe is me" attitude): Yeah, maybe I'll get married before her. In fact, what makes her believe that anyone would want to marry her ugly, toad-face self?

NARRATOR (letting her anger get the better of her): Go after her! Tell her what you think of her. Tell her what you just told me.

ANN raises her eyebrows at the NARRATOR as if to say, "Really? That's not very nice!"

NARRATOR (nodding her head and holding up her hand, shifting her weight from foot to foot):

Alright, maybe not in those exact words. Calling her toad-face might be going a bit too far. But, you can make her think twice before she speaks so freely. Just point out that your getting a date isn't a marriage proposal. Marriage has nothing to do with it. It's just a chance for you to be with your friends and have fun. Ask her what gives her the right to make such statements. Say that she doesn't even know who you are and that maybe if she got to know you, she'd see that your CP is just as trivial as the fact that she has brown hair. What truly matters is what's on the inside, what you have to offer someone.

ANN (uncomfortable that she's unleashed the advocate in the NARRATOR, ANN responds hesitantly): No, no. I can't. She'll just see that she's upset me.

NARRATOR (encouraging but argumentatively): But, you should let her know that she offended you.

ANN (pushing back): But what about sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me? I should be able to just let it go. Besides, if I confront her now, I'll get more upset, and she'll get the pleasure of knowing that she got to me.

NARRATOR (decisively): Well you can't let her get away with it. She already knows she upset you.

ANN (agreeing with the NARRATOR but still not convinced she should confront CICI): Yes, but she doesn't realize that her words were like a punch in the stomach that took my breath away. Why should I let her know? Why give her that power?

NARRATOR (stating her case clearly and calmly, trying to entice ANN to follow her advice): Wouldn't it be better to let her know that what she said was inappropriate, that she shouldn't make judgments based on a sole characteristic? Shouldn't you tell her that there's so much more to you than your CP and that your CP doesn't hinder your capacity to love.

ANN (needing to relieve the tension, ANN giggles mischievously. She hears the NARRATOR but is not ready to face advocating for herself): Maybe the best way to make her understand is to show up at the dance with a drop-dead gorgeous date?

NARRATOR (sarcastically but also frustrated that ANN is not going to follow through with seeking CICI out): How will you do that?

ANN (ignoring the NARRATOR's sarcasm and frustration): I don't know, I'll worry about it tomorrow. Right now, I gotta get to class.

NARRATOR (acknowledging that she's lost this argument but still sarcastically): OK, Scarlett O'Hara, good luck with that! Let me know how it turns out.

ANN salutes the NARRATOR who rolls her eyes and half waves. ANN and NARRATOR exit by opposite sides of stage.

END OF SCENE

A TEEN'S DREAM

ANN is a junior in high school and doesn't want to miss her Junior Prom, especially since all her friends are going. The NARRATOR walks backwards onto the stage, facing ANN, who's being pushed on stage in her wheelchair by the school bus driver, heading towards her locker. Her friend ANDY comes from the other direction and they meet in front of her locker.

NARRATOR (giving ANN a little pep talk as she comes on stage): Remember, it's just like any other day. Everything's copacetic, so chill! You have nothing to lose.

The NARRATOR recedes into the background.

15 :dignity

ANN: Morning Andy! How are you?

ANDY: Great! How about you? (pause while ANN nods “good”) Let me help you with your coat.

ANDY takes off ANN’s coat. ANN hands him the key to her locker and he hangs the coat up in her locker

ANDY: Do you need anything from your locker?

ANN: No, you can lock it.

ANDY: Ok! Let’s get you to homeroom!

ANN (shy and uncertain, holding up her hand): Um, wait a minute, I want to ask you something.

NARRATOR (cheering from the background in a loud whisper, clapping her hands and placing them over her heart in a hopeful, almost prayerful gesture): Go for it, Ann!

ANDY looks at ANN and cocks his head waiting for the question

ANN: Um, would you like to go to the prom with me?

ANN’s stomach fills with butterflies. ANDY looks away, like he doesn’t want to answer. There is a beat. He runs his fingers through his hair. You can tell he’s searching for the right words.

ANDY: Um, I hate to tell you this Ann, but I just asked Marissa to go with me. I’m sorry.

Beat. ANN’s heart drops. ANN’s face starts to blush, she feels awkward in this moment and she is disappointed. She tries to conceal her feelings by smiling.

NARRATOR (speaks as ANN reacts, still in the background, hangs her head, drops her previously folded hands to her sides): Oh, man, sorry! Take a deep breath. You can’t let Andy know how disappointed you are.

ANN (speaking as if she is trying to reassure ANDY): That’s ok. I’m glad that you’re going. I know you love to dance so I’m sure you’ll have fun. (pause) Even though you aren’t taking me to the prom, will you still take me to homeroom?

ANDY’s demeanor lightens up; a little smile comes over his face. He bows as a funny gesture.

ANDY: Sure I will!

ANN puts her hand to the side of her face, discretely wiping the corner of her eye. We can tell that she is trying to hold back tears. ANN is relieved that ANDY is now behind her so that he can’t see her face and that he doesn’t have a clue about how sad she is. ANDY pushes ANN off stage as if they were going to homeroom. The NARRATOR, with head hanging like she just lost her best friend, follows them off stage. A school bell rings and some students walk across stage coming from both SL and SR and exit again. This happens another 2 times. The last time the bell rings ANN and her chorus class are left on stage while a few other students continue to walk past as the bell finishes ringing.

TEACHER: Let’s start with Scarborough Fair Canticle...

The CHORUS starts singing and ANN starts getting visibly upset. She tries to hold the tears back, but the more she tries, the stronger they come. ANN tries to hide her face by turning her head the other way. She doesn’t want people to know she’s crying. She doesn’t want to disrupt the class.

CHORUS (singing): “Are you going to Scarborough Fair? Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme.

Remember me to one who lives there, she once was a true love of mine.”

Finally her partner who is holding the music for her realizes ANN is crying. She turns to ANN’s good friends, ANNAMARIA and THERESA, who immediately come down from the risers and take ANN into the hallway.

ANNAMARIA(squatting next to ANN): What’s wrong, Ann?

THERESA: Yeah, what’s going on?

ANN responds between sobs.

ANN: I want to go to the prom, but no one will go with me. I asked Andy this morning, but he already asked your sister. I just thought he’d like to go with someone in our class.

ANNAMARIA: I know what you mean... How do you think I feel about having my younger sister at my prom?

THERESA: Isn’t there anyone else you can ask?

ANN: No, everyone else I’d want to go with is going already. I don’t know who else to ask. I’m disappointed that I’ll miss all the fun.

THERESA: Well, let us think about it. We’ll come up with something.

NARRATOR interjects as THERESA continues speaking.

NARRATOR (sarcastically): Good luck with that!

THERESA: Right now we need to get back into class before Sister Marion comes out, looking for an explanation.

ANNAMARIA helps ANN get a Kleenex from her purse. Ann dries her eyes. THERESA, pushing ANN, exit with ANNA-

dignity: 16

MARIA. Bell rings and some students walk across stage coming from both SL and SR and exit again. THERESA and ANNA-MARIA re-enter with Karl and a couple of other students. They pretend to have a conversation - discussing what made ANN upset. They appear to have come to a decision. The group disbands and blends in with other students walking across stage and exit. Bell rings and a STUDENT pushes ANN with her coat on to center stage. Other students are milling around, waiting for their busses.

STUDENT: Here you are, Ann. Have a good night!

As STUDENT starts to exit with a quick wave, ANN waves back.

ANN: See ya tomorrow!

Students are still milling around. ANN looks a bit glum, sad that Andy had other plans and mad at herself for crying in class. She hadn't wanted others to know what happened and how sad and disappointed she felt. She had done what she could to get herself to the prom. She didn't know what more she could do. A few beats. Karl enters, walking towards ANN. He's wearing his high school letter sweater and carrying a few books.

KARL (enthusiastically): Hey, Ann!

NARRATOR speaks as ANN gets a puzzled look on her face and quickly checks behind her to see if maybe there's another Ann around.

NARRATOR (sarcastically at first and turning to disbelief): What?!? Karl Sanger, the president of the student association and only the cutest guy in the whole school, talking to you? Play it cool...

Nonchalantly like he always stops by after school to talk to ANN. When she begins to greet him, she starts to point to her chest as if to ask, "Who, me?" Then before getting to the full point at her chest, she realizes gesturing "Who, me?" wouldn't be cool and changes in mid point to a wave. To continue the motion, she brushes her hair out of her eyes, shifting in her wheelchair so that she can cross her legs. She then tucks her hand into her lap and bounces her crossed leg. She lets out a quiet giggle as she smiles

ANN: Oh, hey, Karl. What's up?

KARL squats down so that he's eye level with ANN in her chair.

KARL: Well... Um... Listen... I understand that you want to go to the prom.

ANN (nodding her head and shrugging her shoulders): Yeah, I do but I...

KARL: Well...would you go with me?

A beat. NARRATOR speaks as Ann's face blushes. Ann is surprised and gets flustered. Butterflies fill her stomach.

NARRATOR (in disbelief): Really? He wants to take you to the prom? Can a senior ask a junior to the prom?

ANN (a bit confused, unsure what to think): You really want to go with me?

KARL (reassuringly): Yeah, sure... Why not?

NARRATOR (hesitantly): You're going to say "Yes", aren't you?

ANN (graciously, more certain than the NARRATOR): OK. Yeah, I'd love to go.

KARL (delighted): Cool! It'll be fun!

A beat. KARL and ANN are tongue-tied, not sure what to say next. They both nervously look away from each other and then look back at each other. KARL brings his finger to his chin/lips as if in thought. ANN smiles at KARL.

KARL: So, I'll get the tickets and you look for a dress. Once you find one, give me a little clipping so that I know what color tux to get.

ANN: OK, I will. Thanks for asking me.

KARL: No problem... I gotta go catch my bus. See ya later?

KARL stands up from his squatting position and brushes Ann's cheek before starting to walk away. Ann feels her cheeks redden. She smiles as he walks away.

ANN (dreamingly): Yeah, see ya!

ANN can't stop beaming from ear-to-ear. She tries to contain her excitement as she waits for her bus.

NARRATOR (speaking rapidly with excitement, doing the "teenaged-girl excitement dance"): Oh my gosh! Karl Sanger? Kaaaarrrrlllll Sssaaannngerrrr! Wait 'til people find out. Won't they be surprised?!? Wow!

A beat in which NARRATOR visibly catches her breath. Both NARRATOR and ANN sigh simultaneously - as if something good has finally happened. NARRATOR slows her thoughts and begins to think logically. She's still excited but is becoming suspicious.

NARRATOR: Hey! Wait a minute! What about his girlfriend, Chris? Does she know about this? If not, what's she

gonna think? And...and...and... Anyways, how did he know that you wanted to go to the prom? Why did he ask you today of all days?

ANN (annoyed with so many questions): He's in chorus, stupid! And so is Chris. They probably asked Annamaria and Theresa why I was crying.

NARRATOR (still in that "teen-aged girl" frame of mind, excited but suspicious, firing questions rapidly): So, they probably all decided that he'd ask you. Do you think he wants to take you? Or, are they all just doing it out of pity? Do you really want to go if he's pitying you?

ANN brushes her hair away from her face as she audibly sighs.

ANN (exasperated): Give me a break! Karl's a nice guy and, yeah, maybe not a close friend, but a friend nonetheless - like Annamaria and Theresa. He probably just wants to do something nice for me. That's what friends do for each other, you know? (pause) I'm sure pity has nothing to do with it. He wouldn't take me if he didn't want to. It doesn't always have to be about my CP, does it? (pause) Jeepers, would you just shut up? (pause) Let me enjoy a happy moment for once!

The bus driver enters and pushes ANN in her wheelchair offstage - as if going out to the bus. NARRATOR saunters offstage in the opposite direction.

END OF SCENE

SHE'S BATS FOR CATS

ANN is in the car with TANNA and MOM on the way to the Vet's office

ANN (confidently): Things went well yesterday when I spoke with the vet and adoption counselor. I can't wait for you to meet Joey and Tia. Their story tugs at my heart. They're littermates, brother and sister, who have to be adopted together. Joey was born with malformed front paws and Tia is very loyal to him, following him everywhere. I was happy to learn that Joey doesn't need any special care other than trimming his claws. At first I was really worried about having cats with claws, but after I researched declawing, I understand that it's not the thing to do. I should be able to handle it.

ANN, TANNA, and MOM arrive at the veterinary's parking lot. MOM and TANNA are getting out of the car while ANN waits in the car for them to get her walker. As TANNA pulls the walker out of the trunk, the RECEPTIONIST hurries out of the office, wanting to save ANN a trip into the office and avoid a confrontation. She thinks she'll make nice and ANN, TANNA, and MOM will go their merry way. She doesn't expect them to push back.

RECEPTIONIST (confused and flustered): Didn't they call you?

MOM and TANNA (looking puzzled and shaking their heads): No?

RECEPTIONIST: They told us they'd call Ann and tell her that we won't allow her to adopt Joey and Tia.

TANNA (still confused, she wasn't expecting this reception): Wait...wait... Who's "they"? Who's "we"?

RECEPTIONIST: Lollypop Farm and the vet technician who's been caring for them.

TANNA (stunned this is actually happening): What? Why?

MOM (seeing the situation escalating, wanting ANN to be involved, and hoping to slow things down): I'm getting Ann out of the car. She needs to hear this.

MOM takes the walker from TANNA, walks around to the passenger side of the car, and opens the door. TANNA and the RECEPTIONIST start a discussion that becomes more and more heated. ANN, with a worried look on her face, swings her legs around and starts getting out of the car.

MOM (concerned look on her face): There's a problem.

ANN (defensively): I called them this morning, told them I was coming back.

MOM shrugs her shoulders and raises her eyebrows. MOM and ANN hurry to join TANNA and the RECEPTIONIST.

TANNA (strongly advocating for ANN, heatedly but not shouting): ...a very capable person. You're prejudging her.

ANN keeps trying to jump into the discussion, but the arguing is flying too fast.

ANN: I don't...

RECEPTIONIST (firmly): We just don't think that she'll be able to give them the care they need.

ANN: I...I...I...

MOM (also advocating for ANN and wanting to show ANN's abilities): Ann lives independently. She owns her home, works full-time, leads a fulfilling life.

dignity: 18

ANN: I don't un...

TANNA (providing evidence that ANN isn't a first-time cat owner): For the past two years, she's been caring for another cat. When he got sick, she immediately got him the medical care he needed.

ANN: I...

RECEPTIONIST (seeing that she's losing ground, grasping at straws to find viable reasons for preventing ANN from adopting Joey and Tia): But, (pause) Joey and Tia are different. (pause) They're special.

The arguing among the three continues. The actors may ad lib dialogue, but just phrases are heard distinctly. ANN feels invisible.

NARRATOR: This is getting way out of hand. You gotta get yourself heard somehow. Scream. Fall down. Act crazy. Do something.

The argument continues, actors may continue to ad lib the dialogue. ANN gets visibly frustrated, she thrusts her arms out as if to say, "come on!" They continue to ignore her. ANN puts her hand to her head; she is aggravated. She finally raises her hand up and they all look over at ANN in confusion wondering what she's doing. They briefly stop talking but quickly get back to their argument, all the while ANN still has her arm up. They realize they are going in circles, and TANNA suddenly stops when she realizes that ANN's arm is still up.

TANNA (like a light bulb goes on in her head, her face brightens with realization): Oh wait! (pause) Ann wants to say something.

NARRATOR (snarky, drawing out "Finally"): Finally! They realize you're here!

ANN (bluntly stating the facts): I don't understand what's changed. Yesterday you had no problems with the idea of my adopting the cats. If I had adopted them yesterday, what would you have done?

A couple of beats while they all think about what ANN has said. MOM and TANNA nod in agreement with ANN. ANN's mom looks proud because she stood up for herself. RECEPTIONIST looks taken aback and a little bit ashamed. She blushes.

RECEPTIONIST (speaking with an air of indifference brought on because she doesn't feel like she can get involved and it's out of her power): I'm sorry but the decision has been made. We're not allowing you to adopt Joey and Tia.

NARRATOR (like a sportscaster calling the play): ...and she's going for the jugular...

ANN (with some sadness in her voice but also determination to right the wrong): Oh, it's far from over. If you think that we're leaving it like this, think again. We're going to the adoption center and getting to the bottom of this. What you're doing is dead wrong.

NARRATOR (cheerleading): Yeah! Go for it! Don't let them railroad you!

ANN (ANN gives NARRATOR a look as if to say, "come on?" or "really?" She shakes her head, glares at the NARRATOR, and puts one arm out to gesture this same sentiment.): Duh...Didn't you hear what I just said?

NARRATOR looks uncomfortable and embarrassed. NARRATOR puts both of her arms out, palms forward, and backs up a little bit.

NARRATOR (a little bit sassy): Ok, you have it under control. Guess you don't need me right now...

RECEPTIONIST opens her mouth as if she was going to say something but nothing comes out. She closes her mouth and shrugs. She looks down and flips her hand as if to say, "oh well, I don't know what I can do." She is deflated and resigned.

ANN, MOM and TANNA turn around and exit. RECEPTIONIST exits shortly after. The stage is empty for a moment.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR walks on stage with a clipboard. ANN, TANNA, and MOM come back on stage. They are very confident. ADOPTION COUNSELOR looks up from her clipboard

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: May I help you?

TANNA: We just came from the vet's office. Ann's interested in adopting a pair of cats they're fostering.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: Oh, right. They called a few minutes ago and said you were coming. We have a few cats without claws that I can show you.

ANN, TANNA, and MOM look confused, scrunching up their eyebrows and glancing at each other as if to ask, "What gives?" ANN lets go of her walker with one hand and lifts it palm up, elbow bent, to near shoulder height and then drops it to her side in exasperation. She re-grabs her walker. TANNA rolls her eyes. MOM shifts her purse. The ADOPTION COUNSELOR cocks her head to ask, "What's going on?"

MOM (firmly): No, you don't understand. We need to talk. Is there somewhere private we can go?

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: Certainly, right this way.

The ADOPTION COUNSELOR leads them past cubby hole apartments of cats, pointing to ones that, she thinks, might be good matches for ANN to adopt. ANN, TANNA, and MOM ignore her suggestions and "march" to the room. ANN sits on

the bench in the room and TANNA sits in the only chair. MOM remains standing against the wall. The ADOPTION COUNSELOR closes the door.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: We have many nice kitties for you to consider adopting.

MOM: Ann's interested in adopting Joey and Tia.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR (authoritatively crossing her arms): I'm sorry but we're not going to allow you to adopt them.

ANN (defensively): Why?

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: You said you're going to have them declawed. That would be very harmful for them, and we can't permit that to happen.

TANNA (surprised that they'd suggest such a thing): What?

ANN (forcefully and incredulously): No! I never said that.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR (starting to become suspicious that she doesn't know the whole story, she relaxes her authoritative demeanor): You didn't?

NARRATOR (coaching): Here's your chance to make your pitch. Be strong and sell yourself!

ANN waves her hand at the NARRATOR as if to say, "Be quiet! Don't bother me." The NARRATOR face blushes and she hangs her head dejectedly.

ANN: No. I asked about declawing because I never had a cat with claws and I was afraid of getting scratched. I also didn't know how I would keep their nails trimmed. However, after I left the vet's yesterday, I talked with Megan here about declawing and living with cats with claws. She gave me some suggestions. At home last night, I spoke with some other people who have cats with claws. I know now that declawing is not the answer. I'm confident that I can handle that.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: Oh, if that's the case, then I don't see why you can't adopt Joey and Tia. Give me a minute to check some things out. I'll be right back.

The ADOPTION COUNSELOR exits. ANN, TANNA, and MOM look at each other in disbelief and sigh.

TANNA: Congrats, Ann! It sounds like you're going to adopt Joey and Tia.

NARRATOR (cautiously): Let's not get our hopes up too far yet! I'll believe it once we have the paperwork in hand.

ANN (nodding her head but smiling): Yeah, I know. It sounds promising, though.

The ADOPTION COUNSELOR returns with a file and paperwork in her hand. She's smiling.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: I spoke with Megan, who agrees that you understand about declawing and have no intention to declaw the cats. So, I see no reason why you can't adopt those cats. I've called the vet's and asked them to get them ready to go. All we have to do is go through some paperwork. Do you have your adoption forms filled out?

ANN: (looking in her purse to find the papers and handing them to the ADOPTION COUNSELOR): Yes, here you go...

ADOPTION COUNSELOR: (taking the forms and leafing through others): Thanks. Could you sign here and here, please?

MOM pulls out the signature stamp from ANN's purse and stamps the papers

ADOPTION COUNSELOR (everyone smiles as she speaks. ANN gives a few silent claps to signal her delight to TANNA and MOM, but ANN, TANNA, and MOM are still tense, knowing that they have to return to the vet's to pick up the cats.): Congratulations! Joey and Tia are now yours! I'm sure that you'll give them a good home and a happy life. You can pick up two cardboard carriers at the desk on your way out.

NARRATOR (sarcastically relieved - almost sighing through the first sentence): Well it's about time that they realize your capabilities! I bet that went much smoother than you expected.

ANN (excitedly): Yeah, I thought we would have a real fight on our hands. I was so nervous that I was shaking all over inside. I couldn't imagine how a well-known organization such as this could be so blatantly prejudiced in this day and age. I'm not sure what I would have done if they had continued to deny me the right to adopt those cats.

NARRATOR (nodding head in agreement while replaying ANN's actions. Saying the last sentence, the NARRATOR tucks her thumbs into pretend suspenders): You handled the whole situation well, stating the issues matter-of-factly and not letting your emotions get the better of you. (pause) I taught you well, if I do say so myself.

ANN smiles at the NARRATOR. MOM and TANNA shake hands with the ADOPTION COUNSELOR as they exit the room.

The NARRATOR hangs back while ANN is the last to pass the ADOPTION COUNSELOR on the way out of the room.

ANN: Thanks for listening and believing in me. I would never do anything to hurt them.

The ADOPTION COUNSELOR pats ANN on the back in a half hug and smiles. ANN turns to look at the NARRATOR, who

dignity: 20

gives her a thumbs up. ANN and the ADOPTION COUNSELOR exit, and the NARRATOR follows behind, doing a victory dance as she exits.

END OF SCENE

RELEVANCE GAINED

Another shopping scene appears. It's 30 years after the first shopping scene. ANN and her assistant ROXIE are shopping at Pittsford Wegmans, which is crowded with shoppers.

ANN: Roxie, have you seen the prepared chef salads anywhere?

ROXIE: No, but I could go look around if you'd like.

ANN: Yes, that would help. I'm getting tired of maneuvering through the crowd.

ROXIE wanders off while ANN waits to the side of a sushi case. CHEF DEBRA who has done presentations for ANN's department in Wegmans corporate office sees and recognizes ANN standing there. CHEF DEBRA, dressed in a chef's hat and coat, approaches ANN.

CHEF DEBRA: Hi. It's been a while since I've seen you. They've been keeping me busy in the stores, working on knowledge-based sampling. Customers love these California rolls. They're flying off the shelves. But, tell me, how are you?

ANN: I'm good... analyzing all the good marketing you do. Trying to see what works the best.

CHEF DEBRA: Can I help you find something?

At this moment, ROXIE returns empty-handed, unable to find the salads.

ANN: Debra, this is my friend Roxie. We're looking for the prepared salads.

CHEF DEBRA: Follow me. I'll take you to them.

As ROXIE and ANN follow CHEF DEBRA, they overhear a couple of customers pointing ANN out.

CUSTOMER #1 (pointing in ANN's direction): See that lady in the purple coat.

CUSTOMER #2 nods.

CUSTOMER #1: She works at Wegmans corporate office. I see her in the hallways every now and then...



CUSTOMERS #1 and #2 stroll off stage, pretending to shop as they go.

CHEF DEBRA: Here we are. The salads are in this case. Can I help you with anything else?

ANN: No, thanks. We're set now.

CHEF DEBRA: Well, it was nice to see you. Have a good day!

ANN: You, too!

As CHEF DEBRA leaves, a MOTHER with her son EVAN, aged 5 or 6, rounds the corner. EVAN is intrigued by ANN and stops to study her.

MOTHER (acknowledging EVAN's curiosity with ANN and her walker): See the nice lady with the walker?

ANN (overhearing the MOTHER. ANN stops to greet them): Hi there!

MOTHER: Hi. Evan is curious about your walker. See, Evan, the walker helps her walk.

ANN waves at EVAN and smiles.

EVAN: Why does she need a walker?

MOTHER (instructive but respectful of ANN): You use muscles to help you walk. Her muscles probably don't work in the right way to help her walk. Say hi to her, she's waving at you.

ANN (attempting to show EVAN that she's a person like he is, shifting the emphasis away from her CP): Are you having fun shopping?

MOTHER: Yeah, we are. We're looking for cookies for Valentines Day.

ANN (pointing to a case in the bakery): Oh, they're over there!

EVAN (excitedly): Oh I see them!

EVAN pulls MOTHER'S arm and starts to drag her away.

MOTHER: Thank you! It was nice meeting you.

ANN nods her head at the MOTHER to acknowledge that she understands that she needs to leave. The MOTHER holds on for a second to hear ANN's response

ANN: Have a good day!

EVAN runs off stage and MOTHER chases after him. They both exit. ROXIE and ANN look at one another and smile.

ROXIE and ANN start to walk off in the other direction. The lights start to fade and the NARRATOR comes on stage from the opposite side. ANN stops walking but ROXIE keeps walking. ANN looks back at the NARRATOR.

ANN (very gratefully): Thanks, lady. You don't know how much I appreciate your kind and thoughtful explanation. I feel like a respected human being, not some sort of freak.

NARRATOR (summing up): My, how things have changed in the past 30 years. Although we're still not totally there, dignity and respect are real possibilities for people with disabilities. What it boils down to is that now people see you not as someone needing constant care, but as Ann: a customer, a Wegmans employee, a neighbor, a board member, a parish member, a homeowner...

ANN: Today, people seek me out because of my abilities and talents. I feel valued and appreciated, a true member of my community. My life finally has relevance.

ANN smiles at the NARRATOR and the NARRATOR smiles back. NARRATOR walks across the stage to ANN and they exit together as the lights fade.

END OF SCENE

Game Day

By Chris Thornton

In Collaboration with Zach Arnold

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

to keep myself healthy throughout the day. Now I begin to prepare for my game.

I get into my game jersey to start my routine. After I am all changed, I place my headphones on to listen

to my radio. The music of 100.5 gets me pumped up and I turn my music up loud enough so that I cannot hear anything else. After my tunes get me excited, I watch a little TV. I put in *Everybody Loves Raymond* into the DVD player, clearly one of the funniest shows ever to be on TV. Whenever Robert makes funny faces at Raymond I laugh out loud because it is just so funny. Every once in a while, I start one of my silly dances. It's easy to say my dances get me excited the most. I grasp my hips and swing them around with a few arm twirls into the air. Although funny, the dances

are the special pre-game routine to prepare me for basketball. To make sure I don't get hungry during a game I eat my special bologna, cheese, and ketchup sandwich. No one else in my house eats that kind of sandwich, and that's what makes it my special "Chris" sandwich. My sister picks me up at the house and we begin to drive to the YMCA in Webster.

I bend down to climb into my sister's small white car. I put my water bottle next to me in the front seat. My sister and I like to talk on the way there. My sister is beautiful and we are really close. We tend to



talk about a lot of things. To start, we talk about how everyone in my house is doing, then about the different events at the house, and finally how my family is doing. I love talking to my sister because she knows me best and always finds a way to cheer me up.

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

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

We pull into the parking lot and as soon as I open the door I can

feel the heat. I grab my water bottle from the cup holder and we make our way to the front door. On the way there we see lots of things like other cars, the playground, and the slide. I even see people like my teammates and the other people who are at the YMCA. We make our way to the front door and the first thing that I see is a soda machine. I like soda, but because it is game day I do not drink it. Before the game begins I take off my sweatshirt and sweatpants so that I am in my game clothes. Then I see the courts and I



get excited, it is almost time to play.

We start by doing some warm up exercises. Some of the drills we do are practicing lay-ups, passing a ball against the wall, and shoot the ball at the net. Then once we are done with our warm ups our coach talks to us. He tells us our positions for the game so that we all know where to play. Then we take our positions on the court, the game is just about to start.

To start our basketball games, we do the tip-off. The ball is thrown up into the air and I try to tip the ball towards my team. Since I am one of the bigger players I usually win and pass the ball right back to my teammates. Right away we are on offense. I ask for the ball and put my hands up in the air. They pass it to me and I make my way to 3-point line. I have someone defending me with their hands up, but I move to the side and I take the shot. It goes straight through netting, lucky for me it goes in and now we must play defense.

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

The game continues on this

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

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

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

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

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

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

Geraldine's Favorite Trip

By Geraldine Copeland

In Collaboration with Sarah Winstein-Hibbs

Geraldine started to get interested in politics when she saw President Reagan. She was sitting on the red, fuzzy couch at her family's house watching him on TV, and he was talking about getting married to Nancy Reagan. It was a TV with a wooden frame, and it was a color TV, which was a really special thing at the time, since color TV was still new. Sometimes, it didn't work, and it made a loud staticky sound, switching from cartoons to a fuzzy black and white blurred image. The house had shiny French glass doors in the dining room, swinging open and closed, and separating the dining room from the living room. When Geraldine saw President Reagan on TV he said, "I want a First Lady in the House to help me." He was smiling like he always did, and laughing a lot, with his big laugh, a laugh so wonderful you could hear it 1000 miles away. A thought crossed her mind: "Gee, I should take a trip to the White House to see what the presidents really do." Geraldine went and talked to her mother, who was vacuuming the living room, pushing the vacuum back and forth, back and forth. Geraldine asked if they could take a trip to Washington. "Mom, could we please take a trip to Washington so I could tour the White House to see what the presidents do?" And her mother said, "Umm . . . you

can't tour the White House, because no one is doing that anymore." But then, Geraldine said, "I can tour the White House in my mind!" Her mother asked, "Oh, when will you be doing that?" Geraldine told her she'd be going in the future.

Geraldine went back to her room. Her room was covered in wallpaper, with big red hearts and red roses, which made her feel small, like a little girl growing up. She didn't want to grow up; she wanted to be always small. She still feels like this, like Peter Pan; but now she also has friends to share her life with. This wallpaper in her bedroom made her happy, but in the future it would make her sad, when they had to move. She can still see it in her mind now, years later.

Lying on the bed, Geraldine took a trip in her mind to the White House. She thought about happy things. Reagan's laughter made her happy. She wanted to meet him. She thought about what she would do when she was president. She wanted to meet Reagan someday.

A few years later, Geraldine went to Washington with her family, when she was still a little girl. It was warm and sunny and there were pink cherry blossoms on the trees. There were lots of different buildings: tall ones, round ones, little ones. It all looked beautiful. She went with her grandmother, her mother, her father, and her sister. She saw the

White House but she didn't get to go in. They were driving by the White House, and even though they were far away, it still seemed really big.

She felt happy because she liked seeing the White House, and she felt great, because she had always wanted to see it and there it was! She wondered about President Reagan in the White House, and wondered what he was doing. He was probably laughing, like he usually did on TV.

Geraldine felt wonderful. Their hotel room had photographs of past presidents on the wall. Over the bed, there was a photograph of Lincoln. The bedspread even had pictures of presidents on it. The bed was soft and comfortable. Geraldine went right to sleep, but her sister Ginny tossed and turned – she didn't like it.

In the morning, someone came in and told the family it was breakfast time. Geraldine and her family went downstairs and they were served a breakfast of cereal, eggs, bagels, and coffee. They didn't even have to order anything. Everyone was very friendly, and Geraldine felt happy when she got this breakfast. Her family was feeling happy, too, including her grandmother. They all said thank you. Geraldine's grandma was the one who always had her try all different foods. Sometimes Geraldine imagines that her grandma is still living. She had Geraldine try pickled herring fish.

Anyway, the family went

sightseeing after that. They saw all kinds of birds and flowers. Bluejays, robins, woodpeckers. Her family used to take care of a blue jay that fell off its nest. They kept it in the sun-porch pantry at home, and it kept flying onto Geraldine's shoulder. She held the little bluejay in her hand and fed him blueberries. As she walked through Washington, she thought about all this, about the blue jay, about how she wanted him to grow up and learn to fly.

Next, Geraldine went with her mom, her sister, and her grandma to the Smithsonian Museum. Meanwhile, her father went to the FBI headquarters. He used to fix machines at Kodak, and when he was a sailor, he fixed boats in the navy. Anyway, Geraldine looked at all the pictures at the Smithsonian, and she really liked them. After that, the family went on a tour of the Lincoln Memorial. You could see out of the windows of the tower, and there was also a little telescope. When Geraldine looked through it, she saw that it was all green and grassy outside. She could see where the President lived, and where Congress made laws, and the Smithsonian Museum, and people walking, and the birds, and almost everything.

Geraldine had a wonderful time, and didn't want to leave. Now, she imagines she is back in Washington, seeing the President of the United States, Barack Obama. He always seems happy; he's always smiling on TV, and he has two young daughters, one is in high school and the other is in middle school. Geraldine's teacher, Emily, helps her take trips in

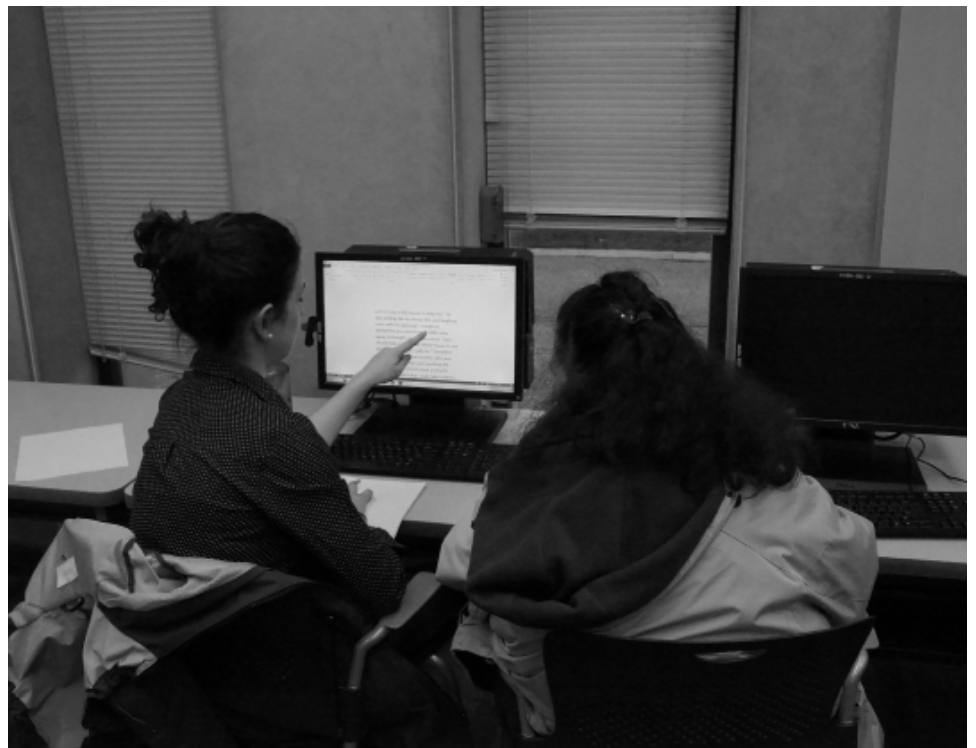
her mind. Emily has blond hair and a big smile. She works at CAC, and does exercises with Geraldine and the other consumers. In one of the exercises, Emily tells the consumers to imagine that they are taking a trip, boarding a plane, packing a suitcase, riding on a train or a bus or a trolley, and going somewhere far, far away – over the rainbow, or even farther than that – maybe even to Washington.

Geraldine imagined that she went into the White House, and that a tour guide in white clothes was giving her a tour. He showed her where the kitchen was. The kitchen was huge, with lots of pots and pans of different colors: red, silver, black. The dishwasher puffed out some warm air as Geraldine walked by. There was bright red wallpaper all over the walls. Then Michelle Obama walked into the room and

said, "Hello, Geraldine! What are you doing?" Geraldine said, "I'm cooking pancakes for you!" Mrs. Obama said, "That's our favorite meal!" Michelle stayed in the kitchen and chatted with Geraldine while she was cooking.

She was friendly, very nice. Geraldine got out the pan, and a bowl, and started putting the dry ingredients in, and a recipe book. Then she put the oil in, and then the milk and the eggs, and she stirred it all up. First she put the dry ingredients together, next the eggs, stirred it all up, and put it on the griddle to make pancakes.

She made pancakes for the whole White House. After they ate, she took their empty dishes and put them in the dishwasher. Geraldine loves cooking, and she would help out the President whenever she could.



Going the Distance

By Patrick Hurley

In Collaboration with Brigid Hogan and Jordana Schmierer

In 2010, my sister, her friend, and I went to Pinegrove Ranch and Family Resort in Kerhonkson, New York. We stayed at a hotel in the woods that was part of the ranch. The ranch also had a big barn and some stables, where there were horses.

We got a chance to ride them, and the horses were so huge that you had to stand on a big wooden box to even get on their backs. I remember sitting on the back of my horse, reins in hand, looking out over the horse's head.

Some people might have been scared, but not me! We took a walk through the woods, and I held the reins tight, moving my hand towards my pocket when I wanted the horse to move its head, which made it walk in that direction.

At one point, we came to a small lake, and, to my surprise, my horse right walked in. At first I was confused, but he just wanted to drink and to eat the green leaves off a branch that was hanging over the water. Luckily he didn't walk too deep, so I didn't get wet, but it was summertime, so I would have dried off even if he did splash me.

This wasn't my first time on a horse. For about a year before our trip, I had started taking horseback riding lessons. This was before I started going to the gym, so I wasn't getting as much exercise yet, and I wanted to find a hobby that was

good exercise. Every Monday night, I went to stables about an hour from home. Since it was inside, I got to go even when the winter was at its worst. We didn't only learn riding at the stables, we also got to practice tricks on the horses. My favorite trick was one where you squeezed your legs in towards the horse, said "trot," and tried to stand up while the horse went faster. This was called the two-point. There was another trick where you ride while putting your arms out, letting go of the reins. This trick was called "the Molly" because it was always done on a horse named Molly. One last trick I learned was riding with my hands on my head. So, by the time I went to the ranch, I was already a pro and my sister and her friend loved it as much as I did.

At the ranch, we ate our meals every day in the cafeteria, which was Wild West themed. Not only was food good, there was entertainment. There were people playing the trumpet, drums, and piano, and people would dance after they were done eating. This was really fun for me, because I love dancing. My sister, her friend, and I all danced together and had a great time. I have to say, I was the best dancer of the three of us, but maybe I had an advantage, because they were playing country songs, which is my favorite kind of music.

My love of country music began

when I went on a trip to Nashville, which was another trip I went on with my sister. We drove there all the way from Rochester, and to get ourselves excited, we listened to my favorite CD of country music. I liked country before, but it wasn't until we went to Nashville that I became a huge fan.

When we got to Tennessee, there was a bar, and we did a whole lot of karaoke – the TV screen had the lyrics across it so that we could sing along. I didn't only sing, I got to drink some beer. The song I sang was Achy Breaky Heart by Billy Ray Cyrus. I stood up on stage with a microphone, and read the lyrics off the screen, and I didn't miss a word. I was awesome and when I was done, people smiled and clapped. Felt pretty good to have everyone see me do such a great job singing my favorite song.

We did lots of other cool stuff, like we went on a tour of the Grand Ole Opry. We got to see a country music show where a lady sang. The whole trip was great, but singing karaoke is still my favorite memory of Nashville.

Maybe the country music at Pinegrove wasn't as great as in Nashville—where could be as good?—but it was still a great time. To finish out our vacation, there was a big campfire, and the whole camp showed up to make s'mores, sing songs, and to talk about what



a great trip we all had. This was the last big thing to do at Pinegrove, but I wished our vacation would never end. But eventually the fire burned down and we had to throw sand on it to make sure it was safe and we headed back to the hotel. The next morning, we had to get up very early to drive back to Rochester. When I got home, it was good to be back in my familiar space, but I still missed my incredible trip.

Even when I'm not traveling, I go on walks. I walk downtown. I walk with my sister Eileen beside the Erie Canal. We see the water and

the ducks, and once I saw a swan. Sometimes we go to the beach at Charlotte and walk around. We walk on the sand, and we walk on a pier, all the way to the end and feed the ducks with bread. In spring I walk up to Cobb's Hill. I see flowers and people walking their dogs. We don't walk up there in winter. Once, we almost did. But I like to stay out of the cold. It's hard going on walks in winter. Sometimes at my sister's house I will shovel the sidewalk and her driveway and get paid. That's a good kind of exercise!

I love walking because I have

fun seeing [things] around me, the yellow dandelions growing up from the grass, and the ladies that I stop and talk to. Sometimes they give me a hug, they can't help it, I get that a lot. And not only on the beach, everywhere. I like looking around. I like being surprised.

Once in Boston, while I was visiting my sister Eileen and my niece Monica, we walked through the aquarium. We saw dolphins in the water, they were doing tricks! They would jump through rings and dive back in the water, they even came up to shake my hand –

I liked it even though it was slimy and felt a little like rubber.

We walked through the whole place. Behind the glass, some of the fish were big and some were small, they were all swimming together. It looked like a mess – there was even a shark swimming in with the fish, it was very exciting. I was surprised by how it looked. It was brown and kind of short, with a skinny tail. I touched the shark too, its back was smooth, and I wasn't scared at all, I loved it.

I walked at night too, and the stores that we walked by had the windows all lit up, and the mannequins were like statues of people in the windows. Another night, we bought frozen yogurt with chocolate chips, and ate it standing on the sidewalk and looking around. There were more people walking around at night, and we took the T back to my sister's apartment. It was the same day as daylight savings time in the fall, so we got to change our watches back and got to have an extra hour.

We walked to the bar from the TV show "Cheers," and I drank a Miller Light with my sister, my niece and her boyfriend. Everywhere we went, we walked, and got to see something new. It felt like an adventure.

Not every time I walk I travel. Sometimes I'll walk or run around the track just for exercise. My sister told me about a race that was happening near her house on the fourth of July. We started practicing in the fall and winter. At first, it just felt like regular exercising with my sister. The race was so far away. I wasn't nervous. I knew I was going

to love it long before. When I practiced I wasn't tired, even in the beginning. Me, tired? Nah. Maybe at the end.

Before the start of the race, they gave me a number to wear on my shirt. Everyone lined up in a row. Someone held a gun above his head, people were screaming, I still wasn't nervous. The gun blew up to the sky, and race started. I ran the race half and half – half walking and half running. It was raining on and off. But rain? Don't bother me. But at the end a timer was waiting. When I saw the clock, I ran the whole last way, no slowing down. It was hard. But I did it.

It felt terrific, there was waving and clapping, my sister, my niece Claire, and my nephew Dan, they all finished at the same time as me. There were people on the side of the road that had cups of water for all the runners. I grabbed one, drank, and poured the rest over my head. The race was over. We went back to my sister's house. Everyone wanted pictures and there was a cookout in the back yard. They were so proud of everyone who ran.

It felt so good, that I wanted to find other races to run. I'm running another 5k, that's coming up some time in May. It's for CP. I work at the 7/11 to help out. This guy I know, who works at the same place, and works with CP, he took my picture. It was summer and nice out, I was wearing bands on my wrist, and held my arms out, and he took the picture. He made it bigger so everyone could see, and put it on the flyer. I think everyone recognizes me now.

In November 2013, I did a 5k, called a Turkey Trot. It was held on Thanksgiving Day. My sister was going to do it with me but she's not very good with the cold. My brother in law, Jim, my niece, Claire, and my nephew, Daniel, all did the run with me. When I was running, I felt good but a little bit tired. My family ran with me but I tried to beat them because I like doing that! We were on the road but at the end of the run, it was on grass and there was just a little bit of snow and ice. But I still made it and finished it.

On the run, there was another guy who was running without a shirt in that cold! I think he finished before us but it was fun watching him. I enjoyed the run so I decided to do another one this year.

It feels like I'm always training for a race now.

dignity: 30

The Bestseller

By Toni Montgomery

In Collaboration with Anjalene Whittier

Toni was in the park when a man asked her, "What are you doing?"

"I'm writing," she answered.

He said, "Are you writing a book?" "Yes."

"What's the book about?" "I don't know yet."

"Can I see what you've written?"

"I'll think about it, once I've written something."

He sat down to join her on the bench, and they continued to talk. "I work for the newspaper, and sometimes it's hard for me to think of what to write, too," he said. "Let me challenge you. Why don't you write me a story?"

"Sure, about what?"

"That's up to you. We can go get coffee and keep talking. My name is James, by the way. What's yours?"

Toni sat across from James. She began to stir her coffee. She stared out the window. They were in the bookstore's cafe. The coffee was warm. She looked at James. He was Black and handsome.

Through the window, she saw two teenage girls hanging out. Suddenly, it hit her. High school is such a big part of every person's life. If she wrote a book about high schoolers, people would love to read what she had to say.

She turned to James. "Listen to what I just thought of," she said...

Kim is so excited to go to prom

with Todd. Todd is her second boyfriend, and she's happy that they get to spend time together at the dance.

She waits by the phone, but Todd never asks her to prom. She has no idea why. She thought they were dating.

To her surprise, Todd arrives at the prom alone. He walks up to Jessica and asks her to dance. They move on to the dance floor, and they begin to slow dance.

Kim sees the two of them. She's hurt. She walks over and angrily breaks up with Todd, saying that he doesn't know how to respect her. Todd is off the hook. He decides he'll date Jessica instead. They keep dancing, and act like nothing happened.

Meanwhile, Sarah doesn't know that Todd has been caught yet. She walks up to Todd and slaps him, because she wants to protect her sister. They get into a huge fight. Sarah gets kicked out of the dance, while Todd and Jessica are allowed to keep dancing.

Kim leaves with Sarah, and they go home. Kim is really upset about what happened, but she's glad that her sister stuck up for her. She just wishes that she hadn't slapped anyone so that they could have finished dancing!

The next day, Todd is having a picnic with his friends and Jessica. His friends call him a jerk in front of her. They start talking about why boys cheat on girls. They call Todd a cheater. Jessica is angry and hurt and

calls him a jerk, too. She didn't know he was actually dating Kim on the side. She thought it was just a rumor. Now she knows for sure.

Todd feels hurt because he thinks Jessica is being unfair. Jessica is popular, so lots of boys flirt with her all the time. She has never cheated, though, so Todd is the one being unfair. He just wants to make Jessica feel bad.

James was cooking for Toni. He was making ribs, baked potatoes, and garlic bread, with a side salad that had shrimp on top. Those were Toni's favorite foods.

They had been dating for a few months, but she hadn't gotten any closer to figuring out what to write next in her book. She was stuck.

Her phone rang. It was her mom and sisters making sure that she was okay. She loved when they called. Family was very important to her. She smiled.

Her mom and sisters would always be her angels. She knew exactly what to write next. She had to make sure her characters were very close with their families.

NeNe is planning to host a party, so her maids are helping her to get ready. She smiles at her husband, Greg. She loves him a lot.

NeNe feels a bit nervous, but she's also excited. She hopes that everything will go well. Tyler Perry is planning to come that night, alongside several other stars.

31 :dignity

She misses her daughters' help around the house. Kim and Sarah are at camp, and they've been away for two months living at an all-girls' summer cottage. They'll be back in just one more week, but NeNe is missing them so much, she can't wait.

Kim and Sarah are trying to get over Todd during their time at camp, but since it's an all girls' camp, it's been hard. Kim and Sarah have been planning to sneak to the boys' camp. They want to meet a few guys and hang out. They're going to bring two other girls with them. The other girls are the masterminds, so Kim and Sarah are just following.

They're not all that daring, but they still want to meet some boys -- just not that way. They don't have another idea, though.

They plan their move during the day. They decide to do it as part of a prank. Both of their friends have had crushes on Brian since summer camp started, but they've never been able to meet because the camps are separate. Sarah and Kim don't have feelings for Brian, though.

They're not able to pull off their prank, because they get caught. The girls' counselor figures out what they're doing and stops them. She decides not to get them in trouble, though, and lets them off with a warning. That's that for boys! They don't try to sneak out again.

But then, the boys sneak on to the girls' campus, and they meet them anyway! Brian, Usher, Apollo, and Peter all come over during the night. Boys are sneakier, so they're able to pull it off.

The boys are swimming on the girls' side. The girls are hanging out by the campfire near the trees, and

see the boys nearby. The girls go over to the boys.

"Remember that? That was our first real date, after we got coffee," said Toni, looking away from her computer.

"Well, sort of. It wasn't summer camp. Plus, I didn't do any sneaking around," said James.

"No, of course not!" Toni replied. "But it was sort of sneaky. You pulled up to my house and said 'get in.' I had no idea where we were going. Then we came up by that beach. We had to hike through the woods to get there. Do you remember? It was quiet. It was very nice."

James hugged her. His arms were dark and strong. Toni's skin was dark too. They fit well together.

He smiled. "Get in," he said. He unlocked his car.

They ran through the woods together. James was in front. He held her hand. He pulled her forward until they saw the beach and sun again. He took off his backpack and dropped it on the sand. Quickly, he took out food and red wine. He saw a pink rose bush. He picked a bouquet and put it in Toni's hands. Toni was stunned.

"I wanted to get more ready for this. I can't wait, though," said James. He dropped to one knee. "Toni, I love you so much. I want to be with you forever. Will you please marry me?"

"Hey, what's up?" says Taylor. "We were thinking that you guys should come over to our cabin. There isn't much else going on since everyone else is asleep."

Kim gives Taylor a look. She knows that having the boys over is against

the rules. Kim is concerned. She could tell that Taylor had been acting out a little bit. Inviting the boys over is a bad sign.

Taylor had felt really sad lately. Kim knows that Taylor hasn't been sure how to deal with it. She needs friends and people to talk to in order to work through her problems. Kim isn't sure how she can help her -- but she is sure that sneaking around with boys isn't the right answer.

"Actually, I think I'm going to go to bed a little bit early. You girls should come back with me. It gets a little scary out here at night," Kim says.

"Yeah, I don't want to be out much longer," Sarah says. They turn around and look at Taylor, waiting. They hope that she'll join them.

"Okay, I guess I should go back. Sorry guys - maybe next time," Taylor says. She walks back to the cabin with the other girls.

Now or never, Kim thinks to herself. She turns to Taylor and says, "Hey. I know you haven't been feeling the best lately. I was really worried about you out there. Are you doing okay? Do you want to talk about anything?"

Taylor pauses. She has to think: Does she really want to tell anyone what's happening? "Actually, no, I'm not okay," she says to Kim. "Some really bad things have been going on with my family, and I don't know how to handle them. I feel very scared and alone." "That's okay. Sometimes I'm scared, too. Do you want to visit a counselor? I can even go with you, if you want."

"Yeah. I think I'd really like that."

NeNe waits outside the airport. She is so excited to see her girls again. Each time she sees a Black girl walk

by, her heart jumps from being so happy - but it's never the right girl. She sees two girls struggling with their bags. They're chatting away. The pink suitcase is definitely Kim's. Kim is very girly. NeNe starts out to meet them. Then she sees a third member of their group. She's surprised.

"Mom! We missed you so much!" Kim shouts, as she runs up and gives her a hug. "This is Taylor. It turns out she lives right around the corner. She's actually going through some really tough stuff right now. Is it okay if she comes over for a little while before she goes back home?"

"Oh, honey, of course that's okay!" NeNe says. "You know my doors are always open. Come in the car. You can sit in the back next to Kim."

Taylor smiles. She feels nervous. She had never told anybody about her stepfather before. He treats her terribly. All she has ever wanted to do was leave home and go somewhere safe. Summer camp was a good break. Now that it's over, though, she has to deal with him again. She is scared of how he will react when she says she wants to get counseling.

She loads her bags in the car and climbs in. She buckles her seatbelt. She stares out the window. She wishes that the car ride would go on forever.

Kim and Taylor are sitting on Kim's bed. They chat about their plans after graduation. Sarah is hanging out in the doorway, trying to nose around.

"I can't believe this is finally happening," says Taylor. "We're almost done with high school. This year was so fast." She lays back on the bed and stares at the ceiling.

"I know," says Kim. "I can't believe I'm going to college." She had just been accepted to a few schools, and is

trying to decide whether to stay near home or go farther away.

Taylor rolls over. She pulls her journal out of her bag. Her counselor said that she should write things down in a journal. She turns to a blank page. She starts to write. "April 26th: Mrs. Perry is so nice. I'm so happy she's there for me. Living with him is hard. Soon, it will be different. I've been accepted to colleges in New York, Texas, and even Alaska... I feel so excited."

Kim and Taylor line up for the graduation ceremony. They are right next to each other, because their last names are so close together. For Taylor, every step toward the stage means one step away from her stepfather. She is so ready to move out on her own.

Kim is trying not to cry. She is so happy that everything is going so well. At the same time, she feels sad about leaving her friends and family behind for a new life at college.

Sarah and NeNe watch from the audience, smiling. They feel so proud. Nothing could make them feel bad. Then, Sarah sees Todd in the bushes. She could have sworn he dropped out, but it looks like he showed up to crash the graduation anyway.

Taylor looks around while she waits in line. She sees Sarah and NeNe looking at the bushes. They look worried. She looks in the same spot. Sure enough, Todd is there.

She gasps, and taps Kim on the shoulder. She whispers her name very fast: "Kim! Kim! Kim! He's back! It's Todd!" she says.

Kim feels hurt and scared. She doesn't know why he's there. She's worried. But, then, she decides that one person can't ruin her day. She puts her head up. She says that noth-

ing is going to bother her.

Todd feels jealous. He picked Jessica before, but he wants Kim now. He wants to go back to high school. He made some big mistakes. Now Kim is graduating, and he'll never have a chance with her. He sighs. This was a mistake, too. He decides to leave.

Sarah and NeNe watch him turn around and go. They feel very relieved. Knowing Todd, though, they're still suspicious. They don't have to be. He's gone for good.

Kim doesn't even notice. She's so happy to be with Taylor. They both walk towards the stage. The next part of their lives starts there.

Toni was writing her newest book in the park. She was running late to her book signing at the shop nearby. She was planning to meet her readers. Her two bodyguards rushed her off.

She looked at all the copies of her book on the shelves, and saw just how far she's come. She had been selected by Oprah for the latest book club. She felt amazed.

She sat down and started signing autographs, while her books were flying off the shelves.

Home Runs

By Jeff Yarmel

In Collaboration with May Zhee Lim

I started watching the New York Yankees as a little kid. 1998 was the first time I went to watch a Yankees game at Yankee Stadium. I can't remember who played. I sat behind home plate and I could see the players coming out. I could hear the umpire call strikes and balls.

His voice was loud. I could hear the crack when the bat hit the ball. In between every inning, they played cool music. It was a fun game to see. The sun was out. It was a nice 70 degrees.

I first saw Derek Jeter play in that game. He looked the same as he did on TV. He was really tall and he looked good in his jersey number 2. I got to see him bat. He missed some balls, but overall he still gave a good performance.

Derek Jeter is a cool player to see because he has good moves. He swings really well. The entire team played a good game. I was waiting for the Yankees to score home runs and I wasn't disappointed. They won the game, which made me really happy.

Yankee Stadium was huge. It was something I did not expect. I've only seen the stadium on TV and it looked smaller. There were a lot of chairs. The stadium could seat maybe 50, 000 people. There were a lot of people there, so it got a little too crowded sometimes. It

was a long game but I didn't mind because I got to see the Yankees play. In between innings, there were shows on the field, where you could win Yankees prizes like t-shirts, caps, and posters. People came onto the field and danced to music. They threw the prizes out at the audience, who would stand up from their seats and try to catch them. I didn't want to catch the things because I couldn't hold out my arms fast enough to catch them.

I went to the game with my dad, who is a Mets fan, but he enjoyed the game too. I like both the Yankees and the Mets, but the Mets lose a lot of their games. It's not as fun to watch a Mets game. I've been to a Mets game four times, and they lost most of those games.

The Mets' stadium looked the same as Yankee Stadium. They were both huge and they sold the same food and drinks. I didn't go to the team store because I knew the things would be too expensive to buy. After the game ended, my dad and I went home. We talked about the game on the way home.

I saw Derek Jeter play for the second time on TV. It was different than being at the stadium. It wasn't as loud, and the seats weren't as hard. I was at home watching with my dad and my brother, Peter. We always watch the Yankees games.

This time his performance was just okay. He didn't hit as many home runs in the first inning, but in the second inning he started getting better. He was actually keeping his eye on the ball, and he started to get on the bases! We were excited. He was playing great!

Recently I read online that Derek Jeter was leaving the team. He was retiring from baseball. I was sad to hear the news. I thought this was bad news for the Yankees. They will still be a good team, but they've lost a very important player. He has been on the team for 19 years. He has won them five World Series championships. It would be strange to not see him on TV anymore. I haven't had much time to watch baseball lately. I've been busy with work.

I like all sports. Baseball is one of my favorite sports, but I really like NASCAR too. I like watching them more than baseball. It's fun to see who wins. They drive really fast. I watch NASCAR races on Sundays. My dad lets me know if a race is on. My two favorite drivers are Jimmie Johnson and Danica Patrick.

When I was younger, I was a runner. One of the races was on my birthday. I won that race. I ran really fast. I finished in 100.3 seconds. I also played baseball when I was 10. It was hard for me

to hit and catch the ball. But I could run really fast.

My dad taught me how to play baseball. Peter would play with me. I liked that I had the time to play baseball when I was younger. Now

my brother lives in Long Island and I live in Rochester. We don't play together anymore. He might come visit me at the end of April. I hope we can watch baseball on TV together. He is also a Yankees fan.

When I go home, Dad and I watch NASCAR or baseball together. Sometimes, Mom will join us. Sports bring us all together. It is great!



Poems and Letters

By Thuan Nguyen

In Collaboration with Jamie Kurtz

I Look to the Sky

I looked in the sky and saw the twinkling stars.
The Father called me to help someone learn about the Bible.
He taught me how to talk to the people.
The Holy Ghost talked to my Father.
The Holy Ghost helped me talk and live.
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit feel good from the inside out.
He came down from the sky to be with everyone's heart.
He helped us do something good with each other.
I love the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I Look for the Sky

I saw the bird.
I looked for the bird's eye but remembered you.
When I'm with you, you make me happy.
When we get together, the sun shines.
I remember when I looked into your eyes.
When you need me, pick up the phone; I'll be there.
I saw you.
I remember everything you do.
I look for your eyes.
I look in the sun.
When we get together I say to you, "I'll see you later."

Dear President and Congress,

I am concerned. A lot of people are waiting for a place to live, food to eat, or medicine. Also, a lot of people with disabilities do not have a program to go to. I do not know how many. People are not able to go to a day program because they are on a waitlist. Please open more programs. At my program, I have a lot of work. I like doing work. I learn a lot at my program. It helps me to move forward. Every program moves people forward. Programs make people better. They teach people how to write and how to read. The program does not have the money to increase pay, so people go to another job. It makes me sad. I have lost a lot of friends.

I am supposed to get a new wheelchair every five years. Medicaid is needed to help the whole nation, not just me. Listen to what I say. When my chair was broken, they took too long to fix it. I had to wait for 90 days. They taped the back of my wheelchair. I did not feel good. I was not able to lean back. I usually lean back. I had sores on my bottom. They were painful. I speak for the people who are not able to go to the doctor's.

I would like to invite you to come to Rochester, New York to come to where I work. I want to show you my program. I would like to talk to you about my concerns.

Sincerely,

Thuan Nyugen

dignity: 36

Winter Days

The snow falls from the sky down to the ground.
In December, I saw the snow outside and all of the beautiful Christmas lights.
I look in the window and see the crackling fire in the fireplace.
The stockings are all hung in a row.
People come from far and wide to be around the Christmas tree.
Santa Claus comes down the chimney to bring presents to everyone.
People sing carols by the fire.
Little Town of Bethlehem is my favorite song because they talk about my Father.
The winter is one of my favorite seasons.

The Sound of an Animal

We go out in the water to the ocean.
We hear the sound of an animal.
We see a werewolf nearby in the water.
The werewolf is big and tall.
He is as tall as a house.
His fur is red, white, and blue.
He has big teeth to eat fish with.
I do not know if werewolves eat humans.
We are afraid of the werewolf.
The werewolf almost got in our boat.
If the werewolf go in our boat, there would have been a fight.
I do not know who would have won.
We probably would have been killed.
The werewolf decided not to come into our boat.
A group of dolphins told the werewolf to go.
The werewolf listened to the dolphins because they are friends.
We thanked the dolphins for keeping us safe
And we go out of the water.

The Life of Thuan

I go to Healthy Living on Mondays and Fridays. Healthy Living is a gym. I throw a ball and I roll it. Sometimes it is heavy. I also work with a band. I pull the band towards me. I do a lot of arm work.

I went to the swimming pool. It is on Winton. I go swimming once a week, every Saturday. I swim ten laps every time. Sometimes I go with other people. The people in the pool are the people who work on my legs. They work on my muscle tone. They help me to swim. I like swimming. It makes me stronger.

I go to church on Saturday because sometimes I have to work on Sunday. I like going to church to hear the words of the Father. I like Communion. At the Last Supper, Jesus said to the disciples, "This bread is my body. This wine is my blood." When time is over, there will be a lot of things going on. Communion will make me prepared when Jesus comes. I prepare every day and every night. I pray. There are a lot of things that I only tell Him. It makes me feel better. Sometimes I have no one to talk to, no one but Him. He changed me, and he can change everyone. He changed me for the better. He made me feel good. He opened my heart to helping people. He opened my eyes to see everything from the inside out and to know him more. He opened my ears to hear what is good and what is not. He opened my mouth to talk to the people about Him. He works through people. People work together for

him. Without him, no one would help anyone.

I'm working now. Tomorrow I have a meeting with higher ups. A lot of people are talking about what we're going to do in 2014. They are talking about the project. After tomorrow, I will know what the goal for the year 2014 is. We are selling a lot of things, not just candles. Also, New York State is going to call me back soon for office work. I don't know yet which office; I don't care which office I work for.

I do a lot of copying. I have to learn how to send a fax. I can answer the phone. I copy the paperwork. They give me a lot of paperwork. The copier never breaks. I give people papers for the meeting. I have the minutes. I am working on how to read and write. Right now, I am working on numbers and counting money. I learned how count money. I can count change and dollar bills. The half dollar is my favorite coin because it is newer. It is also bigger than the other coins. I want to know how to count money. I like working on numbers. I am working to get better. I want to be able to add together numbers and to subtract numbers. They are teaching me how to multiply and to divide.

I make copies and learn in the same place. I go Monday through Friday. My favorite thing to do at work is writing. I make flyers. Sometimes I have to give flyers to everyone. I interview people. I do everything. I copied flyers for the advocacy meeting and put them up. I am advocating for something to get done about the project to sell everything. I want everyone to help sell. Right now, not everyone is helping. Also, we talked about hiring people. I am helping with the interviews; I have interviewed a lot of people. I ask questions where they worked before.

9 Questions to ask:

- 1) Are you comfortable with this job?
- 2) Where did you work before?
- 3) Will you work in the community?
- 4) Are you okay with doing personal care?



- 5) How would you handle a stressful day?
- 6) Are you comfortable getting up close and personal?
- 7) What hobbies do you like to work on?
- 8) Are you comfortable making eye contact and smiling?
- 9) Do you have a good attitude and appearance at work?

I want the questions to make people think about the questions. I need to know what someone is going to do to help the people that need help. These questions help me to figure out how someone will react. There are right answers, and there are wrong answers. If someone says a wrong answer, they are not hired. If you want to be hired, you have to say the right answer. I already know what someone is thinking by looking for the inside and not the outside. I see the inside through their eyes. I have already hired a lot of people so I see what they are doing when they answer. I am friendly to all the people I interview; I do not intimidate anyone.

I'll tell you a story. Last year, I did the play in May. They told me to go outside and come back in. I had to skip when I came back in sometimes with two and sometimes with three people.

Last year in November I was in the production of *Peter Pan* at the Kodak stage. I played one of the pirates. I was with the Lost Boys and the Indians. We worked together. We sang songs and danced. My teacher taught me how to dance. My teacher taught me how to sing the song. My teacher also taught me how to warm up my voice. Most shows were sold out. I will return this year for another production. This year there will be two productions so far and more if I get the parts. Last week we had a cast reunion, and it was a good time.

Last year, I was in a concert. I sang with the band. I sang a lot of songs. I sang "You are my sunshine" and "One heart, one love." 45-50 people sang with me. I had a microphone while I was singing; everyone had a microphone. Someone else had a solo.

The Light of the Sun

When the morning came, the sunlight was different colors.

It was red, purple, orange, and yellow.

The sun is happiness.

The sun warms me so I can go outside for exercise.

Exercise makes me healthy and stronger.

Without the sun, plants would not grow.

Without water, plants would not grow.

Plants need to grow stronger too.

I pick flowers after I exercise because flowers are beautiful.

I give some of the flowers to only one woman.

She is my girlfriend.

Sit by the table by the ocean sea

I have dinner with you, with a candle, and a flower.

We go out to the water.

I hear the animals underwater.

We talking all night.

When the morning comes, we look up in the sky to look at the sunrise.

We go out together and look at the blue ocean.

I can see you in the morning,

And say I will see you again.

The Inspiration Project:

Project Director

Joanna Scott

Project Advisers

Deborah Rossen-Knill

Glen Cerosaletti

Project Coordinator

Jenny Boyar

Consumer Adviser

Latrice Person

Consumer Advocates

Marilyn Argenta

Tina Bennett

Gretchen Young-Zeh

Kristi Powers

Anthology Design

Taylor McCabe

Consumers

Patrick Hurley

Chris Thornton

Ruthie Emens

Ann Kurz

Toni Montgomery

Latrice Person

Thuan Nguyen

Tori Bemant

Geraldine Copeland

Jeff Yarmel

Student Collaborators

Jamie Kurtz

Sarah Winstein-Hibbs

May Zhee Lim

Jordana Schmierer

Justina McCarty

Anjalene Whittier

Brigid Hogan

Zach Arnold

Natasha Sacato

Kate Cowie-Haskill

Zarah Quinn

