

# SUMMER R & R



Reflection & Revision

PAWLP SI 2014

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*Personal Pieces 2014*  
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### The Anniversary

By: Kathleen Bortz

He woke on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the same way he always did. But this day was different. This was his anniversary – 42 years of total wedded bliss. And, while 42 years is hardly a big anniversary, this was still a significant one nonetheless. He still remembered meeting her in college all those years ago. Just back from Vietnam, he had enrolled at Temple University as a phys. ed major. He decided to take a golf course as an easy A to boost his grade point average. After graduating fourth in her class at her large catholic high school, she had decided to go to Temple because she was paying for college on her own, and it was easily accessible. She reluctantly selected a golf class to fulfill her phys. ed requirements because it was the lesser of all of the evils. The word athletic couldn't even be applied in her case, whereas he had been a sports jock all of his life. Fate intervened the day they both serendipitously enrolled in the same course – and he had thanked those lucky stars every day since.

A retired man, he lounged for a bit in the morning, leisurely readying himself. As he showered and shaved he couldn't help but think of his preparations for their first date, just over 45 years prior. Two thirds of his life ago, he took her to a banquet for a team he had coached. The night was essentially a success...minus the part where he escaped through the bathroom window. It wasn't her, of course. He already loved her. But he had somehow managed to split his pants, and needed to run to his nearby house to change. He took a chance that she wouldn't notice and would never find out, but that story had been told countless times through the years. He smiled thinking of it now, as he pulled on his khaki pants. The good pants, though – he made sure not to wear the pair she hated. The ones that were frayed and ill-fitted. No, only the best for her today.

On his way to meet her, he stopped to pick up flowers. He always did. Never when he was in trouble – no, flowers were for happy occasions. Every anniversary, every Mother's Day, every birthday. But not on Valentine's Day – no, he'd send those to work a few days early, with a note that read something to the effect of, "Valentine's day is for amateurs. I've loved you every day of my life, not just on February 14<sup>th</sup>." Oh yes. He was good.

When he arrived at their place, he looked up at the crystal clear blue sky and felt the warm spring sun shining down on him. So different from their wedding day! A dreary, rainy May Saturday in Philadelphia – but she had never minded. "Rain is good luck!" she'd always said. 42 years of love and happiness later had proved her right time and time again. But today was perfect, which pleased him. He knew she'd be warm, and she was always cold.

She had arrived first. He always knew she would, because she always did. But he still couldn't believe it when he saw her. His love for this woman washed over him in that moment – 45 years of togetherness, of memories, of family and adventure and laughter and children. Three children, who were all her. He thanked God for that daily, especially now.

He greeted his love and nervously presented his flowers, pausing for a moment to try and comprehend this anniversary. Trying to accept it the way she had. Trying to remember all 41 before. He saw her smile, he heard her laugh and greet him by his pet name. He felt her love

envelope him – it was the sun on his skin, the breeze on his back, and the tears in his eyes. They talked for a while in their own special way, after he had knelt to the ground to place the flowers perfectly on her grave.

42 years prior he had promised to love her in sickness and health, until death did they part. A naïve 26 year old didn't understand at that time what he was promising – promising to hold her hand through chemo for two different cancers, promising to be essentially a single father to their three teenagers while she endured a month long transplant, promising to pace ICU waiting rooms, to take notes at doctor's appointments, to give shots and pick up medications. Promising to hear the traumatic news, promising to learn the household systems she'd perfected, promising to pick the cemetery and make the plans and wrap his massive arms around their now adult children, a huddle of sobbing tears and incoherent thought after she'd taken her last breath.

And then promising to carry on without her, which was the hardest promise of all.

No, he didn't fully understand what he was promising all those years prior, but it wouldn't have made a difference if he had known. If someone had told him where their life would take them, or how it would end, it wouldn't have stopped him. He knew he was going to love her his whole life. And through all those hard days in her life and after, he had memories of exponentially more good days. All their vacations, their children's accomplishments, their date nights. Even just the days she would come home from work and snuggle into his side on the couch; the nights she'd scratch his back with one hand while holding a book in the other.

Every smile.

Every laugh.

Every second.

It was all worth it.

He left the cemetery after a short while, promising to return on Sunday morning like always, but this time with some fresh peonies from their garden. They had always been her favorite, and he swore they were blooming fuller and more beautifully than they ever had before. As he bid his love farewell, he knew he was not really leaving her when he turned and walked away. No, she'd be with him on the drive home; every time a new peony bloomed in their garden; every time one of his children said something so witty and clever he knew it was her speaking through them. He wasn't saying goodbye because he knew, more firmly than ever, that he'd see her again someday. He fully believed there was a heaven, because she was showing it to him every day. And he was certain he'd make it in eventually, but only because of the man she'd helped him become.

## Mary's Little Lamb

by Mary Chalmers

Humans say, "Dogs are man's best friend." Right? Well, I disagree. My best friend is a little girl with chocolate-brown pigtails and big, brown eyes. Her name is Mary Hollingsworth. My stuffed, fleece body fits perfectly into her small, gentle hands, while my button blue eyes watch over her wherever we go. My buddy's favorite nursery rhyme starts, "Mary had a little lamb..." So, her family was not surprised when Mary opened her birthday present last month and saw me, her own little lamb.

It was a chilly, October day, when the sun peeked through the pink drapes in our bedroom as Mary woke to her mother's voice coming from the hallway. I watched my young friend jump out of bed, dress herself, and tie her favorite sneakers that were covered with small orange flowers. I was so proud of her. She tucked me into the pocket of her cute, yellow dress with my head sticking out *just right*. After breakfast, Mary put her soft, white sweater on and headed to the end of her driveway to wait for the nursery school van.

When we got to the school, Mrs. Jones made Mary leave me in her cubby. I *did not* like this rule, but I was getting used to it. I sat in that cubby watching my best friend paint with her fingers, sing the ABC song, and listened to the other children tell stories about their pet dogs. Mary didn't have a dog. Her mom and dad had six kids. They didn't have time for a pet. But, my buddy didn't care. She had me. Finally, it was 3:00. Mary ran to her cubby and gave me a "best friend" hug, before we climbed into the nursery school van and headed home. I was so excited that her school day was over. But, the day wasn't over yet. That's when this little girl's world changed forever.

The nursery school van pulled into our driveway. The driver honked the horn, and Mrs. Hollingsworth waved from the door to let him know she was home. Mary gently tucked me into her pocket with my button blue eyes peeking over the edge. Then, we happily skipped up the driveway together. But, the moment Mary's flowered sneaker lifted off the tar-black driveway and touched the sidewalk in front of her house, I saw a huge gray and black German Shepherd come bounding up the front lawn. I bleated, "Run!" The dog seemed like the dreaded wolf from the fairy tale books I had heard Mrs. Jones read at the nursery school. I panicked, because my buddy didn't even see the beast. She was happily skipping up the sidewalk. I wanted to tug on her dress to make her turn and look, but my stuffed legs were tucked tightly into her pocket. She took a few more steps on the cement sidewalk, before I heard her scream. Mary's orange flowered sneakers took off toward our house. The huge dog was charging toward us like a vicious coyote eyeing a helpless roadrunner snack. The matted black and gray fur encircled its menacing snout. The sharp yellow teeth it bared made me wish I could close my button eyes.

As I turned my glance upward toward my friend, I saw Mary's frightened face scanning the front porch. Her tears were beginning to soak my soft, cotton-white head. In the midst of this terror, I realized she was already searching for a place to hide. Although the gliding loveseat filled most of the front porch space and seemed like a safe haven, I quickly learned it was a poor choice. The sturdy metal frame kept the dog's heaving, furry body away from us, but the woven mesh allowed its chomping jaws to penetrate the unstable shelter. Mary's little hands were gripping me so tightly, but she didn't make a sound. I could feel her heart thumping and her

body trembling. I felt helpless. Her mother was screaming at the dog through its deafening growls to "Leave her alone!" and "Get out of here!" I wondered why Mary didn't call for help, but then I saw the fear in her eyes. She was frozen. Mrs. Hollingsworth was trapped at the front door. She didn't know how to help. Finally, Mary's mom hollered, "Hang on!" as she retreated into the house to call the dog catcher.

"Hang on?" I thought. "Where are you going? Don't leave us!" It seemed like time stood still as my friend and I were left alone to fend off the canine attack. Mary seemed to have a death grip on the metal frame of the glider. She was shaking and trying to hide behind this huge swinging seat. Suddenly, the dog's head appeared from under the glider. Its sharp front teeth snagged on the sleeve of Mary's white sweater. She screamed and tried to push the beast away from us with the frame of the glider, but this animal was just too strong. Every time Mary shoved the gliding seat toward the agile attacker, its gray head and sharp teeth found another entry point. This monstrous creature tried to push the glider with its huge, hairy body. But, Mary kept pushing back at the beast as she twisted and turned the only thing that was between her and this vicious dog, as if she was steering the metal framed seat. As my frightened friend was avoiding contact with the aggressive brute, I saw the dog catcher's shiny metal truck pull up in front of the house. Even though help had arrived, Mary was still dodging the dangerous jaws that were beginning to rip through the nylon mesh of the glider.

Thankfully, the dog catcher got out of the truck, stuck two fingers in his mouth, and made a loud whistle noise. Almost like magic, the creature stopped digging its head into the glider and turned toward the sound. The gray and black beast bolted toward the truck as if its name had been called. The dog catcher had a stick with a special loop at the end. He looped the dog's neck, picked it up, and tossed the beast into a door on the side of the truck. As the dogcatcher was clanking the metal latch shut on the dog's confinement chamber, Mary's mother flew out of the front door, scooped us up, and just hug, hug, hugged us as we settled onto the glider.

Although the attack was over, we were still in shock. Mary's body was trembling as she just sobbed and sobbed. She used my soft body to try to dry her endless tears. We stayed on that glider for a long time. Her mom's hug was that warm blanket on a cold winter morning. Eventually, I felt my best friend's quivering body begin to melt in the comfort of her mother's arms. As the time passed, her tight grip on me softened, and she wrapped her other arm around her mom as we were lovingly rocked and rocked. I wish I could say that this was the end of Mary's bad luck with dogs. But sadly, it was just the beginning.

## My Life of Crime Sally Drucker

My life of crime was over before it ever began. I had cased the joint for years. I knew every aisle and floorboard. I knew where the good stuff was and which aisles were better left alone. I mean, who needs oilcloth or kitchen supplies? There was a row of birdcages alive with squawking parakeets that sometimes escaped and flew around the store until they were caught or until they found an open door and freedom. The wall of fish tanks was filled with sparkling goldfish and tiny guppies and neon striped something-or-others and although they were interesting they weren't the prize I was after. But the toy aisles, they were golden. Boxes of board games I had seen on television commercials were stacked one on top of the other. Any games you'd ever heard of were there along with a few dust-covered boxes that were so old it seemed that no one still alive remembered how to play them. The boys' toys were in the next aisle but G.I. Joe and toy guns were not items of interest. In another aisle were dolls that drank from bottles and wet and talked and had hair that you could style. They were all there. Barbie was there, too. This was before she became the CEO of all things pink and it was long before she became a doctor/lawyer/chef/fairytale princess and sleazy dresser. Her section was small but alluring and I did need that black, sparkling evening gown. But this wasn't my target. The heist would take place in the aisle where tiny toys lay in bins on the counter. I can picture them now: sets of jacks, multicolored super balls, metallic tops, Duncan yoyos, tiny wind-up chicks and cows and cars, bags of marbles, troll dolls... This was where I would make my mark.

I had never stolen a thing in my seven years of life and I wasn't going to take any chances. I recognized the salespeople and I knew who paid attention and who just walked around looking busy. It would have been so easy to do it right then, pocket one small item and walk away, but I had to wait for the right time. I had a plan and it was perfect. When I turned 100 - on my actual one-hundredth birthday - I would walk into Woolworth's and pocket one thing from these bins. It didn't matter what I took. At 100 years old I didn't think I would be playing jacks too often, but I wanted to know how it felt to steal something. The plan was so perfect because I knew that even if I were caught the police wouldn't, couldn't arrest a 100 year-old woman for taking a cheap toy from Woolworth's. I might even have a few moments of celebrity in the local news. I was confident. I tucked this plan away and waited.

Years passed and my plan stayed on a shelf in the cobwebbed aisles of my brain. I became a teacher, then a wife and mother. I was a paragon of moral, clean living. I never thought of my criminal plan until the day I read the news: Woolworth's was closing its stores. I may have gasped out loud. It all came back to me, the sights and sounds and smells of my time spent in that store and along with those memories came the memory of my plan. I wasn't anywhere near 100 years old. A 100 year-old shoplifter may be quirky but a 40 year-old shoplifter was just pathetic. The crime of the century - my century - would not happen.



I know what you're thinking. I know I could find another store, but my tastes have changed. I've resigned myself to a life on the straight and narrow. It just wouldn't be as much fun taking some totally charmless object from Five Below and I'm pretty sure that even a 100 year old woman would get into a bit of trouble pocketing something from Tiffany's.

### Where I'm From

By Lisa Dudek

I am from Mom.

I am from the smell of banana bread warm in the oven  
And the hint of vanilla lingering on her hair,  
Which I greedily inhale as she wraps her arms around me.  
I am from homemade spaghetti sauce and fried fish dinner,  
From conversations around the kitchen table.

I am from willow trees, whose soft weeping limbs drape down,  
Surrounding an interior of tough wood and strong roots.

I am from Dad.

I am from the sight of him working in the yard,  
From the smell of fresh cut wood and the drops of sweat glistening on his brow,  
While I play in the creek bed nearby – silent companions together in separate worlds.  
I am from basketball games in the driveway and wiffle ball in the yard,  
From silly jokes that only we laughed at.

I am from oak trees – proud, strong, and mighty –  
Whose acorns drop to allow a new generation of life to go on.

I am from Mom-Mom.

I am from summers at her house  
Dark and mysterious, cluttered and closed off from the outside world.  
I am from the memories stored up and boxed away in that house,  
Unknown secrets waiting to be explored  
In the hidden quiet of long afternoons.

I am from the ivy that covered the wall behind her row home,  
Concealing the life beneath it, holding in a secret history.

I am from Aunt Chel: godmother and kindred spirit.

I am from camping trips where I learned a sense of adventure,  
Thanksgiving meals where I learned the pride of tradition,  
And summers at the shore where I learned the value of love and laughter with family.  
I am from the way she understood me, because I am like her,  
And in turn allowed me to understand myself.

I am from birch trees, whose silvery bark stands out uniquely,  
Guiding you with its watchful eyes.

I am from friendships old and new, long and short.  
I am from ice cream cones and Camp Fire Girls,  
From the laughter and high-fives of Friday nights at the bowling alley  
And the smell of stale popcorn at the movie theaters.  
I am from the long-desired independence that they brought me,  
And the value of close family that I eventually found.

I am from maple trees, sometimes short and hidden below the towering trees around it,  
Or sometimes tall and strong, with their helicopter seeds being carried out to the world.

I am from evergreen trees, constant and reliable amidst a changing forest,  
Propped up by family and tradition.

## The Impostor

(Note: Author's Name Appears at the End of this Piece)

Most people who know me call me Dee, including me. I call myself Dee, too. Most of the time. Some people don't know the real me until they meet my husband, or my mother, or see my name in print. It's like a secret me. It even goes unnoticed at the bottom of my emails, or on my mail, and it isn't part of my voicemail message, where of course, I call myself Dee. Some of my friends since college have come up with endearing, and, amusingly, LONGER! nicknames for me. Judy, my dear friend, and first employer after college, calls me DeeDee, as does her daughter Monica, who as a toddler dubbed my little, blue Dodge Charger, "Dee Cahhh" and her parents likewise referred to it as Dee Car. My friend and teaching mate, Andrea, calls me Deedle Lee Dee. Lisa, my friend who teaches in the classroom next to me, calls me Deedlelee. It's funny how a name grows legs and wraps around us, becoming an integral part of us in ways we cannot anticipate at the start.

And yet, Dee is an impostor. As much as it suits me, has molded itself to me, it is not me. Occasionally, someone will probe and prompt, "Dee is for...?" leaving a pregnant pause for me to fill in the name from which Dee is derived. At other times, an acquaintance will be clued in to the real me upon meeting my husband, or my best friend Peggy, or my sister Nadine. People always marvel upon meeting my mother and hearing her lyrical voice address me. They react with, "Oh! I didn't know that was your name!" My heart still aches after four years, yearning to hear my father say my name again. These voices and people all predate Dee, connecting me to a time when I had not yet shed the skin of my given name, the one that is inextricably linked to my father, the one that sounds like poetry on my mother's lips and has generated a more organic nickname, Lil (leel), which is the choice of my sister and my BFF. The name bestowed upon me at my birth. Dalila. (də-LEE-lə)

As a child of the seventies, I was disappointingly excluded from the personalization craze. Never was there a mug or shirt or pencil that bore my name. And yet, like Chrysanthemum in Kevin Henkes' touching children's book, I loved my name. As an adult, her character harkened back to my young self, and each year, I share the book's powerful message with my students. The words, I realize, are mine:

*"Chrysanthemum loved her name.  
She loved the way it sounded when her mother woke her up.  
She loved the way it sounded when her father called her for dinner.  
And she loved the way it sounded when she whispered it to herself in the bathroom mirror.  
Chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum."  
Dalila. Dalila. Dalila. I hear.*

*"Chrysanthemum loved the way her name looked when it was written with ink on an envelope.  
She loved the way it looked when it was written with icing on her birthday cake.  
And she loved the way it looked when she wrote it herself with her fat, orange crayon.  
Chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum."  
Dalila. Dalila. Dalila. I hear.*

*"Chrysanthemum thought her name was absolutely perfect.  
And then she went to school."*



As I read these words to my students, my voice is often choked with emotion. This book has become deeply personal and my students know it. They have already heard me on the first day of school as I make sure I know how to correctly pronounce each child's name. "Our names are special. They are important to us. It is important for us to honor and respect one another by getting each other's names right," I implore. And when we finish reading about Chrysanthemum's experiences in seeing her name through kind and unkind eyes, we talk about the importance of names and students share their experiences with their names. The conversation has more than once generated tears for me, and for students who relate to the tortured and conflicted feelings that come from having a name that is dear and is not treated with care by others. It is a deep wound to the heart and I encourage the members of our classroom community to tread gently as they use one another's names because our names are special and exceedingly, deeply ingrained in who we are and how we identify with ourselves.

Hakan and Korgan and the little boy whose last name was Xu, all appreciated the time we took to establish the sacredness of a name. But so did children whose names did not seem so obviously challenging to me, like Max and Emma.

As the teacher, I realize that I am coaching a younger me to be brave. I am Chrysanthemum's "Delphinium Twinkle," the teacher who points out that her own name is that of a flower and that when her baby is born, she would like to name her Chrysanthemum. Like Delphinium Twinkle, I tell my students, "Your name is special. Like mine, your name is love. Someone chose it just for you. Wear it proudly." My little girl cries inside because she was not given that same message. Her name carried shame. She tried to hide the person she was for the sake of fitting in and being liked. She gave up a part of herself, and so she cries with her students each year, gathered in a circle, assuring them that she will treat each one of them and their very special names with the utmost of care, kindness and love.

My name is Dalila. It is a Hebrew name by origin. It was given to me by parents who, like Chrysanthemum's parents, wanted to choose a name that suited me.

*"Her name must be everything she is," said her mother.*

*'Her name must be absolutely perfect,' said her father.*

*And it was.*

*Chrysanthemum. Her parents named her Chrysanthemum."*

My parents named me Dalila. It means delicate and it has always made me think of the fragile petals of a flower. Dalila was the name of one of my father's aunts. My father was Tunisian and my Belgian mother loved everything about that. When they met in Salt Lake City, Utah, and were swept up in an overwhelming feeling of passion and love that was bound in marriage a month later, my mother told my father that she would follow him anywhere, to a tent in the desert if that's where they should land. When they soon after journeyed to my father's hometown of Tunis, and traveled by Jeep through the sites of his country, I was already along for the ride. It was the Peace Corps that brought them together in Utah and then to Tunis where my mother grew to love not just my father, but his very large family. I have heard countless stories of my uncles and aunts and was fortunate to finally meet them in the summer after I turned thirteen. I was born into this family in April of 1965 at the clinic in Carthage, Tunisia where Dr. Nicole Ben Youssef delivered me. My parents chose the name they thought was "absolutely perfect" and called me Dalila. Dalila Elisabeth Saada. My maternal grandmother, Aziza, I am told was overjoyed, and my mother still cries when she tells of my grandmother's great sorrow when learning that my parents would return to the U.S., my infant photo affixed to my father's passport. But these are not stories I am likely to tell you.

Like Chrysanthemum, people have not always been kind with my name. They teased me in school by calling me Delilah and asking "Where's Samson?" in taunting voices. My last name was turned into "Salada Tea", a popular brand when I was growing up. My seventh grade science teacher called me Soda Pop. I'm sure he thought he was being funny, but my middle-school self just wanted to fit in, so it embarrassed and rankled me. My name made fitting in hard to do.

And yet, my name feels like love. It also feels like shame. It reveals a me that is not accepted by others. Those who have grown to love me are almost rabidly protective and fanatically supportive of my name. My husband calls me Dalila, introduces me to others as Dalila, and refers to me in conversation as Dalila. My best friend, Peggy, is openly offended, if prompted to share her opinion, by the fact that I have chosen not to use my given name for most of my adult life. She introduces me to others as Dalila and she often employs the nickname given to me by sister. She lovingly calls me Lil. But the seductiveness of not having to explain my name accompanies the nickname Dee, which came along in my second year of college. I no longer remember how it started, but once it did, it stuck. I gave it the glue it needed. It was easy. I didn't need to pronounce it slowly, or repeat it. I didn't need to explain its origins. I mimicked my father. My father, who was named Mohamed Hachemi Saada, was the favorite son of his mother. He once was delighted with the beauty of his name that was lovingly bestowed upon him by parents who adored him. Throughout nearly 45 years of marriage, my mother only ever called him Hachemi. But, over the years, people were not always kind, and my father came to understand that to be an Arab in America was not acceptable. It was sometimes linked to being black, an often less-than-desirable attribution in this country, especially in the 60's. Hachemi tried to blend by adopting the name Hank, and later changed the pronunciation of Saada, which sounds a lot like Grenada, and instead made the "ah" sound into an "ay" sound, making Saada rhyme with cicada.

I do not begin to understand the hurt and shame that accompanied my father's harsher experiences in this country. He loved being an American, and I still remember the pride my parents and I felt when we became naturalized citizens. But, my father was Tunisian, and he loved his country of birth, too. He was a conflicted man and it has become part of his legacy, that I should avoid using my own name. I am a pleaser by nature, and avoid conflict. I want to make things easier for others and myself. If the nurse at my doctor's office stumbles upon my name, I quickly proffer Dee. Easier for her. Easier for me. She doesn't have to try to say my name correctly. And I don't have to hear a mispronunciation, like nails on a chalkboard, of my beloved name or explain its origins. Dee is simpler.

Still, Dalila speaks to my heart. My name feels like love. I want others to love and accept it. Recently, I attended the IRA annual conference and I introduced myself as Dalila. And just before that, I had done the same at the first PAWLP class on May 2nd. Yes, I had to repeat the pronunciation once or twice, just as I have always had to do. Typically, people say, "What a pretty name." I like that. It makes my heart light up. As though the specialness of my parents bestowing this name on me is resurrected each time someone says, "How pretty." How pretty. What a pretty name. Pretty. Yes, I like when people like my name. It affirms what I know in my heart. I love my name. It feels like love. It reminds me of my father. It fits me and I want to use it. It has taken me longer than Chrysanthemum to work through the conflict that can accompany a name that rings unfamiliar or strange with others. Each year, when I share Chrysanthemum's story with my students, I am supporting my young charges, reassuring them that they will be accepted in our community for who they are. But, I now recognize that I have also been counseling that little girl named Dalila, who just wants to be loved and treated as the special and unique person that her parents believe her to be.

The world can be a cruel place. The adult in me has slowly, begrudgingly and heartbrokenly accepted this fact. But, I diminish others and myself when I do not trust in their ability to accept me for

who I am, when I do not accept myself. Some will not accept me, but many more will. Dee is no longer my impostor, but rather a part of the making of me. However, I no longer need Dee to help me fit in. She can become part of the endearments and monikers that attach themselves to a person over time. I now choose to wear the courage of Chrysanthemum and embrace all that my name has come to represent and everything I am. It is my father. It is my mother. It is my family, my friends, and my heritage. It is challenging, and also beautiful. It is lyrical and it is love. My name is Dalila and, like Chrysanthemum, it is "absolutely perfect."

#### Afterword

As I was preparing to finalize this personal narrative, I did some fact checking with my mother to be sure I had my information straight. When I had written about becoming a citizen, I pictured my parents, sister, and maternal grandparents being there, which got me wondering, Had my grandparents become citizens at the same time? (They did not.) Also, did I spell my paternal grandmother's name correctly? (I did.) Finally, what was the spelling of the doctor who delivered me. I had heard her name countless times over the years, and realized I had never written it. (I was reminded that Dr. Ben Youssef's first name was Nicole, so I added it.) I went back to my story to make these last few corrections, and then I remembered that I wasn't certain that I'd spelled my father's first name correctly, so I sent a quick text to my mother. "How did Dad spell Mohammed?" She replied, "Mohamed, but it wasn't Dad's name!" Now, I was confused. Had I misremembered? I replied that I remembered old papers where he had signed, "M. Hachemi Saada." I also remembered that, at some point in my childhood (maybe even several times, as family stories often repeat), my father had explained that it was an honor, for parents in his culture, to bestow their male children with the name Mohamed. Yes, my mother said, that was all true. She went on to explain that she had been defending my dad's wishes by saying that Mohamed was not his name. My mother told me that my father dropped the name Mohamed when he became a U.S. citizen. When my parents returned to Tunisia in 2005, my father went to the Tunisian embassy in Washington D.C. to request they drop Mohamed from his Tunisian passport. The folks at the embassy would not remove it. My dad was very upset by this, but the ambassador, whom he knew well, told him that in Tunisia, he would always be Mohamed Hachemi, and so my father responded with the equivalent of "Amen" in Tunisian Arabic, and "they were all smiles," per my mother's account.

My mother's loyalty in this exchange spoke volumes. Her love for my father is and was uncontainable. Her loyalty to him has extended beyond his life and she has honored his wish to be Hank Saada (like cicada) in this country. A name is a powerful thing. It carries much weight. It is the cover of the "human book" and, like a book, is sometimes judged without peeking inside to get a better look. That is unfortunate. There are some very good books with strange titles, boring titles, plain titles, short titles, long titles, and even foreign titles that could go unread on account of their titles. I remember all of my father's "titles." They, like my many monikers, did not define my dad, but were, and apparently always will be, a part of who he was.

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The author of this story is Dalila E. Eckstein. She would have included her name with the title, but realized that it would get in the way of the storytelling. She also considered a different title, *I Say Dalila, You Say Delilah*, which seemed "absolutely perfect," except that it also would have interfered with the unfolding of the tale. After all, a name is very important, and you shouldn't let it get in the way.

#### The Red Rope

Joan Harris

On a crisp December evening in 1990, the first snow of the season fell. The air was filled with the kind of soft snowflakes that fall from trees and melt easily on your eyelids and cheeks. A perfect evening for a walk in the snow ... not so cold that you can't breathe, but cold enough to hear the snowflakes crunch under your feet as you step on the sidewalk. For me that evening, with its fresh purity, provided the perfect background image to embrace a much needed sense of serenity knowing that someone is watching over me.

"Why don't we go for a walk? We can visit the holiday light display – it is not too far from here," my soon-to-be husband, Buz, suggested. "Come on," he continued to prod, "you love those lights."

"Okay, I guess," I agreed, hoping he could not detect the hesitancy in my voice.

The walk was perfect. Stars out, houses twinkling with bright colored lights, hand holding, conversing about our upcoming plans, enjoying each other's company. We quickly found ourselves approaching the neighborhood that famously drew crowds to view the annual holiday light extravaganza. We approached the home from a side street which was part of a maze of interconnected streets unfamiliar to me. That unfamiliar street provided me with an overwhelming, yet deeply moving experience that quietly restored a much needed sense of contentment.

A year earlier, my life changed instantaneously. My mother was hit by a car and passed on to the next life. The year was filled with heart wrenching, agonizing, and numb moments. My hesitation for taking the walk was not because of the trauma of losing my mom during the holiday. It was due to the nakedness I felt by not being able to wear my official necklace of the season.

*Each year at Thanksgiving, there was a ritual the female members of my family dutifully embraced. We each wore a unique, one of a kind cloisonné necklace that depicted a seasonal embellishment. We received the jewelry in our Christmas stocking a few years back from our mom, and she looked forward to the tradition to mark what she determined to be the start of the holiday season. The cloisonné trinket was small, and it dangled from an inexpensive cord rope that slipped over your neck with a small knot in the back. The adornments, as I recall, included a poinsettia flower, a ringing bell, a decorated Christmas tree, a reindeer, and a Santa. My stocking gift was the Santa. "It goes with your red dress," I distinctly remember those words.*

*My cord rope was red. Santa hung from a singular brass circle. He is two-sided, the identical image on both sides, complete with red hat, white hair, mustache, and beard. He is the size of your thumb nail, and proportioned the same way – smaller on top and round at the bottom. His arms are wrapped around his stomach, depicting a jolly old fellow.*



*Thanksgiving Day, 1990 was difficult, but we all managed to meet at the family home, and we all wore our necklaces. We had the feast, we shared stories, we laughed, and we mourned. The tradition felt right. The ritual would continue, except for one little mishap. A nervous gesture of continuously playing with my Santa, running back and forth across the cord caused my red rope to fray and break. It was not repairable, and tying another knot would not allow it to slip comfortably over my head but luckily, my cloisonné trinket was safe. "Don't worry," Buz assured me, "you can find that rope anywhere this time of year." As misfortune would have it, even though I tried three different stores, I could not find the right size cord for Santa to securely slip on. Sadness enveloped me. Feeling overwhelmed with loss, I gently tucked the trinket away in my jewelry box for safe keeping. Part of my heart was locked away with him.*

Walking along the pavement, guided by Buz's hand, gingerly stepping on the new fallen snow and weaving through the bustling traffic of baby carriages, excited toddlers, and tired parents, I started to trip. Not a quick fall where you hastily rebound and pretend you did not lose your balance. I was going down.

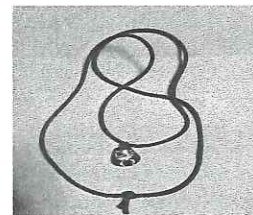
I pleaded to Buz, "Let go of my hand, I can't walk."

He retorted, "You are okay. You tripped on the crack in the sidewalk."

"No," I stammered. "There is something wrapped around my legs."

Sitting on the snow covered pavement, my entire being wanted to immediately dispel my embarrassment for stumbling. With a swift motion my first attempt at recovery was to pull one foot out of the cumbersome binding. Reaching one hand around my ankle, I tugged one foot out and quickly stood. The attempt proved to be awkward for I wobbled and fell again. The next try was to break the trapping. Mustering all my strength, I yanked hard, but the pull was unsuccessful. Desperately, I reached both hands down around my ankles. I grabbed hold of something, and it was wrapped around both legs. I first thought it might be a twisted, discarded branch from the huge old oak tree next to me on the sidewalk, but when I removed the snare, I was astonished. I stepped both feet into a crimson red corded rope that was tied with a small knot in a closed circle. Buz and I looked at the red cord, bewildered, then joyful, a sign of contentment, a sign of peace.

The red rope fit Santa perfectly. I have worn the Santa around my neck every year during the season starting with Thanksgiving and ending on Christmas since that fateful evening. It has never worn out. Of course, I know most people will not believe my story, but I have a witness. Buz looks forward to Santa every Thanksgiving.



No Bears Here!

Mary Ellen Hopkin

I've always admired my younger brother's commitment to the outdoors. He somehow always manages to incorporate a jaunt to some, not so far away land of natural wonder into his busy schedule. Unlike him, I had always wanted to take advantage of what the Northeast had to offer an outdoorsman (woman), but so much planning went into it. I rarely took the opportunity.

So when Nicholas asked me to join him on his weekend excursion to the Adirondacks for a weekend of hiking and camping – I jumped at the chance. His savvy for the outdoors would lend itself well to my inexperience.

As plans got underway, I realized that this wasn't going to be like any other hike that I had ever experienced. For this trip I needed equipment; new shoes, back pack, sleeping bag; this was real hiking!

I was really excited. A chance to challenge myself, spend time with my younger brother who had many times successfully conquered this hike. *What could go wrong?!*

There are two things that scare me, bears and alligators; it's something about the razor sharp teeth and claws. I realized that I wouldn't be seeing any alligators up north, but the thought of bears did cross my mind. But, Nicky never mentioned them as being a concern, so I didn't worry. As a forestry major in college, and an experienced hiker, I trusted him. My safety was in his hands. He knows the outdoors – *Right?*

All packed up and ready to go, we left bright and early to get to Lake Placid. We would have enough time to get there and have our camp set up before dark.

When we arrived at the trail head we needed to sign at the Ranger's station. This type of hike requires that rangers know who is on the mountain and your intended course in the event that anything were to go wrong. From the looks of the parking lot it looked as though there were many hikers on the mountain.

It was early afternoon, we planned to hike for about four hours until we set up camp. New shoes, back pack weighing close to fifty pounds, four hours! We stepped into another world. The weather changed. It smelled different. It was different.

Where were all of those people from the parking lot? It was deserted. The forest floor was a carpet of the blackest soil made up of decomposing trees and leaves and broken branches. The majestic trees stood tall and proud. I felt so insignificant. Light from above filtered in with golden rays that gave me the sense that heaven may not be so far away. We were in another world.

As we continued on this hike, I realized how challenging this was going to be. My brother never missed a beat, he is very strong and capable. I followed behind as best I could. I knew that I could do it. It would just take some breaks, I never expected the backpack to be so heavy and my shoes weren't as broken in as I thought. I knew that blisters were developing. Nick would have to be patient, and he was.

It wasn't long after we got started that I started seeing prints, bear prints. BEAR PRINTS! My expert, outdoorsman brother assured me that they wouldn't be a problem. *But bears really scare me.* I tried to keep it out of my mind as we went along. We climbed rocks and ledges. We took breaks on the



edges of the mountainside that over looked some of the most breathtaking scenery. *Bear prints*, we didn't see a lot, just those few at the beginning. I had to believe that he knew what he was talking about.

Wow! What an amazing feeling making it to our campsite. No other people, just us! We looked for a lean-to to spend the night – none available. So we were under the stars – or at least the canopy of the impressive trees that towered above us.

Camp was set up, we had our dinner and we were ready to pack it in for the night. Before we got some shut eye we needed to put any and all food high above in a tree where the bears could not get it. There was a strategy to this. Nicholas knew just what to do, again, he was the expert. High above on a weaker branch of a tree, away from our campsite, a place that the bear couldn't possibly manage to reach our food.

My feet were on fire, I was sweaty and smelly. The amenities of home were long gone. I rinsed off in a nearby stream. We climbed into our tent for bed. It was an exhausting day. There should have been absolutely no reason that when my head hit my sleeping bag that I shouldn't have fallen asleep in seconds. However, my bear phobia had once again gained momentum – I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned and continued asking about the bears. Nicholas was losing his patience. It was a long day and we had an equally long day, if not longer, tomorrow. He grits his teeth when he gets frustrated. Even though we were in the black of night, I knew –he was gritting his teeth.

"They don't want us."

"Ok." I didn't believe him.

"Just go to sleep." But I couldn't.

Needless to say, I didn't get much sleep. It was windy and the trees seemed to sway as if taunting me, like some sort of initiation into this mountainous world. Things creaked, and branches snapped – but again the bears had nothing to do with it, my brother assured me. There was one particular "snap" that sounded louder and closer and *different*. I wasn't so sure he was right.

Morning arrived! I had made it unscathed. "I can do this!" I thought. The first night is always the worst. I didn't want Nicholas to regret asking me to join him. Today I was not going to overreact. I decided not to let my insecurities come between me and this amazing adventure.

Nicky went to collect our food. I was ready for a fresh start. After breakfast we would embark on another day of hiking. I was prepared. The early morning light and sounds were so refreshing. It gave me new perspective. This mountain was so amazing. I anticipated the day ahead with a sense of exploration.

"The bear ate our food!" Nick said matter of factly.

It was Nicholas, he was back from getting our food. I knew that he was joking to try and scare me, except that he wasn't! Our bag along with anything that was in it, was shredded! SHREDDED! Our three day hiking trip was just cut short. The one thing that the bear somehow did not manage to ingest was the small bottle of Bailey's that my brother brought along. It wasn't that the bear didn't try. Teeth and claw marks definitely indicated that he tried!

"So that *Snap* that I heard last night. The one you said wasn't the bear, was the bear?"

"Probably."

It was like we just discovered a hole in our balloon, slowly, but surely, deflating.

A four hour hike down the mountain without anything to eat left us ravenous. We were able to stop for water in the mountain streams, but that was all that got us through our descent. My feet seemed to hurt even more, the pack was somehow heavier.

We could not wait until we reached our car. All that we thought about was what we were going to have for breakfast. To this day, I don't know if I have ever been so hungry. People burn between 400 and 600 calories per hour of hiking. We were burning a lot of fuel without replacing it. What would have happened if we were two or three days into our hike? I am glad we didn't have to find out.

I can't say that I gained any satisfaction in knowing that maybe I was right about the bears on the mountain and my mountain man brother wasn't. Nicholas still insists that "they didn't want us, they just wanted our food." The park where we hiked implemented a new rule shortly after our adventure. Campers are now required to keep all of their food in bear canisters that prevent the animals from ravaging through campers' food.

One thing we both did agree on was that our breakfast was amazing! We found a diner just a mile or so past the trail head and ate until our bellies were full and satisfied.

Nicholas is moving to Washington State at the end of the month. I will miss him. I look forward to someday visiting that part of the country. I understand that it has a lot to offer for an outdoorsman (woman). I wonder if we will ever have the opportunity to ever finish our hike.

## Locked Doors

Jo Anne Johns

Sliding along the grooves in the floor, the door slammed shut making me jump. I stood inside a prison cell. My pulse quickened. My mouth went dry. With a pounding heart I looked through the bars and watched the officer rattle his keys, swinging them back and forth as if to taunt us. It was a memory forever etched in my young mind. I was on my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade field trip to the Police Station.

Locked doors. You may think them devices for security but have you ever been on the wrong side of a locked door? Have you experienced irrational fears of being trapped by a door that refused to swing open?

\* \* \*

'The Dungeon,' as it's commonly known to staff, fills one third of the lowest level of our school. Built back in the 1800s, the Merion Square School building has a subterranean foundation with exposed stone walls. Dirt and dampness easily seep through. Dust hangs in the air and covers the shelves that line the gray landscape. Along the low ceiling waste pipes from toilets drop to the floor joining the central sewer pipe as it dissects the length of the room. Gingerly, I step over this obstacle and bits of discarded ribbon from an old craft project. I pass rows of metal shelving belonging to my colleagues filled with classroom supplies. I reach my destination - the back wall of the Dungeon. The smell of damp earth fills my nostrils reminding me of recent rains. Lifting the drop cloth from my unit, I blow dust from boxes and bins. Pausing, I hear the pattering of footsteps and children's voices coming from above. My mind imagines those rooms lined with oak flooring, warmed by the sunshine that floods through glass windowpanes. These are rooms filled with life. They rise in stark contrast to where I stand below.

The Dungeon's only door needs a key to enter. It locks automatically from the outside. I haven't seen any rats here. You won't find the rack or other devices of torture. None are secretly hidden inside these walls. Yet, it's not a place you'd wish to spend any amount of time. Sometimes I play the Pied Piper bringing my own rugrats with me. Strength in numbers, right? Each time I enter, I desperately hope the lights stay on as the switch is located two rooms away. Cloaked in utter darkness, my fears would exponentially grow like too many spooky stories around a campfire. With that in mind, I dutifully prop the door open each time I pass through.

I was reminded this spring of the importance of this simple act as a muffled voice reached my ears. Sally, my colleague, turned to look at me in wonder. Someone was crying for help. Rushing to the Dungeon we found Susie, our music teacher, pounding on the door from inside. 'Try the key!' she urged, as she pushed the panic bar on her side. Sally reached for the key dangling precariously from a chain screwed into the wall. Neither bar nor key worked. The Dungeon door simply wouldn't budge. I wondered why she hadn't propped the door, why she let it close behind her. It was a place for keeping supplies, not teachers. I'm not sure when this fear of imprisonment began in me. Was it too many buried alive stories my older sister told me when we were young? Could it have been that day in Kindergarten I

got locked inside a coat closet and kicked my way out through the ventilation grate? Certainly these fears have been perpetuated for the last 15 years since traveling to London where life lessons were learned about locked doors.

\* \* \*

Our dreary day ended on Drury Lane. I was traveling with 40 middle school students on a People to People tour of the British Isles. With room checks completed and students settled, the teachers convened in the lobby's pub. Graeme, our tour manager, was discussing the next day's events. Just as we heard about climbing the steps of St. Paul, Julie, one of our students, came to tell us she couldn't get into her room. I looked longingly at rows of traditional brass and wooden beer pumps. Boddington, Brodie's, and Abbots Brown Ale would just have to wait. Little did we know a real problem was brewing.

We stood incredulous outside Julie's room. "Can't you get us out of here?" John's voice joined Kim's as I wondered what he was doing in there! Amr, the night manager, tried every one of his skeleton keys. He dubiously informed us the inner workings of the latch had unexplainably broken. The door would not open. If this wasn't bad enough, the soft spoken Egyptian sheepishly explained the building's mechanical engineer lived two hours away. Panic gripped me of impending danger. I envisioned the building going up in flames and no way of escape for those two trapped inside. "If there's a fire, you're up here with an ax hacking the door down! Understand?" He assured me he would.

With two hours to wait, my thoughts vacillated between my own worst fears and a new one forming - John being locked in a room with Kim for three hours! Just how would I explain *that* to their parents?! Putting my thoughts aside, I stepped off the elevator for Julie's floor. Before I rounded the corner the sound of hammer on crowbar split the quiet night. Down the long corridor I saw two gentlemen; the building mechanic donning red fleece knelt before the door. Amr stood by his side in juxtaposition, impeccably dressed in gray suit coat and knife pleated trousers. A discarded drill and bit lay at their feet on the paisley carpet. Raising his arm to strike again, the mechanic brought down the hammer with one last blow. The final piece of trim had separated from the door jam. Splintered wood and loosened nails littered the floor. Carefully slipping the screwdriver into the latch, he depressed the mechanism inside. The door swung slowly on its hinges. "All he talked about was hunting and fishing!" Flying out of the room, there was a note of exasperation in Kim's voice. After three long hours the jail birds gained their freedom.

\* \* \*

Locked doors. You may think them devices for security but they have the capacity to become larger than life itself. Just last week I stood in the halls of Upper Moreland High School watching wide-eyed, as teachers one-by-one rattled the bathroom door handle. Inside they wrestled with a fussy lock. Once released, words of caution were thrown over shoulders. Judging from the look on their faces, mine is not the only irrational fear. Where do your fears lurk? Real or imagined, I want mine tamed to the size of a nickel kept in a safe; under lock and key, unable to escape, behind a door that won't budge.

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## Addiction and Other Problems I Don't Like to Think About Leigh Ann McCormack

"Your loved one has a disease like cancer, they can't help it," says the short, middle-aged, blonde addiction counselor. This statement resonates in my mind for the moment and will linger there for years, eventually taking a very long time for me to fully understand and accept. I am sitting in a room at a rehab center in northern Pennsylvania, along with about 30 other people and my parents. We are in a large, plain, sterile room. It smells of cleanliness, of newly scrubbed tiles and windows, and of emotions. Feelings of fear, hope, and anxiety are circling around the room, unseen and felt by all. The medium-sized leather chairs are in neat organized rows and when I look around I notice that the walls are painted a dull yellow with nothing on them. How ironic, I think. This room is clean, organized, and neat, everything our lives are not.

I am in this room, with these strangers because I have come to this rehab to visit my younger brother, Andrew. I'm listening to what the rehab calls "educational counseling." The requirement before we are allowed to see our loved ones. I enjoy the counseling for I am learning about a slice of life newly squeezed into our family. My parents are with me but I know they aren't truly listening. They act like nothing is happening, Andrew's addiction has been something they have swept under the rug but has left a big lump that they can no longer hide from the outside. They believe that he "hung out with the wrong crew" and somehow got addicted to pills. I know the truth: track marks don't lie.

The addiction counselor continues her required lecture. I learn that addicts are manipulative people and master con artists. I learn that the addict I love will try to manipulate and con me. I learn what enabling means and looks like. I am storing these newly learned terms in my mental dictionary under "addiction and other problems I don't like to think about." I listen and learn yet I am also thinking back to my brother. My mind wanders back to our childhood.

Andrew and I are chronologically two years apart and spent our childhood very close by one another: climbing trees, riding bikes, getting in trouble. Me always blaming him and he always taking the blame without any reservation or complaints. Andrew is the brother I remember from our childhood. Andrew is the fearless high school football star that everyone in school loves. The brother I am visiting today is Drew. Drew is the adult that Andrew became. Drew is the drug-addict, the brother who steals and lies.

The strangers, my parents, and I remain sitting in this room, a purgatory to us. We cannot wait until we are released and able to see the person that we yearn to see. I look around to observe the other families, to make sure that I am not alone, that the others might look like me: white and middle class. Because I have stereotypes about addicts and families: that they are black and poor. The room breaks through my stereotypes: we are all white and likely middle to upper middle class. I think about the years of turmoil and grief that has brought my brother to this rehab. The years of my pleading, crying, and screaming. I think about Drew stealing from my parents and selling things like televisions and vacuums to local pawnshops. My parents would spend time shopping and buying their items back from the pawnshops, ignoring that transparent fact that Drew is stealing from there. My brother knew better than to steal any of my things. When I visit from college I warn him, "you steal anything of mine and I don't care I will call the police." He knows I am serious; I'm not as forgiving as my parents.

The educational counseling ends and we are all finally released like caged birds, fleeing to an outside area where our family members wait. What will it be like to see Drew? What will



we talk about? I will soon find out that he is never again the same. He is not the brother I remember, Andrew is gone and Drew remains.

"Eyeing" the Sky but Glimpsing a Vision of Self  
Emily Plummer

"I suppose you'd much rather be there than be here, having your eye poked and prodded," joked Dr. Tapino as we discussed my two week follow-up visit, the date for which I will not be able to accommodate given that I will be flying, apparently joyfully in the doctor's eyes (no pun intended), to California for my soon-to-be sister-in-law's bachelorette party.

As much as I love Laura, I honestly had a moment when I thought, "Well..." I glared at Dr. Tapino with my very red eye; he had made me realize that I prefer moderate bodily discomfort to a fun trip meant to celebrate family and enjoy time with a lovely group of women (with wine involved!). Eyes issues aside, what is wrong with me?

I hate to travel. I have known this about myself for some time—the inner sense of dread and alarm I always feel when a family vacation is mentioned and the subsequent last minute squirming and posturing to get out of a two-stop flight to Texas for Thanksgiving, for example. But, it was not until the above-mentioned recent visit to the eye doctor that I felt the need to stop and reflect on this hatred.

The reasons for my travel hatred are obvious and are things that all people—even the lovers of traveling, the ones who quote Augustine as saying, "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page"—can admit to finding extremely unpleasant: the not so vague feeling that I need a shower immediately upon finally disembarking from the claustrophobic, stale air tube; the proximity to body parts of strangers that I do not wish to see even under more pleasant circumstances as they stuff their too large bags into the overhead compartments located precariously above me; the nagging voice in my head saying not to check my watch to see how much time has passed and then being even more disappointed than I feared I would be when I "accidentally" glance at my wrist while squinting to see out the tiny window and realize multiple hours still remain. There is the waiting to check-in, the waiting to get on the plane, the waiting to get off the plane, the waiting to retrieve the bag that I checked in.

I know I have company in my hatred. My father, for one, may actually hate travel more than I do. "Have you ever seen anyone on a plane who seems happy?" he often jokes, and he is right. But, for me, it is more than the cramped quarters, the lack of peanuts, and the incessant hurrying up to wait. I would simply rather be at home. Sure, exploring wine country with other young twenty-somethings will end up being a memorable adventure, but it is a lot of effort, not just in getting there, but also in actually being there. I am by no means anti-social; I simply like company and entertainment on my own terms. I enjoy spending my spare time in the evenings and on weekends with Gino and Charlie, the first my fiancée and the second my cat, and with a glass of wine. I love a book, good or bad, really, and maybe if I am feeling a little bold, a pretty jigsaw puzzle to put together while watching HGTV or re-runs of a favorite series. Sure, I could seemingly have all of these things save the specific human and the kitty while in the midst of air travel to California or elsewhere. So, what does all of this reveal (besides the fact that I have become relatively reclusive)?

I am an extreme homebody; I have been ever since I tried to run away from school in first grade and was assigned a special desk next to Mrs. Lindacher as a result. I am a control freak. I care too much about what other people may think of me; I agonize

over what to pack for any trip because I can never be certain exactly where I will be at all times and what will be appropriate attire for all of those mysterious times (The control freak is overlapping here also, obviously). I cannot accept any sort of change. Clearly, I must be a rigid perfectionist with overwhelming anxiety of anything unknown.

Or, perhaps, I simply love my family and the lives that we share together. Perhaps I want others to see the best in me so that they can understand not just how happy I am in life but how happy I am to be with them at that moment. Perhaps I am loath to welcome change because I do not feel the need for it—my life is good.

And so, maybe the true answer—or, really, the true lesson, to take away from my extreme hatred of travel, a hatred so strong that I had to consider whether an invasive eye examination was preferable to a few hours on a plane for a bachelorette weekend, is that I must learn to be more of an optimist. Rather than ruminating over how my dislike of Delta (or any airline sans alliteration) shows that I am a frighteningly flawed woman in need of some sort of therapy, I should recognize a few more positive things about myself in light of my preference to stay put. First, it is acceptable to wish to avoid extensive travel. Second, it is worthwhile to note the many fulfilling aspects of my life that make me more than content to remain at home. Third, Augustine may be right after all about the world being a book, but I would still rather read that book from the comfort of my tiny porch or my overstuffed chair; however, if I have to travel, at least I can read a book on the plane. And, fourth and finally, odds are I will have a terrific time when I land in California too—optimistic, right?

### Daddy's Little Girl

By Ellen Raleta

*"Little Sulky Sue. What shall she do? Stand in the corner, till she comes to." ~ Mother Goose*



"I love you more than you love me." "Uh uh, I love you more than you love me." The memory of this long ago bantering surfaces every so often and takes me back to a time when I was safe in the certainty of my father's love. My father's nickname for me was Sulky Sue from the nursery rhyme because I stuck out my bottom lip and pouted whenever I was unhappy. Though it referred to a less than desirable personality trait, he used it endearingly.

I thought I had my parents pegged. Mommy was the caretaker and disciplinarian. Daddy was the breadwinner and the fun one. He conspired with me as I affirmed that I, like him, had heard the reindeer on the roof. He took me ice-skating, heading up the whiplash. He taught me to wait for the perfect wave and ride it to shore. Daddy encouraged daring feats and childhood play. As a tree climbing, fearless tomboy I relished these escapades.

Our relationship changed as I approached adolescence. A number of factors fostered this. My deteriorating vision required new, thicker glasses every 6 months. I hit that awkward stage. In reference to my chubbiness, I was christened with a new nickname, Petunia. My sister Kathy, replete with her sunny disposition and adorable dimples, was born. And unbeknownst to me, my parents' marriage was in trouble and my Dad saw the baby as a way to save it.

When I was 16 my parents divorced. The four of us children, I being the oldest, lived with my dad. While he enthusiastically embraced the single lifestyle, I became the cook, maid, and chauffeur. It was taken for granted that my mother's chores would be taken on by me and I never questioned these new expectations. Dad said things during this time that hurt me for years. "How could a mother leave her kids?" made me think I did something wrong. "You were lucky. You had a mother," when I questioned the leeway he gave to my little sister. I never stopped to consider that I too had suffered a loss. It took me decades to realize that my sister's young age and cheerful disposition actually made the transition less traumatic for her.

Throughout these years and beyond, I yearned for my father's approval. I wanted his eyes to light up at the sight of me. Higher education and good grades were of the upmost importance to him. I earned honors and became the first in the family to graduate college, but he didn't sing my praises. There wasn't even a college graduation present, though he joked for years about the gift being in the mail.

Perhaps our innate differences made the relationship so strained. I am ultra-sensitive and he lets things roll. I examine things deeply and he took them at face value. I worry about what's on the inside and he worried about appearances. He liked being in the spotlight, while I shied away from being the center of attraction. I was a bookworm and a successful student. He wasn't a good student and though he demanded I be, good looks, fame, and fortune where what really impressed him.

I built a wall around my vulnerabilities. I told myself that I was grown. I pretended that I didn't need Daddy's approval. But deep down, I craved it. I loved him and I wished I could tell him. But even the thought of uttering the words aloud was terrifying. I couldn't do it. A lump closed off my voice box at the very idea.

Years passed. I married. The father/daughter dance was to be to "Daddy's Little Girl". It was the traditional song of the 70's. My dad was traditional and wanted to always do the right thing. I was also traditional but had the added incentive of the words which expressed how I wanted our relationship to be. *You're the end of the rainbow, my pot of gold. You're daddy's little girl, to have and hold. A precious gem is what you are...* Ironically the band didn't have the lyrics but a guest, who knew the lyrics, sang it while we danced.

He married. We vacationed and celebrated holidays together but our relationship remained the same. In fact it got worse. To put it mildly, his wife and I did not get along. The longer they were together, the more like her he became. Talk about appearances mattering. She is 100% superficial and self-absorbed. There was a personal agenda behind almost everything she did.

Often during a phone call he would ask me, "What's new?" I usually answered, "Nothing," or talked about something one of my three children had done. I felt I disappointed him with my mundane, unexciting life. I chose what I said carefully. I didn't want my true feelings about his wife or their lifestyle to surface. I was still trying to gain approval. Deep down, I continued to pine for signs of his love.

In August of 2001 my three children and I were visiting my dad and his wife at their shore house. We were all at the beach, the kids swimming when Kayleigh, his step granddaughter, their undeniable favorite joined us. He said that my daughter Stephanie, who was in the water using the "best" boogie board, would have to give it to Kayleigh because it was hers. I questioned, "Why does Kayleigh have her own boogie board when all the other grandchildren have to share?" Then I uttered the unspeakable. "And she's not even your real grandchild."

He immediately left the beach. I tried to discuss what I'd said back in the kitchen of the shore house. I forget exactly what he said; I just know that I was CRUSHED. I wasn't allowed to explain. I wasn't allowed to speak. He, his wife, and Kayleigh returned to Pennsylvania. For the sake of my kids I stayed for the week. I wrote a long letter explaining my feelings. I explained how it was hard for me to talk honestly to him. I told him that I loved him and felt it wasn't reciprocated. I admitted to being too sensitive. I told him that he thought he knew me, but that he was wrong. I asked if we could get together without his wife to talk. I said all the things that I couldn't speak out loud. The letter was 8 pages, handwritten on college ruled notebook paper.

When my children and I departed, I left the letter in his drawer. I am positive that his wife read it. I'm not sure that he read it in its entirety. He didn't speak to me for months. He told me that his wife said it was horrible. He didn't want to discuss my feelings about not being good enough, about how he treated his grandkids as opposed to how he treated Kayleigh. He didn't want to discuss my honest assessment of who I was and what I needed from him. He just wanted to pretend it never happened. Talk about being devastated. We came to an uneasy truce and things improved gradually.

I came to understand that the dad that I wanted, that the dad that I thought I once had, didn't exist. Maybe my childhood, heroic version of who he was, was fantasy. I also came to realize that he didn't intentionally hurt me. He definitely changed during our many years together. But so have I. Looking back, I realize that I may have misconstrued some of my father's teasing and intentions. We are so different. However, he didn't make the effort to see things any differently than was comfortable for him. He didn't attempt to understand where I was coming from. (And yes Dad, I just ended a sentence in a preposition!) When my oldest daughter, his first grandchild was born, she instantly became Little Sulky. Corey earned that nickname strictly because I was her mom. She has my sister's sunny disposition. As I reflect on this nickname, I can see that it was a sign of his feelings for me.

My dad had a series of mini strokes in September of 2011. They affected him cognitively. He still readily recognized and could converse with family. He could follow and discuss his beloved Eagles and Phillies. He could no longer drive, play golf, or see well enough to read his newspaper. Appearances ceased to be important. He didn't joke around as much. I mourned the loss of his strength and vitality because they had been such an integral part of who he was. It was how he defined and saw himself.

During the next year, his last, I grew closer to my Dad. He would beam when I visited and his voice was happy when we talked during my daily phone calls. He always answered "Hi Sulky! How's Sulky doing?" And as we chatted I no longer felt insignificant. And I ended these calls by saying, "I love you Dad and I meant it and there was no lump."



## *Transition*

Timothy Rybnik

Perhaps nothing evokes more vivid associations and memories more than those that rely heavily on one of our five senses. A certain scent can take us back to a love lost, a particular sight may remind us of a moment or era in our lives, a distinct taste can traverse miles and years to a special meal, and a soothing touch can stir images of our then youthful parents mollifying our fears after a nightmare. Sound too unlocks the past. For me, the sound of two particular words bring back a moment forever emblazoned in my brain; a moment I have wrestled with for 19 years, trying to simultaneously both exorcise and incorporate it, wondering whether it was a gift or a curse.

It was an especially slow night in the middle of the week in November 1994. I was a rookie patrol officer in the Scranton area, and I was especially annoyed that evening because I was quickly realizing that this new profession that I had embarked on for excitement and thrills wasn't fulfilling its promise. Driving around a few neighborhoods for eight hours every night was admittedly boring. I sensed that my brain was going to atrophy. I gave up graduate school at Purdue University for this? But I was sick of the classroom. I wanted a street education. This certainly wasn't the life I had imagined from watching *21 Jump Street*, *Starsky and Hutch*, and *Dirty Harry*. In my several months patrolling I experienced little excitement, made little or no difference in anyone's life, and began to feel that malaise one is overcome with when recognizing they are in a bad relationship.

The radio crackled some time after 1:00 am. I don't recall the exact time, but I was told to investigate a motor vehicle accident with possible injuries on Route 6. Only miles from the scene, I was the first responding officer. I found an overturned vehicle and a male lying in the roadway, many yards from the demolished car. The victim was lying on his back, and I recall him looking like a turtle, struggling to upright himself. My thoughts turned to my very overweight uncle who used to make us laugh as kids by getting on his back. His struggle to sit up used to make me giggle uncontrollably. But as I neared the victim, my sense of humor changed to horror. Indeed, this man was dying.

When a body experiences blunt trauma to any area, that area swells. This man, who I originally thought was overweight, was so swollen in his chest cavity that he looked fat. The accident caused him to hit his chest against the steering wheel, fly through the front window, and hit the roadway chest first. He hit so hard he bounced over on his back. I'm certain he read in my eyes with a calm resignation what fate shortly awaited him. He seemed calm, almost peaceful, wanting only to have someone there with him in his final moments. He did not talk, but his eyes spoke to me. He reached for my hand. I took it, and cradled his body in my arms as I awaited

the EMS squad, who were, by the sound in the distance, en route. He looked me directly in my eyes. Not a word was exchanged. And then I heard that awful death rattle that was talked about frequently in the police academy as the precursor to death. The end was near.

I did not originally know the name of this man. Yet, while I held him, he became my brother, my father, my uncle, my friend. I kept thinking, John Donne was right. Any man's death does diminish me. This unknown was not a stranger. He was a human being, with a mother, a father, hopes, dreams, and a past. As his chest heaved heavily for the final time, I sensed or understood the meaning of a beautiful death. No, what caused his death was not beautiful. Yet, his transition to the next world was. He expired with a sense of hope and peace, still holding my hand and his gaze into my eyes. It was the first time I witnessed death as it happened. I had seen dead bodies on the job, but they were soul-less. I felt this soul depart.

By the time additional help arrived, my friend was dead. Back up units went about their routine in the efficient and sterile manner they were trained. Measurements here, calculations there...it was all too cold for me. My Sergeant approached me and told me to go take a few hours off. My uniform was covered in blood and excrement. "Go clean up," he calmly advised. But his true intentions were not hygiene related. He knew this was the first time I had witnessed death on such a personal level. He was giving me time to grieve. He knew that I would handle further deaths in the same ways I saw the backup units handle it that evening; and he was correct.

Before I left the scene, I found out the victim's name. Moments later, I returned to my apartment, changed my uniform, and cried heavily, grieving someone I had never known but in whose life I had by fate played an important role. Today, when I hear either his first or last name, two seemingly meaningless sounds, I'm transported back to those surreal events of November 1994, and think and pray for the soul of Eric Kartell.

## Life's Footprints Christine Soring

Do you know how there are always those people in your life who make an impact? A footprint is left on your heart like a footprint in the sand, and it stays with you forever. For some it is a child, a friend, a mother, or a grandparent. For me it was a short, blonde-haired, skinny swimmer. It was someone who sat in the last seat in the last row of my classroom, hiding quietly behind his laptop, whose daily mission was to avoid eye contact at all costs. For me, it was Patrick.

\* \* \*

"Come on, Patrick. You can do it!" Quiet, brilliant, reserved Patrick agonizingly listened to me preach the importance of public speaking. I wanted him to do the annual Dunaway public speaking competition so badly that I dedicated chunks of time trying every day to convince him. Since he spent every day in my class tucked comfortably behind his laptop, I thought he would have a strong opinion about this year's topic: *Is technology a crutch or a tool?* With every bit of energy and persuasion I had, somehow he was convinced. I'm not sure if he realized he could do it, or if I just pestered him enough that he gave in. Either way, I was thrilled.

Days came and went, and his speech was edited and practiced. I didn't realize that this quiet, hide-in-the-back student was such a perfectionist until he insisted on coming to my classroom—the one that he so fiercely hid in—every day for 3 weeks to practice giving his speech. "Ma'am, I'm starting to get nervous. I'm not sure if I want to do this anymore," he said with a sort of chuckle that I had never heard, and the sound of it caught me off guard. I began to laugh, and so did Patrick. His laugh was quiet, light, and more of an uneasy chuckle than anything. Patrick was nervous, and so was I. I wished so badly for him to do well. He had put hours of effort and bursts of frustration and hesitation aside to develop this speech. He deserved to win.

On the day of the speech, I gave Patrick one last piece of advice. "Oh, you'll do great! Just think, most of your peers could never stand on stage and give a speech. You're already a winner."

\* \* \*

Sounds of grunts, phones, and clanking chairs filled the ballroom as the student body gathered for the Dunaway. I couldn't help but cringe at the conversations happening around me as we waited for the event to begin.

"I'd rather be in my room sleeping."

"How long is this going to take?"

"This is going to be so boring."

These complaints soon stopped as the contestants took the stage. My heart slowly began to beat faster and faster as I sat through the first few speeches anxiously awaiting Patrick's. The speeches were impressive, but they soon became a blur once I saw Patrick. As I stood in the back of the hot, sticky ballroom, I squinted and tried to focus my eyes on the stage as the sun shined

through the decrepit and tattered shades. Patrick walked with such ease, one step in front of the next, as his military medals swayed from side to side, the sound of it faintly echoing in the quiet room. As he walked he looked calm, keeping his head up and briefly glancing at the crowd. Our eyes met for a split second and I grinned, knowing that inside he was probably overwhelmed at the large crowd he was about to speak to.

Patrick's nonchalant walk slowed as he approached the podium. Slightly taller than it, Patrick adjusted the microphone as he cleared his throat. Before he spoke, he took a deep breath as he looked at his mother sitting in the front row, and then he gave his speech. He almost had it entirely memorized and rarely did he look down at his paper as I watched his blue eyes looked around the room confidently, his head held high, and his voice clear. He spoke with such elegance that it sounded flawless. I felt like a proud parent. Patrick, the shy student in the back of my class, was on stage giving a perfect speech. Not once did he stumble, or seem nervous, or hesitate. It was truly perfect. As his speech came to an end, I saw the anxiousness in his face. His pace began to speed up as he approached the last line. He ended and said, "Thank you," smiled, and walked quickly and confidently across the stage with the same poise as he did before. He disappeared from sight, but the smile remained on my face.

As the English teachers gathered at a table in the back of the ballroom, we carefully tallied the scores given by the judges. Contestant after contestant was scored, and then we came to Patrick. I can still hear the clicks of the ancient calculator as I slowly, carefully, and optimistically punched number after number to add Patrick's score. As soon as I saw the total, I could not control my excitement. I actually found myself jumping up and down, but reluctantly I forced myself to stop so the others in the ballroom wouldn't know who won. My heart was racing as we handed the name of the winner to the announcer. After a brief intermission, the students gathered again in their seats and waited for the winner to be revealed.

The announcer made his way to the stage, the crowd quieted, and I found myself a spot in the front of the ballroom right next to the stage. I wanted to be in the front. I wanted to see Patrick's reaction and I wanted to see the proud look on his mother's face. The contestants lined up on stage, looking polished and professional in their military uniforms, with collages of previously earned medals and ribbons on their sleeves.

"The winner of the 2014 Dunaway Oratorical Competition is..."

There are moments in the classroom when I can hardly control my joy, when my students explore unfamiliar land, and when our experience is driven by the mind. Then, there are moments like this. Watching Patrick add a new medal to his collection brought tears to my eyes, but his impact on my life is much more than that of a winning speech. He put his fears behind him, explored unfamiliar land, and triumphed far beyond what he expected—for that, Patrick has left a permanent footprint in my heart.

## Sunflowers

Susan F. Starr

Sunflowers... standing tall, lifting their heads to the sun, bobbing in the wind...

Sunflowers are in my soul. I picture fields of them as we drive towards L'Escala, Spain. The sunflower sculpture on the road from Barcelona to Girona marks the halfway point. I know we are almost home. I can feel myself take a deeper breath. With each exhale, the school year is slipping farther into the past until it is just a memory. I am softening as the stress is slowly leaving my body. I can feel the warm breeze with just a hint of tangy sea salt mingled with the scent of rosemary and lavender.

The sunflowers are slowly lifting their heads to the brilliant blue sky. Their golden petals are beaming in the hot sun, slowly unpeeling their purpose. It is the end of June. Days are long and languid, nights are still cool. Our pace is slowing down to just being. Books are waiting to be unpacked, read and savored word by word. The biggest decision will be where to have lunch.

Standing in a field of sunflowers, I feel as if I am turning golden yellow. I take many photographs, hoping for that one elusive shot. I know it will be tucked away in a desk drawer. When Spanish summers are no more, I will pull out this one perfect picture. I will longingly touch the petals. The warmth of the sun will flood my heart with memories. William and I are sitting on the balcony of the little white house with the red shutters nestled on top of the hill. We are simply looking out at the sea, listening to the fishing boats murmur past, loving each other. I now hold that precious memory in my hand.

I realize I will not see those glorious blooms once again this year. My neighbor, Carmen, will not bring them to me as my "welcome home" bouquet. William will never again meet me at the airport, late or early doesn't really matter anymore. I will never peer out at the crowded Arrival Gate looking for his white canvas Tilley hat perched jauntily on his head. He will never open the house for me again. I will never feel his warm, brown velvet skin next to mine as we are jostled on the train to our destination. Now, what matters most to him is the ability to just be. Memories are landlocked in his mind as his body slowly shuts down to begin his final journey. I understand all too painfully when he returns to 107 Calle Punto Montgo, it will be as ashes. His essence and spirit, however, will always be with me. In my heart, I long for one last summer, although I know it cannot be. It is just a futile wish.

Fields upon fields of sunflowers – taking on the toll of summer's torrid heat... By August, they are drooping. As is the Spanish custom, they, too, take a siesta during the heat of the day. All too soon, it is time to pack up, close the house for the season and return to Jenkintown. I kiss the cool, white walls one last time. I turn around in the car as we drive down the hill until it quickly disappears.

So much elegance and so many memories are packed into sunflowers. Beautiful, proud tall – facing into the sun, speaking their own language as lovers do, bobbing in the wind.



Sunflowers are in a cobalt vase sitting on a lace covered table with a dazzling, azure sea in the background.

Scorched from the intense heat, sunflowers hang heavy on their stems. Their heads brush the ground, parched, finished. The yellow petals are dried, toasted brown. Soon the fields will be no more.

Sunflowers...standing tall, lifting their heads to the sun, bobbing in the wind...

### Personal Best

Jessica Tecco

My heart is pounding so rapidly, that I feel my chest might explode. My hands are trembling, my head is spinning and my body has gone as limp as a dancing air balloon. I can taste the sweat building on my upper lip. My legs quiver, as I try to steady my feet against the hard, dull floor. The sun shines brightly through the window, and reflects the damaged soft blue walls all around. The holes remind me of the emptiness I feel deep down inside. The pressure in my ears allows me to hear only the faint sounds of conversation amongst the numerous, side-by-side, heads in front of me. My palms sweat as I grasp so tightly onto the red, fuzzy seat, that I think the fabric may soon ooze between my fingers. Is it excitement? I am not quite sure.

As the bulky silver bus pulls up to 235 South 33<sup>rd</sup> Street in Philadelphia, the massive "Franklin Field" stone-covered sign surprises me. It is at this moment, I realize, I am here. The 1992 Penn Relays. There is no turning back. I take three deep breaths, stand tall and walk slowly down the steps onto the bumpy concrete. As I look up, the huge brick dome stares down at me. The way is paved. My team, Archbishop Prendergast, enters the huge, two-tiered arena. A plethora of people are scattered all around. My tension grows. Sleeveless jerseys announce school names that I have never heard before: Holmwood Tech, Port Jefferson and Deep Run. The list of unfamiliarity goes on and on, as my overwhelming feeling intensifies. Some things, however, are recognizable. Only at a moment like this is it refreshing seeing the colors of royal blue and white, the colors of my rival Cardinal O'Hara, and the colors of red and gold that represents PennCrest High School. The blue seems so vivid that I want to drink it, and the red and gold are so bright that I almost have to cover my eyes. It's quite uplifting associating with something familiar at this point, but that doesn't allow me to minimize my reason for being here today. It's April 24, 1992. The sky is clear. The air is heated. My apprehension is mounting. I keep telling myself to *calm down*.

As I continue my journey around the historic football stadium, I notice the state-of-the-art scoreboard that keeps fans well informed of the action on and off the track. Why is this image so beautiful, yet I only have unpleasant thoughts? There is a perfectly good reason for my being here today. I fulfilled all the requirements, and I've qualified to run. So, why do I feel so inadequate? I've been in many races before, took part in All-DELCO and All-Catholic events and have come in first place more times than I can count on my own two hands. I have been honored to gather so many award medals and be able to create a scrapbook full of newspaper clippings and pictures, *my* newspaper clippings and pictures. With all these major achievements, why am I succumbing to such doubt?

Check-in time came and went. Only one hour before race time. Having to report fifteen minutes before race time, the remaining forty-five minutes do not seem like ample time to prepare myself mentally for this race. I am prepared physically, as I have practiced this 800-meter relay so many times that I think my right hand has taken the shape of the baton. The significance of this race has added many unnecessary pressures to my mind, body and soul that it's almost hard to breathe. I try to steady my body, close my eyes and, again, take three deep breaths. It isn't until I unexpectedly feel a soothing heaviness on my shoulder that the knots within my stomach begin to unravel. It's the familiar warmth of my

mom and dad's hands, and it's this comfort that has always kept me going. It's encouraging knowing my parents care that much to come to my team huddle to wish me luck. It's inspiring. I am not so surprised, though. My parents have made it to every other race, bringing along so much reassurance and a pack of Sour Patch Kids for me in the end. They each give me a tender kiss on the cheek, as they turn back to return to their seats. I only hope to make them proud.

"Runners take your mark" is all I hear. The time has come. My heart pounds fast. Why do I feel like my shoes are too tight? Is my shirt tucked? Will my ponytail holder break? I see indistinct colors of blue, green and yellow jerseys out of the corner of my eye - the colors of my competitors. The gun sounds with a loud boom. Four laps and then the baton is mine. I take three more deep breaths. *I am going to run my heart out today*, I promise myself as I close my eyes. Two more laps. One more lap. I feel the cool, but roughness, of the baton enter my grip. It's my turn. Here I go. The wind in my face is energizing. The cheer of the crowd, but mostly my parents, is invigorating. My breath is so powerful and my legs feel so strong as they fall swiftly, but softly onto the rubber-infill track. My shorts rub against my thighs rapidly with swish after swish. One more lap, half a lap, quarter of a lap. My teammate waits anxiously as I close in for the fourth and final hand-off. With a quick release, my two minutes and twenty-one seconds of running is through. Oh, how I long for the sweet and tart taste of candy on my tongue.

At the culmination of the event, it surely isn't the winning that fills me with so much gratitude and pride. The Archbishop Prendergast 800-relay team didn't come in first, nor did we come close to third for that matter. But, I ran my heart out, just as I promised myself I would two hours prior, and I have, personally, gotten one of my all-time best running records in the 800-meter relay. As I begin to walk out of the two-tiered stadium, the air feels cooler, my anxiety has ceased and my heart has come to a calming norm. I exit the rounded stone archway, with my feet landing on the bumpy concrete. I take one look back, walk up three steps and sit with ease in the same red, fuzzy seat. I look out the window, think about my two minutes and twenty-one seconds, and smile proudly at yet another accomplishment.

*Fired in the Kiln*  
Denise Ungerman

I love clay. Squishing it in my hands, the earthy smell, though I was woefully inept at the potter's wheel. They had sat expectantly on the other side of my 12<sup>th</sup> grade art room all year, waiting as my reward for the final semester of Neshaminy's three-year Honors Art Program. But all of my pots came out stubby and short. Intended vases became candy dishes. Some ended up as blobs put back into the clay pit for someone else to use. No matter how I tried, I couldn't pull up the sides. I was a failure.

Everyone else made it look so easy. One hand inside the pot, counterbalanced by the other hand on the outside, applying gentle pressure as their foot kicked the wheel to keep the table spinning around. Like magic, the clay grew taller and taller, teased upward by their talented hands. An elegant vase sprouted from the center where a lump of clay had lain only moments before.

Not for me. Half the time the clay blob wasn't perfectly centered, or maybe it was that I enjoyed throwing the clay at the wheel to get started. Kicking the wheel, watching the turntable turn like an old record player, watching the lines make me dizzy if I glazed my eyes. Squishing the clay, molding a perfect sphere to throw at the wheel - SPLAT. More often than not, I had to scrape it off and start again.

My artist's hands that were so good at drawing, painting and sewing, that had the perfect curve for scribing beautiful cursive and playing the piano - those hands were no good for throwing clay. My fingers pierced the sides as I tried to coax the clay higher and higher, always too thin, too fragile.

Like me.

I once heard my mother say I was fragile. She didn't know I was listening. I felt horrified. Offended. Embarrassed. *I'm not weak*. She had no idea; I was just a kid, but she had no idea what I hid from her: the boy I liked teasing me for liking him, the girls at school excluding me at recess, the supposedly good-girl Girls Scouts taunting me at camp. I kept it to myself because by age eight, I had already been told it was my own fault if I didn't have any friends because I was too bossy. How could I be fragile if I didn't let them see?

Maybe people did see. If they did, they didn't let on, and certainly didn't consider my fragile feelings in how they treated me. It took moving 3,000 miles away to the Sonoran Desert to heal the cracks by growing up. Like the clay forged in fire, the desert heat made me strong. I scraped off the off-center blob of clay and threw it again. And again. And again. I have brought myself up from the stubby pot used as an ashtray to a towering vase: finally tall, but with sides that are no longer too thin. The potter's hands have changed me, left their mark, but I am here, and I am strong.

My Sister's 'First Cool Boyfriend' and his Z28  
William Joseph Williams

1-Distrust  
*Never trust a Chevy Man!*  
*Ford Men always play it safe.*  
*Foreign Car Men always want more than they can ever possibly have.*

These nuggets, from Pop's philosophical perspectives of the car world, purred through my mind as I peered at Troy's 1970 Chevy Camaro Z28, with its blue metallic paint and white racing stripes being projected from the glow of our townhouse nightlight. From the porch, I could hear the hum of its 402 horsepower, 350 four-barrel motor. Troy would leave it on because it was quieter to leave it in idle than to restart it. My sister's relationship with Troy had reached the point where he could enter without a knock, so he glided past me with a warm look to find her. When I heard the creak of the door shut, I meandered over to look inside this mistrusted, reviled, hated pony car.

With my elbows perched on the open windowsill, I investigated the interior. It was a simple machine designed to serve its driver- cockpit style driver's console with six gauges to exhilarate and warn at the same time. Black vinyl seats. Rally Shifter. Customized tower stereo with a tape deck and eight-track player. In the back seat, two engorged speakers that were bolted into where factory speakers once labored to bring stereo sound to the car, now had the ability to project the symphonic chaos of Judas Priest to the entire townhouse development. Man, did I ever want to distrust this guy.

He represented the enemy in all of its GM glory. Even though Pop saw the Chevy Monte Carlo as the true enemy to his own 1969 Dodge Charger, the Z28 was its pony car little brother, and Pop felt it was his duty (and all of ours) to defend the Dodge Challenger with the same air of superiority and disdain for other pony cars as any honorable MOPAR family should. In his Charger, breathing was barely allowed and only in short, quiet breaths. Hands were to be kept to the sides, so no fingerprint or elbow splotches would tarnish the latest Armor All job. No single crumb survived the hour, and seatbelts were better suited in proper, straight lines between the seats than actually worn.

*If we get in an accident in the Charger, better to be thrown out of it than roll inside of it.*

According to Pop, a spotless car represented the backbone of a orderly and worthy life, and all people should be critiqued by the appearances of their cars. With this in mind, I performed a close inspection of the Z28's floor. Crumbs! Straw wrappers! Dried dirt from a construction site! Half a candy bar! Matchbooks! Ashes!

*See, Chevy men cannot take care of a goddamn thing, and it starts with their car! How can anyone trust them!*

"Okay Pop," I mumbled. I continued my "objective" inspection on the rest of these gritty details of the interior, and appreciated the fact that Dad had not returned from the gas station yet. I wondered if the idled Z28 was actually intended to hasten escape before Pop arrived. I popped the hood. Hell, if he can just walk into the house then I can see the condition of his motor, right?

Metallic spotlessness! All wires, coils, bolts, and pins in proper order! Air filter clean enough to have been replaced in the last hour! Each spark plug wire wiped off to see their identification markers! Even the damn battery terminals were coated with protectant in a similar circular pattern! My own reflection peered back at me from the air scoop!

*Okay, the goddamn motor is spotless but he is not the complete package with that interior, and even if the interior was as clean as it should have been, he is still a Chevy Man and...*

I contemplated what drove him was on the inside by the look of his motor- he desired a clean, pure masculine power of his own, but hidden underneath construction dust and candy wrappers; he desired to control the uncontrollable with a steering wheel, shifter, and instinct and leave the rest to fate and cleanup to others in his life. Who needed a spotless interior with a mindset like that?

*It's exactly why you need to have a spotless interior!*

#### 2-Spottin'

"Let's go spottin' this Tuesday," Troy said as he glided out of our house as he had ten minutes ago. He had no reaction to me examining the Z28's motor, but quickly closed the hood before we could say much beyond my compliment on its cleanliness. It seemed that he was used to people opening his hood without his consent beforehand. My sister was not in tow, yet. Lateness was her current rebellion. I acted as if he was not here for her but me- the next one on his list to impress.

"Okay," I said. I had no idea what "spottin'" was. Thoughts of it being something done with the Z28 consumed my thoughts. Did he mean the best spots to do doughnuts or eat doughnuts? Was it a new cruising term that he knew and I didn't? And, how would someone older than me know a term like this before me?

*He's a redneck, so probably some hic term to hunt squirrels or some shit.*

My sister finally came out and scrambled by me, turned, and gave me a quick hug.

"Did you say anything stupid?" she whispered in my ear.

"I only reminded him how smart you are, so that may have been stupid." I regretted saying such a silly lie.

"Yep." She was already lost in the aura of his presence and ambled over to the passenger door. Troy, already waiting, opened the door for her.

*It's a goddamn ruse- MOPAR men are the last chivalrous men!*

Monday blurred into Tuesday. Ninth grade mattered little to me now. I was already working weekends at the gas station and counting down the days to my driver's permit test. I darted home and sat on the curb in front of our townhouse. Pebbles, remnants of wrappers, dead bugs, and cigarette butts littered the road underneath my feet. With my head between me knees, I cleared the clutter to the left and right until all was left was the dark macadam of the parking lot. My friends would take this opportunity to create a spit pile at their feet; I preferred to peer at the

cleared space amongst the clutter. The tentacles of darkness, that marked the day's transition into night, filled the corners and crevices around me.

*Christ, it is already 7:00. Doesn't he know it is a school night? Again, Chevy Men are never on time- always making themselves look pretty in the goddamn mirror when they could be cleaning-out their broken-down Camaros or 'Novas.*

"Pop, I know," I mumbled, but he was not home yet either. Lately, it seemed the earlier the sun set the later Pop came home.

*Because MOPAR Men always need to spend more time on Chevys, Fords, and the foreign pieces of shits than they want to when the weather starts to turn.*

The Z28's presence could be heard well-before its arrival, as Troy shifted down to second so he could turn into the neighborhood without any sense of braking beforehand. It added to its effect on others. The roar wound down to a neutral purr as he headed towards our street. I hid my excitement with my continued attention to the cleared macadam between my knees. When I looked up, I peered into the rounded headlights and metallic grille. I inhaled 350 four-barrel with its power only inches from my knees. When a third beam punctured my nonchalant attitude, I rolled back onto the grass in surprise. Its beam glared down from the driver's door- its singular resonance more powerful than the headlights on high beams. When I turned back around, I became drawn to its gauze but closed my eyes as if I was staring too long at the sun.

"Powerful fucking beam, huh?" Troy yelled above Ratt's "Round and Round" from his tape deck. Most adults cursed in front of me now but tended to hesitate before saying them and often still espoused regret afterwards with a dispassionate "Sorry". But not Troy.

I went to the driver's door. The spotlight looked temporary, attached to the windowsill in front of the side view mirror. It had a handle to control it while the car was in motion, but he also had the ability to remove it quickly if required. All of my "spottin'" assumptions were dispatched with the appearance of this contraption, so I walked around the car and got in the passenger seat. I was happy for two things: Troy did not get out and open the door as he did for my sister Mary Lou; and, that he did not ask me to get in the back. This car needed to be experienced in the front seat.

For some reason, he decided to switch RATT tapes and plopped in *Invasion of your Privacy*. I wasn't sure if I liked the tape cover or the songs more, but when "You're in Love" began to play, it was obvious that it was one of Troy's favorites. The Z28 roared in unison with the pop-metal anthem of newfound love. Speed limits never matched its intensity.

"Great fucking album," was the only thing Troy said the entire way to our "spottin'" location. Down Bristol Road we went, past 84 Lumber® and the old bowling alley to a right on Route 202. Next to the new RATT album, the only aspect of our trip Troy seemed to enjoy more were green lights.

"Here we are," Troy said, "I love how dark it gets when you pull into the park." I barely caught the park sign, "Peace Valley Park", with Troy's torrid turn down the main park drive. *He's going to race through an empty park, so typical of a Chevy Man because who can challenge him?*

"Come on Pop," I mumbled.

"What?" Troy said.



"Oh, nothin'," I said.

Once in the park, Troy slowed down so the Z28 would only rumble through the exhaust with a subdued growl behind us. He lowered *RATT* down to background noise and maneuvered the Z28 to the other side of the road. I could hear the crackle of the custom tires against the gravel. It became the loudest noise.

"Watch this," he said. The spotlight shot out to his left, and what was gray and black became a wild field of high grasses and pairs upon pairs of eyes, shot up as if something below the grasses jarred their heads up in simultaneous unison. The eyes did not move, still like parked lights in a parking lot.

"We picked a good night for spottin'" Troy whispered.

"Oh, I see," I said.

"Yeah, it is an awesome spotlight," Troy said.

"No, I was not sure..." I said.

"Shhh, look," he said. Rows upon rows of eyes, some higher than others and all completely focused upon us. When he drove over little bumps in the gravel, the spotlight would bump up to illuminate the sloped hills and exit roads one after another. At the top were houses, some with porch lights on and others dark as the fields they overlooked.

"I see a buck," Troy said.

"Deer?" I said with regret. My lack of knowledge exposed.

"Uh, yeah," he whispered, stopped the Z28 and turned it off and the silence shrouded us. The spotlight shut off as well.

"Shit," he whispered, turned off the radio, and turned the key to power the spotlight.

"Fuck," he said with conviction, "I cannot find the buck." He whirled the spotlight left to right then slowed it down like I had seen in numerous police dramas. The high grasses, hills, and houses came in and out of view in constant motion.

"I found the bastard," Troy said. There was only one set of eyes, now. They met the spotlight without a sense of fear. Proud. Strong. Confident. It did not run from us- the buck simply moved to cover its territory- to continue its grazing. As if the buck knew that Troy could only observe him like a scientist but could not act on his desires. It was not hunting season for another two weeks.

*Cheater! When we were young, and hunted deer, we never tracked them to see where they would be easier targets. We would climb up the trees and wait. Wait. Wait. Wait. If no deer, we would come home with another kill. How can you trust someone who plots what should not be planned in the first place?*

"Hey you" a voice shouted from the darkness, "you are not supposed to spot in the park!" The buck's eyes turned, and I could see the magnificence of its horns- eight points that appeared to turn before his eyes. He leaped to the left and then right, and was off before Troy could muster the speed to follow him. Rustled waves of noise poured out from the field- pairs of eyes flowed through the spotlight and were gone.

"Sonofabitch! Sonofabitch!" Troy yelled, turned on the Z28 and revved it in pure anger. The car approved and vibrated the spotlight in a dizzying effect that turned the field into a psychedelic canvas. Troy knew the deer herd's routine would alter now. A night's work ruined.

"Stop spottin' in the park!" the voiced yelled again, and I pinpointed the voice from a distant porch with a single light on. The figure, almost a shadow from our distance, yelled one objection after another with conviction.

"It's not eleven yet, asshole!" Troy yelled back, "It's not eleven, yet!" He put the Z28 back into gear and blared *RATT*'s "Dangerous but Worth the Risk" loud enough to create an echo through the entire park. I slithered down in my seat. "Let's roll." He dropped it into second and spun gravel behind us in a flurry of noise, smoke, gravel, and dust.

*Pointless rebellion leads to worthless consequences! He has no idea how to use a car. It is the car itself that defines the rebellion, not what he does with it. That is why you cannot trust a Chevy Man. They use their cars to rebel- the cars are too shitty to represent rebellion themselves! It's a shame that Chevys are driven by Chevy Men.*

As we drove back through quieter towns than they were an hour before, I could not help but listen to the steady roar of the 350 four-barrel that quieted my Pop's philosophical perspectives of the car world. The *RATT* tape ended and Troy flipped on the radio. On the local rock station, they were halfway through "Riders on the Storm" by *The Doors*.

"By far, their worst song", Troy said.

"My Pop loves it," I said.

"He would," Troy said, "driving a MOPAR is like riding on a storm!"

I smiled.

Finding A Yokefellow  
Nicole Zuerblis

I was 15 in Long Island, N.Y. Remember 15? Excited to be almost driving, going out on group dates with the whole crew, glad to have the friends you've grown up with who know you. That's when we moved from Long Island to the Lake Wallenpaupack Area in the Poconos. The drastic change in geography wasn't even the toughest part. It was nearly November of my sophomore year. Two months into school. Some of my N.Y. friends just got their drivers' licenses. That meant beach trips on warm September weekends. Fast forward to Halloween in hills and winding roads full of deer popping out of woods at any moment. That's where I'd learn to drive. But I still had several months before I turned 16, no friends to chauffeur me, and nowhere to go anyway. In order to "catch" an 8:00 movie, you'd have to leave at 6:30 to allow an hour to get to the "local" theater, stand in line for tickets and popcorn, and get a seat.

But this was my first day of school at Wally High, and I had no expectations. I had my schedule from when my mom brought me in to register me. This place was already so different than what I'd called home for 15 years. I got ready for school, dressed in my long geometric print sweater, leggings, boots and my eighties mall hair. I knew who I was in N.Y., but in this place? I wasn't sure how I'd fit. The halls were small. They actually had fish painted on the walls. Was this an elementary school? All traffic flowed on the right sides of the hall, in the direction of the fish. No two floors, no corner bathroom seeping smoke into the hall. Still, I wandered around looking for my first room. Homeroom was in the band room. We sat in folding chairs on tiered steps. I had just found a seat when we stood for the pledge. I don't remember any teacher, but there must have been one. I do know that everyone else was looking at me. "Are you the new girl?" said a boy wearing a purple and black Buckhorn football jacket. The buckhorn was their mascot! This was all too much. We didn't have deer in Long Island. Or if we did, I didn't see any. The New Yorker in me wanted to say, "Are you the old boy?" I didn't want this attention.

It's hard to believe anyone could get lost in a school so small, but I wasn't going in the direction that most of the other sophomore fish were going. My year started in N.Y. There I had Chemistry in tenth grade; in Wally High that was twelfth grade. French 3? That was with Juniors. English Comp? Sophomores. Health? Freshmen. Fortunately for me, gym was with other sophomores or else I wouldn't have met Alice. Alice was the kind of person who'd do what she wanted. She really never seemed to get hung up on what anyone else thought. She was a friend to most, used her gullibility to somehow charm teachers, and cackled with laughter whenever the mood struck. I didn't have gym clothes to change into, so my boots and hair seemed to stick out even more. Alice was impressed with the fountain effect in my hair sprayed do. I realized she was looking at me as a "city slicker."

Still, there was a curiosity to her look unlike the judgment on others' faces. She listened as I spoke to Ms. Philipps. I took my place as a spectator on the bleachers. I'm pretty sure Alice intentionally put herself in the dodge ball's line of fire. I watched her shrug her shoulders and put her hands up. "Oops." Ms. Philipps rolled her eyes as Alice skipped toward the bleachers. She had a small water fountain of her own. What did she use to keep her hair from moving along with her feet? She bounced to the seat right beside me, eyes as wide as her smile, "Hi, I'm Alice!" Did people really do that here? I mean, that's the "Hi, my name is" advice my dad always gave me. I was suddenly in the midst of an afterschool special. I did need a friend, but



hadn't planned on such an early opportunity. There wasn't much more of a conversation. Do I introduce myself as Nikki or Nicole?

I'm not going to say we were inseparable from then on, but we just seemed to fit. It was just easy to laugh together. I don't remember how, we stumbled upon the word *yokefellow* to describe close companions. Alice and I decided that fit us perfectly.

Yet, I was always reminded that I was in a different place, and soon I was the Long Islander whose accent only came back when visiting relatives in my home town. I remembered her, the daring kid who climbed trees with don't-even-stop-to consider-testing-the strength branches, the confident teen with lots of friends surrounding her at a surprise moving away party. She was gone, and at the same time I was saying a final goodbye to that life, I was grateful for a new start. That stuck-in-the-middle feeling is what drew me to Alice. She allowed me to revisit that childhood silliness. I could still find that.

I met lots of other people in lots of other classes, but I found a vulnerability in Alice that let me show my own. So, we finished growing up together. We collected fortune cookies like recipes, talked about who was cute and if he'd like me, and even went on a first double date together. I stopped visiting Long Island, and I became Nicole to most people, except a few like Alice. We were pen pals in college, where I changed again and more, but her letters to Nikki let me see that yokefellow I'd always have and the part of me that I'd always recognize.

Sometimes I can't even reflect because that kid is just a long distance relative, that teen at Wally High was formed by her sheltered surroundings, but there's something about hearing Alice's almost as strong as it was cackle, seeing the same smiling face with flatter hair that brings me back. Few people can do that for me-allow me to know that for a while, that was me. I know I'll change some more, but impressions are important to collect along the way. We all need an Alice to let us recall who we were and what shaped who we are now.

## About the Authors PAWLP 2014



school research papers.

Kathleen Bortz is an elementary school teacher in Central Bucks School District. She has been teaching for six years, including time working in 5th grade, 3rd grade, kindergarten, and now 1st grade. She has been writing for as long as she can remember – including floppy disks full of stories about her childhood friends, journalistic endeavors as the Editor-in-Chief of her high school's paper, diaries full of thoughts she knew better than to share out loud, and perfectly MLA formatted graduate

Mary Chalmers is a third grade teacher in the Upper Moreland School District. She earned her Bachelors' degree in Education from Gwynedd Mercy College and her Masters' degree in Education / Literacy from West Chester University. Mary's love of reading and writing has guided her to currently enroll in the PAWLP Institute through West Chester University, where you can find her immersed in robust writing instruction that she is excited to implement with her students in the Fall.



Sally Drucker is a second grade teacher at Gladwyne Elementary School in Lower Merion School District. She has been teaching for over 25 years and she enjoys writing and encouraging her students to be writers.

Lisa Dudek is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Upper Moreland Intermediate School. She has a Masters in Elementary and Special Education from Arcadia University. Her hobbies include reading, cooking, camping, fishing, and kayaking. Through the PAWLP Summer Institute, she is rediscovering her love of writing and looks forward to learning new ways to inspire this love of writing in her students.



Dalila E. Eckstein, a.k.a Dee Eckstein, and named by her parents Dalila Elisabeth Saada, has been a third grade teacher at Gladwyne Elementary School since 2004. She came to teaching after 17 years in the advertising industry, the last 7 of them running her own media buying business, Dee & Co. It was the lure of books and the passion she has for reading them to herself and aloud to children (and really anyone who will listen), that eventually sent her back to school for her Master's in Elementary Education. She is fanatical about the importance of reading aloud to children from birth and encourages parents to keep up "bedtime stories" even after their children can read independently. You can follow Dalila on Twitter at @DalilaE or @TheFamousReader. Dalila blogs on reading aloud, literacy and books at famousreader.org where you can find out how she picked up the moniker "Famous Reader."





Joan M. Harris is a fifth grade teacher at Penn Wynne Elementary School in Lower Merion School District. She has been teaching fifth grade since 2001, and taught third grade for three years prior. Joan has an undergraduate degree in Marketing, and has business experiences in management and merchandising. She received her Masters' degree in Elementary Education in 1999, and has remained steadfast in her dedication to teaching. She is pursuing additional education credits in order to be current with best practices in the field.

Mary Ellen Hopkin has been teaching elementary school for the past ten years in the Centennial School District. She has taught second, third and fifth grades. She is inspired by her students and the stories that they share. Becoming a PAWLP fellow has been a goal of hers since she started teaching. In her free time she enjoys travelling, photography, and the outdoors.



Jo Anne Johns is a passionate educator and reading specialist with over twenty years of teaching experience. She began her career teaching children three to six years old in northeast Pennsylvania. She currently teaches first through sixth grade students of all ability levels in Reading and Writing Workshop at Gladwyne Montessori. Jo Anne is excited about place-based education and has designed educational travel programs focused on history for her students. From Williamsburg to Edinburgh, Jo Anne loves learning beside her students as she brings history to life.

Leigh Ann McCormack has taught special education for the past 10 years. She is currently a doctorate student at Temple University. Her research interests include early literacy and parental involvement. When she is not attending class she enjoys spending her free time with her husband, John and their two beautiful children Jolie and John Thomas. She hopes to one day write a children's book.



Emily Plummer is a secondary English teacher at Rose Tree Media School District's Penncrest High School. She has experience teaching grades nine through eleven. Emily has always enjoyed both writing and editing and has been published in *International Education*, *Philadelphia Home*, *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, and the *Current Newspaper* (based out of Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey).



Ellen Raieta will be starting her 21<sup>st</sup> year as a gifted support teacher at Norristown Area School District. She has been married for 36 years and is the mother of 3 grown children. Ellen loves writing poetry and has had 4 poems published in *Phonics Through Poetry* and *More Phonics Through Poetry*. She enjoys running, reading, photography, being in Chincoteague VA, and spending time with her family.

Jessica Tecco is a first grade teacher at Cynwyd Elementary School in Lower Merion School District. She has been teaching for over ten years, and has enjoyed every minute of her career. Jessica has discovered many ways to make learning fun that it has become a vital part of her home environment. Jessica's favorite thing to say as a teacher: "There's always something new and exciting going on in the life of a first grade teacher." She enjoys many hobbies, including reading, running, trail walking, baking and crafts, and has now found her love of writing through PAWLP.



A teacher in the Lower Merion School District for 15 years, Tim Rybnik's primary passion is integrating mathematics with the liberal arts.

After completing her Master's degree in English from West Chester University, Christine Soring continues her journey as a life-long learner. She has been a high school English teacher at Valley Forge Military Academy for 3 years and recently created the VFMA Writing Center for grades 7-12 where she makes herself available to help students with all types of writing. Throughout her journey as a writer, Christine plans on turning her love of writing into a book of poetry so that she can release her passion to the world.



Susan Starr has loved reading as long as she can remember. She instills that love of reading to her Special Education students. She has taught both Learning Support and Emotional Support for the past 38 years. Susan was first exposed to PAWLP ten years ago when Chris Kehan was a presenter. She was inspired by Chris's enthusiasm and knowledge. So what if it took ten years for her finally take the class? When Susan is not teaching, she is a master baker and an accomplished potter.



Denise Ungerman is a sixth grade teacher at Mary Devine Elementary School in Bristol Township. She is a proud graduate of Arizona State University. Her teaching career of fifteen years – three in Arizona, twelve in Pennsylvania – has spanned from second grade Sheltered English to a K-3 Spanish specialist before settling into the intermediate grades for the past ten years. As a student, Denise won the Neshaminy Young Author's Award in 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, and a spot in the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Constitution Day Parade for winning an essay contest. In 2010, her picture book manuscript *Liliana KittyCat* was a finalist in the Pacific Northwest Writers Association annual contest; it is currently gathering dust awaiting "slash & burn" revisions. Denise lives in Bensalem, PA with her muse, Lily, and two new kittens awaiting their own literary adventures.



William Joseph Williams is in his fifteenth year of teaching high school English for urban, rural and suburban school districts in Pennsylvania and Vermont. He has a Bachelors degree in English Education from West Chester University of Pennsylvania and a Masters in Educational Leadership from Widener University. In addition to his experience in high school classrooms, he spent two years as a Product Manager for Vantage Learning, where he assisted in the launch of three educational products (MYAccess!: Home Edition®, iSEEK®, and Student Progress Monitoring System®). Currently, he is an English teacher and ice hockey coach for Harriton High School in the Lower Merion School District. He lives in Broomall, Pennsylvania with his wife, Dawn, and their four children.

Nicole Zuerblis is a National Board Certified Teacher in the area of Literacy. She has taught both primary and intermediate grades and is currently a K-6 Reading Specialist in Central Bucks School District. Her goal is to give all students the confidence to see themselves as readers and writers.



