

Verbal Equinox

Spring 2012

Best wishes from Claire Hughes and all the writing consultants
at the Weber State University Writing Center/DELIC.

In this issue:

2011 Writing Center Writing Contest Winners

Creative Non-Fiction

- 1st Place - Starla Stanley.....Memories
2nd Place - Julius Mayer.....Story of My Life
Honorable Mention - Raquel Perea....Military Health Technician

Fiction

- 1st Place - Raquel Perea.....May Showers
2nd Place - Joey Kirkham.....While the Elephant Slept
Honorable Mention - Isaac Akers.....Rodger Douglas

Poetry

- 1st Place - Melanie Walker.....Twilight Falls
2nd Place - Zachary Stickney.....The Missing Silhouette
Honorable Mention - Starla Stanley.....A Smaller Picture

Scholarly Non-Fiction

- 1st - Debbie Bacon.....The Merry-Go-Round of Texting
2nd - Nathan Waugh.....What on Earth Do You
Call That Thing?
Honorable Mention - Michelle Michelsen...The Development of
the Individual Woman

Talented writers in all areas attend Weber State University, and we are glad that many of them submitted their work to the Writing Center's annual writing contest last fall. We enjoyed reading them, and we look forward to another great round this fall. Keep your eyes out for the call for submissions flyers.

Because we had a lot of great submissions for the contest this year, our thirteen judges had some tough decisions to make. We extend our hearty "Thank You" to all those who submitted their work. We also thank the teams of judges who read, carefully weighed, and discussed each and every submission.

"The reason one writes isn't the fact he wants to say something. He writes because he has something to say."

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Thanks again! Write on!
--Eric W. Riddle, Editor

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Editors performed only minimal editing in order to preserve the authors' original works.

Memories

by Starla Stanley

I gasped, looking down at his face. He looked like giant puzzle pieces were dividing his face into dark red purple and pale yellow-colored sections. He had a tube taped in his mouth and a big needle hanging out of his neck. His beautiful brown hair laid framing his face and falling down on the pillow around the back of his neck. I reached down to touch his big hands, and his skin was cold and waxy feeling. I wanted to see his eyes. They were his soul. The light and charisma that came out of his big brown eyes charmed everyone. I lifted up his eyelid and looked down to see a glass ball that reminded me of a giant marble. Anatomy without life is empty.

“You’re cold, Sis,” was the last conversation we had.

“Funny I didn’t know I was until you woke me,” I answered him sarcastically.

The cold air sent shivers through my skin. I heard the creaking of the hall closet and knew instantly Brandon would be returning with all his energy. Moving my body over on my twin bed I propped myself up, preparing for one of my favorite rituals. My door squeaked and my brother walked back in shaking the blanket out over my bed. As he jumped onto my bed, the mattress formed to his weight, pushing me up higher. Our feet were in each other’s faces, with our heads propped up on the opposite ends of the bed. My body was five-foot ten-inches and slender, and his was six-foot-two and big. We barely fit on my twin bed together anymore. We had spent hours sharing in my bed over the years. Tonight, he had just returned from a date and was full of energy. He went on and on about the bowling, the walk, how kind and smart the girl was. It was an evening like so many. I was home for Christmas break in Rapid City, South Dakota and was leaving in the morning to go back to college in Utah. It was a perfect ending to the holiday season.

How had I gotten here? Standing next to my dead brother. It was a day I would never forget, March 13, 1989. It was a crisp spring day in Ogden, UT. The air was cold and the sky was crystal clear, the color blue that only shows up against white capped mountains. Feeling relieved, I had no homework I took the local UTA bus out to my mother’s house in Layton to hang out until she got home from work. She had moved out to Utah that year to start teaching; my father and brother were to join her at the end of the school year. My father, an officer in the Air Force, had received orders to move to Hill A.F.B. As I entered the home, I heard the phone ring. I ran up the stairs.

“Hello.”

“Is Mrs. Miller there?”

“No. May I take a message?”

“This is Doctor Johnson from Ellsworth Air Force Base. I need to get in touch with Mrs. Miller. Do you know how I can contact her?”

“This is her daughter. Is my brother or dad ok? Please tell me what is going on?”

“Please, do you have Mrs. Miller’s number?”

I rattled off the number to Washington Elementary School in Bountiful, UT. The doctor thanked me and hung up. My stomach dropped. I was so scared. We had no cell phones, and the number at my mother’s school was busy. I walked out to my mother’s patio and sat on the edge of the railing that circled the deck.

“Please, God, don’t let anything have happened to my brother. I have already lost two. Don’t take my best friend too.”

Tears were running down my face. Then it happened; the air went silent and all of nature stood still. He was there.

“I love you, Sis. I wanted to say goodbye.” Softly, the voice whispered as clear as day. The cool air returned and the leaves shook.

“No, No, Brandon. You are not dead. Please, no!”

Jumping to my feet, I ran inside to call my Mother’s school again.

“Washington Elementary.”

“Can I please talk with Mrs. Miller?”

“Who is calling?”

“This is her daughter, Starla.”

“Starla, she will be home in a minute. She left ten minutes ago.”

“Thanks.”

I ran to the front of the house and sat on the porch waiting to see a white Jeep coming down the road. Hearing the noise of an engine, I looked up. I ran up and as my mother opened the passenger door. I asked, “Is Brandon alright?”

Slowly walking over, she wrapped her arms around me and deliberately uttered the words “No, Sissy. He is dead.”

Memories

(cont.)

Making fists, I started hitting her as fast as I could, repeatedly beating her chest.

“NO! NO! NO! NO! Mother, he can’t be. Not Brandon.”

I am not sure how long I hit her, but I know it had to hurt. She just let me go on hitting her until I fell in her arms, weeping uncontrollably.

“We need to go, Sis. I need to get us some flights.”

It wouldn’t register. I did not want to hear it; I wanted to be in another world, any world other than this reality. So I left.

“Where are you going, Sis?”

“For a run.”

I ran for the longest time barefoot, with tears streaming down my face with every exhale. After my body physically had nothing left, I walked into the door of my mother’s home. “There is a blizzard in Wyoming and South Dakota. All airports are closed. They need me to come identify the body. Your father is not capable. They have him locked up on suicide watch. He found Brandon. We will need to drive. It is thirteen hours. Let’s go to your dorm and get the clothes you will need for the week.”

Hell: the only word to describe the drive. It was a complete white out and they closed the interstate right after we passed through the road block. Nature echoed my feelings of despair. I was driving with the parking lights on to try to see the road and then I turned off all lights to drive in the dark blizzard. The snow was going horizontally, and I had to pull the wheel against the wind to stay on the road. A big part of me was just wishing God would blow our car off the road and take my mother and me to be with Brandon.

The wind-chill was forty below, a normal winter day in South Dakota. As we entered the hospital doors, the cold stayed with me. The smell of ammonia and alcohol made my stomach almost vomit. My mother put her arm on my back. I swallowed it back down and regained my composure.

“I will go get Doctor Johnson.”

The receptionist must have known who we were by our appearance because we hadn’t said a word when we were greeted. The white tile floor looked like something out of a nightmare to me. Why are hospitals so cold, so sterile? Then a quiet voice got me to look up.

“I did all I could do. I am so sorry. I tried for hours to resuscitate your son Mrs. Miller.”

Oh my gosh, the doctor is a boy. He is a lieutenant, probably fresh out of medical school.

“Ma’am, please follow me.”

Standing, I started walking behind my mother and the doctor to see my brother.

“Sis, no. You do not need this in your life.”

“I want to see Brandon, Mother.”

It was a rare moment in our relationship. She relinquished her control to me and did not say another word. The walk down the hall to the elevator felt longer than any dream in a hallway. The elevator button ring seemed to echo as the doors opened for us to step in; one floor down to the morgue. How can the world be so silent? How is it that one person leaving this world can take so much life with them? The doctor walked us down a hall then into a room. Before entering, I took a deep breath. I was walking, yet I felt like I was outside of my body watching the whole picture. I could see my mom breathing heavy. There stood the doctor with the same color eyes as my brother. The color silver was everywhere, metal everywhere I looked. I did not count the many doors on the wall where they roll the bodies in and out. There were tools like an operating room ready to perform a procedure. Then the visual that stopped me in my steps and made my heart literally not beat. I couldn’t swallow; I felt like I could not breathe.

A white sheet was formed to a body on a table rolled out of the wall. My mother walked up and pulled back the sheet. I watched from across the room as she went through her emotions of saying goodbye to her youngest child, her seventeen year old baby. She cut a lock of his hair off and put it in her pants pocket. Then she kissed him. I am not sure what I was thinking as I watched, I just felt frozen in time and like I was in a heavy fog, trying to breathe.

The thoughts cleared as I was placed back into the reality of holding my dead brother’s hand. Then my mind went to the day before when I had sat on the railing.

“I love you, Sis. I wanted to say goodbye.”

“He is not here, Mother. He is gone.”

Then the tears wouldn’t stop. She placed her arm around me and walked me to the elevator. My mother never

Memories

(cont.)

shed a tear in front of me that day.

Our next stop was to see my father. We went down the hall to a room with military police sitting outside the door. There was another military police inside the room that stood when we entered. On the bed my Father sat with his legs hanging over the bed. The officer was rocking back and forth like a little child with his arms wrapped around his knees; he looked small.

"Lynn." There was no recognition, no response to the woman who had been his wife for twenty one years. Mother turned to leave the room.

"I love you, Father," I whispered as I turned to leave the room.

"Sissy, oh Sissy." Looking up he stood and hugged me and started to cry. As I wrapped my arms around the grown man, the history major, the musician, the officer, the father, he fell to the ground like a noodle. I could not hold him. The military police came and caught him right before his head hit the floor and sat him back on the bed where he started rocking again. For the next year, that is how I came to know my father. He was sent from psych ward to psych ward in different hospitals around the country. He doesn't rock anymore, but he doesn't live either. He left my mother a year after my brother's death and went to Washington to live by himself. Every two or three years, he calls to tell me he loves me and is so sorry. Then he disconnects that number.

After leaving the hospital, my mother and I went back to our home on base. As we pulled up we saw my brothers Triumph convertible sports car backed up in the driveway. Walking up, I saw the hose coming out of the exhaust and going into the home. Ever so clever, I thought as I saw the duct tape wrapped around the exhaust pipe to make sure the carbon monoxide went in the house. The screen door was broken. Opening the front door, we ran into the hall closet door which was broke off and our piano leg that was against the wall had a big chunk of wood broke off. I assume that happened at some point with my father trying to get Brandon out of the closet he chose to sit in to end his life. In the closet on the floor I saw a tape player. I leaned down and pushed play. "Comfortably Numb" by Pink Floyd started playing. It was a cassette tape with auto reverse, and he had recorded the song on both sides of the cassette repeatedly. The last noise he heard. I was sick thinking of him in there scared. I had protected him his whole life, and this time I wasn't there for him. It killed me.

Months later, I found myself in a counselor's office.

"Everyone has to feel anger to heal. Anger is one of

the emotions you go through."

Anger is not a feeling I ever felt towards my brother.

The last time I saw him was when he put a blanket on me, then plopped down on my bed to tell me about his date before I went back to college. We spent the night laughing and sharing.

"I love you, Sis. I can't wait to hang out with you during spring break." He gave me his great bear hug and walked out of my room.

My mom was right. I did not need the years of nightmares of seeing my brother with the tubes in his neck and his face all different colors, but I needed to see my best friend dead to have closure. There are days I feel his presence. When I am aware he is near, I get tears in my eyes and a smile on my face.

"Brandon"

I often watch the moon at night
I sit with the wind
There are rocks with no voices
Since you ended your life

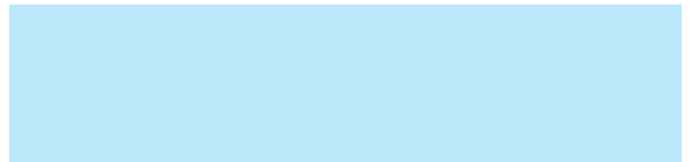
I got tired of screaming into the clear night

I watch the mustard fields blow in the wind
Feeling the gentle breeze that makes them dance

I'm me again after a little sin

I have my own son now
I call his name often
For hearing your name brings joy

Please hear me Brandon,
The moon is beautiful once more.



Story of My Life

by Julius Mayer

My father was born and raised in war torn Poland in the 1950s. One of the assets of the Soviet Union at the time, he wanted out. When he turned thirty-two, he escaped and went to America with his wife. I was born two years later. My name is Sklavok Zagorski, and I was raised American in a Polish family. Father would not tell me about Poland while I was growing up. Whenever I asked about his home country, he would just say, "You have a better life now. We are in America, the land of freedom and opportunity." I could not understand why he despised his country of origin.

I realized America was my home and his new home, but I set myself a goal to make money and go to my country. We lived in a neighborhood in the Bronx. The school I went to had many different people of different ethnic groups. There were some African-Americans, some Asians, some Hispanics, and also Caucasians. The school was a poor school. It had five classrooms for about three hundred kids. The classrooms were muggy and loud.

Learning was hard to do because of the environment. Many kids in my graduating class just slacked off and did not care. Many of them grew up to be in gangs and future felons. Others became drug addicts and some dealers. Very few people cared about the education. I was one of them. I worked hard in school and always gave my best. My father made sure of that. He made sure I gave my best and never gave up. He forced me to do well in school and to choose a good career. The place we lived was sort of like an apartment building. It was old, at least fifty years. It smelled of mildew in every room. My family had to share a room with three other families. We were all Polish so that made life a bit easier. Although my father and my mother would not teach me my native tongue, I learned it on my own. I watched and learned, paying attention to what was said and what the person was doing, and I slowly began to pick up the language. I could understand by the time I was eight. When I tried to speak it with my father, it had the complete opposite effect. I thought he would be proud of me, but instead, he became angry with me. He made me suck on a bar of soap for one hour every time I tried to speak Polish. Instead of speaking this at home, I got some other children in the grades above me to teach me. It was hard to get them to keep the secret; in order to keep quiet, I had to give them candy or money.

Once I turned sixteen, my mother passed away. This was very hard on not only my family but also the families that lived in our neighborhood. She had been very lively and a great person to talk to about anything. She was also a hard worker; she had worked in a textile factory since my parents arrived in America, through her pregnancy with me. I do not know how much she made. My father always said it does not matter how much one is paid as long as one is happy. We were a happy family. I eventually figured out my parents were not paid much

judging by our living conditions. But my father was right. We were happy and together. I graduated high school at eighteen and went on to a small community college down the street. I studied there for a while but then my father became ill. I then went to find work and finally found it working at McDonald's. This was against my father's wishes. He viewed fast food jobs as work for someone who has a bad background or no education. I, however, did not have a choice. It was the quickest job I could find, and I could barely pay for the medicines for my father's illness. I eventually convinced him to let me take him to the doctor.

We did not own an automobile, so we rode the bus. It was a painful ride for my father and for me. Every bump made him cringe and grab his chest. This made me sad and scared. It took the bus two hours to get to the hospital. Once we got there, my father could no longer walk. I had to carry him on my back through the main entrance and we had to wait at least forty-five minutes for an "available" doctor. There was a window in the waiting room, and we could see people in lab coats just sitting there playing cards on a gurney. This struck me.

My father came here, to America, for life, property, and his own pursuit of happiness, and this is how the country repays him in his dire need. When we finally got in, we were seated again in a room with no windows and a pure white light. After about fifteen minutes of sitting there, I wanted to get up and call someone, but my father, in his raspy, weak voice, told me not to. So I stayed by his side and waited and waited. A doctor came in after an hour of our being seated and stated my father had lung disease and had to be hospitalized. In order to support my dad, against his wishes, I took up multiple jobs and dropped out of school. The whole community pitched in, too. It was not enough. My father lingered, and then in 2004, he passed. By that time, he was a grandfather and a father-in-law. My wife and I held the marriage in his hospital room and brought only the closest of friends. My wife, my child, my unborn child, and I live in poverty to this day. I went back to school and received my Bachelor's in psychology and we survive on WIC and Medicaid. This is how the people of this country treat us. I just wanted my story to be heard.

Sklavok Zagorski currently has four jobs and his wife has two. They are supporting two children and cannot afford life insurance or insurance of any kind. People in this situation need any help they can get. Many people are out of a job, not all of them are uneducated. Many have degrees to high paying professions. This is the reality of the situation. Another reality is people need to help people.

Military Mental Health Technician

by Raquel Perea

I try to make each person I meet with feel comfortable. Slouching low in my chair with a casual tone, like two friends conversing, I put them at ease. I even put the pen down when emotion rises and let empathy flood into my eyes.

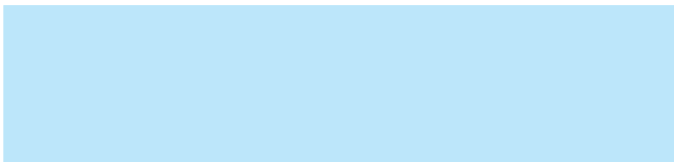
Questions drum off my tongue with quick succession: “How old were you when your mother left?” “Have you ever been abused?” “Are you having any thoughts of suicide?” The words flow, floating their way into the atmosphere to meet a patient’s thinking pause. And no matter the content, no matter my heart-wrenched surprise, no answer ever gets an eyebrow raise. I walk the chow hall with a bucket full of others’ secrets.

As I wait in line, I watch Smith seated amongst chattering friends, absentmindedly stirring the mash potatoes on his plate. He relapsed last week, and I wonder if his lunching buddies have noticed his recent introversion. When it’s my turn in line, Davies, who’s going through a grueling divorce, serves me my order of pork chops dispassionately and forgets to offer a “Have a nice day” as I take the plate. Seems things have taken a turn for the worse. He’s been shuffling around like this: blood shot eyes, sagging expression, and wrinkled uniform for the last week.

At least Callaway is doing well today. I spot her nearby lightheartedly joking with her boyfriend. I had a feeling Lieutenant’s counseling style would work well with her. I’m glad I put them together. The cashier rings up my meal and Callaway catches my prolonged glance and quickly averts her eyes.

I push through the 11 am lunch crowd, a field of camouflage, loud voices, and brief “hello/goodbyes.” I pass familiar face after familiar face, which brightens in recognition. Yet, shortly brightness collapses to quiet shame, exposed, as their recognition leads to a memory connection.

Their stories fall off the book shelf of my mind, revealing sour tidbits. Raped when he was 10, diagnosed with bipolar disorder, on 24-hour watch. I can barely see their eyes looking at mine, just labels in Times New Roman font under SOAP note: Diagnoses: Axis I. II. III. I quickly look away, out of respect. Our exchanges are a silent unwanted acknowledgment that holds too many seconds, and I breathe better as I exit. Yet, as the distance between us grows, foot propelling foot, I am left rereading the opened story in my mind. I just don’t forget.



May Showers

by Raquel Perea

Papalou said the rain would stop when the world gave way. And so it rose, engulfing ferns, filling cracks, pooling in my shoes. We strung up the hammocks from the ceiling beams and slept as boats on a rising tide. The rain fell continuously—knee deep, Papalou and I trudged to the market, our cattle following lazily behind us. I gathered stray floating items that had bobbed out the doors of neighbors' houses. A rubber slipper, a 5-gallon bucket, a drowned kitten. Papalou muttered a sing-song chant, barely audible, that our ancestors had been singing for centuries.

"Karanaeh-ugantcha-karanaeh-ugantcha" fell in rhythm of the rise and fall of muddy steps. Papalou, merry in song, was swept in the remnants of a memory — eyes focused afar off. The same song was sung into the souls of his feet as an infant, stomped by his father in ceremony, breathed into his soul. "Karaneh-ugantch-a-rah taka-rah taka." Papalou never taught me; he just repeated the words.

The rain took three lambs. We couldn't get them to the roof fast enough. Papalou moved slowly, meditatively heaving limp Kantrana from her watery grave to his shoulder, his lips moving in remnants of chant. I cried, but the rain washed my tears away. Papalou's hand was wooden and pruned as he took mine. The familiarity of the chant filled my throbbing heart.

The water rose to touch my belly button. Papalou moved our belongings to the roof. Glee took my body; I splashed and swam, laughing with the rain. Then the water carried the cattle away and stole my cheer. Papalou and I sat on the roof and watched the drowning world, legs dangling over the edge, the flood lapping my toes. Papalou never stopped singing. I refused to cry, in order not to contribute to the rising pool. Seven days had passed, and the rice was almost gone. I passed the hours staring into the treetops, looking for signs of life. I had been watching a child who had been sitting on a branch for days. On day eight his body gave way, and fell with a faint splash into the rushing tide. I dreamed of the sun.

"Karaneh-ugantcha-karaneh-ugantcha."

Papalou sat, knees bent, resting on the balls of his feet, a distant expression on his face. The dark clouds pressed in from overhead and sat in my lungs. Rain dulled my senses, blinding my eyes. Grains of a scant meal sat in my belly.

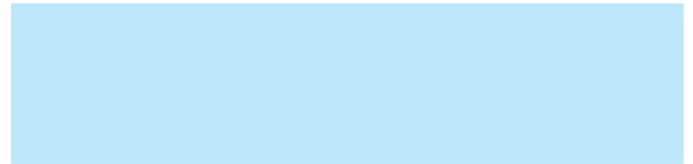
"Karaneh-ugantch-a-rah taka-rah taka."

The words stung, tasting of mockery. Where were our ancestors now? Agitation boiled and brimmed. "Papalou, why do you sing? They are deaf. They have forgotten us." Papalou finished his verse and paused, his eyes tracing the

horizon momentarily.

"Mondi, do you know what the words of the ancient song mean?" Papalou continued to look straight ahead. "In the prison, do we find our God. We give. He takes. We bow."

The next morning I was awakened by rays of light, rising from the east, kissing my eyes.



While the Elephant Slept

by Joey Kirkham

Oh, how Mr. Gibberwald hated waking up to the cock and the doodle, and even the doo of the chicken, or was it a rooster? Mr. Gibberwald contemplated this for some time but soon let the thought pass his mind. He especially hated the glare of the sun piercing through his window. This was much too bright for Mr. Gibberwald, and he hated it. He lazily reached for his glasses. Oh how he hated reaching for his glasses in the morning. Let the reader know that Mr. Gibberwald is, in fact, an old man, and as an old man, he grew to hate everything. No, no, no, let us not assume that Mr. Gibberwald hated EVERYTHING, but Mr. Gibberwald was an old man. An old, grumpy man.

He would often start his day by sitting on his white rocking chair on his porch. The chair would go crick and crack and creeeeek, and crack again. It was an old chair, and Mr. Gibberwald hated the creaking and cracking of the chair as he rocked back and forth. Every morning he would light his ol' fashion lookin' pipe and puff away. He would puff, puff, puff away as he cricked and creaked in his rocking chair. The smoke would billow up in its little nesting place and slowly creep out, floating up high, high and away, up into the sky. Mr. Gibberwald would do this day in and day out, rocking on his lonely chair out on his lonely porch, accompanied by none other than his lonely pipe. To children, he was a very scary man. They would always walk on the other side of the road when they approached his house in hopes of not getting yelled at. Nonetheless, Mr. Gibberwald would find a reason for yelling at the children. He didn't particularly enjoy children. Oh, poor Mr. Gibberwald.

To adults, Mr. Gibberwald was a very sad man. Adults would often visit his home with a plate of brownies. He would bark at them before they reached the porch. Mr. Gibberwald hated brownies. Oh, poor Mr. Gibberwald.

There was one thing that gave Mr. Gibberwald joy. It was the green, rolly hills. He called them the green rolly polly golly hills. To other people, it was known as the city park. Mr. Gibberwald loved the park. It consisted of a small pond surrounded by a few park benches. Off to the side of the pond, just beyond the benches, were two green hills. They were green, and very rolly, or so Mr. Gibberwald said. He loved the green hills and would visit the park every day, just before the sun would creep down below the mountains, falling into a deep slumber.

This particular day that he went to the park would be a day he would never forget. This day would change Mr. Gibberwald forever. Strange but wonderful events were soon to unfold, but this had not yet occurred to Mr. Gibberwald as he set out for the park on this dark and gloomy day. Apart from the rolly green hills, Mr. Gibberwald enjoyed the gathering of

rain clouds, especially when rain drops started to fall. He even found joy in opening up his mouth and pointing it towards the heavens in hopes of catching a few rain drops in his mouth. As he continued his small journey towards the park, pipe in mouth, hat on head, he made an effort to yell at the occasional dog for barking, or the small child for riding his bike. To the dog and the child, Mr. Gibberwald was a mean man, a scary man, and children made sure to keep their distance. After only a few blocks and a few turns, the park appeared in front of Mr. Gibberwald with the large gate reading, "Rolling Hills." He slowly made his way through the entrance of the park, while the smoke of his pipe guided him to the rolly polly golly hills.

As he entered the park, he noticed the lone bench, his lone bench, which rested at the bottom of the first hill, right at the edge of the pond. Hovering over the bench was the lone street lamp with its lone dim light resting over the bench. The rain clouds had taken the sun captive for an unknown amount of time, or so Mr. Gibberwald imagined when the sun wasn't out and about, glaring all of its bright light and annoying the betonkers out of Mr. Gibberwald. He imagined the rain clouds capturing the sun and holding him (he being the sun) prisoner. This was another joy of Mr. Gibberwald, creating little fantasies in his head about the day's events.

He quickly made his way over to the bench, with pipe in mouth, as more smoke billowed out spreading upwards toward the dark skies. He sat down, situating himself under the light and pulled out his bag of bread crumbs. The bread crumbs were for the little alligators. The pond, which resided at the Rolling Hills park, was full of baby alligators and several ducks. And we musn't forget the one giant hippo, which constantly slept in the middle of the pond. The ducks, alligators, and even the hippo had some sort of unwritten agreement in which they would respect each other's living quarters while swimming in the pond. The alligators wouldn't eat the ducks, and the ducks wouldn't rest on the hippo's back.

Mr. Gibberwald began to toss the stale bread for the alligators and the ducks and the lone hippo when something startled him, or someone. There stood a young boy no more than three feet tall. The boy pretended he was a duck, quacking and flapping his arms all wild like. It seemed that for a brief moment several large feathers sprouted out of his arms. "Hey boy, whatcha dancing for all child like?" asked Mr. Gibberwald. "Well, I am a child," said the boy. "I like to dance, just like the duckies." "Can you please stop?" asked Mr. Gibberwald. "You are scaring away the ducks." "No." "No, what?" asked Mr. Gibberwald. "No, I won't stop dancing."

While the Elephant Slept

(cont.)

"Why not?"

"It's the elephant's fault that I'm dancing all crazy like," replied the boy. The boy then pointed to his back.

"What elephant do you speak of?" asked the old man. The boy only knew Mr. Gibberwald as an old man so for now we will refer to Mr. Gibberwald as the old man.

"Why, the elephant in my spine." The boy inched himself forward and looked directly in the eyes of the old man.

"Yep, yep. You're elephant must be green," said the boy. "It says it all in your eyes."

Mr. Gibberwald was even more confused now. "What is it you're going on about, little boy?"

"Your elephant, old man! You're telling me you don't know about your elephant?"

"I guess I don't," said Mr. Gibberwald.

"Sure you have," the boy said. The boy began to explain to Mr. Gibberwald about this mysterious elephant as he swung his arms back and forth with wide eyes, all excited like.

"We're all born with an elephant. That's what determines your eye color. You, sir, clearly have a green elephant, for your eyes are green. The elephant lives in your spine. What do you think makes you dance, makes you run? Why, it is your elephant. The sad thing is, Mister, that when kids turn into angry old men such as yourself, ya all stop dancin' and jumpin' around." The boy continued... "Ya see? When you stop dancin' and jumpin', and bein' all crazy like, your little elephant gets bored and falls asleep. Old grumps like you always get mad at kids like me for running every which way, dancing all crazy like and swinging arms. I just blame it on my elephant. I figured that's why old people are so cranky. Their elephants are asleep. Your elephant is asleep. Your little life force as some people call it. Your elephant is what makes you laugh. It's what makes you scream when you are supposed to be quiet. It's what makes you burp really loud during church. It's what makes you run when you should be walkin'. You know that popping sound your bones make when you pop them?" Mr. Gibberwald popped his knuckles.

"Yeah! Yeah! That's the sound. That's you putting your elephant to sleep. Your bones get all creaky and you stop dancing."

The boy then demonstrated and began to dance around, jumping up and down, flailing his arms back and forth, kicking his legs in all sorts of directions. He began to cluck around like a chicken with its head cut off and moo like a cow. All these things were normal for a child to do, dance like a chicken and moo like a cow. Mr. Gibberwald did something he thought he forgot how to do: Laugh. Mr. Gibberwald laughed. He found this boy amusing, watching the boy's imagination run off all crazy like. "That's a cute little story, boy," Mr. Gibberwald said. "I must get back to my crumb

throwing, so if you could take your dancing and stories of miniature elephants with you and entertain someone else, that would be well appreciated. The boy then raised his arms in the air and jumped. Directly up in the air he went, as high as those little legs of his could take him, when POOF! There sat a bright blue elephant, no more than the size of a small compact car.

Mr. Gibberwald couldn't believe his eyes. He blinked several times and was so dismayed that he fell off the bench, onto the soft ground. Bread crumbs exploded out of the bag and scattered everywhere. The blue elephant let out a rather large bellow with that snout of his, causing Mr. Gibberwald's fallen breadcrumbs to jump up and crawl over to the elephant's snout. There laid Mr. Gibberwald, that old man, watching his bread crumbs come to life, hopping over to a snout of a blue elephant, with a dancing child in the background. The elephant, seeing Mr. Gibberwald on the ground, quickly approached him and extended his blue snout. Mr. Gibberwald awkwardly took a hold of it, and was instantly pulled back up. The boy began to clap as the blue elephant hurried over to his owner. "This must be your elephant," said the old man.

"Yep. Yes, sir. I got blue eyes. Hahahahaha." The elephant was running in circles, like a hyper puppy waiting for some bone to be thrown. The boy then jumped on his elephant and off they went. Mr. Gibberwald stood motionless and watched the boy riding on the back of his blue elephant over the rolly polly jolly green hills. Both the boy and the elephant laughed and screamed, jumping and kicking as they chased ducks around the lone pond.

For the first time in many, many years, Mr. Gibberwald remembered what it was like to be a child, and he missed it. He thought back to what the boy said: we're all born with an elephant. Mr. Gibberwald began to feel his back, rubbing his spine up and down. His hopes were that he would perhaps feel an elephant sleeping in his spine. He felt silly for searching for an elephant, but the words of the boy rang deep through his ears; we're all born with an elephant.

"Hey, old man! You're not going to find your elephant doing that!" It was the boy again. He was busy doing handstands on the elephant's back, while it ran up and down those rolly polly jolly green hills. Now the old man felt embarrassed, but ever more curious as to the supposed whereabouts of his green elephant. "Well, then how am I supposed to find it?" Muttered the old man.

"You got to wake it up, of course! Jump in the air! Swing your arms! Let out a big, great howl in the air like a crazy animal." Mr. Gibberwald did something that he hadn't

While the Elephant Slept

(cont.)

done in over 70 years. He did something childish. He cupped his hands over his mouth and let out a great big howl, like some crazy animal. Out his lungs came forth a large sound, so large it filled the dark skies. So loud it scared the people nearby. Surrounding children with their mothers plugged their ears and gave an odd look towards him. He stopped and looked at the boy. The boy started to laugh wildly, along with the blue elephant, which had a large grin across its face.

“HaHa! There you go!” said the boy. “Come old man. Follow me.” The boy jumped on the elephant’s back and took off galloping. When the old man screamed, he vividly remembered the joy he had as a child. He remembered what it was like to be a child. No cares in the world, being able to run and jump and kick through the mud. That is exactly what Mr. Gibberwald did on that cloud filled night at the rolly polly jolly green hill park. He wanted to have his own elephant, just like the boy. Except his was green.

Mr. Gibberwald grabbed on to the tail of the blue elephant as the boy was yelling “yeehaa!” over and over. The elephant picked up speed. As the elephant picked up speed, the rainclouds started spitting out rain. Heaps and heaps of rain shot out from the skies and drenched the old man, along with the standing hippo, the ducks, and even the alligators. Mr. Gibberwald held on for dear life, laughing hysterically, as the elephant kicked up chunks of earth, causing the green hills to turn into hills of mud. The boy was yelping, along with the old man, as he was being dragged through mud, up and down the hills. He laughed so hard his stomach hurt, causing him to let go of the elephant’s tail. The elephant continued its journey as Mr. Gibberwald rolled down the hill of mud, eventually landing in the pond. The boy circled the pond, peering down into the depths of the water, with no sign of Mr. Gibberwald. Mr. Gibberwald had sunk to the bottom of the pond.

He could not swim, and there was no sign of movement from below. Soon, both the boy and his blue elephant grew worried as they got on their knees in hopes of seeing some sign of movement from the old man, when something miraculous happened. Instead of Mr. Gibberwald coming out from the depths of the pond, out came a green elephant. “A green elephant!” Exclaimed the boy. “The old man woke him up!” The green elephant slowly crawled out of the pond with tired looking eyes but an ever so large grin. The elephant crawled over next to the blue elephant, and they both put their long trouts in the pond. Out came Mr. Gibberwald with one hand clenched on each snout, being dragged up from the depths of the pond. Soaked in pond water, and covered in mud from the hills, Mr. Gibberwald, too, had the biggest grin on his face. A grin he hadn’t produced in several years.

As the blue and green elephants dragged him to the

ground, he exclaimed, “My elephant has awakened! And it’s green!” He quickly stood up and jumped on the back of his green elephant. “Hahahaha!” shouted the boy. “Where are we going now, old man?” “Wherever our elephants take us,” answered Mr. Gibberwald.

Both Mr. Gibberwald and the boy set off on what seemed to be the greatest adventure of their lives. They ran through the park in what seemed like circles. They laughed and screamed while their elephants bellowed out even louder sounds from their snouts. They visited the farthest ocean, climbed the highest mountain, swam under the deepest ocean, and visited each and every creature, both discovered and undiscovered, all on the backs of their green and blue elephants.

Mr. Gibberwald never forgot that one day at the park, that one day when he discovered he had his own elephant, eager to wake up and get out into the world once again. There he sat on his porch, with no pipe in mouth. He wanted to enjoy his last days without all that smoke in the air. Children walked by his house not bothering to cross the street. He gave them a big smile and threw his hand in the air. The children waved back with even bigger smiles and sped away on their bikes. The neighbors would often visit with a plate of eager brownies. Mr. Gibberwald invited them in his house and shared a few with them. He remembered how it was like to eat brownies as a child. His green elephant helped him remember. As the sun was setting, about to be swallowed up behind the mountains, Mr. Gibberwald heard a voice calling to him from within his house. “Ah, of course. Our dinner party,” muttered Mr. Gibberwald to himself. He sat up, along with his green elephant, and they both entered the house. Upon entering, Mr. Gibberwald noticed that his old dusty dinner table had finally been put to use. There lay, draped upon it, a rather large tablecloth. Surrounding the dinner table sat all the children of the neighborhood, each one with his and her own elephant, all suited to the color of their eyes.

Mr. Gibberwald found the only empty seat remaining and sat down right next to the boy with the blue elephant. There lay on the table a large plate of cookies and several cups of milk. Each boy and girl grabbed a cup of milk and began to dip the cookies in their cups. Mr. Gibberwald took his cookie, and upon placing it in his cup, he took in all of his surroundings. Oh, how Mr. Gibberwald loved his green elephant. He saw the joy of the children’s faces, along with their elephants as they ate their cookies and reminisced about the day’s events. Oh how Mr. Gibberwald loved each passing day. He looked outside and noticed the last bit of the sun, slowly descending into its deep slumber. Oh how Mr. Gibberwald loved the sun. Oh how Mr. Gibberwald would love to be a child again. Luckily for him, he had his green elephant to help him remember.

Rodger Douglas

by Isaac Akers

The first time my hands claimed the life of another was the first time I began to feel absent. Even in my first memory, I can't remember questioning a thing of existence. Everything simply was what it was.

My best friend, Rodger Douglas, was everywhere I was and every essence of myself. Together, we were the natural dynamic duo of our time, getting into trouble together, succeeding together, and even feeling life together. Nothing was ever questioned or wrong. We were simply best friends and everything else just came with time. So the first time I saw him struggle and fall at the force of another, I felt his vengeance.

Mark Walters was an average boy in the town. He played sports for the school but mostly kept to himself. To us, his attitude lacked anything to be construed with altruistic, although the common exception made by the townsfolk was that he acted out because of his parents. This was a simple and plain excuse that we had heard our entire life for any child that acted out against social standards. When I looked upon him without a sympathetic perception as his fists drove Rodger to the ground, I lost defense to the cloud of rage in our minds.

Mark's words shrieked out through the woods that night like the taunts to a wild boar, "You're a freak! You'll never have any friends, and you'll never understand reality!" Yet who was he to accuse Rodger of solidity? Day to day you could pass Mark in the hallways at school or see him smoking behind the Country General Store, and he was always alone. Even in the sports he played, he was avoided because no one wanted the association. I personally had no respect for the boy socially crippled by the chance hand he was dealt.

When my hand found the edges of a jagged piece of shale, there were no premeditated notions. There was the current sense of hate flowing in the air toward the boy who mangled my best friend. Even in the moments I was taking his life away, there was nothing recognizable beyond bitterness.

Rodger was shocked but he didn't stop me. Why would he? In that moment though, we honestly believed that no one would ever know. Perhaps no one would have, but when a bad habit is developed, it is never intended.

At school the following weeks, no one seemed to care about or notice his absence. What was once a face in the hall that brought with it a tone of despondency was now just another fragment of atoms mingling with a void of existence. None of them would have thought for a second to end another's life, but they were all guilty of wishing he wasn't there. I alone carried the weight of his robbed soul, but seeing how little it was worth painted across my peers' faces lifted my guilt.

Three weeks after the disappearance of Mark Walters, a girl by the name of Cassandra Milton stumbled into Rodger's life. Perhaps a fatal attraction had brought her over to our midst, but quickly her shallow approval subsided with an increasing knowledge of the both of us. Afternoons of walking to the store together turned into nights of deep conversation for the two of them. They were always in my presence, but I was never really there. When watching a movie, I was always in the far chair; when making food in the kitchen, I was always standing outside the door; when cuddling turned to kissing, I was outside the window. I saw and heard everything, but I felt none of it. That is, until she finally looked at me.

Never did I talk with anyone who wasn't talking to both Rodger and me. Never did anyone need to look at me because they looked at Rodger, but the night she knew, she looked towards me. What Rodger and I did day in and day out was our business as brothers in friendship, but he let her in. She looked at me with the knowledge of Mark Walter's death and a deeper repulsion of who we were. Had I let her run from his house, we would have been locked away to rot and never be the same. Rodger was all I knew, and without him, I would be nothing. Being caught meant losing who I was.

Later that night, as I washed the dirt from the shovel, I looked at him and we both knew what we had entered into. The unspoken pact that had once been a rare friendship was now evolved into the sworn secrecy of our minds. If anything were to ever be discovered I would take the fall, for I was the one who took action. I had truly brought the initial burden and I was the only one able to bear it. Just like Mark, Cassandra had been a nameless face in the crowd. The lack of regard in the faces of my peers for her misplacement once again lifted the load from my shoulders, and once again, life was just me and Rodger. Things seemed right again, but the sweetness of normality was but a drop of honey before a river of tar.

Nearly four weeks passed before I took the final life. People had come into our lives between then and Cassandra's disappearance, who also vanished with their intentions to harm us, but they had completely lost their names to me. I can't recall how each one happened or where, they just simply did.

In the third week of October, when the leaves were golden amber and ready to fall, Rodger and I made our way home from school cutting our way through a seldom traveled path that we had sought out to conceal ourselves. With all the disappearances that had occurred lately, local authorities were quick to stop anyone and question them. Such attention, though, was something I didn't want to bring on Rodger since it was my actions that would cause him fear of capture. When starting down the path, we never assumed we'd meet another soul.

Rodger Douglas

(cont.)

Jerry Bartholomew had once entered Rodger's life when we were younger with intentions to help him but always had tried to influence him not to be around me. Never had Rodger and I fought, yet this boy had suggested that we shatter the bonds of a friendship. I tried to not hold it against him, and, in time, I had forgotten completely about the situation. Seeing his face coming towards us down the path, though, brought all the memories back. Why of all places was he right here at this moment? All day the faces of our peers seared into our heads with the fluctuating burdens of the souls I carried and now he, too, was here. His judgmental gaze fixated on Rodger like always, as if to say Rodger deserved a better friend than me.

"Evening, Rodger. I'm glad you called me when you did," He spoke smoothly as he approached us. "You sounded a little pensive on the phone. Is there something you'd like to tell me?" Piercing uncertainty of Rodger's intensions clenched at my throat as I looked between the two. Rodger was silent and still as the air lingered around us. Why would Rodger call Jeremy, a man who had hated me from the beginning? If my actions had caused Rodger to fear me enough to seek out Jeremy's lies, then he would have gone far enough to tell him everything.

Continuing to search Rodger's lack of motion for meaning, Jeremy pivoted back and forth on the balls on his feet to the sound of a cold autumn breeze. If Jeremy knew the full audacity of our interactions towards others in the recent weeks, then it was only a matter of time before he could inform the police. Now, he too stood between us and our freedom.

Once the seal has been broken for anything, it becomes easier and easier, whether it is swearing, drinking, smoking or any other dissatisfactory habit. Brutal selection had become mine. Jeremy was no different from the rest. A simple spark of emotion and the lack of cognitive thought propelled me to take him into the care and hospitality I had demonstrated with Mark, Cassandra and several others. I owed it as a favor to Rodger now, as my duty to protect him and myself from the harm and malicious content of the world. Yet, as the voice of an officer approached us on this darkening path, I finally began to see for myself what I had done.

My blood stained hands trembled before my eyes. There was no stopping the inevitable from occurring. To escape meant to take the life of another, to kill a police officer. Looking down the dark path further into the woods, I could see no end. Our lives would never be the same, and now Rodger suffered the weight of the cold handcuffs around his wrist.

Through his cries and pleas to be heard, the weight of

the souls I had taken finally crushed down upon me. "Wait officer, this boy is innocent! I'm the one you should be taking!"

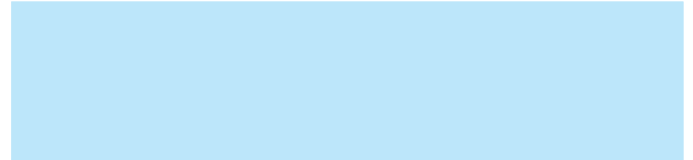
"Wait officer, I'm innocent! He's the one you should be taking!" Rodger cried after me.

"Look!" I shouted with outstretched hands. "Here's the blood on my hands, I did it!"

The officer turned to look at me with a final halt in his march. Slowly he searched me over with a look of disturbed bewilderment, but nothing changed as he looked me over. My trembling hands shook before his face like a white flag to free my friend but something was wrong. My hands were clean. The blood of Jeremy Bartholomew that once ran from my wrists to my fingertips was gone.

"Son, there's no one there." Rodger stood with his blood stained hands pointing at me in disbelief.

My best friend, Rodger Douglas was everywhere I was and every essence of myself.



Poet: Melanie Walker

Twilight Falls

The rusty sweetness of yams
dug up from the garden,
dirt beneath half-moon fingernails,
the pungent taste of radishes,
bitter fruit of the earth
giving up her children after
she thought she'd buried them safely
beneath the dark soil.
Snap-peas that you used to call
snap-crackle peas because of the sound
they made when your small hands
snagged them from the vines.
The sun, like Rumpelstiltskin, illuminating
the golden strands of your hair.
The worms and beetles were your playmates,
counted as close friends, and when the rains fell,
how you buried them all again in the dirt so carefully,
so they wouldn't know pain, wouldn't dry out when the sun returned.
Though you have since made your bed amongst the beetles,
when the toad in our garden sings as twilight falls, and
the lavender shadows wrap around me like your little arms,
I sigh, knowing how Rapunzel once walked the earth here with me.

I Have Traced

I have traced your despairing flight in the open
sky.
You are a gull as distant as the shore.
Your song weeps as wind during eternal night.
I hear the white pines whispering your name.
I call to you, longing to embrace your open arms
As your breath enters my ear, gentle as the noon.
I cling to you as fire does to the shadowy
Corn husks of the earth.
My arms encircle the empty wind.
Your distance resonates with the earth as a bell.
You are made of dark, eternal fire.
You are distant from me, like waves from the
seashore.

Lunacy

"Does the moon ever get in the way?" he asked, staring at the milk-honeyed orb.
"Nah. Well, yeah, sometimes she does. But then I just say, "Hey! You! Moon up there! Get out the way!" and she listens. Her mist creeps up, crawls up, and she hides her face. Then she's not in the way," the other replied, shaking his fist at the moon.
"You're crazy, you know that."
"Well, they don't call it lunacy for nothing." He grinned at his own joke.

Poet: Zachary Stickney

The Missing Silhouette

Walking alone,
I noticed a couple walking
Hand in hand at dusk.
I caught the woman's eye, and
glanced down, not wanting
to corrupt their moment
with my presence.
A streetlight over my shoulder
projected my shadow on
the pavement, illuminating
the missing silhouette,
casting a reminder of
the shadow I spent my own
loving moments with.
Casting a reminder of you.
You, who made mere summer
nights become poetry in motion.
You, who simultaneously
fill my heart to bursting
and leave me as lonesome
as a dove.
I'm not saddened or angry because
of this reminder, and I don't
feel used or betrayed.
No, this reminder is a kind much too
heavy, this reminder is the kind
that makes my heart heave
and sigh.

Our Sacred Pulse

They told us we were meant for
smaller things,
And our love conquered two continents
Tell me, then,
Why heed any words less wise
Than our shared and sacred
pulse?

An Encore

If I write you a poem,
kindly demand an encore
This performance was never
meant
to be portrayed in one act.

Poet: Starla Stanley

A Smaller Picture

It is not the big picture that makes one hold their breath
in awe

It is the finer details

The lines of character that depict life lived

Flakes that reflect color in the iris
The turned up lip

Heavy brows that frame the face

Webs weaved in intricate detail

Orchids with colored veins traveling each petal

Mosaics of dragonfly wings

Beauty is in the detail

WINTER

Sky bluest against the fallen snow

Crystal reflected invigorated light

Crisp air forces a full awareness of breath

Sky bluest against the fallen snow

To live without winter is not to have lived

The Merry-Go-Round of Texting

by Debbie Bacon

Civil war broke out in our home one summer day last year. Like all other epic moments in history, it began like any other day. This particular August day was sultry, hot and humid, since we were waiting for the installation of central air conditioning. Because of the humidity, the swamp cooler was not working and all of the windows in the house had been opened to the early morning breeze, billowing the sheer, white valances hanging above them. That morning, after hearing the rumbling of the mail truck outside, I crossed the lawn to the mailbox to pick up the mail. Among the stack of various grocery advertisements was our monthly bill from T-Mobile. It was then that I opened the bill and saw the dollar amount in bold, black typeface. I cannot remember if I screamed or not.

To say that I possibly screamed is not an exaggeration. My daughter, while at the mall, had visited an independent dealer, changed our family plan, bought a new phone, and had forgotten to add unlimited text on the new plan. How this was all done without her father or me there is another matter entirely (The kiosk she visited was cheap, slimy and of ill repute; need I say more?). The result was a monthly bill for almost three thousand dollars, with over 8,000 texts sent from her phone alone, not including other texts from the rest of us. It took a long time for her to work off that phone bill, even with some contributions eventually from both of her parents out of pity and compassion. After that explosive summer day, texting was taken off from the family phone plan for a long time. It was astonishing how one small act created such enormous upheaval.

As mentioned in the essay entitled “Disembodiment and Disenchantment: Disconnection and Society’s Problems” by author Michael Young, he eloquently stated the following: “Tools and technology are everyday parts of our lives; we rely on them for our survival...but our greatest asset could easily be the cause of our downfall” (107). I mention this quote because it directly ties in with the topic at hand and also illustrates an awkward moment I experienced not long ago while studying for an exam in the library.

I had nearly forgotten about the incident last summer with the horrifying phone bill, until one day while studying in the library last week, a young girl sitting next to me engaged in a screaming match with her mother on her cell phone, her hand cupped around it tightly, trying to muffle the sounds of her shouting and her fury. When the conversation was finished, she angrily flipped the phone shut with a hard snap, and turned to her friend sitting on the other side. It appeared that her mother had removed texting from the phone plan because of the hours spent texting and avoiding her new baby she had responsibility for at home. She spat out to all within hearing distance, “I am not addicted to texting!” Then, in a painful outburst, she asked to borrow my cell phone in order to text

her boyfriend, even though she had her own telephone right in front of her with calling capacity. One can imagine my surprise; it was the first time I had ever seen her and did not know the young woman. Her companion stepped in and offered her the use of her own cell phone to send a text.



Texting addiction seems to be a deeply, profoundly inflammatory subject for some individuals. In fact, few topics seem to generate so much intensity of combatant heat; in order to stir up any social setting, one needs only mention ideas such as religious beliefs, political preferences, or even Wal-Mart. However, there is a new contender on the block that nearly rivals the vigorous lengths one will go to in defense of this subject or even in opposition against: the topic of texting, and whether or not it can become an actual addiction. All of this got me to thinking: is it possible to have an addiction to texting?

My discovery was an avalanche of research with analytical data and documented studies, published in peer reviewed medical journals, linking addiction with text messaging. I was nothing short of surprised. In fact, formal studies have been conducted on the possible addiction of text messaging in countries such as South Korea, Turkey, China, Switzerland, Norway and Finland. For the purpose of this essay, however, I will focus on studies performed here in the United States. I will present the argument that habitual texting leads to increased social anxiety, negative perceptions regarding social skills, impaired interpersonal relationships, sleep disorders, poor academic performance, and increased health issues not normally seen in teenage/young adult patients.

As preliminary research for this argument, I conducted a brief survey regarding perceptions of those who habitually text with a wide variety of eighteen participants: a dental hygienist, a computer programmer, a budget analyst, an accountant, four university students, four high school students,

The Merry-Go-Round of Texting

(cont.)

a registered nurse, a business owner, a manager of a retail department, a tool technician, a loss prevention specialist for a popular chain of retail clothing, and a housewife. The ages of the participants ranged from fifteen to fifty-six. It is also to be noted that every one of the participants has a cell phone and also text with differing degrees of regularity. In the questioning before the survey was offered to establish objectivity, a surprising finding was discovered in the fact that some of the adults actually texted much more than their teenage counterparts. The following is the complete list of questions that were asked, with their corresponding answers.

Survey question asked:	Positive	Negative	Neutral
If you hired an employee and found them texting on the clock, would your impression of them be positive, negative, or neutral?		17	1
If you were ordering food in a restaurant and your server was texting before or after taking the order, would your impression of them be positive, negative, or neutral?		18	
If you were on a date with someone and they were texting, would your impression of them be positive, negative, or neutral?		16	2
If you were in an elevator with someone texting without looking up or giving a brief greeting or acknowledgement of you, would your impression of him or her be positive, negative, or neutral?	1	11	6
If you were in a classroom or workplace setting and your peer beside you was texting, would your impression of him or her be positive, negative, or neutral?		18	
If someone were texting in a movie theater during the film, would your impression of him or her be positive, negative, or neutral?		16	2
If you were in the grocery store and saw someone texting, would your impression of him or her be positive, negative, or neutral?	1		17

Although the survey was not scientific, the results of the study were conclusive among those surveyed: those persons who regularly text, whether on the job, in the classroom, or in average situations are perceived more negatively than those who do not. For example, in social situations requiring attention or courteous acknowledgment, such as a movie the-

ater or encountering someone in close proximity in an elevator, were also situations that were not looked upon favorably. In situations of service, it was almost unanimously agreed upon that texting was disapproved. However, it did appear that certain social situations are much more appropriate for texting in that they did not cause negative opinions, such as texting while grocery shopping.

On the other hand, in defense of texting, a study conducted by Borae Jin, M.A and Namkee Park, Ph.D., actually discovered that initially, cell phone users text more often as a result of increased social activity and not because they were socially impaired. They found that using text messaging gratified the participants' need for closeness and friendship. In fact, the greater amount of face-to-face interaction with others led to greater text usage in order to stay in contact with those individuals. It was also noted that wanting to send more text messages usually was based on affection and loneliness, and stemmed only from the desire to be included (611-612). Also, in agreement of this theory is psychotherapist Dr. Michael Hausauer of Oakland, California, who also confirmed the need for acceptance and being included linked with text messaging. In an interview with CBS, he stated, "Teenagers have a terrific interest in knowing what is going on in the lives of their peers, coupled with terrific anxiety about being out of the loop" (Hausauer and Hardesty). Although they were momentarily in the loop, the longer their phones were silent, the more worried they became that they were missing out on something important. Also while worrying about when the next message would come, they were missing out on crucial social activity going on around them at that very moment.

For example, during the holidays, I was teaching my two daughters how to bake homemade rolls and pies for Christmas Eve. My oldest daughter was so consumed with why her phone was silent that she left the kitchen to go back to her room, panicking about why no one was texting her back. As a result, she continuously missed out on special occasions happening all around her. Just as mentioned in my argument, excessive texting with its myriad of anxious worrying is a vicious cycle: one worries about the silence of the phone to the degree that the texting individual cannot or will not participate fully in the social activities happening around them at that very moment.

Although it has been shown that texting fills a need for closeness, the results of the anxiety that is experienced when receiving a text message and sending one were astounding, and actually made the participants more anxious and nervous socially. In a study conducted by I-Mei Lin and Erik Peper, university students were analyzed in a laboratory setting in regards to heart rate, respiration, EMG activity within the nervous system, brain functioning, and skin temperature. They

The Merry-Go-Round of Texting

(cont.)

were then monitored carefully as they received and sent text messages. In each case, sleep disturbance and interruption was noted as they worried if they would receive a text while sleeping. All subjects reported lowering levels of belonging, self-esteem and meaningful relationships. In regards to actual physiological responses while sending text messages, their bodies would stiffen and become rigid, while they held their breath during the sending process (53). As for what happened when receiving a text message, psychiatrist Dr. Gary Small noted that MRIs of texting brains were exactly the same as a brain receiving a hit of heroin (Small). It is a perfect storm, so to speak, for creating the perfect addiction: the brain was flooded with Dopamine in the pleasure centers each time a text came in to the cell phone, giving a sudden burst of arousal and excitement. Heart rates and respiration increased significantly while reading the new incoming text message. Due to the bathing of the brain in that chemical, the participant cannot wait for another text message to arrive. Another text message equals another burst of exhilarating Dopamine, signaling to the brain the profound feeling of well-being. Levels dropped substantially each time it took longer to receive a text message, and the participants actually grew more anxious and depressed (Lin and Peper 54). It appears that speaking from a physiological standpoint, texting is a nerve wracking merry-go-round one cannot climb off easily without scraping his/her knees.

Besides the physiological aspects of constant worrying and wondering when the next text will come, increasing cases of patient histories are being documented for pre-teenaged children presenting with tendinitis in doctors' offices as well as emergency rooms with painful, swollen thumbs. Typically an injury seen in older patients who have repetitive use from machinery operation, physicians are now seeing unusual cases, from children as young as thirteen years old. It now has its own name: Texting Tendinitis. Dr. Byron Kennedy at Monroe County Department of Public Health, Rochester New York, reported treating a fourteen-year-old girl with the exact same diagnosis. The patient was treated with a thumb splint, ice, and was instructed to minimize her texting activities, which had been up to four hours per day. One month later, she reported she was doing much better, since she was restricted to only 45 minutes per day by her parents and now instant messages instead on Facebook, with instant messaging providing a different angle for her thumbs as they rest on a longer keyboard (Williams and Kennedy 66-67). While reading this particular research data, it made me feel oddly sad for the girl as well as her parents: her day is still consumed with communication from a distance. What about the relationship she has with those in her immediate family? It is no wonder that family then can feel like strangers and virtual strangers or casual acquaintances seem like family, causing damage to the most vital of

relationships.

In regards to scholastic performance and the effect constant texting had on grades, Mr. Greg Hardesty, a columnist for the *Orange County Register* in Lake Forest, California, decided to write an article on the frustration he was experiencing with his thirteen-year-old daughter, Reina, and her texting habits. He reported that in one month's time, she racked up 14,528 text messages and was not able to sleep for extended periods of time at night, due to watching for the little red light to blink, indicating a text message had come. Her grades were also slipping drastically due to the constant activity on her cell phone and fatigue from lack of sleep. The article did not have the effect he had hoped: her text messaging following the release of the article skyrocketed to 24,000 messages the next month from her newfound popularity in the newspaper. Needless to say, the phone was confiscated immediately and her grades, as well as sleeping ability, drastically improved (Hausauer and Hardesty).

Sure, texting can make one tired. But what does it do inside the actual brain in regards to learning that is affecting scholastic performance? In an interview with reporter John Tesh, Harvard Medical School Professor Dr. Michael Rich discussed studying MRI scans of participants while texting, and a notable discovery was made: texting literally re-wires the brain. Traditionally, our brains reward us chemically upon completion of one activity at a time. With increased levels of chemicals being spurted out each time we text, we are now re-wiring the connection with the way that we process information. Jumping sporadically from text to text, with surges of Dopamine flooding the pathways, rewards us for instantaneous, brief activities. With no rests from texting to store processed information, and no reward for diligent work on longer projects, such as school projects and homework, we limit our own ability to succeed scholastically. With constant, repetitive texting over prolonged periods of time, those same children will not have the ability to stay focused in school, work on projects that take more than five minutes to complete, or hold down a job without the physiological need to text again for that brief "high" (Rich). To me, it seems a shocking and ironic twist: children grow up with advanced computer and technological skills but without the emotional or physiological ability to utilize them.

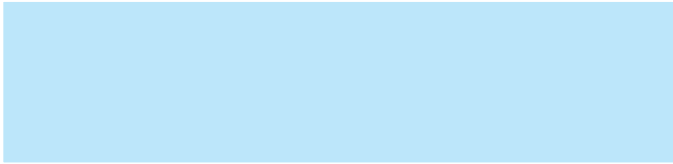
In conclusion to my argument, is it possible to have an addiction to texting? Absolutely, yes. Texting plans are now free and unlimited, and it appears the disadvantages are as well.

Although it is clear that technology provides us with such an increased ability for communication, the flip

The Merry-Go-Round of Texting

(cont.)

side is also a veritable bog of quicksand, very much like a merry go round in an amusement park or county fair. By its very nature, a merry-go-round does not advance the rider in any given direction of progress; it is a circular wheel in design that takes the rider around in circles, forever if possible, until the tickets clutched in sweating fists run out, or the park closes at dusk. Riders dismount, tired and dizzy, but the music was entertaining, and it had bright, vivid colors with a bold variety of mystical creatures on which to ride. Similar to the merry-go-round, excessive texting gives brief, dizzying bursts of speed and adventure when we forget to focus on the small details rushing by in the wind. However, just like a young child, sometimes a caring parent will temporarily pull one off the carousel of texting when it becomes a bit too much and one loses footing or ability to focus on the steadiness of the earth beneath. Eventually, one will find that even temporarily, there is life after texting. But do not worry – that carousel will still be waiting for next time.



What on Earth Do You Call That Thing

by Nathan Waugh

“Everything about Great Salt Lake is exaggerated,” writes Terry Tempest Williams (1991, p. 3). “It is a landscape so surreal one can never know what it is for certain” (p. 3). People of all different homelands, ethnicities, religions, traditions, and histories call the shores of that lake home. They have experienced its presence and its temperaments. Few of them would agree on many topics, but most agree on four: that the lake they live near is buggy, that it is stinky, that it is salty, and that it is big (Trentelman, 2009). Perhaps this evaluation is fair; after all, those descriptions are all true.

Take the stench. Who in Utah’s northern reaches has not woken at some point to the sweet sound of rain and opened their windows eagerly, only to breathe in the rotten stench of Farmington Bay? As for the bugs, it is not possible to make a trip to Antelope Island and miss the swarms of flies, whether brine or the more equine variety, that flock around visitors during the long walk to the water’s edge. Finally, of course, the adjectives “big” and “salty” are promised, accurately enough, in the very name of the lake itself.

Yet one wonders whether there is not more to this much-maligned object. It seems there must be, or such a densely populated strip of cities would not have grown up all around it. One wonders, in fact, whether the dismissive attitude shown toward the lake by the millions of people living in its shadow might be but a tantrum—the product of ignorance, perhaps, of other, better features of the lake, features which for most people might take more effort to contemplate than would a bad smell or a cloud of flies.

In the course of this paper, I will describe four less-considered aspects of the lake and attempt to shed light on why they matter. For in addition to being big, buggy, stinky, and salty, the Great Salt Lake is also an entity of enormous age, history, beauty and life. It may be that, were these not-quite-secrets of the lake to become more widely known, it would be thought of, taught of, and treated accordingly.

The Great Salt Lake is old. It has existed for nearly ten thousand years in essentially its present state, expanding and shrinking in a millennia-old cycle of droughts and wet periods that have affected the climate and ecology of an entire continental region. Yet despite its size, the Great Salt Lake is a mere remnant of a far larger precursor, one which came into being nearly 30,000 years ago and existed for twice the length of time that its descendant has so far.

This ancient body of water, named Lake Bonneville, was formed during long periods of intense precipitation during the last glacial period, as abnormally wet weather was diverted by massive walls of ice over thousands of years into the mountainous northern stretches of Utah. This alteration in climate,

sufficient to create a small sea in the Rocky Mountains, was the result of the severe weather-altering properties of the giant North American glaciers, taller than the skylines of New York City, that were present at the time (Oviatt & Thompson, 2002).

An object so old, so magnificent, should deserve our respect for its age alone. Parallels in modern life abound: senior citizens are given deference in our society, while our youngest citizens are not; our oldest buildings are preserved with special heritage laws and ordinances, in order to maintain them in their roles as hearts of their communities. Few people could fail to appreciate a turtle that has lived for 150 years, or a tree that has lived for a thousand; why then do so many people toss refuse into and blithely dismiss this ancient lake? Perhaps they would not, if they had some idea of its history.

For the Great Salt Lake possesses not simply age, but memory. Its shores, wetlands, and surrounding rivers provided ancient Native Americans with food and drink for 10,000 years and water for crops for nearly 2,000 years (Simms & Stuart, 2002). It surely provided them with coolness, moisture, and comfort as well, as it does for us now. A lake in the middle of the desert is, after all, nothing if not a tremendous heat sink, moderating its surrounding environmental temperatures to limit the amount of fluctuation between high and low seasonal extremes.

The lake has also served as a center for environmental conservation efforts, commercial salt use, brine shrimp fisheries, and academic research in the natural sciences, as well as a headquarters for at least one major religion. The Winter Olympics were held a short drive from its shores—something that might not have happened had not lake-effect snowstorms regularly packed the surrounding mountains with powdery snow. These events, each an important part of human history, all owe something to the presence of the Great Salt Lake.

Perhaps more than age or history, however, the Great Salt Lake possesses beauty. “Maybe it’s the expanse of sky above and water below that soothes my soul,” writes Williams (1991) of the Bear River near where it enters the lake (p. 21). “Or maybe it’s the anticipation of seeing something new” (p. 21). For as long as people have settled the shores of the lake, they must have marveled at its beauty, at towering banks of storm clouds spreading over the lake just before a storm; at the crisp expanse of salt water and air in the cold autumn sun; at the slow ripples of thousands of brine flies taking flight at the approach of some larger animal; at vast marshes full of fluttering, dancing, feeding birds.

All of these images flicker about the human soul, catching its attention in a way that the denizens of many modern cities rarely have the chance to experience. Even the most

What on Earth Do You Call That Thing

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outwardly annoyed naysayer of the lake might find stillness, some special peace, in the sight of the orange sun stretching over the marshes in the evening, or the red in the morning. Even the stars of the Milky Way, so shy in the presence of city dwellers, flicker and grin boldly, intimately, in the sky above the islands of the lake, islands where the lights of man are so remote that they cannot smother the lights of the cosmos. There are emotions to be found in these sights, emotions which all people deserve to feel, and perhaps should—but rarely can, so long as they remain in their city homes. The Great Salt Lake is a rare refuge in our fast-moving, machine-covered society, a beautiful oasis not half an hour's drive from a metropolis that holds more than a million people.

Yet most beautiful of all the Great Salt Lake's many wonders, most stirring of all its attributes, is the life that it shelters in the midst of an otherwise harsh desert. North lie the bare plains of Idaho and Wyoming; south, the sand and dirt of Arizona and southern Utah. Yet around the Great Salt Lake grow mountain forests and swampy wetlands, fed both by the rivers that feed the lake and by the storms that it encourages and creates.

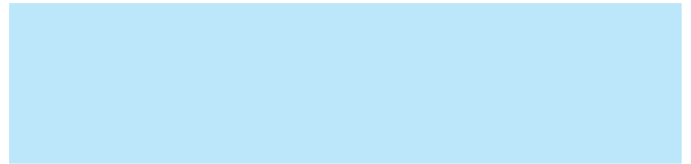
These environments teem with creatures and plants, creating wildernesses that span mountainous horizons. The lake itself brims with halophilic bacteria, which are fed on by algae that swell and fade in magnificent cycles. The algae is devoured by brine flies and shrimp, which are preyed on in turn by immense migratory populations of birds that use the Great Salt Lake as a feeding and resting ground during hemispheric trips that cover thousands of miles. For many of these birds, some of which prey exclusively on brine shrimp, the Great Salt Lake plays the role of their only possible inland stopping ground, and so in a very real way is their only lifeline during seasonal migrations (Bedford, 2005).

The Great Salt Lake is thus a source of many benefits to its inhabitants, often in ways that are unconscious, or even unquantifiable. Its age confers a certain grandeur to our lakeside cities, a sense of being part of something ancient and eminently respectable. The history which accompanies that age provides us with a sense of human context, a realization that we were not the first ones here and will not be the last—a realization which, should we take it seriously, might help us to keep our home clean, as it was kept clean for us.

Because of the lake, there is an immense beauty ingrained into our daily lives. The very mountains, plains, and forests around us form a symphony of stark images, brilliant greens contrasted with salty whites and shimmering greys and blues. This contrast would not be possible without the destructive and creative forces of the lake that lies at the center of our environment. It is even possible that, because of this beauty,

this contrast and color and shifting picture, our very minds breathe more freely and easily than they otherwise would.

Lastly, the Great Salt Lake is a source and shelter for life. The wildlife here has fed our predecessors for hundreds of generations and, so long as we take care of it, will feed those that follow after us for thousands more. Thus, in a very real way, the lake has been responsible not just for the lives of the plants and animals around us, but even for the lives of our ancestors, and in many ways our own. There is much to cherish about the Great Salt Lake. Call it what you will, but keep in mind that you have probably not even scratched the surface.



The Development of the Individual Woman

by Michelle Michelsen

Strong, independent, intelligent and stubborn — these adjectives when used to reference women, struck fear into the heart of the late nineteenth century man. During the early twentieth century, the modernist movement took off, giving both men and women a new sense of self. The reliance of societal norms shifted to a reliance on the individual. Women underwent an extreme change in the world and in self-perception. Women began to view themselves as unique and separate from the drone of nineteenth century patriarchal society, creating the perfect environment for an individualist and feminist movement to evolve.

Two great examples of the change in society and women are represented in D.H. Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own." Lawrence depicts an unusual wife, a woman with thoughts, strengths, and weaknesses who is in every way separate from her husband. He explains how engulfed in title and expectations a person may become, how personal identity perishes. Woolf explains the fight women face to win respect and freedom. She details how women of the past did not reach their potential and outlines the tools necessary to transcend the societal norm. Through these texts, the reader gains an understanding of a somewhat complex modernist principle.

"Chrysanthemum" beautifully illustrates the transition from a person's role in the collective to the role as an individual. In the first five and a half pages of the story, the female lead's full name is used exactly once, "Elizabeth Bates," her first name and married name together.

Our first names are the most personal parts of our identity. First names are what we emboss on jackets and love to hear said by friendly voices. Our last names represent our heritage, our family, and our origins. Bates is the name Elizabeth was given after she married. When a woman takes the name of her husband, she is laying aside her history for that of her husband. A married name is a part of a woman's identity, but not in the way her maiden name is.

During the first part of the story we see Elizabeth referred to as the woman, the mother, the wife, and once as Mrs. Bates. The children both go by their first names: Annie and John. The children carry simply the identity of youth. Elizabeth is smothered by her role, and dissolves into the pages as an unknown and unimportant person. Her actions drive the story, but because we don't use her name, she seems faceless, just one more twentieth century woman. She is going about her day as usual and doesn't know that her life is about to change, so her identity has not been rearranged yet.

In the second half of the story, her name is used fifty one times. Elizabeth Bates is used for the first few pages be-

fore she discovers she is a widow. As the action continues, she discovers her husband is dead, and she is now alone. Her name switches to the more personal Elizabeth, then to Lizzie. Out of many women, she became one who was no longer defined by her societal role but as a singular and unique entity. Elizabeth said or did this or that, as opposed to Woman or Mother said or did.

The death of her husband represents the death of her social role. Because she is now a single parent, she will have to step forward and take control of her family. Elizabeth has just gained the position that was traditionally held by men. She can't afford to be a title any more. Now she has to throw herself into life as the singular.

Every person will always embody certain roles: daughter, friend, wife, mother, brother, father. Some of these labels are lovable burdens. We enjoy having them, but living up to the expectation is sometimes very difficult. As the woman moves through the story and becomes Elizabeth, she demonstrates the modernist principal of the individual self being better or more reliable than the social group or expectation borne of labels. The growth of self assurance in all people, not just women, gave feminism the spark it needed.

It was during the modernist period that the feminist movement really caught fire. Women in England and America, as well as other places, started stepping into the spotlight as thinkers and contributors to literature and politics. For the first time women had a voice that could be heard above the din of social expectation. She still had to scream to be heard, but her voice carried. Today, with the respect and freedom I enjoy, it's hard not to look back on the women of this period, both fictional and real, without feeling affection and gratitude. They yelled so I could whisper.

Virginia Woolf was one of the loudest of these voices. In "A Room of One's Own" she fleshes out the importance of self assurance. "Life for both sexes...is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength... More than anything ...it calls for confidence in one's self" (Norton 2109). Life is difficult for everyone, and all people must push forward, depending on themselves for their own strength thinking independently.

Woolf is a great example of a woman who would not be stopped by a label or expectation. The suggestion that, because she was a woman, she didn't deserve education or opportunity was outrageous to her. "Literature is open to everybody. I refuse to allow you... to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like, but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (Norton 2131). This is an eloquent statement for the feminist and for the

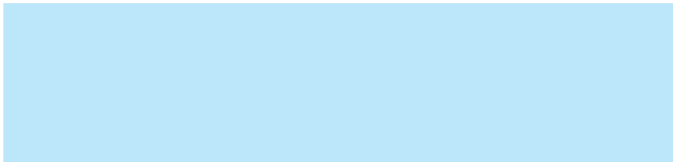
The Development of the Individual Woman

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modernist movement. The individual is stronger than ancient values. You cannot hold people from their dreams because of what they are or the labels they carry. Woman, mother, sister, daughter — these individuals will not be muffled.

Our identity is no longer female, but individual. The woman is no longer Mrs. Bates, but Elizabeth. Each person is the warrior of her own life. A woman does not need a man to fight for her; she needs a man to stand beside her so she can take her shot. Men and women have always had a tendency to block one another, but now women have the authority to tell men to move.

The modernist movement matters because people matter. It was once comforting to hide behind a group or tradition, but that practice was stagnant. Modernism shook up societal cohesion in favor of individual separation. This changed the world for both sexes, but for women, it created a new universe of possibility.



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