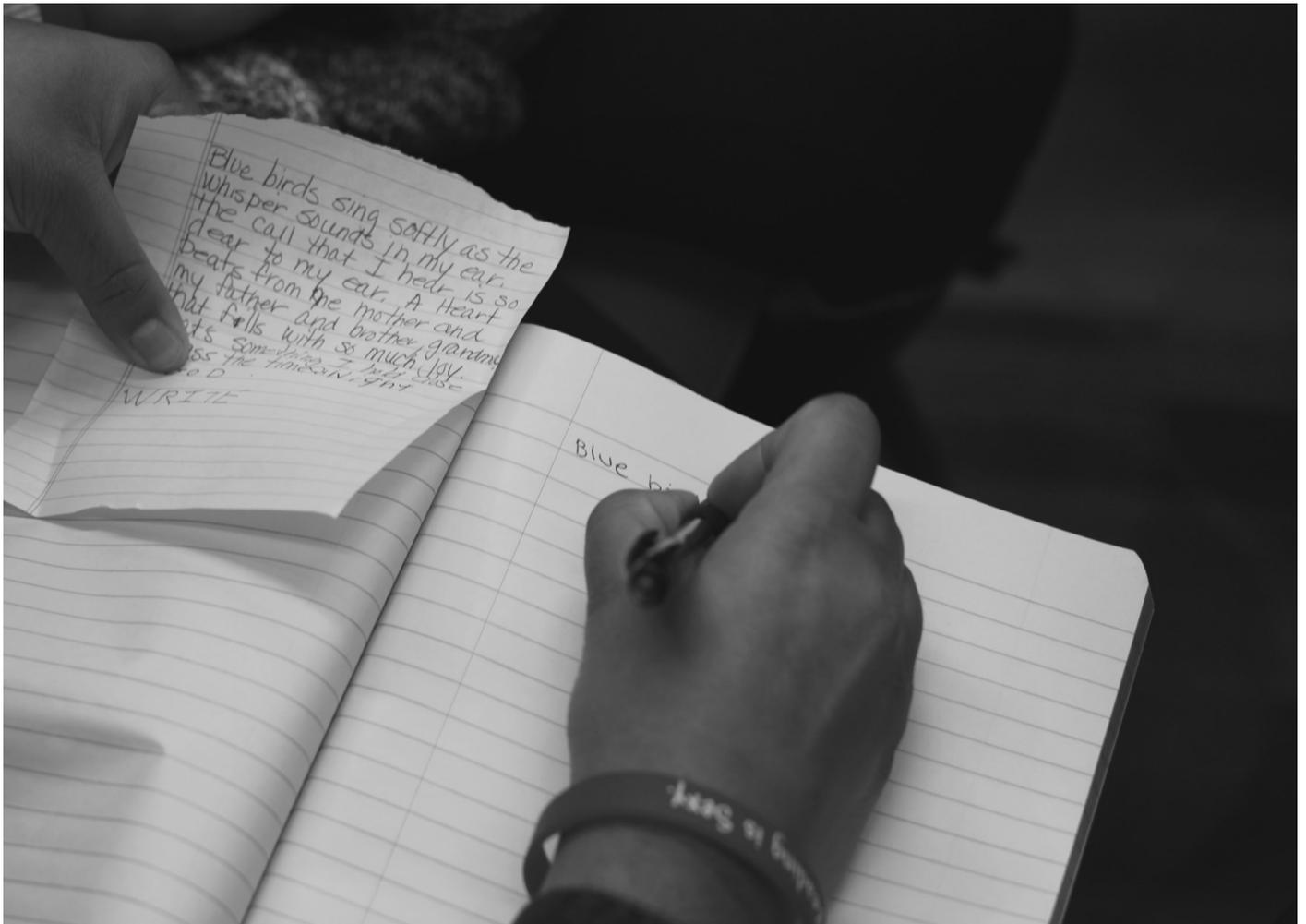


dignity:

creative expressions from the
inspiration project



about:

The Inspiration Project is a volunteer collaboration between the University of Rochester and CP Rochester, a nonprofit organization that supports individuals with special needs. During the spring of 2015, a group of writing students from the University of Rochester met weekly with writers from CP Rochester. Through extensive one-on-one conversations, the UR students and CP Rochester adults have produced the creative works assembled here.

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preface:

Five years ago, on a frigid January evening, students held open the doors at the back of Rush Rhees Library, and in came an intrepid group of adults from CP Rochester, ready for the first session of The Inspiration Project. The project participants gathered in a room in the university's IT Center. No one was quite sure what to expect, but we were all there for the same reason: to write.

We have been writing together ever since. We've created stories and memoirs. We've written poems and plays and letters, filling five anthologies. Through a collaborative process of interviewing and editing, ideas take shape as polished writing. We strive to fill pages with work that deserves to be read.

We are a noisy bunch. If you happen to wander into the rooms at the IT Center on a Thursday night during the spring semester, you will hear a dozen animated conversations going on simultaneously. You will hear the rattling sounds of fingers moving with rapid-fire dexterity over keyboards. You will hear voices expressing wonder, confusion, disbelief, awe, and understanding. You will definitely hear laughter.

At the beginning of our most recent semester, Latrice Person, one of the founders of The Inspiration Project, pointed out that programs tend to be easier to start than to sustain. She was proud, she said, that The Inspiration Project keeps going and going. We have only grown stronger. This year's group is larger than ever. We are getting louder and more proficient. In this new anthology, you'll see that our writers have pushed themselves and tried out new subjects and forms. It's our fifth-year anniversary, and we are only just beginning.

Joanna Scott
University of Rochester
April 25, 2015



Dear Mr. President: A Collage

by Thuan Nguyen
In Collaboration with Sophie Hatch

February-April, 2015

Dear Mr. President,

When I was born, I couldn't walk. My mother, my father, and my sisters took care of me. My father was a captain in the navy for the United States. He was sent all over the world. During the Vietnam War, he told my mother he would try to bring us all to the United States, but after the war he couldn't. My mother had to sell everything to take care of me and my two sisters. I eventually came to the United States, to follow them and to be with them all.

When I was little
and the water came from the sky
I went outside
and played with my friends.
We would play with the water;
we'd scoop it up and splash each other.

Feeling Good
(A Song)

You look like the sunshine.
When I met you, you made me happy.
I looked in your eyes and saw a twinkling of a star.
You make me feel good.

When you need me, girl,
Pick up the phone and I'll come for you.
I'll take you home with me
and you'll be my girl, when I come to you.

I saw you from the inside
and I want to be with you.

Dear Mr. President,

I was in California from 1990 to 2009. The U.S. government sent me there from the Philippines, because my sister, who's one year older than me, was there, where she had a job making shirts. I came on an airplane; my sister helped me with my paperwork. We lived in a house with my mother, my sister's husband, and my niece. In 1998, I applied for U.S. citizenship; at work they had me study for the test, and when I was called for it, I passed. On April 12th, 2000, I became a citizen; at the ceremony I recited the pledge of allegiance with 3,000 other people.

In 1995, I went to school at the community college to learn English as a second language, because I only spoke a little bit.

Trinity

I

The Father taught us how to love someone,
the Father taught us how to pray and worship.

No one but the Father heals us;
when we are sick and in trouble,
the Father saves us.

The Father says, "Love one another like I am loved myself."

When the time comes,
the angels will fight with the Devil to save the world.

The Father gave us the power to fight
the Devil every day and every night.

Dear Mr. President,

Lots of families work hard to take care of their kids, no matter how they're born; but sometimes people need help. Babies born like me should have help no matter how much their families make. Lots of people need help, in lots of different ways. I'm writing to you because I have some suggestions for helping others. The Bible tells us to love each other as we love ourselves. I go to a self-advocacy meeting every month, but I know a lot of people can't. I would like to be a voice for people who don't have a voice.

Winter Days

Every morning when I wake up, I see the snow fall from the sky. The snow is white. The ground is shining with ice. I'm happy to go outside. The van is waiting for me to get in, to drive through the snow and take me to work.

At Work

I have meetings at work; we often talk about the new hires. When the new hires arrive, my boss tells them to come to me. I ask them the interview questions. I ask questions like, “Are you comfortable with the job?” “Where were you previously employed?” or “How do you react to a stressful day?” What we’re really asking is, “How do you react when you get angry?” After I do an interview, I have to do paperwork; if they didn’t answer well, I have to write it down. Sometimes they ask me what I do, and that’s a good sign, because they’re communicating. I look at their insides, not their outsides. If it’s a good interview and they do well, I tell my boss to hire them.

Sometimes at work they send me to pick up something to sell. We go to Marketplace Mall to pick up toys, then we bring them back to work. I take the toys out of the box, and put them in the office. Other people from work sell them. At work I also some-

times go with another person to check the fire extinguishers for safety. I also work with other people to pick up supplies, like tissues, cups, paper towels, forks and spoons, cleaning supplies, and gloves. Sometimes I work in the office; I make copies (as many as 400!), I put out flyers for meetings, and I collect mail, sort it, and put it in the mailboxes. I also sometimes clean the counters and table.

At work, we sometimes make cards for our troops. Every summer we have an art sale to make money. I decorate candleholders to sell.

I started performing in plays in 1991. In 2012, I was in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. In 2014 I was in Seussical. I was a Who. In 2012, 2013, and 2014 I performed in concerts during the summer.

Trinity II

I heard a voice in the sky, in the clouds
I heard the Father call me to do something
He called me to help someone who was sick
He called me to help someone who was in trouble
with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Father told me to love someone who hates me
The Father told me how to talk to those who hate
me

The Father helped me when I was sick
Three times he brought me back from the dead
The Father gives my eyes the power to see,
my mouth the power to talk,
my ears the power to hear,
my hands the power to work.

Winter Days II

In December I see the snow outside and all of the
beautiful Christmas lights.

People come far and wide to be around the
Christmas tree.

Santa Claus comes down the chimney to bring
presents to everyone.

I look in the window and see the crackling fire in
the fireplace.

The stockings all hang in a row.

I go into the house; in the firelight I warm up.

I go back outside to see the stars.

People sing carols by the fire;

“Little Town of Bethlehem” is my favorite song
because they talk about my Father,

Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem.

When He was born, people saw a new star.

When I listen to carols I feel happiness, peace, and

Dear Mr. President,

Here are my suggestions:

1. Create more college and day programs for people with special needs (and people without), so that they can all get the tools they need to learn and to work better.
2. Open more programs to increase the number of physical therapists, doctors, nurses, and others who work with people with special needs—or anyone who needs help.
3. Help create more access for everyone, with new or improved ramps, doors, etc., so that everyone can move around their communities.

Trinity
III

I pray You, Father—
give me the wisdom,
give me the power
to help those in trouble.

Hear me, Virgin Mary—
pray for me,
and pray for the world to be saved,
for us to go to the Father forever.

Please, Father,
open my heart,
open my mind,
open my eyes,
open my hands,
open my ears
so that I may know
what is wrong and right.

4. Help reduce student loans to reduce the debt students carry when they have finished classes.
5. Open more group homes and better support group homes everywhere that already exist; this means making sure they have money to provide day programs (like the one I work through) and to give people opportunities to get out to work and to do activities.
6. Open more nursing homes and better support those that already exist.
7. Help to provide new wheelchairs and communication devices to those who need them, and make replacing them easier and faster.
8. Help to provide safe places to live for the homeless.
9. Help people find work.
10. Help stop violence between people, because we all need peace.

I think these things are very important, because everyone deserves a better life.

It's important that everyone work together to keep the United States moving forward, but some people need a little more help so that they can do their part.

Dear Mr. President,

I invite you to come see me and what I do in Rochester, New York. Here you will see that I, too, am trying to help in my own way.

Please keep the United States safe.

Thank you for listening.



My Magical Trip to Disney

By Tori Bement

In Collaboration with Sally Patel

My mom and I went to go see *A Dolphin Tale 2* in the movie theater. A commercial came on for Disney theme parks. I was sitting forward in my chair as Lumiere described the parks and said, “Be our guest!” in front of Cinderella’s castle. When I saw this commercial, I felt really happy because I have loved Disney ever since I was a little girl. Next, my mom looked over at me and said, “We’re going!” I looked at her in disbelief, I couldn’t believe what she said. I started getting teary-eyed and bouncing up and down just like Tigger. I felt overwhelmed and overjoyed to hear the great news. She told me that my Aunt Kathy and our good friends, Nan and Jennifer, would be going with us to Disney for all of the fun, too. We were going for an AT event that was a 5K through Epcot.

Ataxia-telangiectasia (AT) is a neurological disease. One out of every 40,000 children in the United States is born with AT, and I am one of them. AT is like having all different diseases wrapped into

one. It is so rare that they call it an “orphan disease.” I was not supposed to live past my teens. I am twenty-eight years old and still going strong. Though many people may think otherwise, I am a fully functioning adult.

It was very cold on the morning of the 5k but it was very fun to meet new people who also have AT. They have gone through what I have. On the 5K course, we bumped into Kelly, the daughter of our house’s nurse. She was very energetic. Kelly and her friend were wearing fairy wings and tutus. I wore a Donald Duck sweatshirt that my friend Nan gave me and silver, sparkly Minnie Mouse ears.

After the 5K, we went back to the hotel. As my mom took a warm shower, I watched TV. I found a cool channel that

played all of the old cartoons that I remember from when I was younger. Next, when we were all warm, we went back to Epcot and spent the rest of the day there. First, we went on the ride, Spaceship Earth. They took us on a ride through history in the big ball of Epcot. It was really interesting to learn about it. At the end, they gave us a little treat which simulated our life. They took a picture of our faces and used it in the simulation. I even had to take my Minnie Mouse ears off because we were going backwards down the hill. It was really funny! After we were done with the ride, we went outside and found someone to take our picture with the big ball.

Next, we went to a special soda shop. It was really pretty in the shop with all of the bright colors and the way that it was set up. You could try every soda from everywhere in the world. I tried many flavors of soda but my favorite was a crème soda. Afterwards, we were really hungry so we found a street vendor and got a snack.

Next,





we had a Fast Pass to see Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, and Goofy. First, we met Mickey. He gave me a kiss. Next came Goofy and then, Minnie. They all signed my autograph book. On the way out, we ran into Chip and Dale. Their handler said they had to take a break to drink acorn smoothies but he told us that they would be right back. Their handler told us something very interesting about how to tell them apart. Dale has the red nose and Chip has the brown nose. He said that a good way to remember it would be to think of a chocolate chip nose for Chip! As we waited, we talked to each other.

When they came back, my Aunt Kathy called Dale over and started teasing Chip. She told him, "You're better than Chip!" Chip walked away after this. He knew she was kidding. She got down on one knee and started pleading for Chip's forgiveness. Chip gave her

a hug. As Dale was signing my autograph book, Chip was getting really affectionate with me. He was giving me kisses and hugs. Afterwards, they switched and Chip was signing my autograph book and Dale was being extra friendly. When we were about leave, my Aunt Kathy asked both of them if they would like to come with us to get a drink. They were nodding their heads. They couldn't come because they were working, but I will hold them to their promise and see them next time!

After that, we went on the Land Ride and the Finding Nemo ride but my favorite was Soarin'. They put you and your family on a row of chairs, swing you over to a giant screen, dim the lights, and put on a video of the beautiful California landscapes while you hand glide over them. It felt so real feeling the breeze and smelling the orange trees. I got so into it that I even pulled back my feet to make

sure they wouldn't get wet when we were over water. I was so amazed after this ride, wow!

The next magical day, we went to the Magic Kingdom. There were three surprises when we walked through the gate. First, we were really excited to see Snow White who was in the building right by the gate. I was overjoyed to see Snow White since we were too late to see her the other night in Epcot. Snow White signed my book and I told her that I was really excited to see her because they had cut off the line in Epcot. Then, in the same building, we used our Fast Passes to see Tinkerbell! While she was signing my book, I told her about my tattoo of her on my shoulder. She said, "Wow, you must be brave to get that done!" She also complimented me on my silver Minnie ears and I said, "They're sparkly like your wings and I like anything and everything sparkly."

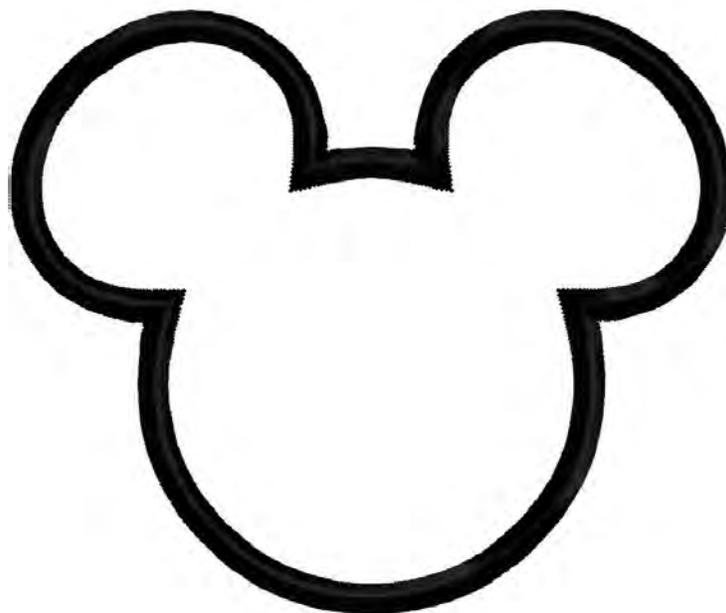
She said, "You're just like me!" We hugged goodbye.

Then, we had an extra special surprise! We used our Fast Pass to see the Magician Mickey Mouse. In the line, the handlers told us to think of a question to ask him while we were waiting. We then went into this magic room. Inside the room, there was a vase. The Magician Mickey turned the flowers into magic wands. There was a big red curtain that Mickey was standing in front of. To our surprise, he began talking- there hadn't been anything like him before as the characters don't usually talk! When it was our turn to meet and greet him, he spent a lot of time with me. First, I gave him a hug. He got down on his knee so that he could be on my level as I was sitting in my wheelchair. I reached out and squeezed his nose, and he laughed. He was the original Mickey Mouse, so I said, "You are what makes Disney special, and I love you!" He responded, "Aw that really means a lot to me, Pal!"

One thing I like to do when I go to Disney is to buy lanyards. Each time, I can buy or trade pins to put on them. This time, we went to a store on Main Street. Here, I bought five pins including the rest of the Princess Collection. Right after this, we saw Marie from the Aristocats in the Town Square. I told her, "Even though you're Duchess's Kitten, you're my cat too!" Then, we hugged and took a cute picture with all of our friends. It was a cool coincidence that all of our middle names were Marie! We had a really great day in Magic Kingdom!

We went around Cinderella's Castle because the tunnel through it was closed. It was exactly like the movie logo, so beautiful. At night it changes to all sorts of colors. Beyond the castle was Fantasyland. We stood in line to see the stepmother and her two daughters, Anastasia and Drizella. Someone came and told me that the fairy godmother was going to be coming out instead. This was probably to relieve the other actors

but I left because I didn't want to see her. I was more interested in the stepmother and her daughters because of Tommy Des Brisay's videos on YouTube. Tommy Des Brisay is an autistic young man and famous runner who taught himself how to speak by watching Disney movies. After I left the line, I went to the Haunted Mansion. It's my favorite ride. I really like haunted stuff and scary movies. The music is great too! They had done some work on it as well. There was new stuff like the hitchhiking ghosts. They had knocking walls and doors. Each time they knocked on the walls, I would always say, "Only if you're a vampire, I'll let you out!" After the Haunted Mansion, I went to Mickey's Musical Symphony. It was an excellent 3-D movie, especially when Donald was tossed off the screen. His bottom was half sticking out of the wall.



Frustration With a Capital F

By Ann Kurz

In Collaboration with Natasha Sacoto

One of the most absurd questions that I've been asked is when home health aide schedulers call to inform me that my aide has called off: "Do you really need an aide?"

Really? What kind of question is that? Do they think I'd put up with all their crap just for the luxury of having an aide? Honey, let me tell you - having an aide is no luxury, it's not like staying in a five-star hotel, having people wait on you hand and foot all day! It's a necessity like bread and water! Still you ask me: Do I really need an aide? Come oooooonnnn! I need them to survive. I have quadriplegic athetosis or more simply put - cerebral palsy. Imagine a Raggedy Ann doll and you'll have a good picture of how CP impacts me. It affects all four limbs and my speech to the point that I need help with the most basic daily living tasks, everything you take for granted like feeding yourself, putting toothpaste on the toothbrush, hooking your bra, pouring a glass of cranberry juice, spreading peanut butter on an English muffin... The list goes on and on. Do they think that I can turn my disabilities on and off depending on whether or not I have an aide? No! Do they think that I can go without food for a day? Don't think so! Do they think they would like me imposing a day of fasting on them whenever I had the whim? Doubtful

Okay, so it's 8:30am now and I've just learned I have no aide. I haven't eaten since 7:00 last night. I'm hungry. I'd better get some breakfast. Hmmm... Pouring Cheerios and milk into a bowl with my hand shaking like a seismograph needle in a magnitude 7 earthquake would be a bit messy. I don't even know if I can lift that full gallon of milk. I'll forego that disaster...I'd love an English muffin, but cutting it open might be dangerous for me and my 3 cats. I'll opt for toast.

8:35: I pull the loaf of bread from the refrigerator to

the counter with the toaster. Ugh, it has a twist tie. Untwisting it without being able to pinch the tie between my thumb and forefinger has forced me to choreograph intricate hand and finger maneuvers reminiscent of those in the Cat's Cradle game. However, like a duck without webbed feet trying to paddle through water, my twist tie do-si-dos get me nowhere fast.

8:45: Ten minutes to take off the twist tie. Now I'm King Kong trying not to mangle the bread as I pull it from the plastic wrap. Unlike twist ties, bread can't withstand my staccato movements and stronghold grip --- and you'd better believe that when I grip, I grip! Looking for a consuming relationship with my toast, I manage to defy my wanton desire to clench my fingers around the bread slices and delicately slide them into the toaster.

8:50: What will I carry the toast to my chair on? A plate? No. The toast would sail like frisbees onto the floor as soon as I picked the plate up. Maybe a cloth napkin is the safest bet. I spread a napkin in front of the toaster, and seeing that the bread is still down, I open up the cupboard to decide what to spread on it. My choice won't be jam because it comes in a glass jar, and I don't do glass. I'd love peanut butter but spreading peanut butter on toast with one hand would be like straightening paper with glue on your hands. Honey in a squeeze container would work though. Darn, the honey is behind the peanut butter jar, which is too wide for me to grab, and next to a jam jar; however, I slide things around like squares on a sliding puzzle and move the honey forward enough to grab it. Wrapping my fingers around the slender container causes my arm to become possessed and it jerks, accidentally knocking the peanut butter off the shelf. Look out, cats! Incoming! Thank goodness the peanut butter jar is just plastic. It's in one piece and won't hurt anything, so I leave it there.

8:57: My next challenge awaits - taking my toast out of the toaster without burning myself. This calls for extreme measures. I begin to operate like Frankenstein. Stiffening my arm for stability while holding a butter knife perpendicular to the toaster, I aim to spear the toast with the knife. Sweat pours down my face as I realize the danger. One false move and I could be toast too! Holding my breath, I ram the knife into the toast, lift my arm, pivot, tilt the knife downward, and the toast falls onto the napkin. Yes! Success! . . . Well, at least for now...

9:02: Spreading honey on my toast proves to be sticky business as my aim is as trustworthy as an arrow sailing towards its mark in gale-force winds. Now for target practice... I squeeze the container, and like bees buzzing from one blossom to the next, my forearm lurches from one slice to the other, catapulting honey drops all over the counter, the floor, and me. I'm lucky to get any honey on the toast really. Perhaps if I aim for the counter, I'll hit the toast. That strategy works fairly well and when I'm finished, my toast looks like a Jackson Pollock masterpiece. Too bad no one is here to gawk at my beautiful artwork, but then again if someone were here, my kitchen wouldn't look like a tar-pit and I wouldn't need to pry my fingers off everything I touch. Maybe Cheerios and milk would have been less messy... too late now.

9:10: Toast is done so let's eat! Right? Wrong! I need a drink. Tea is a no-brainer since I always make tea for lunch. However, my aide usually sets out my mug and puts the tea bag and straw in it ahead of time so that all I need to do is add hot water. But since she's incognito this morning, I'll have to start from scratch. Knocking a mug out of the cupboard and playing Pick-Up-Sticks with the straws adds to the mess at hand. But, who's here to judge? I place the mug in the sink, grab a tea bag, and after a few unsuccessful attempts at dunking the tea bag, I SCOOOOORE! Doing a victory dance, I fill the mug with water and snap on the lid. Piece of cake, I think, until I see the straw on the counter. Ahhhh! I begin a game of Operation, attempting to slide the straw into the lid's hole. I jab the straw numerous times into the top of the lid, thus proving that I ain't no OR doctor. As tea pools on the cover with each stab of the straw, I say to myself, "If my mug were alive, it would be dead," but regardless of my sentiments, I jab and stab, poke and prod, until finally, the straw slides

downward.

9:20: A full 50 minutes later my breakfast of toast and tea is ready! I'm so hungry that my legs are shaking. Carrying the toast and tea to my recliner is like balancing on a tightrope, but I persevere. My breakfast, my sustenance is in sight. I could gulp it down in one bite, but I force myself to eat the cold, cardboard-like toast slowly, savoring each morsel.

9:50: Half an hour later, I wash down the last crumb with the remaining dregs of my tea. What happened to my smorgasbord? Why isn't there any more food? I'm not full yet; I'm still starving. What a wonderful thing anticipation is, transforming my breakfast of toast and tea into a grandiose feast, but meager morsels are my cold reality. People survive on bread and water for days, so I will, too. Now all that's left is to clean up the cyclonic disaster in the kitchen and then shower and dress myself. I should be done by the time my assistant comes at 4:00 this afternoon.

10:00: I don't have an aide, but I'll be fine. I'm starving but who cares? After all, I really don't need an aide!



The Art of Writing

“A picture is worth a thousand words.”

“A word is worth a thousand pictures.”

I like that play on words.

I like to play with words. You can tweak words until people get the true picture. Words are fluid.

But you can't tweak pictures. Pictures are static.

Words leave room for imagination.

Pictures are snap judgments.

And words provide poetic justice

Words can answer any “what if” questions. What if all people were accepted equally?

What if I could encourage inclusion for all?

What if I didn't have cerebral palsy - what would my life be like?

What if I did have cerebral palsy - what would my life be like?

What if I were on Dancing with the Stars? What would I do with my walker? Am I like my great grandma Browne who loved to dance and probably would have been a dancer if she could have afforded such trivial pursuits?

What if I am like my grandma Teresa who loved to teach and if she'd had the chance, would have taught me how to be the change I want to see in the world?

Did you know I taught myself to write? To put pen to paper, to connect the dots, to form letters, to spell words, to compose sentences...to give myself a voice. Why I taught myself to write isn't important - except to say that my teachers and therapists didn't think I could.

To say “you can't” is a sentence. The facts and figures between the capital letter of the diagnosis and the period at the end of the assessments imprison students, trapping them somewhere between can't and won't.

Nobody taught me to write, either. Compose-write, I

mean. Once I'd learned to handwrite, the ideas just flowed naturally from my soul, through my brain, down my arm, into the pen, where the ink gave birth to their visual life on paper.

Nobody taught me to care either. I mean, to care about the problems that seem so external from my daily existence--the silencing, the marginalization, the invisibility, the injustice...

So this is poetic justice.

Ink bleeding from the pen in thin threads streaming in swirls and twirls and whirls across the paper, my lifeline for my voice to ring out strong and clear.

The little black letters chasing the cursor across the blank white page, fingers darting across the keyboard, punctuating the silence with their message, transcribing my ideas into actions.

Written words have power,

Written words are empowering.

Written words woven together wrap around me like a security blanket. They ward off the cold misunderstandings that my spoken words cannot. They comfort my innermost being by lending clarity to my mumbled voice and credence to my character. I rely on written words to insure that people understand my feelings, my beliefs, me.

And through your written words I can understand.

And that is our poetic justice.

4-23-15

Gary

by Ruthie Emens

In Collaboration with Justina McCarty

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

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

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

That birdhouse fell off the windowsill and broke, but now I have a green one in my room. It sits on my nightstand, and whenever I see it I remember waiting for the bus with you when we were kids. It is very cold right

now and snow is on the ground. Sometimes I think about putting the birdhouse outdoors, so that penguins can move in.

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

I picked up the bag and emptied it on the table, and opened the presents inside. There were two new shirts, both short-sleeved. One was yellow, and the other was many different colors. When I was finished opening my presents, you all sang "Happy



Birthday” and we had a chocolate cake, ice cream, and pop.

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

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

After Pat and Chris are finished making breakfast, we all eat together. My new friend MooMoo also eats with us. She’s very nice, but she can’t talk. I know she’s nice because I watch TV with her at night. We sit and watch talk shows and laugh together at the funny things that people say. When MooMoo laughs she covers her mouth with her hands. I love

hearing her laugh. She cries sometimes too, when she’s unhappy. She doesn’t cry when her friend comes to visit her over the weekend, but during the week she cries. I can’t ask her what’s bothering her, since she can’t speak, so instead I sit next to her and rub her back.

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

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

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

At the house, we had a really big dinner on MooMoo’s

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

I like it here at the University of Rochester. Every week I go through the computer lab, and come to a small room at the end of the hall. I come here with many of the people I live with at the group home: Pat, Geraldine, Chris, and Greg. When I am in the small classroom, I get to write. It gives me something to do and makes me feel happy. I write about my family and friends, because I am always thinking about them, and that is how I started to write this letter to you, Gary.

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

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

Love,
Ruthie

Greg's Life Story

by Greg Junious

In Collaboration with Kwanza Warren

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

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

Living in a house with nine people can be very stressful at times, but there are great advantages. I have friends I hang out with. I try to think of a girl I like at Edison. I think

about her and that helps me. I have learned how to get through life struggles myself. My friend Jeffrey comes and helps me. He's a great guy. I really look up to him. I tell him he's my best friend all the time.

Some of the issues that I go through are stress, anger, hostility, or being unable to accept the way things are. I'm not used to annoyances or living with so many different people. I generally like a calmer house. If you give the staff any lip, they will give it right back. I like to do my own thing and have quiet.

Once I got really mad and broke a lot of the stuff in the house. I broke the computer and yelled at the staff. I had to spend several hours at Strong Memorial Hospital that day. I didn't want to

go back to the house after that. I am working through the anger issues and I feel a lot calmer and like I can be more of myself now.

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

have family that really care about me.

There are many things that I enjoy that help me get through difficult times in my life. I like video games, girls, and watching TV. My favorite video



games are on the 3DS. Mine broke on Christmas, the same day I got it. I had it in a stocking stuffer. I was going downstairs, step by step, and I set it down on the chair, and then I sat on the chair and broke my 3DS, but not on purpose! I wasn't paying attention. I should have been, because that thing is no cheap little toy! It's a hand-held system. Now I have to wait months and months until the price goes down, or at least until my auntie can find a new one.

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

Listening to music and having all of my family in my life really help me with my stress and aggression because they are always there for me. I enjoy going over to my uncle's house so he can help take care of me. My uncle just bought me a new TV and I am very happy and thankful for it. I like going to festivals and amusement parks with friends. I like Darien Lake because there are a lot of rides. I like the Superman. You go up, up, up, and then you go

down. You go down fast. One time on the Superman my buckle wasn't latched and I was scared for my life. I was lucky. Just before the ride started someone who works there came over and latched the buckle.

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

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

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

I am looking forward to being myself and looking past my behavioral problems. But I can see some changes happening in my life for the better right now. I'm really glad that I have family in my life.

One of my other uncles is coming back into my life a lot more and wants to be a support system for me. He is going to do everything he can to make sure I get all of the services I need. My family is everything and help with getting me through tough times. It is hard because if I ever got a woman, I don't know how she would perceive me because I am in a wheelchair. It is rare to see women that date disabled men.

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

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

Kitt

by **Jeff Yarmel**

In Collaboration with Nilakshi Mukherjee and Hailey Lawson

Six p.m. on the clock and the silence is sliced by a cellphone ring. I grab the phone. I see the face on the screen; it is my boss. His face is white with fear.

“Hello?”

“Someone needs your help,” Mr. Devin says urgently. “It's about a girl. There's been a break-in”. He tells me the address and explains what has happened.

I tell him I am ready to help.

I fling open the door to the house. The first thing I see is a photograph on the wall. It is a picture of a dog, a golden retriever. I look down the hall and do not see anyone.

I call out, “Is anybody home?” No one answers. I call again. Still no one answers.

As I walk down the hall I hear a sound. It is a dog crying. I go into the family room. I open another door and there, in the next room, is the dog from the photograph.

The dog runs to me. It wants to tell me something. I wish it could talk.

Luckily, I have a car that talks. It's the smartest car in the world. His name is Kitt.

Julie Plummer has gone missing. The back door has been forced open. Her purse and phone have been left behind. There is no ransom note.

Back in the car, I look through Julie's recent phone calls. There was a phone call from her brother. There was a phone call from her boyfriend at 3 p.m. There was a phone call from CVS at 2pm. The most recent phone call was from an unknown number.

I ask Kitt to identify the number. Kitt does not answer. I ask impatiently, “Kitt, who is this caller?” Kitt says, “Hold on a minute, I am thinking.”

While Kitt is thinking I look out the windshield. The street is empty and the streetlights have come on. I glance at my watch and realize that it is 5:15p.m.

Kitt finally traces the number to the person that I believe took Julie. Kitt says to me that he has found the location where the call was placed from.

I speed off with Kitt to the site of an old junkyard. I look around and see some workers mashing the cars together into metal cubes.

I see Julie running away from the bad guys who captured her. I see her struggling to run away. She

needs help. They put her in a red car.

“Leave her alone!” I shout. They don’t listen and slowly approach me. They are mad. They know who I am. They see the word “Knight” on the back of Kitt.

There are five of them. They are wearing T-shirts and jeans. They don’t look bigger than me. I am not afraid of them. I run toward them. It is starting to rain.

Before I left Kitt, I told him to save Julie. My plan was to distract the bad guys in the meantime.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Kitt driving at full force towards the bad guys. Kitt uses his secret hose to launch a surprise attack. The force of the water is so strong that it tosses the men 50 feet back.

I run to the red car that Julie is trapped in. I had a feeling that it would be unlocked because the bad guys knew that Julie was blind and could not escape on her own. Inside the car, I find Julie shaking and confused.

I help Julie walk to Kitt.

We get in the car. Julie says to me, “I have a gift for you. I gave it to Kitt the last time we met. It was for your birthday. I told Kitt to keep it a secret from you. I wanted it to be a surprise.”

Julie takes out my gift from the back of the car. It is a model of Kitt she made herself!

I knew Julie had a dream to drive but had been unable to because she was blind. I wanted to thank Julie and so, I let her sit in the driver’s seat. She drove for the first time. I had never seen Julie so happy.



The Mendon House

by Patrick Hurley

In Collaboration with Brigid Hogan



My family used to live in the house in Mendon. The shutters were green outside the windows, and the house was white, and there were three cars—two in the garage, and then the van in the driveway with the basketball hoop. It was big, each kid had their own room. We were all together in the house. It was noisy sometimes, but it was like the holidays.

At the beginning, we didn't have pets. This was before the

porch, before the horses and our dog, Dairy. We didn't have the pool! We didn't have a barn. Back in the sixties we didn't have much. And then everyone grew up, and we got the horses and the barn and the pool. We went on trips, like going to Ireland, and Boston, and everywhere else. Everyone grew up, and it was just me and my mom in the house when my father passed away. It was too big for just me and my mom. A couple years ago, we sold it to someone else.

This one time, we were living in our old house --and we did have horses by now— we owned our own barn and the two horses lived there. Ginger and Chester- my father named them. He loved it! I think it was Chester -- he was dun colored, and Ginger was brown like a cardboard box. We don't have them anymore -- Ginger was getting kind of mean and she started eating wood. Chester was nice, he didn't leave, he died. I know what he died of, something. Before, when my dad

went out of town on Wednesdays, I would feed them. I would feed the horses and the cats, they ate oats, and hay. Not the cats. They ate a big bag of cat food.

One time, one of the horses got out. He was outside of the electric fence -- he jumped over! Well, you know horses. This was a long time ago, back when we had the van and my sister was driving all side-to-side and swerving. I went with her. And when we came back to the house, we had to call the cops. And the cops called animal control, and they led Chester back to the barn. I think they lassoed him. They had the trooper hats too, and they took a report. They were very serious. My sister was scared, but not me! The horse got off easy, went back to the barn and ate. We had three dogs

at the Mendon house. Not at the same time, but three different dogs -- and we keep the same name. We call them all Dairy. All three of them. I'm not done yet! We had cats. A looooooot. Most lived outside -- but one lived inside with us. And one time, one had kittens, maybe ten. They were in the garage and made a bunch of noise, I would go out and visit them.

The cars were kept in the garage too -- two cars and our van. It was a long time ago. Maybe in the 80's or in the 90's. 20 or 30 years ago. My parents were away on vacation. I didn't have no parties—that, I didn't do. I had some friends over, but we didn't go crazy. I was trying to move my father's Cadillac, to try it out and see how it felt. It was white, not too big. I think it

was probably expensive. I went and got the keys to the car—nobody saw me, not my sisters and brothers. I got in the car and put it in gear to drive. I moved my feet off the break.

The car was going forward. It moved around a lot.

The car went into the white wall between garages, and it hit the back of my mom's station wagon. It hit it so hard that it almost ran into the pool fence (she would have laughed, I know it!). I wasn't scared, though. Me, scared? No. But I was surprised. I wasn't hurt at all.

I shut the car off and got out. I didn't tell anyone. Maybe someone noticed, I don't know. Someone told on me, I think. That's how my parents found out. They were angry. I was



grounded: 4 weeks with no TV. Then I was sad. One of my brothers had a party at his house, and my father said I could get my TV back. I get my Baywatch back. I love that show, it's got the ladies (oh yeah!).

The car was eventually fixed.

But we did have parties, a looooot of parties.

When I turned forty in the spring, it was a huge party, my girlfriend came, and her parents too. We walked around outside, spent the day together, holding hands. The whole family showed up, and we played some country, had cake, I got some presents. And one time, when my sister had her own apartment, like a house kind of, and she cooked for me and my girlfriend Molly. And we lit candles, ate good food, and talked.

One time, my brother John, he hung different lights with bright colors around where the barn was. It was for his graduation. We had a big cook out on the grill. That's what I like! On a nice, warm summer day. There's a round table where we sit there, have a drink, talk and just spend time with each other. We did

have a porch, and sometimes, not only me, we slept on the porch. In the winter we would have a big fireplace to keep us warm. We had a table on the porch and we ate dinner out there and fall asleep with the crickets. We played games, threw the football on the grass. Sometimes we played basketball in the driveway, with the hoop over the garage. We had two garages for the car, but they moved the lawnmower to the barn ... after you know.

But I love being around family all day – we do a lot of stuff. There's an in ground pool in the back of the house. My nieces and nephews will play with me in the pool – playing water polo, doing tricks like when your hands are on the bottom of the pool and your legs are up in a handstand.

In the fall when the leaves come down, I'd help my family raking them – that's the fun part. It was a big lawn, my brother would take the lawnmower to mulch the leaves up, and then we would rake.

Cause we got a lot of trees there! When we were raking, we would make a huge pile, and jump in. Some trees had some fruit on them, like we had an apple tree, and a peach tree, and a pear tree. We would pick the fruit right off, and sometimes I'd feed it to the horse.

In the winter, I'd lie on my back and move my arms around to make snow angels.

I would take the ice and the snow off the car. Christmas Day, we have people come over, and we open presents and have a big dinner. The night before, on Christmas Eve, we go to church. In that time, my mom was singing in the choir, it was nice to hear her sing. We all sang, at least I know I do! Hymns and Christmas carols, I do both.

We still drive by the Mendon house when we go to church – and we still go to church out in Mendon We point it out and say hi to it – I know I do. We still talk about the house, my family does. I think they love it. It was a lot of parties, and campouts, and being with family. I miss it. But I still see family, almost every day, and it's always good, even without the house.



Dream Journal, Real Journal

by Toni Montgomery

In Collaboration with Rutul Amin



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

August 15, 2014

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

I just signed some copies of my book for these famous actresses and actors. I got to meet Tyler Perry,

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

August 18, 2014

My staff comes to knock on my door in the morning. "Time for meds, Toni!" they say. Then I eat breakfast. I like peanut butter. I put it on toast. I drink my coffee with sugar and cream. Now I'm awake! I

get myself ready to go to Program. The first thing I do at there is drink a second coffee. Class starts at 9:30am. We talk about how to find a job in the community. We talk about skills like dressing right, nice hair, filling out an application. I want a job writing more stories. I want to publish my book so people can read it.

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

August 19, 2014

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

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

August 20, 2014

At 2:00pm, I leave the Program center in a van. I go back to my home on Brooks Avenue. I take my meds and relax. I watch some TV. I love Housewives of Atlanta. At 10:00pm, I lay down on my bed. I write

about my day in my journal. I do this often. I write about meeting actors. I write poetry. I write to myself. Here's an excerpt:

Dear Tyler Perry,

I watch your movies.

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

Send Pictures of you.

Good actor, that time you dressed like woman

When is your next movie?

I really want to meet you.

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

You are a good person and are really funny.

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

Write back soon!

p.s. This is Toni Montgomery

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

August 21, 2018

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

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

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

August 22, 2014

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

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

August 23, 2014

It's Saturday morning. I sleep in until 11am. I had some cereal. I go to Walmart and get my nails done. Pink nails, always. I head back home, go up the stairs to my room, and watch some movies. Guess which kind? Tyler Perry ones! Today I chose to watch Good Deeds. Oh! It was so good. I eat something sweet,

like a banana. I relax. It's the weekend. Tomorrow, I will do the same thing, except I won't change my nails.

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

August 24, 2014

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

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

August 25, 2014

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

Comeback

by **Chris Thornton**

In Collaboration with Zach Arnold

It was the 1992 football season for the Buffalo Bills, the last game of the regular season. The starting quarterback for the Bills was Jim Kelly, who had led the Bills to two Super Bowls. Jim Kelly was a super quarterback. The Bills were 11-4 and were playing the Houston Oilers on a Sunday night. It was about the seventh minute in the second quarter when Jim Kelly went down with a knee injury. I was upset because he had a family who was watching and they never wanted to see him get hurt. The team was disappointed because he was a quarterback who put time into practice, scrimmages, and warm-ups. He was a man who was a good-sport and a hard-worker that would be missed. The Bills had to turn to their backup quarterback Frank Reich. In college, Frank Reich played for Maryland where he led a miracle comeback against the Miami Hurricanes. Reich would not play as well as Jim Kelly. Reich did not play as well because got sacked many times. The Bills would lose the game 27-3, I was mad at the Houston Oilers for beating them.

The Bills were luckily still

in the playoffs. They were going to play the Houston Oilers again. We planned to watch the game on TV at my parent's house on Henrietta. The game was not going to be on TV because the Bills did not sell out the stadium. We had to listen to the game on the radio, but I did not mind because I enjoy listening to games. We planned a big party with pretty much everyone in my family. A lot of people in my neighborhood were going to be listening to the game. It was going to be an important game. There was a little bit of talk about Jim Kelly not playing. But I was not nervous because I still felt that the Bills could win the game. On the Saturday before the game I was sitting in my house doing nothing. I was thinking about the game and how I could help out with the party. I was excited for the party and the game to begin.

Sunday came and it was game day. I helped get ready for the game by bringing food into the house like chips, pizza, hot sauce, and ice cream. I also moved some furniture around to help organize people sitting down. As people came into the

house at noon I helped them with their coats and hung them up in our closet,; it was only five coats so it was not exhausting. After I hung up the coats I would offer them food. As people came into the house I asked them how their weekend was and how their families were doing. I was happy to see everyone. My Uncle Steve was worried about the game because he thought they would not make it farther in the playoffs. After talking to my uncle I was a little nervous, but not very much. People talked and talked before the game. People were talking about work and about life in general. They were all drinking beer and wine out of glasses. It was one o'clock and the game was about to start.

I was upset during the first quarter because the Bills didn't make a touchdown on the first drive. Houston had scored a touchdown. My family was disappointed by the early lead. I was a little disappointed with the ref in the first quarter. I stood up, had a hissy fit, and yelled at the radio that the ref was a 'butthead'. The Bills managed to get a field goal right near the goal line. Buffalo

getting a field goal was okay because Houston's defense was playing well. They could always score touchdowns later on.

Houston's defense had cut down the Bills' offense. Their defense got a lot of sacks, they were stopping the running back, and intercepted passes. By the second quarter I was kind of bummed. Houston gained a lot of first downs in the second quarter and managed to score 3 touchdowns, Houston's offense was on fire. Houston went up 28-3 to end the first half. The Bills were not playing very well. My family was upset because the team was down by such a large score. My family still thought they could win though because the Bills had played well in the game before the other Houston game. While we were waiting for the game to come back on I had a 7-Up, my favorite soda that I always have once a day. I also had some cheese, crackers, and pizza because I was really hungry. I talked to my dad at half time. We talked about the game and how terrible the Bills were in the 1st half. I asked him about how he was doing at work; he was doing well at the Munro Plant. My dad was the man who taught me the most about football. I also talked to my dad's friends, just to see how they were doing.

I went back to my seat on the couch to listen to the rest of the game with pizza on my plate. The third quarter started with Bubba McDowell of the Oilers intercept-

ing the Bills' pass and returning it back for a touchdown. The Oilers were now up 35-3 and I could not believe it. I still had some hope but the Bills needed a miracle to come back. The Bills started again with Kenneth Davis running in for a touchdown at the goal line. The Bills were now at 35-10 and people were so happy they were jumping up and down. Don Beebe was next to score by catching a pass at the 20 and running into the end zone for another touchdown. Andre Reed was next to score with two different catches and brought the score to 35-31. Reed was a great receiver who led the team to the Super Bowl twice. The Bills were only down by four and my family knew that they could come back. They were excited because it was a close game.

The Houston defense improved at the beginning of the 4th quarter, but their offense was sloppy. Reed showed how good a player he was when he scored his 3rd touchdown without Jim Kelly throwing to him. Buffalo would take the lead 38-35, this would be the first time Buffalo would take the lead. My family was now giving each other high-fives in happiness for the lead. Buffalo's defense was going after the Houston quarterback. Bruce Smith had gotten a sack but the play was called back for a roughing the passer penalty. Houston was happy about the penalty, but Houston's quarterback Warren Moon was slow to get up. Warren Moon had lead Houston to

a good regular season, and was trying to lead them throughout the playoffs. Moon would lead Houston to the 15-yard line for a short field goal to tie the game. The score was tied at 38 and the game was going into overtime. My family was bummed about the field goal, but I had a feeling it was going to end up in overtime. Overtime was going to start right away so I stayed in my seat.

Houston won the coin toss to start with the ball. I was a little bit scared and worried because Houston could score and win the game. Moon would throw 2 passes out of bounds. Moon would then overthrow his receiver and the ball would end up in the hands of Nate Odoms for an interception. Jeffries of Houston grabbed Odoms facemask and a penalty flag was thrown. Buffalo would start 20 yards away from the end zone. I found myself jumping up and down with happiness, I even did my famous happy-dance. I would grab my hips and swing them back and forth. Everyone in my house was jumping up and down with me. I thought they were going to win at this point. Curtis Davis only ran two short runs to set up the field goal because there were no time outs left to score a touchdown. Steve Christie went on to kick the game winning field goal!

Everyone was screaming and jumping up and down at this point. I talked to my father's friends about the field goal. Every-

one was calling the game a miracle. This would be the greatest game I would ever see. By the end of the game people were tired and left my house. I helped clean up the house; it was only a little bit dirty. I also helped clean the dishes and put them in the dishwasher. I was still happy and excited about the game even while cleaning up. After I was done with the dishes I talked to my sister. We talked about the game winning field goal and she said she was excited too. I went to bed at the end of the night. It was really past my bedtime at this point.

The next day I went to school. All of my friends were surprised by the game. A couple of kids even wore Bills jerseys to school. Even my teachers talked about the game winning field goal a little bit. The news called the game a marvelous comeback. The Bills were going to play the Pittsburgh Steelers in the next round. My father thought that the Bills would beat the Steelers. My dad turned out to be right, they won the game 24-3. The Bills played very well throughout this game. The Steelers game was not nearly as close. The Bills would

then play the Miami Dolphins. They would win again 30-13. I was not as surprised about this win. The Bills would move on to the Super Bowl against Dallas.

Dallas would win the Super Bowl 52-17. I was not that disappointed. The Bills always lose in the Super Bowl. There were a lot of ups and downs but the Bills had a good season. The Bills would still be my favorite team, because I do not like the other teams.



Kwanis: *This Is My Story*

by Geraldine Copeland

In Collaboration with Siri Kanya Ganti

Introduction:

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

Grandma is Fun to be with!

When I was younger, I did a lot of things to help people. I helped my grandma out a lot. I helped clean dishes, emptied the dishwasher. I didn't want her to do it by herself; I chose to help her out. And then my grandma would let me spend the night. And you know what? I did it and I felt good.

My grandma Sadwack is Lithuanian. I was more Lithuanian than my sister, because I was over at my grandma's place more than my sister. One time, she took me to the store. She said I could buy something and I was going to buy something red. But the lady at the lipstick counter said don't buy red because Lithuanians get mad when they buy red.

She took me out to dinner many times. Once I had frog legs! They tasted like fish. We also ate pickled herring once at my Grandma's house. They were so good. I like food a lot.

My grandma and I cooked together a lot. I helped her cook lasagna. First you start with the noodles in the pot; you put them in the pot until the water boils. Then you put them in the pan, with

sauce and cheese over them. Then another layer, and another. Six layers with Monterey jack cheese, shredded and sprinkled all around! And then finally you put it all in the oven. I loved it! Grandma Sadwack and I talked while we were cooking. I felt happy.



Moving to the Group Home: CP Rochester!

After that, the next time I felt happy was at my CP Rochester group home. When I first came to CP Rochester I met Debbie. I took care of my friend Debbie's cat, Willie, when she got sick. I cleaned the litter box. I groomed and fed Willie. He liked to come in my room a lot. When my friend Mary-Ellen got sick, I took care of her cat Snow White too. I love taking care of cats.

In CP Rochester, I helped out at two nursing homes. I helped them play balloon volleyball at one and bingo at another. At the first nursing home, most of them are in

wheelchairs so that's why we used balloons. They couldn't go too far to get them, so I would go in and fetch the balloons for them.

I also went to a different nursing home and helped them play bingo. The friends at the nursing home and all the staff were friendly. They asked me what my name was and I gave my name: Geraldine. They gave me snacks after bingo.

Kwanis is Very Fun! We do a lot!

I want to tell you about Kwanis. Kwanis is where people help each other and we have fun. I

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

We are donating bookmarks that we make to the Brighton Public Library. We made 500 already and put stickers on them. These bookmarks are for all the children that come to the Brighton Library-- I would love to keep one for myself!

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

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

Kwanis also taught me how to make blankets by tying fabric into knots. The day we were making blankets, people were in a hurry because they didn't have enough time to stay there. I had to have two people help me, which was very nice of them! The blankets we made at Kwanis were all donated to a woman's shelter because they don't have their own blankets. When women get abused they go to that shelter. When the women are ok, they can go home

and take the handmade blankets with them -- it's a piece of Kwanis that they can take with them and remember to feel good and strong. I would give blankets to people in hospitals, too, because they need some warmth and love from a blanket.

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

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

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

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

The End



Snowy's Adventure

by **Latrice Person**

In Collaboration with Cat Sbeglia

Once upon a time, Cory's mom makes her a cake for her 9th birthday. In the corner of the room, hiding behind an indoor plant, is a white box with a red bow. At first, Cory thinks it might be a dollhouse. After they eat cake, her mom brings over the box and gives it to Cory.

She feels something shift in the box. And then there is a yip from inside. At first, she is scared because she doesn't know what it is. But it's definitely not a dollhouse. She takes the lid off carefully, and inside is a puff of white stuff. It is a puppy! She lifts the dog out of the box, and puts him on the carpet. He sniffs around. He looks like a big ball of snow. He is a Bichon Frise. Cory names him Snowy.

After a couple months, Cory and Snowy are good friends. He jumps on the couch when he sees her coming home from school through a window. When she gets inside, Snowy pants and wags his tail.

Before Christmas comes along and Cory gets all her toys and dolls, Cory's mom gets a phone call from her granddad. It shocks her mom first. She has trouble trying to find the words to tell Cory. So she gets her second cousin, Melissa, to come over, and they tell Cory together.

Cory is very sad, and she gets a little mad. She is mad because she doesn't believe her mom. She wants it not to be true.

She goes upstairs because her grandma used to be in the guest room. She would come over and play with Cory all the time.

Her mom knocks on the door. She gives Cory a hug. After Cory calms down, she plays with her blocks. She colors a little bit, and then she holds a big teddy bear that her grandma gave her. It's a big black teddy bear. Snowy comes up to her and wants to play catch with her. She feels better.

Cory's mom and Melissa write everything in a little book. When Cory comes down, she sees a little book on the kitchen table. It's purple, and has an angel on it.

"What is this?" she asks. Melissa reads it to her. It's about a little girl and her grandma. She goes on these adventures with her grandma, playing hide and go seek, and they go to the store, they do different kinds of things. And then one day, her grandma gets sick and she dies. But then, the girl already knows that her grandma is a little bird in heaven looking down on her, to keep her safe.

She thinks about her grandma a little bit. She thinks that her grandma wouldn't want her to be sad, so she wants to help her mom. She wants to help make pictures for the people at the funeral, do flower decorations, help her family with the preparations. Snowy starts to sleep in Cory's bed every night. She is comforted by his warmth.

The funeral is in Brooklyn,

and because her aunt and uncle live there, Cory, her mom, and Melissa go over to their house before the service. Even though Brooklyn isn't very far from where Cory lives in Manhattan, she takes Snowy with her. Cory wants to bring Snowy to the church with them as well, but her mom explains that doing so wouldn't be appropriate. A funeral is no place for a dog. Fortunately, Snowy is sleeping when they leave.

Later, Snowy wakes up, and realizes that he is locked in his crate and doesn't see Cory anywhere. Snowy has never been left alone before, so he is scared. Someone is usually home with him. He starts to shake all over and cry. Suddenly, Snowy hears the jingle of keys in the lock on the front door. Now, he is even more scared. He begins to bark and tries to break the latch with his snout.

He successfully breaks the latch, just as the front door creaks open, and then slams shut. Snowy's shaking gets worse and he lets out a yip. He steps out of the crate onto the brown, wooden floor of the apartment. Then, he hears footsteps coming towards him.

A man enters the room, and Snowy starts barking at him. He thinks this is an intruder, but really it's just Cory's uncle coming home from work.

"Hi, Snowy!" Cory's uncle reaches for Snowy, trying to pet

him.

But this action startles Snowy, and he backs away. He sees that one of the living room windows is open, and so he lunges out of the window.

“Come back!” Cory’s uncle shouts after him.

After wandering the neighborhood for some time, trying to find Cory, he meets a stray cat, named Fur ball, in an alley. Fur Ball is gray with blue eyes like water. He knows all about New York City because he has been living on the streets for a long time. He is cool, like one of those slick cats. Snowy approaches him because he is hungry and Fur Ball happens to be standing near a trashcan full of food.

“What are you doing here? I don’t know you. Get away from me,” Fur Ball says.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m trying to find my owner,” Snowy answers. “Can you help me?”

Fur Ball thinks about it for a moment. “No,” he says, snarling. Snowy jumps, but when Fur Ball walks away, Snowy follows him.

“Stop following me! Go home!” Fur Ball yells.

Then, Snowy starts whimpering.

Fur Ball slows down at the sound of Snowy crying. He turns around, and goes back towards the trashcan where Snowy still stands, his tail and his head down.

Fur Ball starts to dig around in the trash. Eventually, he pulls out a pizza crust with his mouth. He places the crust on the concrete in front of Snowy, and then nudges it towards him.

“Here,” Fur Ball says, “you can have this.”

Snowy stops crying. “Thank you.” He smiles and wags his tail before happily eating the pizza crust.

While Snowy eats, Fur Ball thinks up a plan. He decides that because it’s springtime in New York, there will be a lot of kids in the nearby park, and that one of the kids is probably going to want to take the puppy home. Then maybe they will find his real owner.

“I got this plan,” Fur Ball says when Snowy has finished the crust, “I know people, and I know that people love dogs.”

The park has a swing set and a slide. There are little boys and girls and their mothers all around. Snowy and Fur Ball play with a ball together, taking turns pinning each other down.

Suddenly, Fur Ball spots a boy. He has black hair and is wearing glasses. He is sitting on a bench by himself, looking lonely. Fur Ball thinks he looks about eight-years-old.

“Hey,” Fur Ball says to Snowy, “that boy looks lonely. Maybe you should go play with him.”

Snowy is shy, but then he thinks about how Fur Ball is courageous. At first, he moves slowly towards the boy, but then becomes excited at the thought of being around another little boy or girl again, and so he starts to run, his tail wagging happily.

Snowy barks to get his attention. At first, the boy is startled, but he sees Snowy’s green eyes, mostly happy, but with a hint of sadness, and changes his mind. He leans down

to pet Snowy. This makes the boy feel sorry for him, but he is also very excited to have found a puppy!

He picks up Snowy and brings him to his mom, who is standing a few feet away, talking to another mom. He taps her on the elbow to get her attention. She turns around, and looks down.

“Mom, look. I found a puppy. Over by that tree over there,” he says.

“Brandon, you can’t keep that puppy. He’s probably really dirty,” she responds.

“I’ll give him a bath right when we get home,” he says, eagerly.

His mom sighs. “Let me call your father.”

Brandon smiles.

As they leave the park, Snowy looks for Fur Ball. He eventually sees him by the tree where they were playing. Fur Ball raises his paw in farewell.

When Brandon’s father comes home later that evening, he sits Brandon down at the kitchen table. He is a little nervous about what his dad is going to say.

“You can keep the puppy for now, but you have to put up flyers first. And if no one claims him, then he can be yours. But if someone calls and says he belongs to them, you have to give him back. Deal?”

Brandon is somewhat shocked, but agrees.

That night, curled in a ball beside Brandon, Snowy can’t help but dream about Cory. In his dreams, they are playing together. He yips excitedly in his sleep. But in the middle of the night, Snowy wakes up to the



realization that he is not home, and that the person sleeping next to him is not Cory. This makes him anxious and upset. He really misses her, and he wants to go home. He wonders if she misses him too, and he wonders where she is. He hopes someone is taking care of her.

The next day, Brandon notices that Snowy is refusing to eat, and won't play with him. He thinks this is because he is sad and misses his real owner. He approaches his father, and says, "Maybe we should start those posters now, and see what happens because I think the puppy is sad here."

His dad puts a pile of paper in the printer. He then helps Brandon take a picture of Snowy, and upload it to the computer. They work together on the computer making a flyer with their telephone number and the picture of Snowy. When they're done, they print them all out.

They put the flyers around their neighborhood, and then go

back to the park where Brandon first found him, and hang some there. He even gives a copy to his teacher.

A few days after the flyers have been hung, Brandon's father gets a phone call from Cory's mother. Cory's cousin, who happens to attend the same school as the boy, recognized Snowy in one of the flyers that was hung up near the principal's office.

They arrange to meet at the park where Snowy was found that afternoon. Cory goes with her mom, and nervously wonders if it is truly her dog.

Cory and her mom sit on a bench, waiting for the man and his son to arrive. She bites her nails. She has always had that habit. She also giggles nervously and fidgets with anticipation.

Then, Cory sees in the distance a ball of white fur walking beside two people. Slowly, they get closer until they are close enough for Cory to recognize that it is definitely Snowy.

She gets off the bench, and kneels down on the pavement. "Come here, Snowy!" she shouts.

At first, Snowy doesn't react, but then in a burst of excitement he rushes into her arms. Cory hugs Snowy tightly. She is so grateful that she didn't have to lose two loved ones.

Brandon and his father finally join them at the bench. Cory's mom shakes the father's hand, thanking him.

Cory stands up, and says to Brandon, "Thank you so much."

Brandon is very sad to give up the puppy, but he knows it's the right thing to do, and when he sees how happy Snowy makes Cory, he can't help but be happy himself. He looks up at his dad. "Will I get to see him again?"

Before he can answer, Cory's mom says, "You can visit Snowy anytime you want. You can even dog sit for us."

While walking out of the park, Cory looks up at the sky, and whispers, "Thank you, Grandma."

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