

Fall 2012

VOICES

from the Writing Center



A celebration of writing
done in and around
The University of Iowa
Writing Center

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Stranger in a hostile landscape

Raquel Baker

Iowa Nice or White Piping

When people ask where I'm from

I always ask why do you think I'm not from here

Today, Carl of Carl & Earnie's Good Time Pub and Grub says,

It's the coat

I look down

at my raincoat,

It's black with white piping

Unsure of what gave me away

I tell this story

I was born in the northern hemisphere

In the morning

That bright, full time in the morning

Well after the night has become the next day

What I have to say is brief,

So listen, Carl

And make of it what you will

My mother's mother

My grandmother

had my mom in the basement

In a hospital in Feriday, Louisiana

Because they didn't let blacks have babies

Next to the white ladies having babies

in the maternity ward

in the hospital

But the basement was OK

Because before that some people crossed an ocean

Looking for god only knows what

Everlasting riches and world dominion, they said

Instead they found forests

They found forests and some people

They cut down the forests and made plantations

They called this colonization

They killed the people

They said this wasn't called

genocide

We worked the plantations originally

We were called Slaves

We still worked on the plantations when slavery was abolished

We were then called freed slaves, or sharecroppers

We didn't like that, so

We were called blacks by those people

Whose people were from Britain,

And Portugal,

And France,

And Germany,

And the Netherlands,

And some other

places

Meanwhile another plot called imperialism
Was working its way through the world
And everybody was fighting
And so,
In the midst of all the troubles
My father's mother
My grandmother packed her bags
And left Mexico, Missouri
To join her sister who said there were jobs in this factory where she worked,
A real Rosie the Riveter

My grandmother arrived in Des Moines
In the fullness of the morning
She raised her three boys, she worked
She made a home for herself

I was born in California
And one day, I went to school in Iowa, Carl
I wanted to get an education
And my father said the people in Iowa were nice

Carl said, I knew it. I knew you weren't from here
It was the coat
It was the black raincoat with the white piping that gave me away

Everything Happens for a Reason

Rachel Fobian

As you have just parked your car on a Friday night in the Old Capital Mall, you scope out your horizons looking for your next mark. Like always, the bricked pathway is lined with graffiti benches. Some with meaning, but most with none at all. The one that always catches your eye hides at the end of the pathway, to the left side, by The Bread Garden. You cannot miss it. Maybe this is because you know it has a meaning and not just any old meaning but something that is worth telling. Beyond that, it is bright blue with orange wording that reads “Live Like Line,” and on the back is a rustic picture of a volleyball going through the air. You have never understood why it is in the back and to the side of the bricked pathway because that is the opposite of what the girl it stands for was like. That girl is Caroline Found, a seventeen year old high school volleyball player who died in a moped accident two summers ago. She was not wearing her helmet, went over the curb, and hit a tree. You did not know her personally, but the accident affected you in so many ways that it feels like you did. From stories that have been told, you have learned the kind of girl that Caroline set out to be.

The summer of the accident, she went with all of your friends

to a camp called “Young Life,” even though her mother was suffering in the local hospital with cancer and could die any day. Most teenagers would stay by their mother’s side until her very last breath, but the Founds had a different, better way of handling things. They wanted to tell their story, and Caroline was strong enough to tell it. During one of the last days of camp, Caroline went up on stage in front of teenagers, camp counselors, and camp directors from all over the country to let out something that had been held inside of her. She asked for forgiveness from all of them because she felt like she was being selfish, blaming her mother’s sickness on her friends, and that from then on out she was going to live by the motto “everything happens for a reason.” Even though her mother’s time was going to end short, she got to live a wonderful life. Anyone would agree that Caroline had no reason to be sorry, but by going up on stage in front of everyone she not only let you realize what she was going through and, little did anyone know, the kind of girl everyone was about to lose, even before her own mother.

The reason why you started your bad habit is not only because of the effect the accident had on your friends and family, but the effect the accident had on your town. Everyone was mad at the world—they had every right to be—and so the bad habit became your “getaway.”

Beyond all of the graffiti benches you see the average college girls waiting for their favorite bars to open for FAC (Friday after class). They are wearing skimpy, skintight dresses or skirts, shirts that barely cover half of their stomachs, with pierced belly buttons, and enormous high heels that they can hardly walk in, especially after a few drinks. This is when they become your favorite target because they are so susceptible. They think that you are there just to flirt, dance, or maybe even take them home for the night. While making small talk, you drop your cell phone. With their purses still on their shoulders, a few of the girls bend down to help. This is when you strike. They never notice your eyes gazing from your cell phone to one of their open purses.

You walk until you cannot see where the girls are and you walk a little more, trying to escape, but that is the last thing that will happen if the police officers at the fork in the bricked pathway sense your guilt. You keep moving, hoping one of them did not see you. You tell yourself that it would be impossible for them to see you because of the distance between you and them. They are busy trying to catch minors coming out of the bars after ten, right? Then you remember how the police have a way of sneaking up on you, just like they did to the group of guys who are being put in handcuffs. The last time you were caught was a week after the accident. It has been over two years. You are on a winning streak.

You do not want to break it now.

On the nearest corner, you see the same old man sitting down begging for change with a sign made out of cardboard and bright red lipstick that reads, "Anything helps." These are the victims you stay away from now but who were your favorite mark before the accident. This is where Caroline comes into the picture. Every time you come close to being tempted, you think of her speech the way you think it would have played out. Even though she did not know you during her life, she would not want you, or anyone else, doing what you have been doing. The man looks up at you with a smile just like Caroline's, from cheek to cheek. So, you give in and you drop your night's work into the tin can he has sitting by him, and he says "Thank you." You did this not only for Caroline but for your own good; from now on you are going to change.

A few months later you have a steady job helping kids who were just like you were, living a life that Caroline would want you to. At times you look back at how things used to be and you think "everything happens for a reason."

Fridays, 15 minutes

Devin Van Dyke

These are products of writing prompts generated during writing groups at the writing center.

September 23^d, 2011

My name is Devin. Not Devon the county in England. “Devi” has to do with Greek Gods. I can’t recall the specifics at this point, which isn’t very god like. As far as I know my parents hadn’t checked the definition of “Devin” in any books when they settled on my name. And I just learned in my history classes about all these Indian Goddesses who seem to use part of my name. I feel like I am in Godlike company.

Before I came to Iowa my name seemed to have a unique resonance as I hadn’t yet met anybody in Northern California that had a similar name. Then I came to Iowa and found that there are a lot of Devins here. My unique sensation of godlikeness doesn’t feel as special after seeing all these people who seemed to have copied my name. I say “copied” because most of the people I’ve seen with whom I’m sharing my relationship to god are 12 and under. Now I feel like an older god which is bad. I met one guy last week as I went into the library to study that was in his twenties

whose name was Devin. I read that off his name tag and shared a brief laugh with him. Now I know at least that by meeting me he will no longer have a feeling that he is the oldest of the Devins, the god-like name.

October 14th, 2011

I remember the crunch as I crushed the mouse under my foot.

I remember baby-sitting my sleeping niece Carina in her parent’s car’s trunk while they went to a wedding. They put her in it, lid up, let the car idle for five minutes and she is sound asleep. I baby sat a trunk for the first twenty-five minutes.

I remember making fun of my neighbor Timmy when he was nine and I was thirteen as he walked towards me with blood covering his chest from the metal fence post he fell on, back when he and my little brother Rand knocked our three story tall fort over by making it swing.

I remember the leaves catching fire at my campsite at Warm Spring dam. I knew it was a high fire caution day, but I had been careless. I jumped off the bench ten feet away and sprang into action. Three minutes and five gallons of drinking water later I still had fire threatening the wilderness.

I remember the baby bird that fell out of a bigger bird’s claw when it landed on the tree above me when I startled it.

I remember believing I'd lost my months' pay and the panic I felt.

I remember the crunch as I crushed the mouse under my foot. It actually took quite a bit of pressure, more than I thought it would. I had to bear down hard and its soft fuzzy squishiness gave way to firmness. At first I didn't push down hard enough to do the job and I could feel his squirming under the heel of my tennis shoes. It might have been a her, it seemed awfully fat for a mouse. But whichever one it was, I got my prey. There was a gratifying crunch as bones were broken.

September 7th, 2012

He looked out the pipe at the rising sun and wondered how many difficulties he would encounter in his job that day. Hoping that the cars would be co-operative and longing for a clean sweep, he drug his broom behind him as he stood up and faced the sunlight. He'd got the job helping to clean up after football games three years before because he was willing to be up at six AM on Sundays after a game.

As he walked along the riverbank he noticed three skinny dogs coming in his direction. They carried their heads low and one of them walked with a limp. One with a too-tight collar, was constantly looking around and one that stopped and sniffed at every rock,

tree and bush. After glancing back at his pipe entrance, he swore at all those people who let their dogs run and scare the wildlife especially those who didn't even adjust their dogs' collars. He knew he should run them off before going to work because they might trash his camp. As they approached he held his broom up high and enthusiastically chased them in the direction of the woods, away from the river and his home in the pipe. It was fun because the dogs were out-of-breath and he easily outmatched them stride for stride. As he climbed on the bus to go to work he hoped they would leave his home alone.

At work the dogs were forgotten and were replaced by the pleasant ruminations of his job. The difficulties of dodging the cars didn't really cause him problems anymore, not since his legs had been run over and replaced with carbon fiber struts, a development of war medicine. The legs were becoming popular even for people who had no injury. Leaping twenty feet in the air and then landing and continuing to gracefully sweep the detritus of football games off the sidewalk and from around the stadium had become a graceful ballet. And of course all his life's needs were met by going through the piles of waste. Some might say he lived like a slob and that he should be in a house like everyone else. He disagreed.

As he shoveled a pile of waste into a dumpster, a package

wrapped in white paper slipped off his shovel and landed at his feet. He tore at a corner and found that it was meat, deciding to keep it. Then he thought of the dogs and he shook his head. There was no way he would give this tasty meal to those mongrels that might be near his home. He almost threw it away but instead threw it into his shirt that was tucked into his pants. The package was safely ensconced in the pouch where shirt meets trouser. The whistle blew and his time for the day was complete. On the bus ride home he thought about his world.

Thinking it was grand to take so little from the world around him and exist with so little impact on the environment, he was proud of his minimal impact on the limited resources at humanity's fingertips. His pipe was ten feet underground, virtually impervious to the weather and probably miles long. All the dirt above him meant he used very little energy to heat his world. Truth be known, he only turned on his heater for a half-an-hour a day and only in the dead of winter when he got home and was stone cold. It hardly ever rained anymore and he hadn't had to use his raft to float his tent for five winters. He remembered sleeping well on those bygone nights when his home gently bobbed up and down in the waves of rainwater inside his pipe.

Stepping off the bus, the meat bouncing against him in his pouch brought back concern for his home. He walked quickly

straight to the river and made a bee line for his pipe. Pausing at the entrance to listen for the dogs he realized as he that his special legs that had made chasing them earlier easy and fun, were useless in the pipe. It was dead quiet as he took his first tentative step towards his home and its comforts.

Twenty feet away where he knew he could see his tent, a gleam of metal caught his eye. A dog with a too tight collar tried to lift his head and collapsed with his tongue sticking out. Throwing his broom behind him he reached into his pouch and brought out the white package.

He reached forward with a small piece of meat in his hand and said in quiet voice, "It okay fellah, I'm not going to hurt you." The dog tried to reach the meat and was met half way by his hand. The package was on the ground being devoured in a couple of seconds and the collar was cut free.

As the dog finished eating he got his broom back and got behind the dog to chase him out of the pipe. As the dog's silhouette headed in the direction of the river, he gave a sigh of relief.

October 5th, 2012

He was just like everybody else. Bored with their own lives and seeking relief in other's miseries. He knew people were the same and that they all needed relief from their own inability to find a way

out of the haze of boredom. Relief was found in the stories they read and the friends they found there. What if they had sought real life solutions to the dullness dilemma instead of sought refuge in another's fantasy?

He asked himself this question every day when he had just awakened—while he still had one foot in his dreams and one foot looking forward to his first cup of coffee. While he drank his coffee he thought up ways to disturb the fabric of those he encountered—those who constantly professed to be, “out of box thinkers.” They were his sworn enemies. The idiots couldn't even see that by declaring the think thingy, out-of-boxyness, they were condemning themselves to repeat the non-stop boredom of their own recent past. Why couldn't they embrace real change in their own brief span of time as consciousnesses?

He slammed the door to his house on his way out the door and caught the eye of the old fart with plastic bags stuffed in a back pocket that walked his dog past his door every day at the same time. He smiled and waved as the guy jumped at the reverberating crash the shutting door made. Kicking his cat as he strolled down the path to the sidewalk he delivered a sneer to the oldster and sincerely hoped that maybe the grey haired old man would learn a new routine—defying the axiom you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

October 12th, 2012

The bus slowed and the motorcycle rider made eye contact with her. He flagged the bus and it came to a halt. It stopped right behind the motorcycle and the rider removed his helmet. He came through the door like a man possessed, driven by an unknown force. The bus driver bowed his head as Harry, the rider, sauntered down the aisle and stopped right in front of her. Concealing a head scarf in her carry on, she returned the man's gaze. Their eyes locked. He gathered in her long sensuous red hair in his calloused hands. The silent bus was filled with his labored breathing. She stood up, back ram rod straight showing no fear of the tall dark male before her.

He took her petite hand in his and pulled her along behind him and through the door and to the motorcycle. The engine caught as soon as she kick started it. She looked up at him and said, “If I have to wear that damn headscarf when were in public, then you have to wear that helmet when I drive.”

“Girl, you're starting to be assertive. Yes ma'am.”

“If you give me a hard time you will do the dishes AND the laundry.”

He strapped the helmet on, demurely mounted the bike, and put his hands around her waist as she gunned the engine and clicked the machine into first gear.

October 19th, 2012

Flames climbed the side of the building, their heat melting her panty hose. The stink of burning hair filled the air. Smoke caused tears evaporated before they could run into her mouth. Her lover had already made the leap and had disappeared in the smoke below. Coldness had filled her that morning when her alarm clock intruded on her sleep, but that chill was only a memory. The fingers of fire scaling the concrete fortress were crackling like a thousand cicadas on a sultry summer night. The wavering yellow, blue and orange looked like a rainbow turned on its side.

The cheap plastic high heels she called shoes began to melt. Blisters were forming on the heels of her feet from the intense focused heat of the building incinerating below her. Her mind drifted back to all those people who had leapt off the towers on 9/11. Her drop paled in its distance, but to her it seems at least as far. As a child she had been so afraid of heights that she crawled to get around through kindergarten. It was only the prospect of playing dodge ball in second grade that got her to learn to stand and accept that height.

Her lover hollered from below, “Go ahead and jump, Kitty, I’ll catch you.”

She hated it when he called her by that pet name when he knew she didn’t want to do something. He *knew* better. She hissed

back at him, “I’ll break your back and scratch your neck, and then we’ll both be dead.

“Aw come on honey it won’t kill you.”

Then she stepped off the curb and into his arms.

November 2nd, 2012

“Harry, we got a couple extra steaks you can bring home if you want.”

“Thanks, boss, very much appreciated.”

“And take a baked potato too, if you want—knock yourself out!”

Dinner looked good for tonight and since the restaurant had been full since breakfast he knew the waitresses would give him a lot of tips. He appreciated that because he really wanted to buy his daughter that pair of shoes she was pining over.

On his walk home he bought them and looked forward to her happiness at discovering he had been able to afford them. When he finally got home the cold driving rain had soaked through the garbage bag he had used as a rain jacket and the leak above his window had left a puddle again for the third time this month. After depositing the shoes under his bed he walked down the hall to the landlord’s apartment and knocked on the door.

“Yeah, Harry, what do you want—I’m not giving you no extension on your rent!”

“Don’t worry about that. I got it covered, but could you do something about the window—it still leaks.”

“And what in hell do you expect me to do, replace it?”

“Well maybe you could caulk it or maybe I could.”

The landlord stepped through the doorway and towards Harry as he replied, “I tell you Harry you touch, alter or change any part of that apartment I will sue you till heaven steams and hell freezes.”

“Yeah, Okay. I get the picture.”

The door slammed and Harry walked back to his apartment and sat down to his steak dinner and read the newspapers he had scavenged from the dish trays as he did his job bussing that afternoon. The food packed his stomach, and together with reading that his candidate for president was doing better in the polls, he was filled with a sense of contentment at his circumstances. Then his lone light bulb burnt out.

November 30th, 2012

I flew through the door to get my newspapers from the machine in the foyer of the EPB. I make sure to get them because the school takes money from students’ tuition to pay for them. The machines are on the right and I whip out my card while I time my steps to the first of two machines. I’m perpetually in a hurry you

know, not because I need to be, but because I like to burn up the excess of energy that plagues me and can annoy those around me. And I don’t like it when something or anything gets in the way slowing me down.

I noticed there is this really abusive thing about the area around the machines—there is a door stop that is permanent right where I need to place my foot in order to get to one of the machines. Don’t get me wrong I don’t mind looking like a fool when I’m out and about, but this thing is pushing the limits of my athleticism. I gave up trying to dodge it, now I just my slam my foot straight away on it as I fly though the door.

I have to do it immediately or God forbid I’ll forget and look stupid as I trip over the door stop. I look a little bit strange nailing the softball-sized doorstop with my foot like it was a venomous rodent I wanted to kill, but it’s better than either slowing down or falling over it and knocking my remaining teeth out.

Vibrations Within The Heart

Joylene Beadleston

Our eyes meet in a long brief glance.
Love enters quickly within two hearts,
Vibrations...
A magnetic force...
Love can rebuild even the ashes left from broken hearts.
Unfolding with time...
A deep breath exhales,
The wounded heart remembers like a buzzing bee hovering.
Some take the chance and get closer,
Some run to avoid the sting.
We seek stretched out arms,
Tight hugs,
The sweet nectar of soft rose petal lips...
As the connections become many, with trust and listening...
Love grows...
Vibrations within the heart, like the sun's rays
Open the rose fully until love or life wilt away.

Mothers of Syria
Joylene Beadleston

Mothers of Syria Look to the Sky

A mother cradles her child and looks to the sky
the children of Syria just want to know “why?”
Why mamma can’t I play with my friends outside?
Why is my dinner an empty plate?
Why does that loud noise keep me awake making me cry and shake?
Tanks and rockets rattle mountain villages and towns.
As smoke chokes the life trapped in the rubble beneath.
The march of masses walking, chanting for the promise of
democracy, freedom, liberty, and peace.
Rulers watch in comfort and the world in complacency
as another bloody boy or girl falls victim of a sniper bullet.
Human rights are buried as a white cloth of purity
covers another child’s lifeless body and face.

Mothers of Syria look to the sky...

God, why didn’t you answer my cry?
Hungry and cold Syrian refugees search, wander and roam,
Just imagine no place to call home.

Not even the controlling eye of the media will cover the tears of pain.
Mothers of Syria and children, the ones most in need...
Hospitals so full are a target indeed

No places to hide as cries go unanswered
The hopes and dreams for a child’s future cease.
It’s not your child, no, but do you care?

Mothers of Syria look to the sky
and with their children
pray for mercy,
and plead for their lives.

Vote
Joylene Beadleston

Voting Registration
Voting Identification
Voting Lines
Voting Ballot
Voting Precinct Changes
Voting Early
Voting Suppression
Voting First Time
Voting Women
Voting Diversity
Voting White
Voting Elderly
Voting Chad
Voting Laws
Voting Absentee
Voting Silence
Voting Will
Voting Private
Voting Teams
Voting Lies
Voting Malfunction
Voting Choice
Voting Power
Voting Popular

Voting Error
Voting Republican
Voting Democrat
Voting Independent
Voting Write-in
Voting Freedom
Voting Rights
Voting Participation
Voting ALL

Experiencing the Soul of The Deadwood Firsthand/
The Deadwood is Alive
Joylene Beadleston

The sky is heavy with gray clouds, and autumnal leaves accent the landscape of Iowa City. I hear the sound of my shoes kick and crunch dead leaves at my feet as I walk with the crowd moving toward the heart of downtown.

I have just left the “Bon Jovi Get out the Vote Concert” for President Obama. Lingering repeatedly in my head is Bon Jovi’s song “Wanted Dead or Alive.”

I see a big red and white sign, “THE DEADWOOD.”

Falling out of the doorway is a platinum blonde woman around 50 dressed in black leather. She trips in the doorway, caught by her stiletto heel, cursing as her boyfriend helps her. They straddle a Harley steel horse, revving their chopper mufflers baby boomer Lone Rangers, then wave goodbye.

Entering the patio, The Deadwood patrons at first glance appear worn out by life, some with tired eyes and ruffled hair puffing intently on every last bit of a nicotine high, then blowing smoke toward the sky, before stomping the butt until the last of the orange spark turns to ash.

I often pass The Deadwood bar on my way home from classes at the University of Iowa, but was unfamiliar with its culture as I am a tea drinker and a little hesitant to venture inside.

The front of the bar has eight patio chairs filled with smoking “townies,” “hipsters” and visitors discussing the latest hot topic:

Big Bird politics?

No. It’s not all about the newest thing. The employees smile, tell me the much deeper stories of Iowa City — secrets — or haunting stories from history like those of “The Tuberculosis Wards” that lined the upper quarters along the Iowa City streets in the early 1900s, where many died and ghosts are still rumored to pass mysteriously by.

Stories and history, personal and political discussions are what make this lazy, dark bar come alive. Hand gestures fly expressively as discussions get heated, yet stay respectful somehow. The people come here to meet with friends and find a sense of home. I’m told by the bartenders, “no judgments allowed,” just slaps on the back where tired faces turn to smiles.

The cartoon character “The Grinch” is displayed at the entrance dressed with the latest holiday theme, neon lights flashing and daily specials to welcome you. Inside—pool tables, pinballs machines, a photo booth, and black leather movable booth seating and WIFI.

At The Deadwood I don’t see your typical Iowa City bar culture filled with dance floors and young undergrads. Patrons are come as you are: skinny or fat, young or old, straight or gay, introverted or outgoing. You can even bring your dog inside.

The bathroom walls express art and poetry; the Deadwood’s culture seems to inspire, and employees will even offer you a marker upon request. These are a sample of my favorite finds ... “Just Laugh It Off, It’s Better Than It Seems,” “Guilt Is Not The Way You Expose Truth,” and “Hope In A Drab Place.” Are we

A Review of *Spring Awakening*
Catherine Shook

The unsettling themes of *Spring Awakening* are made prevalent through both light-hearted scenes and the seemingly inevitable morose conclusion. Sexual innocence and ignorance, worsened by societal oppression, arise in such perfunctory ways as the opening number, inspiring the audience to laugh at the mother's reticence to inform her daughter of "how babies happen." *Spring Awakening*, however, quickly takes that laughter, deferring to the more serious implications of such ignorance; all in all, *Spring Awakening* provides a commentary on the dangers of societal oppression on adolescents. If the desires and the humanity of the young people are ignored, tragedy will follow. In this tale, neglect and oppression eventually cause the death of Wendla and Moritz, leaving Melchior to suffer the full force of these catastrophes. This somber parable, carried on the shoulders of the three protagonists, Wendla, Melchior, and Moritz, is both disturbing and sobering, as we watch these characters discover the depth of strife that comes from maturing in an unsupportive atmosphere. Two scenes with Wendla successfully display both the actor's participation in unfolding the plot and the tumultuous progression of the tale.

In the first scene, it is clear what Wendla wants from her mother—an explanation. Her sister has borne another child, and whence has this child come? With a demure smile, and clad in her "little girl's" dress, Aneisa Hicks asks a little girl's question and utilizes tactics that embody innocence to try and achieve her goal. At first, Hicks

attempts to reason with her mother in order to get her mother to tell her the truth about childbearing. Eventually, she will have to know, she implies, but, as this tactic is not fruitful, she quickly shifts into a mixture of complying and begging. Reverting to a, "Yes mother, no mother, please mother," format, her youth and docility emerge and reveal a central theme to the story. Her inability to achieve her goal and her childish approach to a mature topic foreshadows her tragedy and the tragedy of the entire play. Wendla's sweetness is undeniable in that first scene, as she smiles expectantly upwards and softens her voice to be without undemanding and trustful. Yet trust is the very concept called into question throughout the play. Moritz's suicide is caused by a deception in the school system—a deception from the adults who were supposed to be trustworthy. Wendla's death is brought on by trusting in her mother, and her mother's abuse of this trust is clear from that initial scene; however, this exploitation takes on new dimensions when Wendla and Melchior reconvene.

Wendla, immediately after she discovers a breach in parental trust, goes to Melchior with a request: to beat her. In this interaction, she claims that her goal is feeling ("I want to feel something. My entire life I haven't felt anything."), though the desperation seems to be colored with other objectives: while she may want to tap into some sensory feeling, she also wants to understand the pain her companion must suffer. The idea of suffering is new and foreign to her, and, frightening as it is, she wants it to be demonstrated for her. Throughout this scene, Wendla is pleading with Melchior, making an attempt at reasoning, or justifying her desires. Eventually she

succeeds, and both are stunned by the results of her triumph. Melchior discovers a perverted joy in the cruelty that he is immediately ashamed of, and Wendla bursts into tears at the end of the beating. This puzzling scene is analogous to other forms of abuse occurring all around them, such as when Moritz's unforgiving father beats his son for failing his final exams or when the school expels Melchior after his best friend's death.

Again, Wendla approaches the situation with innocence and a smile—even with the most disturbing of requests. In their environment, abuse and oppression are rampant, and while Wendla has not been able to detect it happening to her, it seems she has a hunch that it is. Her desire for a beating is a desire for the physical manifestation of the implicit mistreatment that she is receiving. While Melchior's reaction is more difficult to explain, the scene at the beginning where he is being struck by the teacher, help the audience understand this perversion. If nothing else, he is doing what has been done to him, yet his conscientious youthfulness does not allow him to dole out a beating without guilt. Here, we are allowed to see the aphorism, "absolute power corrupts absolutely," applied to the adults because the children present us with a comparison—a more human comparison. This contrast reveals the bitter reality of adulthood and the shedding of conscience that occurs, and urges the onlookers to reject the notion of omniscient adults. Used more as a cautionary example, these scenes advise the current elders and upcoming generation to maintain some human, youthful characteristics and to respect future adolescents.

Wendla, with the help of the entire ensemble, successfully

helped draw attention to the motifs of Spring Awakening. While in these two scenes, her objectives are localized, the intensity of her attention on her scene partners and her constant youthful effervescence indicate a super-objective; approaching people and situations joyously and with this quality of attention, she is indirectly asking for the favor to be returned. In some senses, although this is a generalization, she wants respect. If her mother treated her with the respect of another adult, she would know that sex led to children. If her mother treated her with respect, she would not have forced her to get an abortion. If her friend was treated with respect, her father would neither beat nor rape her, and Wendla would not have any inclination to understand such a degrading experience. Respect for her coming maturity would be a respect for the coming generation and their desires. Herein lies the efficacy of Wendla's performance. In colloquial terms, all roads lead to Rome—all of her objectives lead toward the overarching theme of the play, along with her tactics and her persistent youthfulness which highlight the tragedy and severity of the motif.

Learn, Explore and Live
Aruna Mehta

While living in the city of Iowa City, I closely interacted with the community socially, with their culture, and with their lives. I spent a lot of time at their community center, at the Senior Center, and at the city library. I learned many things in this friendly, encouraging environment. It touched me deeply, especially my exposure to the active, independent and creative lives of the seniors in Iowa City.

All my day-to-day accumulated experiences inspired my spirit to pen my memoirs of Iowa City to share this new vision of independence with my senior people at home. I could never adequately express in black and white my experience and the gratitude I owed each person I met during my visit without the help of The Community Writing Center at the Iowa City Public Library. I ventured to give literary shape to my feelings with the constant encouragement and generous help of Miss Raquel Baker. With her expert guidance, I could accomplish my dream of writing in English at the age of 63 years old. I will be forever grateful to be able to express my experiences not only in my own mother tongue, but also in English, the language of the Iowa Citizens I have come to know and love.

* * * * *

“What will you do for three months in Iowa?” A friend of mine asked while wishing me bon-voyage. Yes, it was a valid question,

but I kept silent. Ever since Julie (my daughter) quit her corporate job to study law at The University of Iowa, I was worried. I had never heard the name Iowa City before. After many sleepless nights I was determined to visit and spend some time with her so I would stop worrying. I joined her in Paris where she had her summer job. After having wonderful holidays in Paris, we left for Chicago to reach our final destination. We spent a few days in Chicago with friends and started our journey to Iowa.

Leaving behind the Chicago sky-line our car headed towards Iowa. The entire way was filled with fresh corn and rice fields; the flowing Mississippi river added its beauty to the pleasant drive. The state of Iowa isn't merely a flat and vast plain, but rather a place of rolling hills, lush and scattered woodlands, and tall grasses.

In three hours we reached Benton Drive, our home, which was situated in a hilly area. It was very beautiful and cozy. Soon we organized our kitchen and had dinner. On a bright summer morning, we went around the town and university and to the farmers market. I dropped in at the Public Library of Iowa City while Julie went to finish buying her groceries. I was impressed with the Iowa City Public Library. I picked up a few informative leaflets and went home. I was worried that school would re-open and Julie would be gone all the next day.

“What time you will be back from school tomorrow?” I asked over dinner.

“I can't say, but you can go for your walk; it's very pleasant and safe also,” she said, convincing me. She also gave me a few books to read to pass my time.

“I will try,” I assured her.

Before I could wake up, she left for school the next day. Not having a land line or cell phone, I could only log on using the computer to watch her online status and say a quick “Hi!” to her. I would cook, clean, read and aimlessly keep changing channels to pass my long summer day and eagerly wait for her to return.

Determined to end my boredom, I ventured to a nearby park. Slowly walking through hilly roads, I finally reached the very beautiful Willow Creek Park. I relaxed there for some time. A group of women and children were enjoying themselves there.

“Hi! Good morning, I am Joanne,” a very pretty woman with brown eyes introduced herself to me with a friendly smile.

“I am Aruna,” I said wishing her well back.

“Oh, where do you come from?”

“I have come from India. I am visiting my daughter who is studying at The University of Iowa,” I said.

“How long will you stay here?” Joanne asked me.

“For three months,” I answered.

“Why don’t you join our women’s club so you can meet people, explore, and enjoy your stay in Iowa?” Joanne recommended.

The International Women’s Club is a club for women from many countries, including the U.S.A., who want to get to know each other, learn, and enjoy life together in Iowa City. It is run through The University of Iowa. Joanne gave me the Club’s program guide and forms. I filled out my form with great excitement; I would have no better opportunity to interact with international women. It took no time to be comfortable in this group; soon we all became

friends.

* * * *

Women from all over the world were chatting, exchanging their views about food, culture, travel, and many more things over cups of coffee.

A tall, fair, elderly American woman with long hair entered with a big flask of tea.

“She is our president, Mrs. Sheila Hayreh. She is married to a Sikh Indian man. She knows much about India,” Joanne gave me a formal introduction.

“Yeah, I could make out from her long hair and bangles that she must be Sikh,” I concluded.

“This is Indian Masala tea,” Sheila offered, and we started talking about North Indian foods over a cup of masala tea. Cheryle Tugwell also joined us.

While chatting, I curiously asked, “Anybody play ping-pong from this group?”

“None of us play ping-pong, but I know some friends who play regularly. Please give me your contact number; I will let you know,” she said trying to help me. And we parted for that day.

It was generous of Sania Ettinger to drop me home. I received a long list of the International Women’s Club’s programs in the mail. The programs included a morning coffee group, a supper club, a craft class, English in the park, a cooking group and many more other activities. With all of these programs, my frequency of

going to the park increased amazingly.

The International Women's Club had an opening meeting, which was a beach party. Lots of efforts were taken to make the event enjoyable.

Amazingly all the seniors organized the complete event. Seniors over the ages of 70-80 sang and danced and played music. It was a great fun; everyone had a wonderful time.

It is a unique example of international integration. Although we had no common culture, language, religion or nationality, we interacted happily together, learning and enjoying ourselves while exploring Iowa City; of course, with the help of warm, friendly and very helpful local people.

* * * *

"Mummy, I am going to Chicago for my job interview," my daughter Julie declared.

She asked me, "Will you stay here alone?"

"I do not know anybody in Iowa," I told her with some anxiety.

While leaving for Chicago she introduced me to her friend Sujit and arranged for a new cell phone for me. Every hour she rang to find out how I was. It was nice of Sujit to come and visit me at night. One night, just after Sujit left, Julie's phone rang.

"Mom, would you like to play Table Tennis tomorrow?" she asked.

"I would love to play, but with whom and where?" I replied curiously.

"Your garden friend Cheryl Tugwell gave your reference to her friend Liah Derksen. Liah rang me and said, 'Your mom can join us to play.' They play in Cedar Rapids regularly. They have a good group to play with."

"Oh, that would be wonderful, but how will I go so far?" I expressed my worry about commuting.

"You don't need to worry; they will pick you up from home."

Liah and Julie synchronized my travel schedule and I was told to be ready at 8:00 a.m. sharp. I got everything ready with great excitement and then I slept soundly.

I didn't know nor had I spoken to Liah, but the door-bell rang at 8:00 a.m. sharp. A very pleasant and beautiful lady wished me good morning smilingly.

"Good morning, I am Liah. Are you ready?"

"Oh, very good morning. I am Aruna," I wished her good morning happily.

"Yes, I am ready," I said.

As we sat in the car, her husband said, "I am Jarol Derksen."

Liah's husband asked me in a friendly way, "Do you play T.T in India also?"

"I played as a student. Now, after a long time, I would like to pursue my passion again. I love to play T.T."

"Oh yeah, we love to play T.T. We play every Saturday in Cedar Rapids and have two T.T. tables in our basement; we call friends and play at home," he said, expressing his love of T.T.

On the way, we picked up Miss Chuling and Mr. Dong Wang,

a university co-ordinator. Chatting together we reached the Cedar Rapids Gym, our final destination.

It was a perfect place. Ten tables were laid out, and Liah gave me a formal introduction to the other members there. They all welcomed me with great pleasure. Without wasting our time, I started playing with Liah.

All of them played very well; it was humble and sporting of them to encourage me to play with them. I managed to play with everybody with great nervousness. It was really a great experience for me. On our way back when they dropped me home, I offered them a quick Masala tea and Indian breakfast. They enjoyed the Indian food.

In two days Liah and Jarol were going to Thailand to teach English and Table Tennis. I would really miss them in Iowa. Formerly unknown people, so warm and loving, they turned my tears of loneliness into great joy. I became speechless and couldn't express my gratitude in words, so I simply wished them a happy journey.

They promised to meet me when they returned to Iowa at the end of October. I am eagerly waiting to meet and play Table Tennis with them again before I go home in November.

* * * *

Throughout my adult life, I have cherished the joy of sending children to school, taking them for activities. Encouraging them for their all-round development. Giving them constant

instructions for their well-being. Cooking their favorite dishes and waiting eagerly for them to come back from school. That was my only small world, being a stay-home mom.

Now, history repeats itself in the opposite way. During my visit to Iowa City, my daughter is the one advising me and taking care of me while she attends law school.

“Mom, it is a very safe town; you can walk to the park. Mom, be careful while crossing the roads,” my daughter was encouraging me during my stay in Iowa. “You can go to the library; it is a very good library.”

Gradually I started going to the library, and the Senior Center, and to the International Women's Club meetings, and to literature sessions in the nearby park. People here were welcoming, warm and open. I involved myself in a few activities here at library and at the Senior Center; it's really a beautiful student town. There is a lot to learn and to explore in any field. Countless amenities are provided, not only for its students but also for the seniors. Iowa City turned me into a student at the age of 63! Every morning I would leave home with my back pack on and Julie would remind me how our roles have changed now.

“Mom, did you take your scarf? It's windy. Mummy, there is a cafeteria just opposite to the library. You can go for coffee there; it's a nice place. Mummy, take this back-pack; it's convenient to carry,” she would say giving me her back pack.”

“Mummy, did you take the energy bar?” And so on, now she sends me to school.

Learning things in a friendly environment gives me lots of

energy. Sometimes I would work until late in the evening and Julie would ring anxiously, “Mummy, where are you? It’s raining. Do you need a ride?”

When I came to Iowa, it was lush green. Now, I watch the autumn leaves change color before my eyes, golden autumn spreading its glow and the weather is dancing in vibrant colorful costumes like the Indian bride before its fall, with no regrets, no pain, and no sorrow, only leaving colorful memories behind. That is what our senior years should be—a fall that is vibrant and refreshing, enjoying its last season before the coming winter.

* * * *

I want to extend my warmest thanks to the ICPL technical staff
for all of their technical help,
To Raquel Baker, ICPL Community Writing Center Tutor,
To the Senior Center,
And, most of all, to my daughter Julie who has remained a
constant source of inspiration throughout my life.

Dear Dad

Farida Al Rimawi

Dear Dad,

I'm writing you this letter to release the anxiety I feel when I start writing any piece. I've always wondered how you came up with ideas for your daily articles in the local newspaper. I just remember the scene that happened almost every day, where you are sitting on the couch, listening to the news, mom calling you for lunch, and we, the kids, are waiting for you impatiently. Mom sends one of us to bring you to the kitchen. Most of the time you didn't respond and we start having lunch without you. I tried to imitate you, but I failed. My friend suggested writing a letter to ease the stress. I chose you because I loved writing because of you, because you are my role model.

We never discussed the issue of writing. When TV or magazine interviewers asked celebrities, do you want your kids to be like you? (Going in the same pathway) most of them answered (**No**), because this is a tough career and I don't want my kids to suffer. But you, dad, never said this, even though you knew that writing is a rough career, perilous and full of thorns, and there are always people hoping you would fail, and they will fight your success.

be my next blog post, I want to write about this to raise public awareness about what's going on in the economy, agriculture and biotechnology, and to advise them to be more cautious about their choices because their choices will make a difference.

It's really an imperative subject, because this is about food, the thing we can hardly survive without for days.

45.6 million were spent by big food companies like **Monsanto** to fight a law that would mandate companies to label every item whether it's natural or has GM content.

I've been wondering, why should I write about a case many people are avoiding? What do you think? I'm aware that behind the scenes, there are a lot of companies and organizations that are involved in this issue. I can imagine a room filled with men in dark formal suits, smoking cigars and, discussing how can they manipulate people, and how can they use the media to aid their side.

I don't want to be afraid to express my thoughts. I hate fear, and I want to be brave just like you, and I believe writing is one the best ways to raise the awareness of people for any cause in the civilized world. Even though deep inside I feel no way we can defeat these big companies, they hired teams and paid millions to fight this proposition. It hurts, that these people are very powerful and they use their power to harm others, simply they don't care about people's health, all what they care about is their profits.

Wish me luck dad. I don't want to bore you; I know your desk is covered with piles of books and papers waiting for you!

Best wishes,

Your daughter,

Farida

Smart Shopper
Farida Al Rimawi

Every day we watch TV segments about being a smart shopper, or read from a popular holistic practitioner or a well-known Registered Dietitian (RD) that we should be smart shoppers and learn how to make smart choices.

What is this hype about? What does it mean? (That we are dumb by nature and now we should think smarter?) What is the real difference between choosing an ice cream instead of fruits?

“So great is man’s hunger for forbidden food!”

–*Ovid*, *Metamorphoses*

We all know that forbidden food (in this case, fatty food, sugary foods) is detrimental to our health, but still we always want it and ask for it. Psychologists and experts are still searching for the reasons why we choose what we eat; of course satiety and hunger are key factors. But convenience, cost and, appearance are very crucial ones.

In my opinion, multiple factors influence our food choices:

Culture, Ethnic background and Religion

In recent decades eating habits have changed dramatically in America, parents choose candy for snacks and ready-made meals for lunch and dinner because moms no longer have time to cook healthy meals. Kids are rewarded with candy for everything they do. These social behaviors led to the epidemic obesity and chronic diseases. Different ethnic groups have distinctive eating

patterns. Also, bearing a religious belief may prevent you from eating certain foods. I come from the Middle East, where the food culture of eating is to eat everything available in the environment (mostly plant foods).

Mass Media

Commercials brainwash many consumers, and the Media has worked with big food companies to create ads that manipulate people’s feelings and beliefs, making claims that their products are healthy to attract more people.

The popular expression “shopping smarter” is repeated again and again. To me it means that we deliver messages to people that you are stupid, and now you should stand and take an action, because it’s the right time for a company to release a new product like whole grain granola bars, or new protein smoothie flavored with your favorite type of fruit..*Just for you!* Also, I blame retailers. Once I saw in a popular supermarket (claimed to promote healthy lifestyles through their goods) an aisle for a stationary stuff for kids, the opposite aisle was filled with snacks and candy. This is a way to get a kid’s attention so they will ask their parents for more candy!

Life-style

A lot of people don’t really care about their health, even if they are suffering from nutrition-related diseases like diabetes. They live by the motto “life is too short,” so they indulge in all the food they love as much as they want!

Emotional Instability

Suffering from an unstable emotional status like being divorced or a single parent or widowed or abused or depressed or any other kind of emotional instability, pushes you to eat irrationally and choose whatever makes you feel comfortable, like eating a high-carbohydrate diet.

But does this mean that we can't change it? What to do?

Changing the culture and how it influences the way we consume food, will take years to change the way we consume food. All RDs and nutrition experts should take the responsibility and find ways to convince people to change their eating behaviors. I know I should address my posts to people who interested in being healthy, but I want to be realistic. Pushing people to do something they don't believe in will lead to more bad eating habits.

Here's what you can do:

- Work on your taste buds, by cutting sugar and salt from your meals; try to sense the natural flavors of food items.
- Set a schedule for yourself, decide what books you want to read about healthy food, seek help from an RD or a nutritionist, go shopping for groceries for foods, and grow multiple plants and herbs in your backyard if possible.
- Cook with your kids, partner or a friend to make the cooking experience more exciting.
- Stop being picky and don't resist change; try a different

way of living, give your body a chance by eating different food items.

- Don't let yourself be the target of mass media, don't watch commercials, and don't engage in conversations with coworkers, friends, etc. about new trends of healthy products.
- Stop bullying & judging the overweight people, let people live a normal life!
- Mothers, teachers, celebrities and all the influential characters in the communities, should be role models for the next generations.

The “Lost” Chapter in the Book *To Kill A Mockingbird*
Siwen Wang

I didn’t know why I was so worried today and where all of these feelings came from. After I heard Atticus say, “I’m going out for a while, you folks’ll be in bed when I come back, so I’ll say good night now,” I just knew I had to follow him and make sure everything was all right. I was sure something bad would happen tonight.

When I was ready to go, Scout came in.

“Jem, where are you gonna go?” I had no response.

“Wait, I’m gonna go with you!”

I knew she would follow me no matter what I said. To tell the truth, I had complex feelings toward Scout. Most of the time, she was a constant problem. I always wondered why she couldn’t act more like a girl. While this bothered me, she was still my little sister and I loved her no matter what.

We went to school together, but I never played with her at school like we did at home; I knew this made her kind of angry. But for me to be with my little sister all the time was awkward and kind of embarrassing. As a 12 year old boy, my peers would laugh at me. Sometimes I felt sorry for Scout, but most times I really enjoyed seeing her angry face.

Although I was tired of having Scout hang around, I could not refuse her coming with me. Scout, Dill, and I went together toward where Atticus used to work.

I worried about Atticus so much on our way to his work place.

I thought that no one really knew my feelings towards Atticus. I didn’t even know them myself.

But now I know that he is a real man and the only man I have learned from and respected. Scout and I are both so proud of Atticus, although we have never expressed our feelings to him. However, I wanted Atticus to talk more with me. I am happiest when I get a chance to talk with him. But overall, he is my father, and more than that, he is a really good friend.

When we got to Atticus’s work place and hid there, we noticed that there was a gang of people who had stopped at the door where Atticus was standing. I did not stop Scout in time, and she ran directly to Atticus. Directly into the trouble he was trying to prevent. When Atticus looked at me, there was blame in his eyes; I lowered my head and felt a little awkward to be stared at by the whole group of people. But I didn’t think what I had done was wrong.

Atticus said, “Go home, Jem.” His words were strict. I stood still.

“Go home, I said,” Atticus said again. His voice was not mild, and I knew he was serious, but I still stood still.

“Son, I said go home” His voice become tender, like he was like pleading with me.

I felt so sorry about this. It was the first time that I hadn’t obeyed his words. I didn’t know what was going on in my mind or my body. My body went stiff. I just didn’t want to leave. At that moment, I had a strong feeling that I would protect my father and no one was gonna hurt him. I knew I needed to stay there. I was

not a little boy any more. I was a man and I should act like a man. Like Atticus.

I couldn't hear what the people around were talking about. But I heard someone saying, "Stupid child! Send him away!" and a lot of other noise. I stood still and a lot of things came and filled up my mind. I thought of my mother, Scout, Calpurnia, Dill and a lot of people. I thought of my mother's eyes and her beautiful smile. I thought of playing soccer with Scout and Dill. I thought of peeking in on what Calpurnia was cooking in the kitchen. I thought of a lot of warm memories at that moment. I kind of wanted to cry, but I kept back my tears. A few minutes later, I felt I understood a lot. I was not a boy, but a man, a man attending a man's business with Atticus.

I was still in the midst of my thoughts, when, thankfully, Scout helped me out of them. I knew she didn't know what was really going on inside me. But she was always on my side and wanted to help her brother. I was really touched when she said, "Don't touch him, no one can take him away!"

I knew this was not as simple as what Scout thought, but I still couldn't come up with a method to handle it. I was a little scared that things would go badly. When Scout started talking with a guy, I recognized that he was Mr. Walter Cunningham. He was in the crowd, and there were other familiar faces as well. I didn't understand how he could act this way. He seemed like he was the leader of the mob, and that made me really angry. Atticus was his benefactor. How could he do this, I asked myself. At that time, I was so disappointed, and I felt I would never forgive him.

Scout's words of blame shamed Mr. Walter Cunningham and sent the gang of people away. No one could have imagined that things were gonna end in this way. But they did, and the crowd dispersed. And, well, we finally could go home.

Atticus walked along side of me. I thought that he would blame me for my behavior and ask me why I didn't do as he asked. However, he just patted my shoulder and smiled at me. Then he said, "You are not a little boy now." I was surprised and moved, and felt that that was the most wonderful moment in the world.

La Mojada Alba

Allison Ulstad

Malin blinked, a split-second relief from the hot Spanish sun's glare. Opening her eyes, she took in her surroundings, and a sense of calmness washed over, blanketing her body in serenity so sweet she could almost taste it. She was sitting on the patio outside at La Mojada Alba, a quaint little cafe tucked away on the corner of Calle Ocho and Calle Verde. La Mojada Alba boasted the best cup of espresso in all of Madrid, and the buttery, golden, flaky, croissants had both the locals and tourists flocking in from all over the city for a little taste of heaven. In her twenty-seven years as a Madrid local, she had yet to come across a cafe with a more relaxing atmosphere. Drove of eager customers flowed in and out past her cast-iron patio table, and she watched them all somewhat absentmindedly. Some patrons walked in hurried and rushed, and walked out sipping their espresso with a sense of newfound zen, as if the sweet black liquid wrapped itself around each nerve, muscle, and cell, calming the body from the inside.

It was a lovely day, the temperature hovering around eighty degrees, and the sun was radiating brightly down from the heavens. A warm faint breeze wandered up from the south, fresh with the smell of salt and brine of the Mediterranean Sea. Unexpectedly, a faint sprinkle started to fall, and small warm droplets soaked in to Malin's chocolate brown locks of hair. Looking up slowly, Malin studied the sky, thinking it odd and somewhat annoying that such a picturesque day could be ruined so fast. Quickly gathering up her

espresso cup, croissant plate, and newspaper smeared with black ink from the rain, she hurried through the old and well-used oak door to take shelter inside the café.

Tossing her soiled newspaper, and placing her china-white espresso cup and croissant plate on the counter, she spun around and accidentally bumped into the elderly man who was waiting behind her. The espresso cup he was holding, as well as his newspaper, dropped to the ground in a crash, the kind of crash that seems unbearable, disturbing the quiet and cozy atmosphere of the café. Malin surveyed the damage. The espresso cup, once an exquisitely crafted work of art, had shattered at contact with the sunbaked tiled floor. Dozens of white, pointed shards of glass lay jarringly against the dark brown tile. The espresso soaked into the newspaper the elderly man had dropped in the confusion, and the ink of the words ran together.

Embarrassed, she could feel the blood rushing to her cheeks, somehow revealing a flush, despite her sun-tanned brown skin. The elderly man stood still as a statue, blinking in surprise. Sincere apologies began flowing from Malin's mouth, and she truly did feel awful for spoiling this poor elderly gentleman's mid-morning espresso break.

"Oh my goodness, I am so sorry! I feel horrible! Please sir, let me give you money for a replacement cup."

The elderly gentleman chuckled as he straightened his worn brown fedora, and Malin briefly thought of how cute and dapper he was.

"Oh, I'm fine young lady, don't you worry yourself. I'm eighty-

three years old, and survived many hardships throughout my years. A spilt cup of espresso will not be my undoing.”

Grateful for his pleasant and forgiving disposition, Malin stepped back, and apologized once more as a busboy swooped in with an old-fashioned wood broom and swiftly began to sweep up the remains of the broken espresso cup. She lingered for a moment, feeling like she should be present for the cleanup, since she was responsible. The busboy was busy sweeping up the shards of glass into a tight and neat little pile. Sharp, shiny, and white, Malin stared at the small pile of glass for a brief moment, thinking that, somehow, it was strangely beautiful.

Feeling the hotness on her cheeks, she was snapped out of her brief daydream. Thanking the busboy this time, Malin turned to leave, silently saying a little prayer that she could leave La Mojada Alba without causing another scene. Walking across the café toward the door, she reached her arm out to grasp the door’s slightly rusting bronze handle. Suddenly, she heard a small crash, the unmistakable sound of breaking glass. Exasperated, and desperately hoping that she wasn’t the cause of this second incident, Malin turned toward the sound. She saw that this interruption was a breaking water glass that she had previously seen sitting on the counter by the cash register. Pondering the remarkable coincidence, or perhaps bad luck, she suddenly noticed that her hand, which was still grasping the rusty bronze door handle, was vibrating.

Startled, Malin took a step back, as the whole café seemed to pulsate. She looked around, trying to figure out if this was all in

her head, or if the ground was really shaking. More glasses started falling to the floor in a deafening crash, and terrified men and women dropped down on their hands and knees to the sunbaked tile, which continued to betray them with its violent movements. Malin turned her back to the door, and slid down it, collapsing on the floor. In a panic, she tried to remember the last time that an earthquake had hit Madrid.

The glass-fronted bakery case was forcefully shaking. Chocolate biscotti, blueberry muffins, and those famous buttery croissants were thrown inside the glass case, like bingo balls thrashing around in a metal prison. Paintings were loosened from the walls. Scenes of Madrid’s central plaza, a woman and child feeding pigeons on a park bench, and of a rainy sky tumbled to the ground. The customers were now screaming, some in pain, some in fear. Others remained silent, eyes squeezed shut, trying to block out the chaos of their quaking world.

Through the dust that was falling from the ceiling, shaken loose by the tremors, Malin spied a little girl lying on the floor next to the glass-fronted bakery case. She could not have been more than six years old, dressed in small bubble-gum pink overalls with shining gold buttons. Suddenly, the intensity of the earthquake’s shock waves caused the glass-front of the bakery case to break. A long spider-leg-like crack splintered its way across the case and shattered, the shards falling on top of the small girl. Fearful, and perhaps hurt, the little girl began to cry. Despite the earthquake’s violence, Malin knew she had to help the child.

Crawling, Malin made her way slowly across the tiled floor

towards the little girl, as the shaking continued to bring turmoil to the café. With debris covering the floor, crunching beneath her palms and kneecaps, and the ground shaking beneath her, Malin made her way to the little girl. She picked her up and held her close in a vain attempt to protect her from the world that seemed to be crumbling around them. As she pulled the child close to her, Malin caught a quick glimpse of a cut running a couple inches long across the child's cheek. Panicking, Malin tried to get herself and the little girl under a nearby sturdy oak table.

A heavy ceramic bowl sat on a table. It truly was a beautiful bowl, hand-painted with warm ocean-blues and plum-purples. Inside the bowl were bright yellow bananas from Panama, oranges from the tropics of Florida, and white grapes, grown locally, in the arid center of Spain. All of these fruits, grown all over the world, brought together in that one gorgeous ceramic bowl, sitting on an oak table in a small cafe in Madrid, Spain. The image struck Malin in the chaos, stayed with her as she rushed for the table, and, indeed, this heavy ceramic bowl was significant. The busboy, the same one who had swept up the broken espresso cup five minutes earlier, had been on his way to bring that bowl of fruit outside. When he saw the young woman bump into an elderly gentleman, he had set that bowl on the very edge of the table.

As Malin scooped up the girl in her right arm, she began to crawl along the floor towards the oak table. When she reached the table, she pushed the little girl safely under it, and the two locked eyes. Just at that moment, the heavy ceramic bowl fell off the table, hitting Malin on the top of her head, knocking her to

the floor. Her blood spilled out onto the floor, where a nearby newspaper that had fallen to the ground. The fine fibers of the newspaper stopped the flow of the red, iron smelling liquid, and the ink of a newspaper was smeared for the third time that day.

All went black, and, ironically, just after that, the earthquake stopped, after seven minutes of destruction.

Black. Complete darkness. Black space. The blackness was surrounding, engulfing. It shot up its ugly black tongue, wrapped it around her, and pulled her under. All the way under, into the black sea.

White. White walls. White ceiling. White florescent lights, obnoxiously glaring harsh light. White linoleum floor. White bed sheets. White gown.

Malin opened her eyes, and took in the white surroundings in which she found herself. Looking down, she saw an IV needle taped to her inner wrist, and felt the flexible rubber of a breathing tube in her nose, guiding pure oxygen into her lungs. Alarmed and confused, Malin looked around and tried to focus, although the room seemed to be spinning strangely off-kilter. She was dizzy, and as she brought her hand up to touch her throbbing head, a mess of black and red wires and tubes came with it, stretching across her face. The television, positioned in the corner of the room, was on, turned to the news, where a weary looking man was talking, yet Malin found herself too exhausted to try and comprehend what he was saying. On the bottom of the screen scrolled the headline, "Massive Earthquake Rocks Madrid, Largest in Recorded History." Feeling suddenly drained, Malin

closed her eyes and drifted back into blackness.

Eyes open. The same white room. Malin sat up in the hospital bed and gasped, her head felt very heavy, or perhaps it was her neck that felt very weak. A passing nurse heard her movements, and poked her head in to the room.

“Good afternoon sweetie, I’m glad to see you’re awake! You had quite the bump on the head.”

“What happened? Why am I in the hospital?” Malin asked.

The nurse just sighed and gestured towards a newspaper that lay neatly folded on the white metal nightstand next to her hospital bed. Malin reached over and picked up the paper. She didn’t need to look any further than the front-page headlines for her answers. A giant earthquake had hit Spain, and the epicenter was none other than Madrid. It struck at 10:54 a.m., and had lasted for seven minutes. It was a magnitude eight on the Richter scale, the largest the area had ever witnessed. Hundreds of people were missing, injured, or dead, and millions of euros in damage had been done to the city’s infrastructure.

Tears streamed down Malin’s face as she remembered what had happened. La Mojada Alba, the little café. She was there, getting her mid-morning espresso when the earthquake had struck. Malin thought that something must have hit her on the head, and knocked her unconscious; that would explain her current pounding headache and the unsightly bump that ached and made her dizzy.

A knock at the door disrupted her thoughts, and she looked up at a woman who she did not recognize. The woman stood in

the doorway, as if she was unsure if she should take another step. She was a thin and ghostly pale, with light, ice blue eyes. Just when Malin was about to invite her in and ask who she was, she stepped aside and a small girl walked in, looking nervous but determined. She had a small cut on her cheek.

Recognizing the little girl immediately, Malin sat up, and felt a smile come over her face. The little girl, and the woman who was presumably the girl’s mother, took a couple of steps into the hospital room. Without speaking a word, the little girl ran over, hopped up onto the bed, and threw her small arms around Malin’s neck, this time pulling Malin in close to her small body.

“Anna, give her room to breathe!” the woman exclaimed, as she gave a tentative smile and took a seat on a white plastic chair near the bed. Anna let go of Malin and sat Indian-style at the foot of the bed.

“I’m sorry to intrude, but Anna has been begging me to see you for the last couple of days. Oh, I’m sorry, how rude of me, my name is Elena, and this is Anna, my daughter. You were at La Mojada Alba on the morning of the earthquake, and you saved my daughter’s life. I had run to the bathroom quick, and as soon as I got in there the earthquake started. Do you, umm...do you remember Anna?”

Malin smiled. “Yes, of course I remember! I am so glad Anna is okay; I was so worried for her during the earthquake. I’m Malin, by the way.”

“Thank you so much for grabbing me and putting me under the table. You saved me!” Anna exclaimed excitedly from the end

of the bed. Malin noticed that the cut on her cheek was starting to heal, with fresh new skin growing across the laceration.

With tears welling up in her eyes, Malin could only nod at Anna, and squeeze her tiny outstretched hand. They locked eyes again, smiling, taking it all in. Malin's head ached, and she leaned back on the white fluffy pillow.

"Come on Anna," Elena said, "Let's let Malin rest."

Anna hopped youthfully off the bed, and turned around, smiling.

"Sweetie, can you wait in the hallway for a minute? I have to talk to Malin."

Anna nodded, and looking once over her shoulder, disappeared through the doorway.

Turning towards Malin, Elena readjusted herself in the chair, and somewhat awkwardly looked down as she pulled a tissue out of her brown leather purse and began to twist it methodically around her fingers. Taking a deep breath, she looked up at Malin.

"I just really wanted to thank you, for everything you did. I mean, if Anna hadn't been protected by the table, who knows what could have happened to her? I mean it, you have no idea what your bravery means to me. So, thank you."

Malin listened to Elena, still attempting to hold back her tears. She cleared her throat and watched Elena weave the tissue around her fingers. Perhaps a nervous habit, she thought.

"You're so welcome. But honestly, it's just what any decent person would have done in that situation. Anna seems like a real sweet girl, I hope the cut on her face heals well."

Elena nodded, and shifted her weight in the chair.

"I'll let you rest, but thank you so much again. You have no idea what you have done for me," Elena said as she rose from her chair.

Turning towards the door, she locked eyes with Malin, and the look on her face was hard for Malin to decipher. Relieved? Tired, maybe? Endearing. Definitely endearing. She turned and walked away.

Malin was tired from all of this interaction, and her body felt weak. Closing her eyes, she let her thoughts wander as sleep threatened to take over. She listened to the eerily rhythmic beep of the heart monitor that she was hooked up to. She smelled the faint lemon odor of cleaning products on the linoleum floor. She had a dry taste in her mouth that made her uncomfortable. Sighing, Malin tried to push those negative thoughts out of her mind. Deep breathes. Try again. She thought of the hot Spanish sun, its warm rays tanning her brown skin, and wished she were basking in it rather than the cold florescent lights in the hospital. She thought of La Mojada Alba, and the sweet espresso that she loved so much. Strong and sweet, the perfect combination. This espresso was that last thought she had, as once more the blackness consumed her, and she drifted off to sleep.

