

dignity:

creative expressions from the
inspiration project



Spring 2018 Volume 8

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 2018, 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.

acknowledgments:

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table of contents:

preface 2

introduction 3

Operation Disney — Tori Bement Schramm 4

The Life I Live — Thelma Barnes 9

The Summer Journey — Jeff Yarmel 15

At Least it’s Something Different — Charlene Furhy 18

Toni’s Dream House! — Toni Montgomery 24

A Visit to My Mother’s New Home — Pat Hurley 26

Amanda and Chris — Chris Thorton 29

All Kinds of Things — Geraldine Copeland 33

Motorsports, Football, Hockey, Wrestling,
Basketball, and Disneyland — Russell Hill 38

How the Whale and the Giraffe Became Friends— Caitlin Weir..... 45

preface

What's in a name? That question is both a cliché that invites yawning and an incitement that provokes yelling. The yawners will tell you that a name is just a word, that it cannot determine anything more than where you stand when you line up in ABC order in grade school. The yellers will insist that a name tells you who you are, that it gives you a way to stand out the next time someone tries to tell you to get in line. For anyone called “disabled,” both are true. Anyone with a disability knows how it feels to wait in line, be called by name, and then have that name replaced by a condition typed on a doctor's admissions form. But people called disabled also know the value of a name. For a person called disabled, there are few things as gratifying as the simple statement “I did it,” the simple act of putting a name on one's own work. That is what every writer wants to do, and that is what every writer involved in the Inspiration Project has done.

“Inspiration Project” is a name that some have questioned. Those who question it will tell you that it makes the story of disability into a tale about overcoming the obstacle of having a body or a mind that works differently. But “Inspiration” is what participants in this program feel in each other's company. “Inspiration” is how most daydreamers would describe a writer who has taken the risk of revealing private imagining in a public reading. If there is a story of inspiration to be told in this volume, it is no more and no less than the story of inspiration that attends any act of writing. It is the story of moving from silence to expression, from being named to giving names.

In some ways, every writer is a name giver. Everyone who wishes to write begins with a blank page—the writer is the person who sees this page as open, rather than empty, as a garden to till, rather than a desert to cross. Each of the writers in this volume have made a commitment to confront the blank page and have made a story of it not through inspiration, but through work. They have done so in two rooms of their own, on Thursday evenings, where they have gathered to work for twelve weeks. Their rooms are on the bottom floor of the Rush Rhees Library and are so recently built that there is no gum on the bottoms of the chairs, or stray pencil marks on the walls. Here, they talk and laugh like relatives returning to the old family homestead to look through photo albums and swap familiar stories.

You will read those stories in these pages. As you do, I ask that you keep these words, spoken by writer Latrice Person, in mind.

She says that the writers collected here are “doing this for other people that have a good outlook on life. This program can change other people's lives. People can have criticism . . . we don't have to inspire everybody.” It's true. But for those who write, it is less often the story told and more often the act of telling that inspires. That act has many names—“creativity,” “work,” and “truth” among them. Today, with this volume, it takes on a new name—“ours.”



— Nick Knopf,
Department of English, University of Rochester

introduction

The reason we started this program is to show society that people with disabilities can write and be creative like anybody else. We have a lot to say and you can learn so much from us. If you listen you can hear our stories and be inspired by our lives.

People with disabilities are just like you and me but they have some challenges. Everybody has challenges in their life; it's the way they overcome them that should make a difference.

If you didn't know me you would probably look at me and think I'm weird or I can't talk, but once you get to know me you would see that I'm very intelligent and have a lot to say.

I like the Inspiration Project because the students that I work with here are open-minded and well-rounded young adults who like to learn and make new friends. This is our little action to make the world a better place for people who want their voices heard.

— The Lovely Latrice Pearson



Operation Disney

By Tori Bement Schramm
In collaboration with Madeline Bove



On Saturday, September 30, 2017, my mom, my fiance Brandon, his aunt Sandy, and I went to Florida for a week. We left the house at 7:30AM for a 10:00AM flight. First, we met at a little café in the airport. I had met Sandy before and I didn't remember her, but by Monday she would become my family. We had donuts and hot chocolate.

Soon, we were ready to get on the plane. We were so excited to go to Florida. We were laughing and talking together. I didn't even need my portable DVD player. Finally, we pulled up from the gate and we were in the sky flying high with Tinkerbell.

Soon, we were in Disney! We got off the plane and we had our own van pick us up to take us to Shades of Green, the hotel

which is on the grounds of Disney. The hotel was beautiful, it was an amazing sight when you walked in. It had a two-story high waterfall in the entryway. It was a surprise to see and hear a waterfall inside a hotel. We went to our room and we kept getting lost; it was so huge, like a maze. We got to our room. We got unpacked and then we were off to Disney.

For the rest of the evening we went shopping at Disney Springs and at The Lanyard Store. I got a *Nightmare Before Christmas* lanyard. It was dripping rain most of the day and we walked to Planet Hollywood for dinner. We ate on the balcony. It started pouring midway through dinner. We all put on our ponchos and walked through the rain. It wasn't a cold

rain, so we marched through it. I had a light blue poncho, Brandon had a red poncho, Sandy had a yellow poncho and Mom had a purple poncho.

The next day, Sunday October 1st, was sunny and bright. The first thing we did was wait for the monorail. We were waiting for the arrival into the Park. I was looking around for Cinderella's castle. When I saw the castle I started jumping up and down in my chair and happy-crying. I just love it there so much. When we got into the park I shouted, "I'm here!"

First thing we went to a restaurant called the Crystal Palace with the Pooh characters. We saw Piglet first, Tigger second, Eeyore third and then silly old Pooh Bear! We got pictures with all the characters. My fiancé asked Eeyore if had his tail. Eeyore turned around and showed him he still had the tail! Then we went to Mickey's PhilharMagic Concert. It is a 3D movie where Donald Duck steals Mickey's sorcerer hat and travels through different Disney movie scenes until Mickey gets his hat back. Then, Donald flies off the screen and you see Donald's butt hanging off the back wall. That was my favorite part.

After we saw four princesses. We saw Rapunzel, Jasmine, Cinderella, and Aurora, too. After that we went to Gaston's Bar. We had Lefou's Brew. My fiancé had flavored water. We didn't meet Gaston because the line was too long but we saw him from afar. We did the Pooh ride after and then the Enchanted Tales with Belle, which is a little interactive play. I was the first one to see Belle. She is my favorite princess! By the time we got out of that it was raining so we did the Little Mermaid ride which was inside. It was cool in there, too. My family and I have been on that ride before during another trip to Disney. I also watched it being built online. It is cool to see something you have been watching be built. That night we almost fell asleep on the bus.

We went to a little bar in the hotel. I got chicken fingers. They were nice and tender. Brandon got a hamburger.

Monday, October 2nd I woke up shaking with excitement. It was sunny. We all got dressed up in our formal wear. Brandon went to his Aunt Sandy's room to get dressed. My mom and I got our dresses on. I was wearing a wreath of white and blue flowers in my hair, a light-blue sundress, soft-blue flats, and a little bit of makeup. My bouquet was white too. Finally, I put on my Cinderella carriage necklace. I was so happy I couldn't stop smiling. We were going to a wedding. My wedding!

Brandon and I met in front of the elevators. As soon as I saw him I got butterflies in my stomach! He took my hand and we rode down in the elevator. He put his mobile cane on the back of my chair. We went downstairs to the lobby and took family pictures. Our Fairy Godmother Kelly, who is the daughter of our nurse and who is the events planner at Shades of Green, surprised us with a whole ceremony in the ballroom. When I first saw it, my eyes got so wide and I couldn't imagine I was getting married in a ballroom. We were so excited about the ceremony we couldn't stop talking. She had the kitchen make our cake. It was yellow like Belle's dress and had a little cup with a rose on it. It was chocolate-peanut butter. She tried her best to get Belle and the Beast there but she couldn't. It was okay, though, because we saw them in the parade. I rode down the aisle to my favorite song "Beauty and the Beast: Instrumental." Aunt Sandy texted Brandon's mom a picture of us together. Brandon wore some tan shorts and a light-blue tee-shirt that looked like a tux. Brandon's mom texted "Where are the black pants?" and I said, "It is too hot!" so his Aunt texted his mom that. She texted Sandy back to say "Already!? After five minutes?!" After five minutes of

Brandon and I being married I was already standing up to her.

After the ceremony we went back upstairs. Mom and Sandy put their regular clothes on and we went to the Park. First thing we did was get a front row seat for the Fantastic Parade. All the Disney characters were admiring my ring and when Snow White saw my wreath she pretend sneezed and said “No fresh flowers for Sneezy!” The parade was amazing, as all the parades are, because of all the floats and Disney characters. There was even a giant mechanical dragon that breathed fire. Then, we went to Tony’s from *Lady and the Tramp*. Brandon and I got spaghetti and we took a picture of the two us sharing a piece like in the movie. It was really hard to not bite down on the pasta!

Then we went and saw Tinkerbell. I was very excited to see her. I have a tattoo of her on my shoulder. She had a lot of glitter on her and she gave some to me! After we saw her we saw the talking Mickey. He was very surprised that we were newlyweds. He said “Hot dog! Newlyweds!” He spent a lot of time with us. After we got done with him we walked to “It’s a Small World.” We did that ride twice. After that we did my favorite ride, The Haunted Mansion. Then we went over to “Tomorrowland” and did the Carousel of Progress, which is like a mini-show that tells us how technology has grown. It was cool. We did the Laugh-lore from *Monsters Inc.* Mike hosted it. It was very funny. The last ride of the night was “Pirates of the Caribbean.” My favorite part was when the dog is holding the keys in its mouth and the pirates are trying to get him to come over. They were whistling and said “Come here boy!” Fun fact: Johnny Depp actually went to down there to record his voice for the ride. I saw that on a video on the computer. At the end of the day we saw the Happily Ever After Fireworks. They were bright

colors and some sparkled and were very big. It was very romantic, since it was our wedding day. Brandon and I were holding hands and standing in the back so we could get a good view. The perfect ending to a perfect day.

The next day, it was sunny in the morning again. Every morning Sandy would knock on the door of the hotel and I would shout happily, “Aunt Sandy’s here!” We would let her in the room and we would just sit and plan out what we were going to do. We went to Epcot. The first ride looked like a hang-gliding ride where you could feel the breeze and smell the different smells. The ride was soaring. The ride took us over the oceans. I saw humpback whales and it took us through Alaska where we saw the polar bears. At the end, we flew around Cinderella’s castle with Tink with fireworks going on. My new husband was nervous about going soaring on the ride but I wasn’t. I had done it before. I told him to sit next to me and I would hold his hand. It was really funny that the voice of Cronk was the pilot.

The next day we went to Animal Kingdom. It is not my favorite Park but we actually found pretty cool stuff to do there. First, we did the safari ride, where you can see the animals in their habitats. We saw several ostriches, giraffes, rhinos, hippos, and crocodiles. All sorts of animals! After that we went to a little café to get some snacks. I had a big cinnamon roll. It was huge! The next thing we did is we went to the Timon and Pumbaa show from *The Lion King*. The monkeys were acrobats. They had four sections and we were the warthog section. I got picked to go up and dance for everyone. I wasn’t nervous at all and the the showman was so nice.

After that we went to “It’s Tough to be a Bug” in The Tree of Life and saw Flick from *A Bug’s Life*. It started pouring rain for a few minutes. Then we went shopping in this little store. Brandon bought me a 2017

pin and he got a shirt for his mom. Aunt Sandy got a pair of bongo drums.

We went back to the hotel for a couple of hours to rest and then we got our Halloween stuff together and went to Mickey Mouse's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party. I was dressed up as Sally from *A Nightmare Before Christmas*. The first thing we did is get a front-row seat for the Hocus Pocus show at the castle. That had all sorts of villains in it and the Sanderson sisters from *Hocus Pocus*. Some of the villains I saw were Oogie Boogie from *A Nightmare Before Christmas*, Dr. Facilier from *The Princess and the Frog*, Cruella, Lady Tremaine from *Cinderella*, Maleficent and Hades from *Hercules*! My favorite Sanderson sister is Sarah. She is the dumb blonde. The show was really fun.

And then we got seats for the Halloween "Boo to You" Parade. We saw floats from all the rides and my favorite one was the Haunted Mansion float. We saw the three hyenas from the *Lion King* and at the end we saw Maleficent and Cruella who were on the float. We were walking to the bathroom and it was time for characters to take a rest so Tarzan, Jane, and Turk were following us and Turk was picking on people like a money does. We were looking for candy and we yelled "hi" to Moana but the line was too long again. But she waved back! It always seems we got the end of the line. When we went through and got our candy my husband saw who he wanted to see: Jafar! We couldn't find the characters who I wanted to see, though: Jack and Sally from *A Nightmare Before Christmas*. There was just too much to do! We walked all over the place and we walked to Acaraba, from *Aladdin*, and went into the Bazaar. We went window shopping again in the Bazaar and then we went back to the hotel. Everyone was pooped but we had a great day!

Thursday was the day before we had to leave but I was trying not think about that.

It was sunny again! We ended up going to Norway in Epcot. We ate at a French Restaurant with real French food. I ordered cheese on bread, thinking it would be cheese and bread. It ended up being a flatbread pizza. Just across the way was Belle's line but her line was closing so we ended up going to see Elsa and Ana from *Frozen*. It started dripping again so we rode the ferry for a little while and saw in Epcot where they have the big dance party and a famous cooking show. We took some more picture with the Disney Topiaries. Then we saw Chip and Dale who were being a nuisance. Dale is the one with the red nose. He was playing with me and Chip was knocking him on the head and looking in Sandy's bag for food. Last time I was down there those two chipmunks were being very frisky. I think they had two young men in the costumes. We saw Goofy on the other side of the rail. We saw Minnie and we went in to see her in her formal wear, which was a pink straight dress with sparkles all over it. She was wearing white gloves and a pink feather in her sparkly headband. She's definitely is my type of mouse: she has my style.

After Epcot we went to Hollywood Studios. First we saw the *Beauty and the Beast* mini-show. We sat in the back but you could still see everything. Then, we went and had lunch at a little snack place by the Rockin Roller Coaster and Mom offered to take me on the Tower of Terror and Rockin Roller Coaster but I didn't go. I didn't want to leave Brandon. Then (it was amazing) Mom was pushing me down the sidewalk and I saw something white and black moving between the people and surprisingly I saw a Stormtrooper! I yelled, "Stormtrooper?!" and we went over to the little area they have marked off for them and they put on a little interactive meet-and-greet for us.

Then, we walked to a theatre that was nearby and saw how they made Star

Wars. When got in line to see Chewbacca, Mom and Sandy were talking so we started falling behind. I said, "Mom, pay attention before a Stormtrooper yells at us." At the end of the line we saw all the famous lightsabers in a case, all the actual ones from the movies. Chewbacca was huge and hairier than I thought he would be. When we left I said, "I love you Chewbacca" and in the gurgly voice he said "I love you, too!" Then, we walked through the gift shop where they were trying to sell BB-8s, the new robot with a mini-remote control.

On our last day at the park I wanted to get over to see Enchanted Tales with Belle again. But this time I was more excited than the first time. We were sitting on the left side of the theatre. This time I got cast as Maurice, Belle's father. In the movie, he shivers in the cell in the Beast's castle, so I was practicing my shivering. I was the first one to see Belle again when she walked in to start the show. When it came to my part to shiver, she put her hands on mine and she said "Papa, are you alright? Who did this to you?" to me very sweetly!

At the end of the show, I was so excited because I gave her one of the fuzzy-

posters that I had been working on for weeks. Even though I am 31, I haven't lost my inner child! First, she took our picture with it and I was probably smiling like the Cheshire Cat because I was so happy! She put it on the fireplace mantle in the library so whenever I watch the movie, *Beauty and the Beast*, I always get teary eyed. My picture is in the library and I am always in the castle now! This means a lot to me.

The next morning was a slow morning – I didn't want to leave. Of course, who does? So, we got dressed, went down to the little café area and we ate a little breakfast before going to the airport. The same van came and picked us up from the hotel. We went to the airport, went through security and we saw a famous woman who was a chef from the Epcot show. We boarded the plane. My husband and I couldn't sit together but he was close by and we did sit next to a very good friend. The kids next to us who were just newborns were great. They didn't fuss, or anything.

All in all, it was a wonderful, magical week.

The Life I Live

By Thelma Barnes
In collaboration with Natalie Chait & Jojo Coelho



I was 17 years old. I was in high school and I was having seizures. Because I had seizures, the kids thought I didn't know nothing. The kids picked at me because I had seizures. The kids messed with me. I didn't talk to little boys, but the girls picked at me. Down South, I had no friends and I couldn't do nothing like I wanted.

I had epilepsy from the age of 12 and my mom thought I couldn't go to Rochester. But I also have faith in God, so I thought, "I can do it". In my heart, I know there's nothing I can't do, because I believe in God. That's when my aunt told me, "Thelma, get a ticket and just come and when you get here, I will call your mother and tell her you're here. Get on a bus and come. Call me from the bus station and let me know when

you're here." After I came to Rochester, they couldn't get me back home. I left home from then on.

I left North Carolina because I wanted to leave. Down there, the kids picked at me because I had a sickness. I came to my aunt for the summer in Rochester and I liked it here in Rochester. My mom didn't know I was coming. She didn't want me to come. But I didn't want to go home. She thought I couldn't come here, she didn't believe I'd stay here because of my sickness. I started going to the doctor here like I did there, and the doctor started taking care of me. From then on, the seizures come and go. I don't have them much anymore. I am happy about that. My seizures were better controlled with the help

of the medicine. Sometimes I go months without them, sometimes years, and I don't have them. Any time, they might come back, they're never completely gone. You never know. Only God knows. I've gone a long time without having them, but only God knows. When they happen, they happen.

The first time I had a seizure, I went to the doctor and I went to church. I went to the pastor and he blessed me. He put medicine on my head and he and the entire church prayed for me. I told them "I believe in God" and I told them "I trust God." The pastor in my church and people prayed for me. I let them know I believe in God and I started going to church. I told them I trust God. I have been going to church ever since. I promised God I was never going to give up. I let God take care of me and let everything go his way. I put everything in his hands and let him take care of everything. You can't give up though.

Church got me through my seizures and Annie-Mae got me here to Rochester. Annie-Mae was a tall, heavy lady, with my complexion. She's got short hair, kind of like a bob. She wore dresses and skirts. She partly raised me and she's my mother's sister. When she was younger, she used to go out to a lot of parties. She didn't drink alcohol though, but she did other party stuff. She just liked to have fun. I lived with Annie-Mae after her husband passed. We lived together for a couple of years. We liked to cook together and watch movies. We even went for walks. I was really happy living with her.

I was 22 when my daughter was born. We lived with my aunt at first. My daughter, Katina, looks just like me. She's got brown hair, brown eyes. When she's going out, she likes to get dressed up and wear makeup. She looks nice, if I saw her, that's what I'd say. When she got married and had kids, she had two boys. A lot of people thought she was my sister for a bit.



(They still do).

In truth, my daughter grew up listening to my aunt. Annie-Mae would teach her like she was her own. This was because my aunt had a son, Kurt. He got into some bad stuff and he also didn't get along with Annie-Mae's boyfriend. He left home, and then my aunt came here to Rochester. She left her son down south and her son grew up with me. My grandma partly raised him with my mother and me. My mother partly raised him with me so my aunt got jealous. My daughter was left with my aunt. My aunt got angry with me and she

wanted to take my daughter from me. I was mad at her about this, but I couldn't take my daughter because of the seizures. She said I couldn't take care of my daughter. My daughter knows that now.

My aunt had a male friend who started living with her; this is the same boyfriend I mentioned earlier. At times, her boyfriend got fresh with me. But Annie-Mae didn't believe me. My mother believed me, but my aunt's other sister, Minnie Mae, didn't. They both believed the man. Minnie Mae was the baby sister, so she believed Annie-Mae, who was the older sister. It was sad because Annie-Mae and I got along good until then. She was good to me until then. I lived with her for a while. She got really close to me and did a lot of stuff for me. She bought me clothes, food, and took care of me. She helped me raise Katina, my daughter. I thank God that I lived with Annie-Mae during that time; for years we lived good together.

Katina's father got me pregnant. A friend of ours told him about this and that's why he left me. He came up to me and said, "I know you're pregnant, and I won't come back anymore." He kept his word and stopped dating me. Annie-Mae was the type of aunt who would fight men and argue with them. Men were scared of her, and she wouldn't let them come back to the house after this. But I said, "if you want to go, go." You know? I'm not the type of girl to chase after a man. I haven't seen him since then. If he's living or dead, I don't know.

Katina would get mad at me because I wouldn't tell her about him. My aunt had a boyfriend living in the house. My daughter thought he was her father and I told her he wasn't her father. "You may live in his house, but he is not your father." She got mad at me and took it out on me. Kids will be kids.

I appreciate what my aunt did for me. But I didn't want her to take advantage of me. She or her boyfriend.

When Annie-Mae's boyfriend got fresh with me, she didn't believe me. She got mad at my story and I had to move out of her house. After I moved out, I was put on welfare and I got my own place because I had to get away from that guy. Annie-Mae wouldn't let me take Katina with me. All I could do was visit her, but I couldn't take her to my apartment. Honestly, it was because I was too scared. I was scared that I couldn't take care of her myself because of my seizures. So I lived by myself.

One day, a couple of guys broke into my house and they tried to hurt me. They tried to have sex with me and I wouldn't let them. The neighbors called my aunt, and she called the police. The men ran away before the police could catch them. I was scared, but my aunt wanted me to move back in after this. Afterwards, I met Frank.

Frank and I were together for about a year. He was dating me while I lived with my Aunt. After we dated for a couple months, I moved in with Frank, but Katina stayed with my aunt. I wouldn't have met Frank without my aunt. She was the one who told me about him. She used to work with him, and he lived in Rochester before I moved here. My aunt knew Frank and so did one of my friends, Renée (you'll learn about her later...). Frank was kind of a tall guy. He was a young guy. He was a nice guy, gave me lots of compliments. If I wanted something, he would give it to me; all I had to do was ask.

And then I got shot.

Frank and I were together when I got shot. I was walking down the street and Frank didn't know until afterwards that I got shot. The guy who shot me knew Frank; he knew I was dating Frank, but he wanted to

get with me. I figured that he wanted to be with me, but I couldn't be with him. I was with Frank. You know how young guys are; they just think, "I want to do what I want." But I wanted to be with Frank, not him. Talking to two guys at one time is okay, but having sex with both is not good. You can get pregnant and then you'll never know; you have to know what you're doing. I walked away and then he shot me.

I lost all my friends after I was shot. My friends didn't believe me when I told them about it. The man harassed me a lot, but I thought he was a nice guy because he was good to me. But he was the kind of guy you didn't know was bad. He was trying to mess around with other girls too and I didn't know. If he didn't get what he wanted, he would mess you up. When he shot me in the back of the head, they had to shave my hair off to get the bullet out. The doctor saved me.

The guy who shot me was not caught afterwards because someone we both knew told the police that I tried to cut him- but I would never hurt anybody. So, after me, he killed another girl after shooting her in the mouth. He ran away after shooting her, but her boyfriend caught him. Then her boyfriend killed him. I heard about this while I was in the hospital. I was in the hospital for nine months.

The only friend who visited me in the hospital was Renée. To me, Renée is a nice looking lady. She has dark brown hair, with lots of curls. Renée likes to wear suits and dresses, because she's a lady and she wears these all the time, especially to church. I have a big picture of her in a frame and it sits on my desk. She looks nice, she's nicely dressed. She's got the kind of smile that makes you smile. I wake up and look at her and I smile, that's the kind of person she is. She makes me smile. When she shows up in my dreams, I wake up smiling.

I met Renée through her friend. We became friends. She introduced me to her mother and a lot of her friends and her church. And then she started taking me to her church. She invited me to her church. From then on, we started going to church together and I joined her church, the Church of God. Renée is one of the reasons I started going to church. Renée visited me in the hospital after I got shot. Her mother, her mother's sister, and the pastor all visited me in the hospital. They prayed for me. After I left the hospital, I kept going to church with Renée, and we still go to church together. We are not giving up. Can't Turn Around is our favorite song to sing in church together. Renée is a really nice girl, a nice lady, with a nice smile. I wish I could be her. She's the best friend I've ever had! She got me through everything.

I'm not gonna change, I'm never going to change. I made that promise. When I met Him. A couple of years ago, I just started to realize it. Now I tell myself. I'm not going to change. It made me feel that I have to do something. I have to keep doing the right thing. I did a bad thing. I'm not going to do it no more. Once, I was going around places and doing the wrong things. I don't do it anymore. I was doing bad things, then I got shot. When I got shot I was in the wrong place. Afterwards, it made me think about God. I learned my lesson. Like the song Can't Turn Around, keep moving forward. In church, every time I hear that song, I cry. I cry from being alive. I am so happy to be alive.

After I left the hospital, they moved me to a group home. I moved straight there. Tina Bennett came and I got to meet her. She visited me and talked to me about living in the group home. She welcomed me into the group home. We talked a lot. She asked me questions about if I liked being in a group home and how I felt about living alone. At first, I wanted to get an apartment

on my own. I was used to living on my own, but after I got shot, she was convincing me not to live alone again. We talked about getting roommate, and I thought that sounded different, but nice. It could be nice, but sometimes, you know, two ladies living together could be a good thing, could be a bad thing. After I talked with Tina, I decided it'd be alright to live in the group home.

I visited my first group home after this. The group home felt safer for me and easier for me because of my seizures and everything I had been through. I couldn't walk, I couldn't cook, and the group home would be helpful. I couldn't do things like I used to do. If I had my own place, I would need an aide to help me. Because of this, I decided to live in the group home. I've been in one ever since. In the group home, Betty was my first, and favorite, roommate. That's how we became friends. We are still good friends. Sometimes we go out to eat. Her sister hangs out with us. Sometimes she's a young girl and she can get mad easy. She's even a little hard of hearing.

Betty has a family, she has two sisters. I met them and I taught them a lot about Betty. I told them I did a lot for Betty and helped her learn things she didn't know about. If she didn't understand, I helped her. A lot of things, her sisters didn't understand. I had been around a long time and I felt like I could help her. I let them know how I felt and how Betty felt. I would do things for her and it made me really happy. Her sisters started giving me a lot of nice things after I took care of Betty. I appreciated them because they appreciated me. Betty gets scared easily about doing things and nervous when she tries new things, so I would help her learn how to do these new things. One time she fell and she was scared of falling again after. If I fall, I get back up and if I go again, I pull myself up and don't let it scare me. That's what I tell Betty and I have the patience to tell her. I tell her "You have got

to have faith in God and not be scared, because God will take care of you." Betty still lives with me, but she isn't my roommate anymore. I see her every day though, so I see her too much to miss her.

Sometimes, people say I can't spend my money like I want. They want me to write down how much I spend when I go shopping to try to figure out how much money I am spending. But when I go out, I don't know how much items cost before I go out to shop. So it's hard to know the price. If they let me go out, I would learn the price, but sometimes I can't go out. I like going out and I like looking nice. I want to look nice for myself. I like my clothes and I want to pick out my own clothes. I know what I like and I know how to match my clothes. I get angry when people don't let me pick what I wear. In public, I like to be nice, clean, and neat. Anybody could come visit me, and I want to look nice for the occasion.

Before moving to the group home, when I was able to go shopping and able to go out, I would buy my own clothes and pick out what I liked. When I look nice and neat, I look like a young lady and people will tell me I look nice, and I appreciate that. Sometimes you see friends from a long time ago, and you want to look nice for these occasions. I don't want them to see me and say, "Why you do you look like that?" I want them to see me and say, "You look nice!"

Renée and Pam understood this about me and always took me shopping for what I like. Pam was my second aid, after Renée, and helper in the group home. She was tall and black, very good looking, and nice. I love her, I really do. She took me to church, shopping, all the stuff I love. She let me pick out my clothes and everything I need. She would tell the boss, "I'm taking Thelma out shopping!" She made sure I got anything I needed and I had no problem shopping then for what I wanted. I was very

happy with her. She ended up leaving because she was so good at her job and got a promotion. I miss her a lot. But, every year, she comes and visits me. She takes me out to dinner when she visits, and we do my favorite activities too: church and shopping! What she can do with me, she does. She is a really nice lady, I love her, and I'll never forget her.

Marc is also a great person. I see him all the time. Marc comes early in the morning to see me. Sometimes, we play games together, sometimes card games or board games. He also likes to cook, he likes to cook my food! I like soul food and he cooks it. He's a young black guy, very nice. He's funny and tells jokes. He makes me laugh. You can't dislike him. I don't care if you think you can get mad at him, you can't get mad at him. You have to love him. He goes to church, on a different day than me. He talks about church a lot; I like that too. We go to different churches; I'm Pentecostal and he isn't, but we still talk about church.

He also likes to sing at church. I have so many fun memories with Marc I can't possibly list all of them. I've known him for years. I've known him for a long time and he always made me smile.

I love church and I'll never give up church. I'm going to keep my promise to go to church. I will continue to go to church. I'm going to continue looking nice, looking nice and neat. I like picking out my clothes. I'm going to keep taking care of myself, I'm not going to give up. I'm going to keep doing things for myself and if I can't do it, if I need it, I'll ask for help. I'll ask God for help. He always says "Never give up." So that's the life I live and the people in it. This is about how I feel about myself. I am very happy. The way I feel, I feel very happy with the life I live and I thank God for how far I've come.

I've come a long way, and I'm going to keep going forward, because, like the song says, you can't turn around.

The Summer Journey

By Jeff Yarmel

In collaboration with Leena Khoury



When I was 22, I had one of the best weeks of my life at Camp Harkness in Connecticut. My first stop on this summer journey was to my room. The building was a big log cabin with a lot of windows. When we got there, it was still early in the morning, so the cabin was full of sunlight. The walls were lined with 14 beds that were six feet apart. After setting up my space in the room, my friends and some of the staff went outside to talk. Standing outside, we noticed what a beautiful day it was, and decided to take a walk to the beach on the camp's grounds. The 15-minute-walk to the beach would have tired me, so the staff of the camp offered me a blue tricycle with a basket in the back to ease my journey. I continued to ride around the camp for a

whole week. At one point, they offered my staff member, my two friends, and me a surrey bike. The bike was four feet wide and eight feet long with a roof that protected us from the hot sun. The surrey bike was so big that it had its own steering wheel like a car. I got to sit in the front row of the bike and pedal us forward. The bike was really heavy, and it was hard to pedal. Even though it was difficult, I still enjoyed the opportunity to be with friends and to help by pedaling. I liked the tricycle more, though, because I was the only passenger.

The next few days had beautiful weather. On one really good day, when it was sunny and 75 degrees outside, one of the counselors told me that it would be a very special day because I was going to ride

a horse. I was so surprised! In order to get to the stables, where I would finally ride a horse, I had to walk down a big hill. All I could think while walking was, “Are you joking? Is this real? Am I really going to ride an actual horse?” It was really exciting. I was not prepared for how great it would be. The walk was short, and I could see the stables at the bottom of the hill. I was so excited that I started running. With the wind in my hair and the sun on my face, I felt like a wild horse. When we got to the stables, I noticed it was very big. I saw 7 horses and hay for the horses to eat in piles and stacks. I was surprised at how strong the smell was inside the stables. I was looking around and saw that there was a lot of horse manure everywhere. When I first saw the horse, he was so big that I thought, “How can I get on him?” The horse’s name was Rein, and he was black and very tall. He showed me that I had no reason to be afraid by not moving too fast so as not to frighten me. He was very gentle with the workers who handled him, and I could have sworn he would flick his tail to show me that he was excited to see me. Getting on the horse was a challenge, and I needed help. The workers lifted me onto the horse and strapped my feet into the stirrups. When I finally sat down on the horse’s saddle, I was high in the air. It felt great. Riding the horse made stressful thoughts on my mind go away. I got to ride the horse three times that day. Some of my friends went on to ride the horse later.

Later that same night, after I rode Rein, the staff found an old golf cart. They asked me if I wanted to ride it, and I, of course, said “Yes.” We took the golf cart out into the night and drove to get a better look at the camp. The sky was big and black and full of stars. The golf cart allowed me to move around more easily so we were able to go to the beach. We went to the beach a lot, and it was usually sunny, but one time, it started to rain. So I helped my friend who

didn’t have a powered wheelchair by pushing her back to the cabins. She could help a little, so it wasn’t too hard, but we had to run up a hill. We managed to run really fast from the beach back to the cabins, so thankfully we didn’t get very wet. I felt helpful by being able to assist my friend when she struggled to help herself. If I didn’t help push her back to the cabins, she would have been stuck alone in the rain. It gave me a lot of pride to be able to help a friend. It rained for awhile, so we stayed inside. Inside the cabins, we made art by making pictures with crayons. Even though it was raining, the cabin was warm, cozy, and comfortable. We played board games and group activities that made the time go by.

On the last night of summer camp, there was a big dance. I enjoyed it because of the music. There was a DJ who played all sorts of music—fast songs, slow songs, and everything in between. The dance was in the camp dining hall, but the room looked nice that night because it was decorated. There were balloons and streamers that were colored white, blue, and yellow. They gave the dining hall the feeling of summer. All my friends were there too. A staff member accompanied me, and I got to dance with them to some songs. I also got to dance with my friends. The evening was so fun. It was unforgettable, and leaving the camp made me incredibly sad. I could not wait to come back to the camp again.

The next year that I went back to camp, I got to help so many more people. I helped by pushing wheelchairs and helping out with cleaning camp, which I liked doing. I got to go for a ride in an old truck to see more of camp. Overall, my friends and the staff at the camp were happy that I came back, and that made my second camp experience really enjoyable. I also got to meet people I didn’t meet the first time I went to camp, such as one of the staff

members who couldn't hear and communicated with sign language. I offered that she could use my light writer so that she could talk. It was a small device that had a keyboard and spoke whatever you typed. She was able to sling the light talker over her chest and hold it in her lap to type with. It was these experiences of helping people and doing incredible things such as riding a horse that made me realize that I can do anything that I want to do. I am capable of

doing whatever I set my mind to, and this continues to shape the way I live my life today. I believe that if someone needs help then I should help them if I can. When it was time to leave the second time, I was not as sad as before because I knew I would return. I knew I would come back to the place where I rode horses and went to the beach and helped my friends. It was only a matter of time.

At Least It's Something Different

By Charlene Fuhry

In collaboration with Zahra Al Zuwayed & Katherine Trice



I was a little girl about three years old and I wore glasses. I don't remember the color of the glasses. I put my hair in a ponytail to keep it out of my face. I had crutches, and a cane. Later I got older, and used the walker. Now I use the wheelchair for long distances when it is so far.

I used to go to Sunshine Camp in the summertime. We used to sleep in tents in the woods with other girls. It was a little bit scary to get down on the ground. The weather was nice and warm. As I got older, I went to Hankamoul Camp. It is another camp they had. We did different things: arts and crafts and swimming. We used to sleep in the dorms. The rooms were a little bit big and you could go outside the porch where there were bathrooms. We used to take

turns, too. It was a little bit of a wait. So we would take a rest after lunch break.

They make different things every day. Every day is different. You don't know the menu. It's different. At night, they had dancing and a campfire and singing in the Rotary Sunshine and Hankamoul. I did all arts and crafts and swimming, they had to help me in the pool.

I'd like to go somewhere someday. I went to Darien Lake one time, in the summer, as a member of the Moose Lodge with my brother Stanley's lodge. I used to stay at the hotel or the cabin for the weekend overnight. It's different too. It's great, you stay over right there in the cabins. They got a trailer for people to stay in. There are tents too. It's nice, they got the ramp for me to walk up my ramp with my walker, and when

I go to the bathroom I can hold on the bar. That's good too. They've got something for disabled people. You get away from Rochester for a while, you have fun, you go see the shows, different ways, you get out. When you're tired, you can go back and lay down.

I went to Hershey Park. It's good. They give me a ride on the rides, they let me ride on the spinney a couple times – I don't have to get off that quick. That was nice of them.

I've never been on a cruise. I've never rowed on a boat. I want to. It costs a lot of money to go, or get on a plane, there is not much area for my legs to go. They should get stuff for people with disabilities. I've never been on a plane. I rode in cars and got in taxis in Virginia or Pennsylvania. We take out time to stop, somewhere to sleep, some motel or hotel, it'd be easier to rest if you get tired after. I've been to Virginia, then Texas, and I went to Pennsylvania.

I used to go to two camps, or go on a vacation when I could, like to Canada that one time I went to. There's parks and stuff; we stay for the day to spend time having fun, having little picnics there. It's good. It's nice. It's different.

It was nice when I was young. I want to go back now, but it is hard. It is different. They changed, with the passport. It'd be nice to go. Well, because they had different rides when I was young, they would help me on, I can't climb up there anymore.

I used to play dolls as a little girl. I would take them to the hospital with casts on. The doctors did surgeries on my leg—they made my bones different, so I could walk better. I didn't know it would be like that, ever. I just wish I could be normal like you guys, walk like you guys. It's hard. Our bodies change, in different ways.

I take care of Grandma and stuff like that. I go down to visit her a couple weeks,

get out of the house way back, Mom let me go down there, you know. It's been so long. She's not around anymore. I'd go help her out. I was doing thread or beads because she crocheted for necklaces and earring way back. used to, not anymore. Yeah, before, yeah I did that, crocheting blankets and stuff, I'm learning other things. She lives in Cohocton. It's a big house, there's too many rooms upstairs, bathrooms upstairs and bathrooms downstairs.

I've been in the program for a while now. It's not bad. I do some reading, math, science, and social studies. It keeps your mind busy and your reading skills, too. I help people in the program. I help them read. I help them read slow. I have a friend, the volunteer lady. Her name is Sue. She's a tall lady. She always helps me break down words. The long and bigger words. I break them down. We talk about different things three days a week. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. It's good. It keeps me busy. I do different things, it's good.

Then, after lunch, I go to read for a while. The volunteer helps me with the hard words, too. I'm doing *Little House on the Prairie* books. It's taking a while. Three books already, I'm on the fourth book, we read twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. I read today. It keeps my mind busy. I imagine the author has been gone by now. It's a lot of work for her, she did that, a lot of words in all those sentences. Take them one at a time. It takes a while. A series. Well, I tried different stories on Jack—I mean Jane and Dick, it was? Or other old books, different ones. Because I always help out the groups at the programs up to three times a week. It's going to keep me going. I help David and Arlee with the writing, I count the numbers when they don't know how to. The ones I'm helping have to learn the words and this science stuff. We're doing different animals. I help out Arlee and David because he's learning the sounds of

his letters, learning to read, to do math too, it is good to help out. I follow, I tell them, he gives me the answers, I write it down for him, he does great today. That's good. I help them write them down when they give me answers to and stuff. I work with them, it's good. For English, we do some readings of poems and stuff, and they find the words and circle them wherever they rhyme.

We do that. It's good to keep me busy and to help people in the programs. I help out with the class and do other things in the group home like taking the mail bag back home.

Our teacher in in the program is Paul. He teaches us different things in the program to keep us busy. He's like a science man. Today we finish fractions, now we do money with the coins because some people in the program don't know their coins. Arlee, she's blind, but she can read. The teacher gives her the words back. She can't see, when she goes to answer, she raises her hand, she know it. That's good, too, if she can hear and think. I got ideas, I got one, I help her write down her answers. She can't see. She's blind. In my group home, Loretta is blind, too. She can feel, she can walk by the rail, go back to her room, to the bathroom across by her room. It's not bad for her.

Now I'm living in the group home for a while. This year is my second year there. It keeps my mind busy, too. Don't lose it! My mom lost hers, her memories gone, too.

Sometimes you don't have time at the group home because of a noisy person. Shaka would be banging the door. Yesterday she calmed down a little. You try to get them to calm down. It is hard when the staff can't get them to calm down. It makes a lot of loud noises. We try to tell them to calm down, please, go back to your room, play the games, basketball, football. The staff tries to help them.

We watched a movie on the TV today. There was Earhart, she lost on the airplane, she dies and everything. It's like a mystery, a history. It's not nice. They can't find her when she died. It's hard to listen when some person next to me talk loud. I tell him to be quiet because you can't hear. It's a shame to do that, and we should stop that. Like in the room, his name is John Grassie, he always wants to leave the room. It would be too crowded in the hall, with therapists working and other people working and little kids riding their little bikes in the program.

I live there because of my leg. CP Rochester put me in there because of my legs. My legs get fluid in them and get so stiff. I take half a water pill everyday, you know, to get stronger. I was in respite for a while. They moved me to Elmwood group home, then I went to Jefferson. They put me in there because of my health and all that. They change bandage of my legs because I had a fracture before and the doctor took care of it. I don't know how many times they change the bandage. Sometimes you don't know, you know. My mom wants me in the group home, I don't want to be there. The people shut the door, speak loud, it hard, and Ashley watches the TV. She watches cartoons like Chipmunks and other things, when I want to go to sleep at night. It's hard.

I wonder if the weather would gets warm pretty soon. Next month will be March. I got up really early this morning. Towed my chair back. I hope the weather get warm pretty soon. We want warm weather to join us. The birds are coming out. Gets warmer get up here. Warm weather coming soon. Trying different things. Different. Now the breeze is coming out pretty soon. The grass is coming out pretty soon, right?

Pretty soon the leaves come out. The leaves are going to come out pretty soon

from the trees. I can't wait till nice, pretty flowers come out in the springtime. Pretty roses, tulips, there's another... I'm trying to think of the others ones. Iris. I'm just trying to remember the names. I forgot the lilacs, coming out pretty soon in May. Hopefully, you get to look at them, with the warm weather. It'd be nice. The lilacs are coming with spring, May. Warm up, and nice, enjoy it, they come out with nice sunny days, they come out sometimes. Not miserable, with sleepy weather either, right? That's good too. Because it's getting warmer. Hope the winter's almost gone. And you don't have to wear coats. It's hard to find the clothes you want for the spring, the cool and the hot days.

I like pretty pink, green, the colors, you don't know what color you're going to wear, something different, style. It's good. I'm doing pretty good things, different things. I like color, it's good, it keeps me and my mind going. Something different. I like Easter, Easter's nice, bright colors, and the kids have the eggs. It's bright, they fill up their bags for Easter times. With the dye, you boil the eggs before you dye, let the eggs cool before you dye. They hide the Easter eggs for the kids to find, they go hunt for them outside. They color or they get prizes and things. It's nice for little kids. The mothers, they want flowers or lilies.

It's almost summertime, right? Some of the teachers have summer school for kids, too. The bus drivers going to bus, some don't. It's great, it's stuff like that, the kids can have fun, do their things, swimming in the pool, do things like that a day camp, and the parent's know where they're at, recreational stuff. Then they go to the zoo, then they go to museum or vacations with their parents. Summer be nice, see the little kids ride their bicycles. They play outside. I hear them sometimes down the street, on their bicycles. They better stay on the sidewalk, not on no street. Remember, stay

there, don't go off there on the street, with the cars and trucks in the way, you don't want that way. Be safe for them. It's better to play in the park or the playground area too, it be safe right there, not in the streets, right? They can have their own swimming pool by their house, or go to the pool, high schools, or summer program, or day camp. Kids have fun, it's good, it's different when the kids go to day camp or camping. Yeah, they see the colors of the leaves on the trees. You don't know the colors - they could be green, red, yellow, orange, something in the fall season. Winter like Christmas time, the kids go out and play on the sled, slide down the hill or something. When the birds come, the spring. I hope they come back from the south, come up here. They coming back from the south. They coming to the north. It's going to be cooler when the hot weather comes, right? They get tired after flying, or stop and eat somewhere, I don't know what they eat. Seeds somewhere, with the food, or people drop it or something. It's nice you see the birds: Robins or blue jays or cardinals, it's nice. Yeah, I hear them. They're cute, "tweet tweet tweeket." I got a bird at home, in a cage, in a kitchen. When I go home, she goes "tweet tweet tweeket," she knows I'm home, it's nice. Birds come in the window, wake you up; the sunshine comes through. "Tweet tweet tweeket." And the spring's coming next month, I think.

It's coming out with nice roses, and Easter's coming up. Easter is coming.

It is sunshine? Sunshine should come out, warm weather. We need sunshine, sometimes, we need sunshine, we don't need no more snow. Maybe it warms up again. Hope it warms up again someday. 'Cause it's going into the thirties I heard this weekend. it's not too bad, at least it's not down like we had way back.

Roses are nice, red, some are white, yellow; lilacs, purple; coming out with the

spring, or some of them. White is nice to show up a little bit too, right? They're bright, you can see them. Look out in the yards of people's houses. They decorate out front or in the back, with a fence. Smell nice and fresh. It's nice to see them come up because little buds coming, someday, or trees, too. I hear the clock's going to be added this weekend. It's nice to see flowers.

And people go to the Lilac Festival. They have concerts there. People walk around, smell the flowers. They eat there, they buy food, like hot dogs, hamburgers, and stuff like that, different drinks and stuff. You don't know what you want! Different booths, earrings stuff and other stuff with booths set up out there. They're pretty and different, some are dark purple, darker or light or white. That's good. There are three colors I can think of lilacs. It's nice to see different things. They don't last long once they get here, right? You're going to miss it when they go. I just like the feeling, enjoy to see them out, fun to see different ones.

It's good. I go to therapy and it helps me walk better. It helps make my legs stronger and I can walk better. I use a walker. It's some kind of special PT bike thing. Go for a walk and do my goals and stuff.

Get stronger, get me going, I want to get stronger because walking more. The exercises help because my legs don't want to move, and you got to wake them up, got to go for a walk. I go to physical therapies Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-1:30. My legs get stronger and stiff because I go to therapy twice a week. Today I stand up, play volleyball, with the ball, and do the climbing with the arm exercise. It's good, too. I exercise on the mat sometimes, get my legs stronger. I do some walking and stuff, some different things, the walking. Get my strength stronger 'cause they had me walking. And the other day I did exercises, different kinds, too. Transfer on the

wheelchair, getting on the mat, getting up and down. And I roll on my tummy, they help. And my therapists help me out, get stronger, because my legs need it. I can keep myself going, that's good for me. Don't want losing my mind, keep going, keep busy, I always like to keep busy, keep going, thinking different things, too. I try walking with my walker. My legs don't want to go every once in a while. My legs don't want to move. I can't help it. Sometimes they ache. It's hard you get up in your age, it's changing after a while.

I'm 65, I'm the biggest one in the family. And I live with my mom before, with my brothers, they're helping. I miss that, I'm not home anymore. I miss my mom a lot, her house, because I live in the group home now, they helping me get stronger, get my legs better and stuff, it's hard. I be back home in the future.

My sister always help me with my shoes and socks. I can't help that, right? My sister do help me 'cause I come home on the weekends and sometimes near the holidays, we be home for a week or two. My brother's going to put more games on my iPad, on my computer. It's a good thing, I want that. Some of Candy Crush, Solitaire. I'm trying, I don't get up that high, I got up to 20, 23, I think.

It's getting the warm weather coming out with the cleaning time. My brother, Steve, he's doing shoveling or cleaned up papers and stuff, he's doing leaves. Pretty soon it is going to be spring, clean it up, and that's good, too. He's got to watch out with this: if it is going to snow, he's going to shovel again. He's going to clean the yards, it's hard. If he can find something, he's on welfare in part, he's looking for the jobs and stuff to find things he can do. It will be good for him. He wants to do some things, try other things, he is looking before because the welfare he's on – food stamps and Medicaid.

I used to have five brothers, one died. It's hard. I lost my father, lost my sister, my grandparents, some of my aunts, some of my cousins, it's hard. We didn't see it coming like that; the doctors tried their best to help them get better, it didn't work for them. With the holidays, you miss them, and they're gone. Like Easter's coming up, you're going to miss them. At least I got mom for a while yet, you don't know how long she's going to be around either. Keep on going and keep our mind busy. It's easier that way; I don't want to lose it like my mother's losing hers. It's hard, you know, she don't remember everything, you know. My mom has brain tumors. Can't think straight. Wants to go upstairs, we tell her she has to be downstairs. She walks with the walker; she gets older. She needs it, you know? Losees her balance. She falls a lot, too, in the house, we don't want her to get hurt, we try to get her to walk with the walker. She doesn't want to go into a nursing home with the family right there. It's a good thing. My brothers take her to appointments, too, to the doctors. It's a good thing my brothers are there. At home, now

she's in therapy, to P.T. during the week, help her out, get stronger. We tell her "Back up, sit in chair, back up" because she can't do it the other way she used to. 84 years old is a long time. We go home on weekends. Sundays, too. Spend weekends with her, you know? My niece Nicole and her boyfriend, Jeremy, are living with my mom, and Julie, she's gone I don't know where she went with her boyfriend. It's hard to see Julie, she calls, "Hi, do you miss me?" Yeah. Nicole needs a break helping mom, Julie can do it for a change. She helps her get a shower or fix her bed because she has accidents. It's hard right there. And she does it during the day, go the bathroom, and she clean up, change her things, you know. Nicole helps her and my sister is helping her, too, you know? It's hard do it, that's why I can't live there now. Someday, I'll live with my brothers, help me out, someday, I go home. I wish my mom could come see this reading, it's hard for her with the walker and everything. My sisters and my brothers can see what I do, right? It's pretty good. It'll be great.

Toni's Dream House!

By Toni Montgomery
In collaboration with Aley Blackmore



This dream house won't be in Hollywood, it will be in Rochester, by the Genesee river! Cold weather, no, but I have friends here. I have family here, yes!

My dream house has two bodyguards, handsome! And my boyfriend, Cedruc! It's big, but not that big—it has three rooms. But they're big! There are names on the rooms. One says "Girl's Room", one says "Guy's Room". The third room is for the goodie bags. When guests come they put the gifts in that room. When you walk through the front door, there's a picture on the wall. It's me! There's also a picture of Oprah and Tyler Perry. The house has a pink office. Within that office are stacks of pink journals, stored within boxes all around the room. There'd be no plants,

but there would be posters from Tyler Perry's films on the walls, and a picture of Oprah and Tyler Perry. The floor is coated in fuzzy pink carpet, and there would be pink chairs. It has a staff that helps me. They give me ideas, like a book club. I do a lot of writing in this office! There's a whiteboard, where I write my ideas. I'm going to write a book. It'll have my picture on it. There will be couches in my house, all pink! I'm short, so there's a small kitchen, with a small refrigerator. I'm short! The dishes are pink. There's a chef who makes salad and ribs. And cheese and crackers. And red wine, and rum and Coke. I have a bar in my house! No kids! I have parties in my house! Just for the holidays. I wear a gown, pink and flowy, to those parties. At the parties, we watch

movies of me and my boyfriend. We watch movies inside. I serve pigs in a blanket. I have book clubs, too! There are a lot of people at my party. I invite Jackie, Val, Nick, my friend Amanda, and Paulette. Oh and Shelley Ball! I talk about stuff with her. A newsperson comes to tape my party. My party's the talk of the town! I sign autographs for my book and give goodie bags. There is journal stuff in the goodie bags, like notebooks and pencils and pens. And pictures of me! Ladies have makeup stuff in their goodie bags. I have a maid, I can ring a bell and she's there. TV show!

They make a TV show of my party. I went to an art party, but the lasagna was really bad, so I'd do it better. I'd make burgers and ribs! And baked chicken with barbecue. And salad, potato salad. I'd hand out invitations! Actual invitations. And a list of people who are attending. I'd also have a big car. Long! And pink! Alcohol in there too, girl! I'd have a girls' night! If I lived in this house, I would be a different woman. I'd be famous! Rich! I'd feel perfect! I'd have people reading my story. I'd be like Tyler Perry. Oprah too. It's on my bucket list. It's very important to me.



A Visit to My Mother's New Home

By Patrick Hurley
In collaboration with Ria Karve



My family is very important to me. I have a big family. Some of my family is in Rochester and some live out of town, or abroad. We do try to meet family from out of town, like my brother Jerry from Canada. But in Rochester, I spend a lot of time with my family. I go to Mass every Sunday with my Mom, my sister Mary, and my brother-in-law, Jim. I love visiting my Mom. I take the lifeline to visit my Mom every Saturday. It's not that far: it takes an hour to get there from the group home.

Last year, my Mom moved to a new place. I know it's nice! We used to live in Mendon a long time ago: the good old days!

Then we had to sell it because my Dad passed away. I felt sad when we sold it; I have a lot of memories of my Dad from our house in Mendon. Then my Mom moved into an apartment to live on her own. It was on Monroe Avenue, in Pittsford. This was a big change for her because she was going to live with other people. When she lived in that apartment, I would stay overnight with her and help her with grocery shopping. I would put the heavy items in the cart and she liked to push it. When we got to the car I would help her put groceries in it. She used to drive in those days. But not anymore. It is harder for her to drive in the bad weather.

This is why she moved; it was easier for my siblings and me to take care of her at the new place.

She now lives in a home for old people. It's called St. John's. Her friends are in the same place, which is nice. Sometimes they play games and I play with them! I play the card game UNO and board games like Scrabble. My friends at St. Johns are everybody plus the staff. I visit every Saturday. The lifeline bus picks me up from the group home and takes me to my Mom's home, and brings me back too. I feel happy when I see her. We have lunch and dinner together and watch football on TV. We go to the cafeteria for dinner every Saturday. Sometimes we do movies when my sister, Eilene, comes to St Johns. She brings a DVD with her. It is a nice group home. She has a different mailbox here and it works with a key. They have a pool too! I love the pool; when you get inside it's nice and warm. When it's nice out, we go on walks around the house. She also has a nice, medium-sized kitchen. I like drinking coffee in the kitchen with my Mom.

One day, my sister Julie and I went to visit my Mom. My sisters take turns to visit my Mom with me: sometimes it is Julie that comes with me, and sometimes it is Mary. On this day Julie brought a delicious spinach quiche and we ate that before lunch, with coffee. Then she had to leave, because she had somewhere to be. I stayed, and my Mom and I had lunch and dinner together. For lunch, I had a bologna sandwich, two bananas, and four bottles of water. My Mom had a tuna sandwich. Around four o'clock, my sister Noel visited and gave Mom her medicines. She stayed a while and we talked about her daughter Bridget's wedding. They had good food at Bridget's wedding I know that! I remember that it was a cold, snowy day. The wedding was in a church. My Dad was there. At the reception, I danced a lot. I dance to any kind of music! I danced with a

bunch of different family members, and Bridget of course. I liked to dance fast! Talking about Bridget's wedding reminds me of Monica's wedding! Monica is my sister Mary's daughter. At her wedding, I did Karaoke! The song was "Girl Crush" by Little Big Town. I really like doing Karaoke! I also did Karaoke at a club recently for my birthday. It was fun! I got second place and I think we made a lot of money.



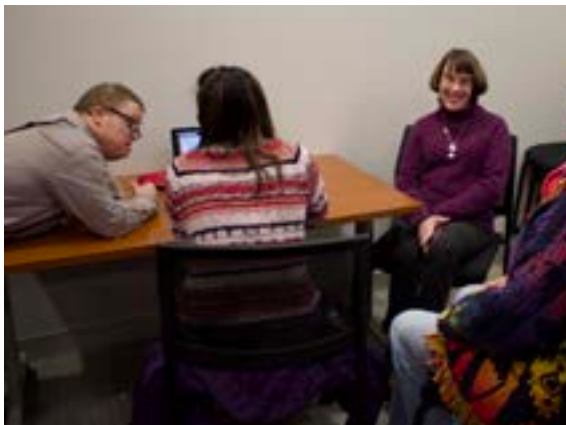
After Noel left, my Mom and I continued to catch up. We talked about going for a walk. There was also a calendar on the wall, and we talked about what she wanted to do every week. We wrote it down on the calendar so that she would remember. Then I got the mail in for her. I also told my Mom about my job. I work at a company called Web Seal, which specializes in supplying industrial sealing components. I arrange the differently sized components into bags and store them in the office. I also asked her about her new home and she said that she liked the house, and that she had

made good friends at the group home. Together, they attended book club meetings once a month. Her favorite book from the book club meeting is *America's First Daughter*. We also talked about days from a long time ago, when we lived in Mendon. We talked about the house: the porch, the pool, how Dad used to mow the lawn. Sometimes I would cook outside on the grill with my Dad during holidays — that was kinda fun! We had a lot of parties. Especially graduation parties — with a band! Mom remembered watching me in the pool, in the summer when it was nice out. It also reminded me of when I used to play the guitar and the drums! I used to take lessons when I was young. I kinda like them because they make a nice noise! And when I played these instruments, I did sing! Then we talked about times when we went to St. Catherine's church outside of Mendon. Sometimes, when the weather was good, we would have mass outside. We talked for a while about the good old days.

Talking about our old house reminded me of my school days; I went to BOCES 1 in Fairport. My Mom would get me ready for school and wait with me by the bus stop for the school bus. I would also go shopping with her. She would drive us to the mall for a long time. My Mom says that her favorite memory is my first day of school. Dad would help me with homework after

school. Sometimes I would help him mow the lawn. I mowed the lawn on the inside of the pool fence and my Dad used the big lawn mower, the kind you need to drive. We would use clippers to cut the grass together. I also remembered a time when I tried to skate — but don't laugh! A long time ago, I tried skating in the gym at school, and I fell down! I kinda twisted my knee. I don't remember too much more, but I know that someone helped me and I had to go to the hospital. When the nurse told my Mom about it, she got worried. She told me to be careful. These memories reminded me that I love my parents. I miss my Dad. He was a funny man, that I remember. I'm glad I get to visit my Mom every weekend. I look forward to seeing my Mom every weekend. It is nice being in her company.

Sometimes I stay over during holidays, like on Christmas Eve and Christmas night. I'll never forget that! I think it was Christmas Eve — we both got presents and opened them on Christmas morning. I got two canoodles: my first one was Chuck Norris and the second one was Taylor Swift. I plan on staying over for Christmas Eve this year as well. But this time I had dinner and left. My sister Julia dropped me back to the group home. I wished I could have stayed longer. But I did have fun, I know that!



Amanda and Chris

By Chris Thorton

In collaboration with Scott Mistler-Ferguson & Natalie Ziegler



This is the story of Amanda and Chris. Amanda is my friend. She's one of my oldest friends. I met her a long time ago at a party. It was my birthday and I was at her neighbor's house. We went shopping together right after the party. We went to Wegmans and have been shopping buddies ever since!

We do a lot together. She cooks for me, I help her clean her house, come back, vacuum, laundry, clean the garage, run some errands, like grocery shopping, all with Amanda. She is a mother for Mary, Alex, Ryan, and Sparky. She's nice and pretty. She's funny. Sometimes during the Spring and Summer she'll take me to get ice cream. I always get chocolate, and we go a lot. She got me chocolates and a Buffalo Bills hat for Christmas. The Bills are my favorite team.

In September, I do yard work for her in her front yard and backyard, like raking

the leaves. I live at the group home so on Christmas she comes over to drop off my present. We do the same thing for birthdays. During the holidays, she goes to visit her father in Buffalo, and I go to visit my sister and my brother. Amanda and I are both Buffalo Bills fans, and I think she goes to Buffalo sometimes.

Sometimes we go to Target and get DVDs and Walmart for headphones, chocolate, and drinks. I like hip-hop, Chris Brown, rap, and the NOW CDs. I like Justin Timberlake, Katy Perry, and Taylor Swift. I liked Justin Timberlake's performance at the Super Bowl this year. Amanda likes to listen to the radio, and I do too. Her favorite station is WDKX. My favorite is 93.3, The Buzz and 100.5 The Drive. I like Syracuse, Buffalo, and Canandaigua stations too.

I like Amanda's laugh. I like her jokes a lot. I think I make her laugh too.

she's really pretty. I like Amanda's dog, Sparky. He's really cute. Sometimes I go to the Public Market with Amanda. We get apple juice and cider. Sometimes Amanda gets fruit and vegetables. I don't like apples but I do like bananas.

Sometimes we watch movies like Home Alone, Power Rangers, and Ninja Turtles. I like seeing Golden Girls too with the stars: Dorothy, Sophia, Blanche and Rose.

We also go across the street from Amanda's house to visit her neighbor, Diane. Her husband cooks cheeseburgers and desserts for us. Her husband, Frank, is a chef. He's really good. He's especially good at making food that I like! He knows my favorite meals and he's a big Dallas Cowboys fan. They have a dog named Skippy, a puppy named Fluffy, and two sons named Michael and Chris. I go over there with my sister, too. I don't see them over the holidays because they go to their parent's house for Christmas, Easter and all those holidays. We usually just eat the dinner Frank makes for us and talk about how I'm doing in the group home. Amanda likes them too. They're good neighbors.

Amanda goes grocery shopping with me too. We take our time at the grocery store. Sometimes she buys milk, butter, snacks for her kids, orange juice and sour cream. I buy a soda, cookies, macaroni and cheese, subs, chips and cookie cake. After shopping, we go to the Public Market for fruit and vegetables. I like the store and the market. Afterwards we'll go to get her car washed and then it's off to Target and Walmart. All in one day! She looks at clothes and last time she bought boots. They were the high ones with the heels. At Target, I get DVDs like Friends, Everybody Loves Raymond and George Lopez. I like Joey on Friends. He's the funniest.

Amanda is more than a friend to me. She's beautiful and I want to be married and

with her. I'd propose to Amanda at her house. When I propose she might say "Yes!" If she said "Yes" then the wedding would be on! I've never proposed to anyone before but I wouldn't be nervous. I don't get nervous! I'd just be happy for it. I'd get down on one knee and say, "will you marry me?" and hopefully she'd say, "yes". I like Amanda. She's a nice, funny, gorgeous and beautiful woman. I like her jokes and she likes mine.

The wedding would be in her backyard with my family and friends and stuff, with free champagne and a buffet where we would have all the food. We would have pizza and macaroni and cheese and the wedding cake, which would be a chocolate ice cream cake. I would wear a tuxedo and Amanda would wear a nice wedding dress. I would have a Best Man, but I can't assign that just yet. It might be my brother, Pat. He lives in Albany and has a dog named Cooba. I get to see Pat on holidays and sometimes we see each other in Syracuse. He's my younger brother and he's always been well behaved (me too!). Gizmo would be there too. It would be best to have the wedding in the summer. I like Amanda's kids but I don't know the rest of her family. I'd be excited to meet them!

The first dance would be to a love song. I'm not sure which one. Maybe an Alicia Keys song or a Madonna song. I'm a good dancer; I can move the hips. We would throw the bouquet too. There would be lots of dancing, and a slow dance of course, to a love song.

For our honeymoon. We'd go to Hawaii. I want the honeymoon to be in Hawaii because it's so romantic. On the flight, there we could have food and drinks from the flight attendants. I could listen to music with headphones too. I wouldn't sleep at all. I'd look out the window. I really like airplanes. My favorite parts are the music and looking out the window. I think Amanda

likes flying, too. I think we'd both stay awake the whole time. Ok, maybe I'd sleep once on the flight but just for a little bit.

The first thing I'd want to do in Hawaii is go on a walk after getting set up in the hotel. The hotel room will have a bed, bathroom, a TV, a hot tub, and a balcony. When we sit on the balcony, we will be able to see buildings, the moon, and the stars. When it rains cats and dogs, you can see that too!

Everything will be very nice and clean. The room will have breakfast, lunch, dinner, and lots of snacks. So, after we are all set up, we're going to go on a walk on the beach, and then we would get ice cream, and after ice cream it'd be time for fireworks. At night time, we're also going to look at the moon and the stars.

While we're walking on the beach, we'll talk about my life at the group home and how I'm doing there—whether I'm behaving or not (I am behaving). Hawaii will be really pretty and fun. We'll look out at the ocean. I'd like to see ducks and geese because they make funny noises. I think Amanda likes them too. I think she'll like looking out at the ocean.

I think there would be an ice cream place by the hotel. The hotel is secluded and romantic. At the ice cream place, I would get all chocolate in a dish, and Amanda would get the same. We would get whipped cream and syrup as our toppings. We'd go back to the beach to eat the ice cream.

After the ice cream, we could watch the fireworks. I like the really loud ones that make a BOOM sound. they'd be green, red, white, pink, black, gray, and red! They'd be over the ocean. Sometimes we watch a lot of TV together. The fireworks and TV are both good, so we'd go back to the hotel for some TV after we see the stars and the moon. We could watch the boats in the water at night.

At night, we'd also see ducks, seals, and some seashells. We wouldn't take any

of the seashells, just look at them. I'd want to see turtles when I'm in Hawaii too.

The next day we'll be doing some swimming and watching TV and movies and having dinner. The ocean and the pool are both good for swimming. I think I might try surfing or boogie boarding. Amanda would try surfing and boogie boarding too because she's adventurous and likes to try new things. I've never gone swimming in the ocean before. Amanda hasn't either, so this would be exciting. I wouldn't be scared, but we would stand close together so we could help each other out.

We could go hiking and horseback riding. We could ride on trails. I've gone horseback riding once before in a barn. I fell once, but I'm not scared to do it again. We would go on a trail, maybe in the mountains. Amanda would be up for trying horseback riding too, even though she hasn't done it before. She might be able to help me learn how to ride, though.

For our picnic we would have cheeseburgers, macaroni salad, hot dogs, macaroni and cheese, and beans. For dessert, we'd eat ice cream cake, brownies, cookies and cream cake. we might have seagulls coming up, but we'd be ok. Then we'd play catch with a Frisbee on the beach. We'd play catch with a football and play some kick ball, but that'd be in the picnic area. I think Amanda's good at all those things. Football is my favorite, but I also like basketball and boxing. I think Football is Amanda's favorite, too. We would also play pool.

After all the activities and the picnic, we would be tired. It'd be time to relax in the hot tub and the pool afterwards. We would switch back and forth between the cold pool and the warm hot tub really quick, which is really fun to do. Neither of us have a favorite between the pool and the hot tub. We both like both!

The last thing we'd have to do is play poker. We'd go to a casino to win lots of money! I'd wear a suit. I wouldn't have a hat or anything – just a nice suit with a bowtie. I'll like poker. It's fun when you win money. This would be my first time playing and Amanda's too. We'd just be testing it out at the casino. I think we would be good, though. I have a great poker face. I've practiced my poker face before. I hold my hands together and stay calm. I think we would win. I would save the money that we win. I think Amanda would too.

When we get back from Hawaii, we'd have to take care of those house chores. there's the garbage, cleaning the basement, the windows, the garage, the refrigerator, the freezer, and the countertops. I'd say Hi to Sparky since he probably missed us. I'd hug and pet him and he'd be really happy to see us. We'd also make sure to clean the closets and get groceries! We'd also catch up on yard work. We'd mow the lawn and clean the garden. Sometimes in the Fall she'll have a lot of leaves in the garden. She grows flowers there. They're green, red, yellow, and white. It's really pretty. She has roses, daisies, and sunflowers. She really likes gardening and I help her water the flowers.

After all that work we could finally do the fun stuff! There'd be sledding, ice skating at the ice rink, skiing, and snowboarding. We've never done any of it but it'd be really fun. We're both adventurous and I'd be excited for all of it. Amanda's really brave and I like that about her. I really don't have a favorite thing about her. I like everything!

We'd probably go out for a date night too! I think we'd go to Applebee's. We'd both get dressed up, have dinner, and then we'd go dancing. I like to dance to Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, Mariah Carey, and Madonna. To be honest, I'm probably a better dancer just because I can

move the hips. After that, if we had energy we'd go out to the movies. I'd make sure to get the popcorn and sodas. A hockey game would be a good date night too! We could go to the Rochester Americans. Maybe we could go to a Lacrosse game to see the Nighthawks too. For Football, we'd see the Bills play. She likes all those teams, too.

Sometimes we go out for dinner. Sometimes we go out to a couple of stores. Bowling would be fun too! We go to get haircuts. We drive past people's houses, and go out to the barn to see horses, and go to 5 Below to get headphones.

I think it'd be really great to have a date for a whole day! We'd do the date on the weekend because there's nothing to do and we'd have plenty of time. In the morning, we'd go out for breakfast at a diner. I like how they have the classics: bagels, eggs, waffles, all that stuff. They've got soda and coffee too! That way I'll have lots of energy for the day. Next, we'll go shopping. This won't be boring shopping though. We'll go to Walmart for drinks, batteries, headphones, CDs, and DVDs. After the first round of shopping it'd be time for lunch. We'd go to Applebee's. We'd probably get a cheeseburger, soda, and French fries. I know we like a lot of the same foods. To keep going with date day, we'd head to the mall to walk around and shop at FYE. Honestly, I'd probably get more CDs and DVDs. Amanda probably wouldn't be buying things at FYE, she'd just let me shop. We might go get soccer gear too. Her sons, Alex and Ryan, are both really into soccer. She goes to see them play a lot and I'd be happy to go with her.

Finally, for dinner we'd go to the Cheesecake Factory. We could both order pasta with meatballs and Italian Bread. Of course, we'd get dessert to finish things off. I think we'd go with chocolate cake.

We really love each other. With Amanda and me it's true love.

All Kinds of Things

By Geraldine Copeland

In collaboration with Manasvi Chaturvedi & Sasha Mesropov



I'm Geraldine. This is my diary and it's about all the things that we talk about at CAC. CAC is a community connection program that I go to: I will talk about the events there, and the teachers, Ben Sherrington, and Chuck. I like everybody there. Here are some of the people and the things I like about them:

Crystal - She helps me with my lunch and she is generous, kind, and bubbly. She's wonderful and she does my hair for me. I love braids - my mom always had braids, and my mother's mother did too, so that she would not get knots.

James - James is very silly. He called me Rumpelstiltskin but I don't live in a castle and I don't weave! He is a wonderful person, and he helps other people

like me out. He tells nursery rhymes, like the man in a shoe, Rapunzel, those kinds of things. I love his sense of humor — he wants to go live where Santa Clause does! I think he is kidding about living with Santa Clause. He does transportation, and he makes me laugh! He inspires me a lot, so does Ben Sherrington.

Ben Sherrington - Ben Sherrington makes me laugh and he likes the snow — he wants to play in it. I like it when he teaches me new things, like painting on canvases.

Tom - Tom is my boyfriend, and he's wonderful. He's always playing Uno with me. I don't always beat him, but he's fun to play with. I met him last year when we were sitting in the conference room. He asked me "would you like to be my

girlfriend?”, and I said “yes!” I like sharing things with him and we like similar things. For example, like he likes coffee, and I like coffee!

Jesse - Jesse does work on her computer and takes care of every one of us. She comes to our ISVP meetings, where they talk about what goals you want to work on, and how you did in the past. Jesse is helpful, happy, and she’s always there when we need her.

Kim - Kim helps people in the office because she’s the manager. She’s shy, and a very quiet person. She also takes people on tours when they come around. Even though we don’t hang out a lot, I feel happy about her.

Chuck - Chuck is a great person and he’s very silly! He was a lifeguard, and he helped people. He told people when it was time to get out, and when it was time to swim. He is a nurse now, and he passes out the medicine at CAC. His shirt says “I’m the doctor and that’s the truth”. You know what else he wears? He wears a shirt that says “I was on the Swim Team at the Titanic”, but I don’t believe it because then he would be in the movie. Where is he getting these shirts from? He says he gets them out of the garbage but I don’t believe that; they say you can’t believe everything you hear.

Abby - Abby is very helpful, she helps people. She comes into the lunchroom and sits with us and talks to us. She is very wonderful and friendly.

And now, here’s my diary about CAC. I feel good about all the things I do at CAC, and I love everyone there.

Monday

Dear Diary,

The first thing I did today was get dressed and have my meds; I had apple cinnamon Cheerios that I bought, and then I brushed my teeth after I finished. I sat with Lauren on the way to CAC, and we talked

about how we felt. When I got to CAC, Tom, Nancy and I played Uno in the homeroom until class started. Tom is my boyfriend, and Nancy is my best friend. My first class was Meditation with Shawna, and it started at 9:00am. I closed my eyes, and I imagined myself in a different country, on a beach, collecting seashells - like in the Bahamas. I felt very relaxed. After I meditated, I went to eat lunch with Tom and Nancy in the conference room, and we talked about our plans for the upcoming week. I go to Anthony in afternoons for singing. I like it when he plays the Beatles — he plays all kinds of songs from them. He also lets us try to play the electric guitars.

My next class was art with Ben Sherrington - this week, we’re making a collage. Hopefully when it’s done we can use it as a checkerboard. I love checkers! One of the collages is yellow and green, and the other is blue and pink. I like the yellow one better, because yellow is my favorite color. I gave the yellow checkerboard to Shawna after I finished it, because I didn’t want my room to be cluttered because it is small. My room is mustard yellow! I love that color. After I got home, I had a snack and some coffee, and I got to play computer games until dinner! I played again after dinner until bedtime at 11 o’clock.

I saw ambulances today, and it reminded me of the time I helped my staff. At my old group home, two of my staff fell on the floor and they couldn’t get up, so I opened their mouth to see if they could breathe, and when they couldn’t, I called 2 ambulances. I told them my name and address, and said that we need two ambulances, please, and to hurry up.

I would like to get out of the group home some day, and be on my own. My house would be a dream house, with a wooden floor and yellow walls.

Tuesday

Dear Diary,

Today I got to have waffles for breakfast! They were the frozen ones that you get from the freezer, but one day I'd like to make the real ones. I brushed my teeth right after I ate, I waited for my van, and then on the van I sat with Lauren. We talked about all kinds of things, like when her next vacation is. When we got to CAC, I went to the conference room and sat with Tom, and then we hung out until class started at 9. I went to print writing with Erin first; we used special tools to make designs on special sheets of tinfoil. We got to pick whatever design we wanted, so I made a rainbow and palm trees first, and then butterflies, and a sky on the next one. I think they turned out really well - I even got to bring them home with me! After lunch, I went to Ben Sherrington - he makes me laugh a lot. Anyway, we went to his class, and worked on collages even though we weren't supposed to be working on collages. He is so silly! I made two air balloons on one paper, with a boy and a girl, but I still have to color it. We went back to homeroom after that, and then I played Uno with Nancy and Tom, and I won! Me and Nancy, we always talk, then we talk about our days, what we're gonna do.

After I went home on the van, I read a book called the *The Evil Librarians*; I'm on book five, but my sister told me they're working on book six now! I can't wait! They're really wonderful books, and at the end they talk about which books are coming up next, so I always get excited. In this book, a boy meets a stranger, who rips his clothes up and breaks his glasses; the stranger makes him wear a bunch of funny costumes that should be in the circus, but he wants no part in it! But in the end, the boy's grandpa gives him new clothes and glasses, and then he's happy. You know what I

would've done? Just stayed in my room and closed the door.

I gave the print writing to my parents! My dad didn't like it very much, but my mom loved it.

My parents live out in Greece. My mother and father are very nice people. I love them. My sister is in Florida so I don't get to see her very much. That makes me sad. Steve Jergison, my brother-in-law, and my sister had Kyle, Cory, and Clay, three boys.

I saw four deer today. I like deer meat; it tastes good, but I'm not gonna do it no more because I don't want to kill the precious deer. I don't want to see people take their guns and kill deer for deer meat; that's wrong. One time, our friend Chuck, not the one from CAC, but the one at my group home, thought he was cooking steak but ended up cooking deer.

I ate frog legs with my grandmother once, too. I'm not eating frog legs no more. Once when my grandma was alive, she gave us a jar of pickled herrings, and I ate half the jar.

My Aunt Sue found out our heritage is... we all come from Lithuania. I'm glad I'm Lithuanian! I'm Lithuanian, Scotch, German, and English. I would like to learn Lithuanian some day.

Wednesday

Dear Diary,

This morning I had cereal for breakfast. Since Lauren is on vacation, I sat with Scott; he's a nice person, but he doesn't talk very much.

Wednesday was happy. I went to Emily's room first for reading — we read two books, including *Country Mouse* and *the City Mouse*, and James (who's very silly) was in there. He kept saying "I'm Luke Skywalker" and he said "I'm your father." I think he saw too many Star Wars movies. I like it too but I'm gonna get the

book. After lunch, I went to Ben Sherrington to work on my collage again, and I almost got my balloon collage finished. I also started something else, another collage with triangles and all kinds of shapes. At lunchtime I sat with Tom and Nancy again and played Uno, and I won again! When I got home, I played games on my computer - I played a game with a cat, where you try to solve mysteries and get points, and then you can collect seashells. I had to take a break to eat dinner, and get ready for bed, but then I got to play games until 11pm!

I feel much happier here, at CAC, than I did at the Bahamas. Peoples and Places left me in the casino and they went off the boat to the stores and left me there alone. I couldn't find anyone, but I got my neighbor to help me. We went to the massage parlor, where they gave us a back rub. After that, I asked the captain to blow his horn asking people to come back on, and then they found me again. When I told them I was upset, they yelled at me for no reason.

Thursday

Dear Diary,

This morning I woke up at 6am. I got dressed and had my meds. I made some waffles, real this time! I put two scoops of pancake mix in, oil, milk, and whisked it all up until all the lumps were out. Then, it was still dry, so I put in some more milk, and then put it in the waffle machine. I just love making waffles! I'd like to get a job sometime, but I can't because there's no job opening. I'm a good cook and I would cook for everybody, and I know how to cook waffles now. I like to show people in restaurants how it's done.

I sat with Scott again; he smiled and said hello to me, but he still didn't talk very much. When I got to CAC, I hung everything up, and went to the conference room. My first class of the day was with Shawna, where we worked on mandalas (we

colored and put them in a folder); mine looked like a rainbow! I went to lunch, and played Uno with Tom and Nancy again. We're having an Uno tournament at my day program! We're gonna have lots of Uno cards. After lunch, I had paint and dye with Erin, and we finished up our signs. Mine says "please smile." and it has glitter and all kinds of stripes. I hung it by Ben Sherrington's room. I made something for Emily's wall in the dance room, because she doesn't have any color in the dance room. The last time I was in there, I decided she needed more colors. I made a parrot with all different colors, to look like my sister's parrot. His name is Remington (he called me Genny)! After paint and dye, we all went to home room and waited for our vans. At home, I played the cat game on the computer again and got a snack. For dinner, I had chicken, mashed potatoes and vegetables. I don't like cauliflower - yuck! Then, I came to UR!

Today when someone swore at me, I went to Jesse, and she helped me. She first told me to ignore him, she said, "Oh Geraldine, don't let this person bug you". So, I walked away and sat with somebody else who I knew.

I remember how different it was with Peoples and Places. At the airport, when I had a broken wrist, I asked for help with my bag, and they yelled so loud, I felt like walking right out of the airport. Another time, they left us on the curb, and went to get food, and a car could have come speeding and hit us. That's why I'm not with them no more.

Right now, I'm listening to the Davy Brothers - they play Irish music. I've seen them at least five times. Their music makes me happy, and it makes me smile. I love them, and they are so wonderful!

Friday

Dear Diary,

I first went to Ben Sherrington this morning. We made collages — I did an aeroplane. Ben made it and I colored it all different colors, on the back too. Then, I went to lunch and I did not have meat because of Lent. For Lent, we don't eat meat, and I am trying to not have behaviors like not yelling. After lunch, I went to Shauna's. At Shauna's, we did collages too but different ones. In Ben Sherrington's class, we use paper, and in Shauna's we're using magazines. In Shauna's class I'm making a spring collage — I want to make it look like spring because it is almost spring and it makes me happy. My favorite thing about spring is the flowers coming out, and seeing the lilacs because they're purple and they smell pretty.

I gave some of my artwork to Kim for her office because it needed color. I love doing artwork, and love painting the best. I also like drawing hearts because it makes me think of people smiling.

Ben keeps on coming in everyday, to the conference room. And so does Chuck the nurse. He is so silly! He used to be a lifeguard at the old Arc, where I swam.

Today, Chuck wore a shirt that "I was on the Titanic Swim Team", but I don't believe that — that's not true! I remember

when at Darien Lake, the lifeguard told me to hold a ring and give the line to somebody who couldn't swim, and I did that. They gave me a T-shirt that said "lifeguard" too.

I found out from our action club, guess what. We're going to a game place that has games, and they're free! Like tie-dye and coloring. They also have sand art. I like making sand art.

The action club is where we make things to send to people, and all kinds of places. We make them for little kids, and schools and sometimes we make scarves and blankets.

We have a food truck that comes in for the action club, in the bigger parking lot. The firemen come, the police cars come, and everyone comes. Next Saturday we're raising money for Golisano Children's Hospital - we're standing and asking people to donate. Then we get to buy lunch after.

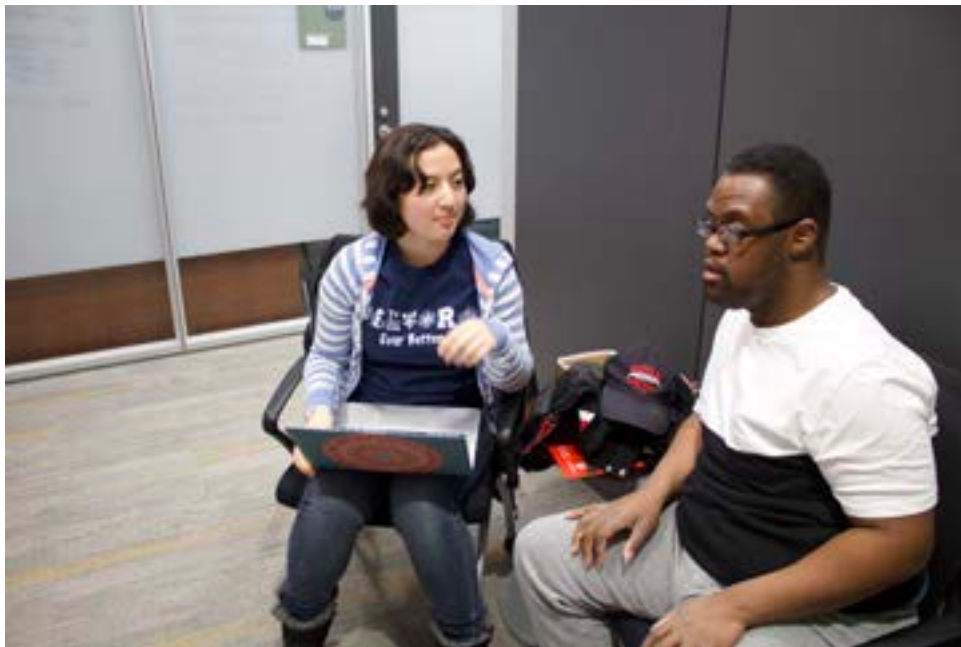
I was thinking about what I did across the street from CAC once. When we had the ice storm, I took a flashlight and helped people up there, because they had no power. That was a long time ago, before I had a walker. I couldn't go home because of the winds, and had to sleep on the floor of the gym — but that didn't bug me because I had a soft sleeping bag.



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

By Russell Hill

In collaboration with Emily Corpuz



Motorsports

I love motorsports. I started watching race car races when I was a kid. I watched the races on the TV at my mother's house. My mom and dad don't like race cars, but I found out about race cars by flipping through channels at my mom's house because my mom had cable. The cars seemed really cool, so I started watching the races. I watched race car races by myself, just chilling out, doing my own thing. And

ever since I was a little kid, I watched the races every Sunday. There are races on Saturdays, too—they're the same types of races as on Sunday, but with different drivers. Also, Saturday racing happens in the morning, and Sunday racing happens in the afternoon. I like both equally.

On Sundays, the race car races start at 1:30 pm, and end about 6 pm. I like to sit in bed to watch it on TV. Sometimes, I snack on a fruit cup or popcorn or donuts. I

can drink coffee in the kitchen while it happens.

I don't like to listen to the commentators while watching the race—I just like the race itself.

At the beginning of the race, someone waves a green flag. Then, the race starts. The race cars have to go around the track one thousand times to win. All of the races are, like, four hours long. But I like watching them, even though they're long. The first time I went to a race in person, I was around twenty years old. It took place in Rochester. I went with a group from CP Rochester. My staff members and housemates went with me. It was a good experience. I got to wear a Mountain Dew hat from one of my staff. This is because Chase "Race" Elliott and Dale Earnhardt, Jr. (who is #88) drives the Mountain Dew car. I also got to wear my race car jacket. It has the number 24 on it, which is for my favorite race car driver, Jeff Gordon, and it's also got his name and autograph on it. I have a hoodie that says the same things. The jacket is made of raincoat-like material. Another one of my old staff gave it to me just as a fun gift. It also has a pocket! And it has more pockets! And more pockets! I've got a lot of pockets on this one. And there are also buttons on the bottom. And a zipper.

Anyway, when I got to the building where the race was, I took a seat with my friends on the bleachers, and I saw the race cars in person for the first time. The cars were looking good. The race began with someone singing the National Anthem. Trumpets played during the National Anthem. Then, someone said, "Gentlemen, start your engines." Then, one of the managers waved the green flag to start the race. The race car engines were loud. Jeff Gordon was in the lead, and he won! No one was even close behind him. It was the Daytona 500, and he won a big trophy.

Another race that I saw in person was the Sprint Cup, which I saw about ten to fifteen years ago. The Sprint Cup is a big, annual race. I went with CP Rochester (Marcus, Teko, and Ben). One of my friends, who was also a resident of CP Rochester, suggested we all should go, so we all went to the race at Watkins Glen, which is close to Rochester.

The race happened from about one to five o'clock pm. There were about five to twenty cars there. The race was held outside. While watching the race, we had burgers and sodas. It was around spring/summer time, and about 95°F. I was wearing a hat to keep cool. We were sitting kind of far back from the race, but I was still happy since I like to watch racing in person better than on TV.

Sitting there in person, the cars sounded louder than monster trucks. I had to wear headphones and earplugs at the same time because it was so loud! We saw a couple of accidents happen with Danica Patrick, but everyone was okay. Number 24, Jeff Gordon, won. I was very excited when Jeff Gordon won. During the race, I also thought that watching the pit crew was cool—it's cool to see the pit crew working in person. I actually read about car mechanics in a book I got from the library since I'm a little curious about how cars work. I also have read a library book about race car history, about #8 and #88, which were both driven by Dale Earnhardt, Jr. (he always rides Budweiser). The book also talked about a race car driver who passed away: Dale Earnhardt, Sr., who drove #3, the Coca-Cola car. The book also talked about Jeff Gordon, #24. I also read a motorsports book that said #3 (Dale Earnhardt, Sr.) was best friends with Jeff Gordon. Another book I read was about a place where motorsports cars get fixed, like in a garage. I also saw something about

these places on TV. It's cool to know where these race cars get fixed.

Anyway, back at the race, a staff member bought me some stuff at the shop there. I got a poster for Jeff Gordon, a Jeff Gordon tablecloth, three Jeff Gordon jackets, a big Jeff Gordon car sticker, a Jeff Gordon book about DuPont and Pepsi cars, and a Jeff Gordon toy car. Actually, Jeff Gordon retired a few years ago. I was surprised when he retired, but I think it's because he wanted to be out of racing—he was too tired to keep racing.

Some other race car stuff I have is a #9 hat that's even bigger than all the other hats. I also got a #8 hat with the Budweiser logo on it. I also have a Jeff Gordon hat (it's a Pepsi hat). I also have a bed that's shaped like a race car. I also have a Dale Earnhardt, Jr. #88 toy car that fits in my hand—it's about as long as the height of a laptop keyboard. I got the car in a race car shop. It has windows on the front and the back and on both sides. It has a Mountain Dew logo. There's another logo next to the Mountain Dew logo that says "Quaker State." It's also got a name on the back that says "National Guard," and it has a flag next to it. This car always wins in the races. It's always the fast one. It's also got all these logos down here. They all say, "3M," "Auto Meter," "NASCAR Sprint," and "Stant." It's got a lot of words on them. There are also a lot of logos on the side near the headlights. It's got wheels. The wheels got the name on them. They say "Goodyear." If you look on the bottom, you can see all the things the car is made of. On the bottom of this car, it also says, "Made in China." There's a motor underneath the hood of the car. There's the gas tank right on the left corner of the car. I also have a #33 car with a Coca-Cola logo (it used to have a Target logo, but not anymore); and a #31 toy car with the Coca-Cola logo (the car's name is "Cat," and they call it "Cat 31"). I also have the #24 Jeff

Gordon toy car, which I also got from a race car shop. There's also a toy car with Target logo and a Dr. Pepper logo on it. I like playing with toy race cars. I like playing with them the best. Toy race cars go really fast, or they spin around. I play with them whenever I want to.

During this race that I saw in person, I saw Tony Stork's car. His car is #14 and has a Coca-Cola logo on it. (Other cars have Coke Zero and Pepsi Max logos on them.) But Tony Stork was actually a go-kart driver before he started race car racing. He was a really good go-kart driver. And actually, I watched go-kart racing before race car racing, and I first saw Tony Stork on the news with his go-kart. One time, his go-kart caught fire during a race! It was just his own go-kart, but it burned all the way down. An ambulance had to take him to the hospital. When Tony recovered, he went back to racing go-karts sometimes, but he also started racing with race cars. Actually, I started watching race car races because of Tony's move to race cars.

In the race I watched last Sunday, two cars crashed! One car crashed into the outside wall of the track. But, everyone was okay. There was another car in the crash, but it landed in the grass since it swerved to avoid the crash. Like I said, the drivers were okay, but their cars were totaled! The drivers were able to get themselves out of their cars, but they had to be taken away by an ambulance. The other drivers were upset because they had to stop the race.

Actually, it seemed like all the cars got banged up last Sunday. Race Elliot's car (#9) rear-ended Jimmy Johnson's car (#48). I'm a fan of Jimmy Johnson. Both drivers were okay.

There was another crash during this race. Both cars got smashed. One of the cars in this crash was car #24, driven by Jeff Gordon. The other car was driven by someone in a Sprint car. Another car that

was sponsored by DuPont crashed. Everyone was okay.

There were also two other crashes during this race. With the third crash, one of the drivers had a Boston accent. I don't know the car the driver with the Boston accent crashed into, but both cars got totally smashed. The fourth crash involved car #4, and I don't know the name of the other one. All of these crashes happened around the same spot, but everybody was fine. Car crashes happen pretty much every race. Four is the most car crashes per race I've seen. Another time, there was an accident with #22, a Coca-Cola car. He hit the wall, and there was a fire. The driver was okay, but the car was totaled. They had to grab him and put him in the ambulance. Actually, #10, #11, and #22 are all Coca-Cola cars. I like all beverages equally, including Coca-Cola Zero.

The race car that won last Sunday was Race Elliott. He has a blue car with a Mountain Dew logo on the side. He's a very good driver. He wins almost every time. This is his first time in the professional races.

Race car races are great to watch on TV and in person.

Buffalo Bills and Football

I was in my early twenties when I started watching football. I always wear my Buffalo Bills hat. I got it this past Christmas. It was a gift from the house staff. The hat has an autograph from Fred Jackson, #22. He signed it at a signing at the Greece Ridge Mall this past January. He also gave me a keychain with his autograph. I also have a Buffalo Bills calendar, with a different player for each month.

I also have another Buffalo Bills hat at home which I got the same day I got the one with the autograph. I've also got an old

hat that says "Est. 1960" on it. I also have a fourth hat which I got when I was in Buffalo when I was there with my Pinnacle Road staff. While I was there, I also got a matching Buffalo Bills scarf, and a Buffalo Bills jersey with LeSean McCoy's number (#25) on it. Both the scarf and the jersey came from the staff. LeSean McCoy is one of my favorite players, but I like all of them.

The first time I watched a game in-person was at the stadium along King's Highway. I was around 24 years old. I went with my old staff on Pinnacle Road. This was actually a training game, which is what the teams do before they start playing (before the season starts). There were a lot of people during this training game. Since it was a training game, the Buffalo Bills played themselves.

The game took place on a Tuesday, and it was at Total Sports Experience, which is in Gates, near Rochester. When I was there, I was able to walk around TSE the morning before the game started. We actually went there for a dance party a few years later. There were some people from my house and my friend Chris's house at the dance party.

But back to the training game. The training game started with the national anthem. It was an exciting game. Everyone was really excited about the game.

During the game, we had hot dogs and burgers at the concessions stand in TSE. I like ketchup and mustard with my hot dogs and burgers. I also had some baked beans, and there was also crispy chicken (like at KFC), and sodas (like Mountain Dew and Pepsi), and Gatorade, and coffee. Also, there was macaroni and cheese, ribs with barbecue sauce, collard greens, and salad. They also had apple pie there, and I shared an apple pie with my house. There were also cookies—chocolate chip and peanut butter. We ordered our food and took it back to our tables. I love to eat all the food at TSE.

After this game, we went to Bill Gray's, which is a restaurant in Rochester. They serve burgers, fish, garbage plates, pasta salad, bread, baked potatoes, and more sodas (like Coca-Cola, Coke Zero, and a new soda—Mountain Dew Ice!). They also have coffee. My ideal burger has onions, tomatoes, pieces of lettuce, hot sauce, spicy sauces, and American cheese. I like three to four patties on my burger, with fries on the side, and a Mountain Dew to drink.

A few years ago, I watched my first professional football game with the Buffalo Bills and the Indianapolis Colts. I went to this game with my old friends from Pinnacle at the Red Wings Stadium. It was really tense and exciting—the Buffalo Bills won! They scored in the fifties!

I also like to listen to football on the radio. I like it about the same as watching it on TV (and recording it at my house), but I like watching it in person the most because I like watching the Buffalo Bills team.

Buffalo Sabres (Hockey) and Disney on Ice

The Buffalo Sabres are always good. They always win. I watch their games on TV. I started watching hockey around the same time I started watching football. I watch it by myself because we got TVs in our rooms, and we got cable in the room. I watch the Buffalo Sabres on Sundays. It's really exciting when people score. There's like an alarm, and everybody's excited.

I've seen a couple games in person, when I was with King's Highway. The games were in a building downtown. The Buffalo Sabres were playing the Chicago Cubs both times. One of the players had a #25, but I don't know what his name is. We were very close to the hockey rink! I was very excited! But I got sort of scared, too. One of the staff got us all Pepsi drinks in the

game. I saw all the goals scored, and I was excited!

All of the players are my favorite. I even got a jacket with the Buffalo Sabres on it. I got this jacket from a group of my friends—we call ourselves the Wow 3. The Wow 3 is made up of our staff and my friends and me, Chris, and all of my friends in Gates-Chili. Anyway, someone in our group, Christie, had a baby, and so she gave the Buffalo Sabres jacket to me. I also got a bus, a little Buffalo Sabres bus! Another time, while watching a TV game, one of my roommates gave me a Buffalo Sabres fan. (My friend is also a fan of the Buffalo Sabres.)

I really like the Buffalo Sabres, but I also like ice skating. I like Disney shows on ice. We saw the Lion King on ice in person! This one was one of my favorites ever. I saw it with a couple of friends from the house. This was a long time ago, after the time I started watching football.

We also saw the Little Mermaid, Lilo and Stitch, Pinocchio, Aladdin—oh! And Beauty and the Beast, and Pocahontas!

Sometimes, I watch ballet on ice on TV, on Saturdays or Sundays. I started watching this around the same time I started watching Disney on Ice.

Wrestling

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

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

I also have a hat that says “Tap Out” on the front and “My Fight Matters” on the back. It’s got a little symbol on it—it looks like a ‘T.’ There’s also a “Tap Out” logo on the tag, inside the hat. There’s some more words on the tag, and on the back of the tag, too. I got the hat at a wrestling match, one I saw in person.

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

The match began with the national anthem. There was an American flag dropped down from the ceiling. (I actually have four shirts with the American flag on them, and one has the American eagle.) The match was a Smackdown Live, which is the one that comes on Tuesday. The ones who wrestled were all of the superstars. I also saw Kurt Angle—he’s a manager at the matches, and he gives out the titles. He used to be a wrestler. He’s in the Hall of Fame. I also saw Shane McMahon and Stephanie McMahon—they’re sister and brother—and I saw their father, Vince McMahon. I also saw Triple H in person—he’s an old wrestler.

I also saw “TNT” Savio Vega—he does all the wrestling. I always watch him every Wednesday, about 8:00 pm for Wednesday Night Wrestling.

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

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

There are also these two wrestling groups, the WWF and the WWE. They stand for “World Wrestling Federation” and “World Wrestling Entertainment.” The WWF is kind of old, like old time wrestling. I like both of them the same.

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

Basketball

The Chicago Bulls are doing good. I’m a fan of them. I got the shorts for them,

too. I got the Andi shorts with Michael Jordan. I have a jersey, #3—Big Ben! I also have a basketball book, called *The Book of Basketball*. I got the book in the library. In that book, I learned about all the games. I saw all these jerseys in the book. The book's got Michael Jordan in there. I've got a lot of books about basketball. They're about the basketball players. There's a ghost writer, too, for one of the books—I saw the ghost writer in person. We met in a big building in Rochester. And I got a basketball from the ghost writer, and I also got to meet all the basketball teams at this NBA basketball convention. One of the players from the basketball team gave me the book this ghost writer wrote. I don't know the name of this player.

I went to the basketball convention with everyone in my house. We got sodas at the convention. We also got hot dogs, hamburgers, and pizza. Later, there was a game, and they sang the national anthem. During the game, I heard the alarm sound when they scored! After the game, we had a soda break. I drank Pepsi, and then Mountain Dew in the car home.

Disney World

Disney World's got Mickey Mouse, Pocahontas, Lilo & Stitch, Winnie the Pooh, Pinocchio, Bambi, the Little Mermaid, the Lion King, and more Lion Kings, and the Lion Guard. They're coming out with a new Lion King movie—with people in it! There's also the Disney Channel on channel 61. (I found out about the new *Lion King* movie on channel 61 and channel 30. I also heard about the new movie on the radio station 101.3. There's another radio station that talks about Disney: 93.3.)

But anyway—Disney World has always been my favorite because they have my favorites on the TV, and I love their music. I went there a long time ago. I also love the big castle in Disney World. Disney World is kind of big. They play all the Lion King music there. At Disney, they play all the Disney music, with singing and dancing. I also like the food there. Actually, I was born there, in Disney World, in 1986. I had a house in Disney World, too. One of my uncles, two sisters, and I lived near Disney World.

How the Whale and Giraffe Became Friends

A Children's Story

By Caitlin Weir
In collaboration with Maggie Perry



“This is dedicated to my new niece”

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

The giraffe tried to talk to the monkeys but everytime she came close they would swing away and laugh. She would try and talk to the frogs but they were little and

they would look up and say, “What? We can't see your face!”. She tried to talk to the zebras but they galloped away because they couldn't hear her! The giraffe got so upset that she started to cry and run away.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The whale went, "Why?"

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

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

The giraffe asked, "Really?"

The whale insisted, "Yes!"

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

asked the whale, "Do you have any friends?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The seahorses made music by playing on shells, the turtles decorated the sea with coral, and the monkeys brought

bananas for their sea friends. The zebras showed the dolphins how to dance and the dolphins were doing backflips. They all had a great time playing around at the party and they all became friends!

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



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