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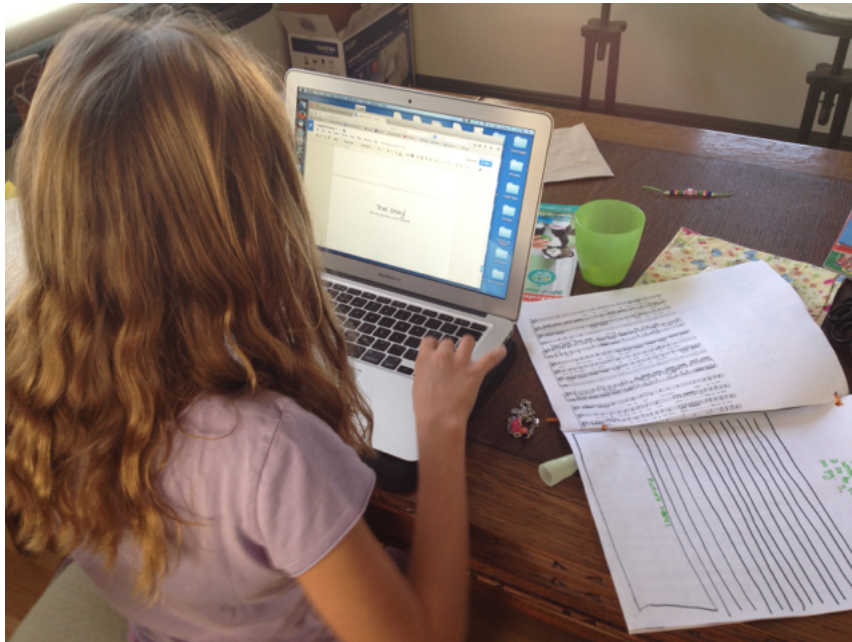
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# POSTSCWRIP

## I Have Better Writing To Do:

Beyond the Mastery of Forms

by Tim Dewar ('94)



My older daughter has written her first five-paragraph essay for school. In the language of the Common Core, and since she is in fourth grade, it was an opinion piece. The topic? Should students have more or less homework? She argued for less and with a tone best described as “Duh” by a colleague who read the final version. My wife and I kept our hands off of her drafts, letting her teacher dictate the process, classmates provide response, and the red and green squiggles of Google Docs do the editing.

The assignment, taking just over a week, was not particularly painful for her. She likes to write, often purchasing notebooks as souvenirs when turned loose in a gift shop. She once told me her best subjects in school were “writing, reading, and paying attention. I know ‘paying attention’ isn’t a subject, but if it were I would get an A in it.” And apparently she had paid attention to the classroom teaching. Her paper earned her a “16/12.” Above scale, off the chart.

So why am I not thrilled? Because I know what is coming. Umpteen more versions of the same paper. For the next 8 ½ years. The topics will change (Four-day school week? Paper or plastic? School uniforms?), but I fear the process will change only in one significant way – her reaction. This opinion piece demonstrated not only her achievement in a new form, but also the joy she finds in writing. Her fluency as a writer comes, I think, from lots of reading and her comfort with using language to do tasks she sets for herself. She has seen lots of authors do lots of neat things with words. They have made her laugh, and cry, giggle, gasp, and have transported her to distant times and places, including far past her bedtime. And she wants to do those things, too, with postcards to friends, notes to her sister (and less often, her parents), stories starring her toys, dolls, and lovey friends, further adventures for book characters (fan fiction!). The same week she wrote her opinion piece for school, she produced a nine-page magazine, *News For Everyone*, with craft ideas, poetry writing suggestions, a short story, a non-fiction informational piece, and an advertisement for a local play.

What makes her a strong writer is not her mastery of the five-paragraph structure, but her interest and courage to try to do new things with writing.

See, it is not just reading that has kept her up too late. She is just as likely to choose to write before going to bed as to read. Those notebooks from the gift shops? Filled. Some started off as diaries, later to become illustrated adventures. Others are pages of lists. Still others are filled with secrets that must be hidden from parent's eyes (and sister's, too!). Many pages of starts and beginnings, wild middles, then running out of steam or interest. Loose-leaf notebook paper gets tied with yarn to make "books." This is a child who lives in words, her own and those of authors.

Form should emerge from the process of discovery and the needs of audience and purpose; it should not come first.

As she explores this world of words, she takes risks, seeks new pleasures, revisits familiar favorites. But all the time she is setting the course. Well, my wife or I do recommend titles and offer suggestions, but most often in response to my daughter's questions. What makes her a strong writer is not her mastery of the five-paragraph structure, but her interest and courage to try to do new things with writing. I worry that the string of

poorly conceived opinion, and later, argument essays that my daughter (and her classmates) will likely be assigned will diminish the interest and eliminate the courage. Writing will become this rote filling of a template that some one else devised. It will become work, rather than play, a drudgery of finding evidence and inserting transitional phrases in the right places.

The five-paragraph theme structure is often defended as a scaffold for writers, something that supports beginners until they are ready for more sophisticated forms. A strong foundation from which to grow. Ignoring the mixing of these metaphors, we often get into heated professional discussions about when and how to wean students from relying on this formula. These conversations assume that writing is about the acquisition and mastery of forms. If this were true, couldn't my daughter with her "16/12" be certified as having mastered the five-

paragraph essay? She could get a card for her wallet or a badge from Google Drive or something so that the next time a teacher asked for her to express her thinking in an-intro-three-body-paragraphs-and-a-conclusion, she could just flash her badge and say, "Sorry, I've got better writing to do."

But writing isn't simply the mastery of forms. Writing is what my daughter is doing outside of school, and what I am doing here – using language to discover and communicate thinking to affect an audience in the real world. The language might be as truncated as hashtags in a tweet or as verbose Faulkner, the thought might be cliché or original, the audience could be as large as the world or as small as the self. Wherever on these ranges the writing falls, the form should emerge from the process of discovery and the needs of audience and purpose. It should not come first. I fear that when we do this, we not only do not help non-writers become writers, but we teach those students already in love with writing that we must not know the first thing about writing or writers. How can we if we are just teaching forms? Or worse, we teach them that writing isn't about the joy and struggle of finding what one has to say. Instead, writing is some kind of game with the teacher as rule-maker and opponent.

Or worse, we teach them that writing is not about the joy and struggle of finding what one has to say. Instead, writing is some kind of game with the teacher as rule-maker and opponent.

Our challenge is to teach our student writers that writing is this amazingly powerful tool for shaping the self and the world. While this has never been easy, the current educational landscape makes it more difficult. The Common Core standards are often unfortunately and incorrectly understood to define writing as three "types" – argument, informational or narrative. College, career, and life readiness requires much more than knowing prescriptive forms for each. I want my writers to be able to recognize a situation that requires writing, have a variety of processes and tools at the ready, and the courage to write. With that, writers can change the world. Without, even "16/12" essays won't reduce the homework.



"It is really hard to be lonely very long in a world of words. Even if you don't have friends somewhere, you still have language, and it will find you and wrap its little syllables around you and suddenly there will be a story to live in."

*Naomi Shihab Nye*

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## From The Editor...

This is our second edition of PostSCWriP in its re-imagined incarnation as the online journal of the South Coast Writing Project, and we're glad you have found your way to it. Please take your time and wander for a bit, enjoying the poetry and prose of SCWriP Fellows who somehow found the time and heart to write and share.

Our themes are sometimes suggested by submissions we receive, rather than the other way around, and this has certainly been the case for this edition, which turns out to be, in equal parts, about *Looking Back* and *Getting Old*, but with plenty of attention to the precious present too.

You'll find sweet nostalgia here, childhoods dear and gone, the surprise of being no longer young, and bearing witness to elders in the challenging part near the end. There's a lot of wonder and bewilderment as well, and a good deal of wisdom and love.

Along the lines of *Getting Old*, Peggy Kelly and I share stories about tending to elders residing in memory care and assisted living facilities, and Ann Bumby tells how unexpected insights into her grandmother's past inspired pride and respect. Robin Webster has written a brave and touching piece about her father's passing and a painful lesson she will never forget. And with candor and humor, Lou Spaventa offers his own personal musings about growing older. We might as well laugh.

In that lighthearted frame of mind, you may enjoy Cassie Cathcart's baseball card memories, and Mary Adler's recounting of a coffee shop conversation with a briefly entertaining stranger not easily explained. Or dive into thrilling tales of guns and gunpowder written by our dear Bob Isaacson, whose voice many of us miss, presented here as a special treat with comic illustrations by his nephew John Isaacson, who teaches at Goleta Valley Middle School.

And since most of us are teachers, whether current or retired, we've included Monica Kaplan's affectionate tribute to her retired teacher mom, as well as Tim Dewar's thoughts on the teaching of writing, illuminated by observations about his own daughter's experiences.

You'll find a bounty of poetry inside too, some recently written, and a couple of gems mined from the SCWriP anthology of a long ago summer. Partake with pleasure.

*Cynthia*

# Thoughts While Bending Over by Lou Spaventa ('01)

"How're ya doin'?"

"Okay."



There are seven billion of us on the planet. Of that seven billion, how many could have had someone's index finger in their anus and had a small conversation about it just at that moment? So many a day are born. So many die. How many get rectal exams at the same time? What does a Croatian recruit say to a military MD when he is bent over the table? Does he hold on to thoughts of revenge against the Serbs and so squeeze hard on the doc's finger with his rectal muscles? Do Chinese men find some soft serene place in their minds when the barefoot doctor's finger zooms right up between the cheeks? Do gay men in the Castro district talk to each other of the coincidence of pleasure and health?

Every once in a while, I come across a photograph of another me at an earlier time.

I am a piece of meat with problems; some are simple enough to feel for, others wash over my interior life and wash out again into some dark recess before I can figure out what to do about them. I begin to think that the difference between believing you're young and believing you're not is that of a ready answer. For some problems now, there don't seem to be answers. For one thing, I'm sliding into

my father's body at this age, short and fat. My hair is thin, without luster. I begin to add up the good nights of sleep against the bad, and hope the balance remains positive. I see myself as an object lesson, a cautioning presence against indulgence and indecision, too much introversion. I imagine others see me that way.

I look at my wife and notice how she has skillfully managed the years. I have always been one to say, "Let it happen. Bring it on. It's all the way it should be." But at some point, one must learn to turn the moment to one's advantage. I see that my wife has. She has her hair cut short and boyish and washed through with a henna coloring. Her clothes suit her. She smiles a lot. She is soft-spoken and caring, even solicitous of others. She is someone strangers share confidences with.

I am beginning to weather under the southern California sun. Too fast...

I dress without art. I have not learned how to make myself attractive to others. I get a haircut when the spirit moves me, rather than when appearance dictates I should. I am beginning to weather under the southern California sun. Too fast for my liking. My eating habits are unrestrained and I drink far too much for someone concerned about his body.

Every once in a while, I come across a photograph of another me at an earlier time. The hair is thick, dark and curly. Perhaps there is a bushy mustache tracing a line around the mouth, a set of too-long sideburns. Perhaps the hair springs straight out in ringlets. I remember when the Beatles brought long, straight, Prince-Valiant-style hair to the U.S. I hated my own curly hair enough to "conk" it with the lye-base stuff that blacks used to straighten their hair in those days. Then Afros came and I was effortlessly part of the hip. Now there's no careless experimentation; no casual approach will do. Now I worry about how I look, yet it seems wrong to worry.

Back to the examination table. My rectum has been certified okay, as has my central nervous system, scrotum, eyes, and heart rhythm. My blood pressure moves about too much for comfort. We'll soon see if the blood is right. I'm a little overweight according to my examiner. According to me, I'm a lot. The last thing I leave of myself at the medical center is a small waxed cup with a lid. It holds my urine. I put it on a shelf between the laboratory and lavatory, and wonder as I leave whether it could sort of stay there indefinitely, in limbo, whether someone might never think to find it there, even though that's where it goes.

My son says, "I can see my reflection in the back of your head." Now I don't need a mirror to measure the rate at which my balding proceeds. The thing that I know and he doesn't is that it will take him a goodly time to grow into his adult body. The hoop is up over the garage and I can still toy with him in an eleven-point game, even be magnanimous and give him lots of open shots. I can still find the energy to play him at the end of a day. I worry when I tell him, "Not today, John. My back hurts." I might just as well say, "I'm getting old." It hurts to think it.

#### THE COMING OF LIGHT

Even this late it happens:  
the coming of love, the coming of light.  
You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,  
stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,  
sending up warm bouquets of air.  
Even this late the bones of the body shine  
and tomorrow's dust flares into breath.

- Mark Strand

## Mr. Greenball by Peggy Kelly ('14)



A few months after we moved my mother to a memory care facility, when I came to visit her in the afternoon, she started talking about the big blue ball.

"It's just so much fun!" she said.

"What is?" I asked.

"They have this ball," she told me. "It's big and it's blue and we were playing with it earlier. I know it's silly, but it's just so much fun!"

In her dementia, my mother has reverted to some childlike behaviors. Childlike, but not childish, and at this stage, she still has a foot in each world. One part of her just loves playing with the exercise ball. Another part knows it's silly.

What surprised me about this was that she remembered the ball from earlier in the day. Usually, she resides only in the moment. We talk about what's going on around us, or I tell her about my day, but I never ask about what she's been doing because I know she won't remember.

But she remembered that ball. And how! For the hour that I visited, every five minutes she returned to the topic of the big blue ball, her eyes lighting up as she told me what they did with it and how much silly fun she had.

Not long afterwards, her birthday came around. Unsure what to get her, I asked the staff at Friendship House. Lisa suggested that since Mom loved the exercise ball but only got to use it at certain times, we might want to get her one to keep in the building where she lives. So I went to Target looking for the prettiest-colored exercise ball I could find. I purchased one in green, blew it up, put a bow on it (it's not easy to wrap an exercise ball), and gave it to her on her birthday.

You should have seen her with that thing! She started bouncing it – a rapid dribble that reminded me of the rubber ball and paddle toy I had as a child. She got it going like a Harlem Globetrotter, and you could see how much she enjoyed the rubbery bounce, the immediate response to her hand. I'm not sure I could have done any better with it.



We put her name on it, and now the green ball stays in the common room of the Special Care building where my mother resides. The staff has even anthropomorphized it. When the nurse told me that she took Mom and Mr. Greenball to the Netzer Center, it took me a minute to realize who, or rather what, she meant. Mom doesn't often play with the green ball when I'm there, but she frequently looks at it and comments on it.

She tells me that she loves the green ball and that she saw it at a store and couldn't resist buying it. At first, she said she paid ten dollars, at some point the story changed to a dollar, and the last time she brought it up, she said that she got it for ten cents.

And with this comes another lesson.

Mom doesn't know that I gave the ball to her. She thinks she bought it for herself. At first, there was a part of me that missed getting the credit. *I* went and found it. *I* picked out the color. *I* put a bow on it. And *I* brought it to her. No one else even thought to give her a gift. Not my brother who visits once a year, not my dad who is overwhelmed by the task.

My mother lives almost purely in the moment. It doesn't matter that she no longer knows that I'm her daughter...or that the ball came from me.

But it doesn't matter. My mother is a being who lives almost purely in the moment. It doesn't matter that she no longer knows that I'm her daughter. It doesn't matter that she is unaware the ball came from me. Now I realize I would rather have her picture herself in the store, spying this toy, deciding to embrace her inner child, opening up her purse, pulling out her wallet, and buying that silly green ball that makes her so happy.

She doesn't need to know that she spends her days within the confines of an Alzheimer's facility, or that the wallet she envisions opening sits empty in a purse filled with used tissue, half-eaten crackers, empty plastic cups, and whatever else she has put in there since the last time I cleaned it out. I'm glad she still sees herself as a woman who can go to the store and buy something that suits her fancy, even if it's only a green ball that costs ten cents.

## Ninety-One by Cynthia Carbone Ward ('01)



Journalist Jane Gross describes it as a "bittersweet season", this ambiguous time of tending to an elderly parent. Referring to her own experience, she has said, "My mother and I had a very difficult relationship. I didn't race to the loving caregiver's role with an open heart, shall we say. I sort of weighed in my mind what seemed to me like the lesser of two evils. You know, was I going to do this because it was the right thing to do or was I going to bail and feel guilty for the rest of my life? On balance, with that as the rock and a hard place, I decided, you know, do it and do it right."

That's how it's been for me, and, as I realize only lately, for so many of my generation. With our elders living far longer than anyone's expectations, navigating our own complicated lives while overseeing that of an aging parent can be tricky and emotionally exhausting. My beloved father died when he was still relatively young, and my mother recently celebrated her 91st birthday. Well, as one wise old lady told me, "We get what we get."

My mother has resided in an assisted living facility for about fifteen years, and I have remained her steadfast visitor through various crises and long stretches of bleak. It's a wearisome duty, and it's gone on so long, but my heart insists that it's the right and only thing to do, so I don't see any leeway. As I walk up the stairs I brace myself for whatever new problems I may unearth and for a certain smell that greets me as I push open the door. It's an institutional smell, one of disinfectant, soiled laundry, unappealing meals, some sort of stagnation that makes me crave air. My mother feels it too, and although she doesn't complain, she's always eager to go outside.

She was a legendary walker in her time, but these days it's hard for her to get up from a seated position. As soon as we step out of the building, though, she becomes more animated. With childlike enthusiasm she remarks upon the clouds, the warmth of the sun, the flowers and birds, a cat slinking by. I help her into the car and we head over to the drive-thru lane of a nearby McDonald's, not a choice I'd ever make otherwise, but I hand her a soft-serve

There's been an unexpected addendum to my history with my mother, and it shines a different light on things.

vanilla ice cream, and she gratefully licks and slurps. She gulps, in fact, and it occurs to me that she is gulping at life, or whatever is left of it, inhaling what pleasures remain, grasping, almost greedy, still here and still wanting. It occurs to me that her old resilient body knows only to keep going. It's not about making sense—it's about the senses.

To quote Jane Gross again, "You have no idea how long it's going to last. You have no idea what's going to happen next. And I think so many of us are used to feeling in control of what we're doing...you make a to-do list and you check everything off the to-do list and then, when you get to the bottom of the page, whatever the task is, you're done. This doesn't work that way."

I'll say. And even when things seem to be humming along rather smoothly, you never know when the next disaster will erupt: a fall, a broken hip, new dimensions of dementia. But you know? There are also some rewards: above all, I have learned forgiveness right down to the core of me. I have learned how compassion, patience, and duty cleanse the soul. I have learned to retrieve from the rush of time that which is worthwhile, and to release what can only cause bitterness and sorrow. There's been an unexpected addendum to my history with my mother and it shines a different light on things.

In many ways I'm lucky: my mother is sweeter now than I ever remember her being. She is confused but always knows me and has kept important memories intact. A year ago we were told she probably had only a few more months to live, and now she has improved to the point of no longer needing hospice care. She's deaf as a stone even with her hearing aid, requires a walker, and has lost her lower dentures, but unless she's in pain, her general demeanor is one of cheerfulness, acceptance, and appreciation. People seem to like her, and that works in her favor.

So I organized a party for her 91st birthday with a big cake that had her name on it, surrounded by pink roses. Quite a few of the residents joined us in the community room, and she was delighted. Which brings me to another unexpected good thing about this experience, since I'm always looking for the good: the people, or at least some of them. There are caregivers who do difficult work with diligence and good-heartedness, and there are residents whose dignity and resilience inspire me.

Even in a relatively pleasant place, as this one is, facing the daily routine can't be easy, and I'm touched at how 92-year-old Pauline manages to emerge from her room each day impeccably dressed, including lipstick and eyeliner, or how graciously Jaimie-from-Ecuador

shares stories and kisses my mother's hand, and the intelligence and thoughtfulness of people like Toby, who might remind my mother if there is a Friday evening Shabbat service or escort her back to her room when she seems momentarily lost.

In fact, at the birthday party, I mentioned to Carolyn, another resident, that I thought this might be the season of life that requires the most bravery. Carolyn quickly agreed. "It's because we've lost control of our own lives," she said. "We're still the same inside, but we have to depend so much on others now, and our choices are so narrow."

There was a small, wiry fellow named Len who lived here until he passed away a few years ago. I can picture him now with his beret and his cane, a dapper looking gent, nodding a greeting before stepping outside for a cigarette. Even though Len is gone, his daughter Paula still visits my mother on a regular basis. It's hard to get my mind around such generosity.

"Paula is amazingly kind," says Vanna, the daughter of another long-term resident. "When my mother dies, I swear I will never set foot in this place again. I've been coming here every day for twelve years, and I've watched my mother go downhill, and it's depressing. I've had enough! I come here every day and I think about death. My mother's had enough too. Haven't you, Mom?" Her mother's weary expression indicates that indeed she has.

But if we think about dying, we're thinking too about living, and it was so good to orchestrate a happy day, to be present in a sunny room.

But if we think about dying, we're thinking too about living, and it was so good to orchestrate a happy day, to be present in a sunny room, to hear some anecdotes from the diverse and interesting lives that happen to have converged here. In an essay called *To Grow in Wisdom*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote the following: "What we owe the old is reverence, but all they ask for is consideration, attention, not to be discarded and forgotten."

So Toby held the cake up and we took a picture of it with my mother, who sat there like a queen, visibly delighted, and dear Marge wheeled over, leaned in, and offered her best wishes. All in all, there were about ten guests around a long table, and we sang happy birthday to my mother's deaf ears, and even if she doesn't remember it, it happened, and it was a very fine moment. A lady named Lou from Milwaukee, 96 years old, joined us near the end, wearing a plaid shirt and pink shorts and sandals, full of exuberance and ready for a piece of that cake and seconds too.

I was still in my 40s when this tour of duty began, still in the midst of working and raising a daughter, prime time. And here I am, beginning to think about my own old age while the duty continues, and I imagine there will be harder times to come before it ends. But I am blessed in many ways, and I am grateful, and this was a good day. I feel human.

# The Courage to Be a Bumby by Ann Bumby ('14)

Bumby. Bumbs. Gumby. Cumby, as I am affectionately known by Southern California Edison, despite my many attempts to correct it. Bumbles. Bumblebee. Even my Jog-a-Thon class name has, multiple times, been “The Bumbybees”. Once I was turned down for a teaching job at a school where teachers go by their first names, one reason being that I could not *possibly* let my last name go to waste and be referred to as “Ann” by my students. Ms. Bumby was meant to be used and heard many times daily.

The name has inspired nicknames and drawn attention for as long as I can remember. Store clerks often question me about its origin, and whether it is my maiden name. When I reply that, yes it is in fact my maiden name, the follow-up question, without fail, is: “Are you going to keep it when you get married?” This is usually accompanied by an unsolicited opinion about how I *have* to keep it, that it’s too joyous and bubbly to give up. These are all solid arguments for keeping my last name, should I choose to marry one day. But I have a different reason for holding onto it: my grandma.

Our days were spent sifting through dry, dusty photos, letters, and treasures collected from her travels around the world, which had been stored in the attic and forgotten about for decades.

Shirley B. Sather. I never knew her by any other name. The “B” stood for “Bumby”, her first married name, my grandpa’s, the man from whom she’d been divorced since 1972. I always wondered why she kept it, and why she didn’t free herself of the name and that part of her past.

Then, five summers ago, I helped my grandma follow through with her decision to transition herself to a senior care facility by assisting her in cleaning, organizing and moving out of her home, the same house she’d lived in since before I was born. Our days were spent sifting

through dry, dusty photos, letters, and treasures collected from her travels around the world, which had been stored in the attic and forgotten about for decades. Box by box, we carried her memories to the sunroom. Each box was filled with stories, and through her retelling of them, my grandma bestowed upon me a deeper understanding of my family’s history. Many of the stories were told in letters my dad wrote while stationed in Vietnam, and how he couldn’t wait to return home to the great love of his life, my mom.

My grandma’s stories also told of the suffering she’d endured as a woman during a time when women were not meant to put their own happiness above the expectations of society. I learned so much about her- how she’d been miserable in the 1940’s and 50’s as a housewife raising four children, my dad being one. She talked about my grandpa, who was a very conservative, prominent businessman in their town of Ripon, Wisconsin, which incidentally is the birthplace of the Republican Party. My grandma confided in me that she was *never* to vote against my grandpa, as that was considered an open act of defiance for a woman. She smiled, and with a fiercely bold conviction in her voice, told me that she *always* voted against him in every election, even if she disagreed with the candidate.

She confided that she'd had enough of being a housewife, of passing by in a life devoid of passion or choice. Her actions had been simple and clear when she kicked my grandfather out into a cold, bitter night, snow whipping around his bare head, nothing but his Eddie Bauer down jacket and the alcohol in his veins to keep him warm. He quickly remarried, and as another deliberate act of rebellion, my grandma ran off with his best friend, Kenny Sather.

One afternoon we began sorting through her kitchen, which was full of old cookbooks, reminiscent of the many years my grandma spent in the role to which society confined her. In the cookbooks she had jotted down the dates when recipes were first cooked, notes of what my grandpa liked and what he'd prefer she do differently, and whether she should she make the dish again. As I began pulling them off the shelf over the built-in desk, I noticed another pile of clothbound, hardcover books hidden in the back: old first editions, some still with the original dust jackets. We both froze when I pulled them down, and I immediately sensed that I had uncovered a secret, and wasn't sure how she'd react.

My grandma gently reached out, took the stack from my hands, and smiled, running her hand over the top of one. As the moment settled in, I glanced at the titles of these long-hidden books. *The Joy of Sex* and *Total Orgasm* popped out at me. Without any explanation, my grandma handed them to me, saying only, "I think it's time I passed these along. Use them well, Lamb."

"I think it's time I passed these along. Use them well, Lamb."

It wasn't until later, after I'd flown home to California, that the gravity of what these books stood for sunk in: they were published within a year of my grandma's divorce. Although their publication was a sign of societal shift on the horizon, it remained an era when many women were housewives, regardless of their desire to pursue different paths. They were not supposed to read about the unspeakable act of sex, let alone learn how to *enjoy* it. Yet my grandma had the courage to stand up for her beliefs and her gender when so many did not. My grandma, Shirley B. Sather. Perhaps she wasn't holding onto the past at all. Perhaps leaving the "B" in her name was her biggest act of rebellion yet, left permanently in her name as a public reminder that she was a woman who would *never* settle into the background, masked behind decency.

My grandma's books are now prominently displayed on a shelf in my kitchen—*The Joy of Sex* alongside *The Joy of Cooking*. They make a statement that no matter how much society discourages it, one should never disguise who one is and is truly meant to be.

And for me, that includes being a Bumby.

## Untitled by Robin Webster ('14)

When my father was dying my family came together in a touching way. My father and mother lived in Utah; the six children lived around the country in California, Colorado, and Hawaii. We knew Dad was sick, but one night came the call from my brother Bill. "Do I need to come?" I asked. "I think so," he answered.

We all came and were fortunate enough to be there for the last two weeks of my father's life. He, a lifetime Navy engineer, was in the Salt Lake City Veterans Hospital. It is known as a state-of-the-art hospital, and they fought hard to save my father, but unfortunately, they could not diagnose what was poisoning his body with sepsis and killing him. It later turned out to be a cyst in his liver, a condition that was occurring in other veterans that served in the south Pacific during World War II. It was the result of an insect bite, but was just beginning to show up in men now in their 70's.

My family grew closer, taking turns at the hospital, spending evenings together reading, talking, and singing to my sister's piano music. Reading this you may think that we were a warm family, nurturing and understanding, but in reality we were not. There was a distance and coldness in our home, and even with so many members it often felt like a lonely place. We were not a typical military family; it was not a home steeped in discipline. If anything there was a sense of chaos as we grew up, moving from base to base, father often away on duty, mother overwhelmed by raising six children alone. As the youngest of six, I had never really been comfortable around my siblings, often feeling left out and frequently the victim of "youngest syndrome". I am referring to a tendency in a family for unhappiness, anger, and frustration to get transferred down the command. The one at the bottom rung took the brunt. But during this time we were, for the most part, uncharacteristically kind to one another as we watched Dad leave us. We all gathered protectively around our mother, who had been dependent on my father in so many ways. We could not imagine how she would survive without him. He was her world.

In my father's last few conscious days I learned a lesson in regret I will never forget. We were with him as he was being wheeled once again from one room to another, looking sallow, his eyes red rimmed and his lips dried and cracked. He could not speak. Looking up, he saw my mother and reached for her. He tried to draw her near him for a kiss. Somehow, I knew he was trying to say a final farewell, but my mother, ever second-guessing herself, ever distrustful of emotion, hesitated, and then kissed him on the forehead. As they wheeled him away she explained, "I didn't want to hurt his lips."

He never gained consciousness again. Many years later she expressed regret about this to me, knowing that I had been the only witness. I had already regretted it for years, blaming her for being so foolish, but I did not reprimand her. "He knew how much you loved him," I said. And he did. But I learned a sorrowful lesson that day, and have vowed, in my life, never to make that mistake: never to miss that irretrievable moment to offer a tender gesture, never to miss that opportunity for a final goodbye.

## Baseball Cards by Cassie Cathcart ('14)



It was Thursday. Finally! Jacob, Laura, and I had been waiting all week for this day. This was the day when the baseball cards would be delivered to Dexter's market. We had worked the parents over all week so that when Thursday arrived, we would have permission to ride our bikes across HWY 246 to Dexter's to purchase the coveted baseball cards. We all met in the garage, tightened the chinstrap of our helmets, and hopped on our bikes.

As we headed down Shadow Mountain Drive, the sun reflected off our metal bike frames. The wind was freedom, and as it blew in our faces, we quickly forgot the promise we had made to our parents about not using the "short cut". Now, to call the dirt path that ran by the river a short cut was not entirely accurate. It took almost as long as going around, but the trail was covered in mud. If you picked up enough speed, dirt would spray up your back, making a rooster tail- every kid's dream. Whenever we watched Supercross on TV, the motocross riders all had rooster tails on the back of their jerseys, a testament to the muddy conditions and their hard, fast riding. It was a mark of coolness, and we wanted badly to be like them. We only had bikes, but the short cut helped us sport the same mud as our heroes, so despite the promises to our parents, we had to ride it.

As we raced down the trail, mud spraying in our wake, we took turns nailing tricks off the jump at the end. Jacob kicked his heels off the pedals, Laura moved her feet to her pegs, and I twisted my handlebars. Turning off the path and onto the cement, I planted my left foot in the mud as I maneuvered my bike into the close turn. I watched many motocross guys do this in races in an effort to save time and cut close turns. We had all been practicing this move, and



now, as I executed the turn, the practice paid off. My back bike tire cut through the mud, my front tire stayed planted, and I was quickly positioned north, in the direction of the cement. The mud that sprayed up and covered the side of my white shirt as I made the turn was an added bonus.

We raced down the sidewalk towards the traffic light, anxious to cross Highway 246 and get to Dexter's. The light was slow to change, but finally, the walk signal told us we could cross. Jumping on our bikes, we raced the half a block to the store. Quickly, we locked up the three bikes out front and went in.

Jacob walked right up to the counter to get the baseball cards. Laura went with him. I busied myself down one of the store's aisles, grabbing clothespins, the last item we needed, and the thing that would give the baseball cards purpose. Outside the store, Jacob quickly passed out the shiny silver packs. Laura was the first to open hers, the metallic packaging tearing with difficulty under the force of her fingers and teeth. Jacob and I did the same, and in no time we all had our decks fanned out before us. I slid the stale, hidden piece of gum from underneath the last card, wadded it up into a ball, and chomped it into my mouth. With saliva building, I said, "Here, take one!" and handed out the clothespins.

Without glancing at the baseball cards, not a care which player they featured, we all took the cards and the clothespins to the back wheel of our bike. With a little finesse, we clipped the two cards on the back metal rod that went along side the back wheel, the cards sticking in between the spokes. PRaRaRaRaRa! Three bikes raced down the street towards the short cut--the sound of three motorcycles riding--with three rooster tails flapping in the wind.

## Time by Ina Ettenberg ('01)

Time dances mysteriously, playfully  
always keeping one step ahead  
never resting  
never in one place long enough  
teasing, coaxing,  
throwing her head back in laughter  
tapping a rhythm with her toes  
taking the lead  
never out of breath  
I follow  
trying to catch up.  
Time, I say,  
Stop and rest awhile.  
She smiles and leaps forward, gracefully.

## Guns and Gunpowder by Robert Isaacson ('85)



Around the age of eight, I started packing an iron. My first gun was a Benjamin pellet gun. It was the sort of gun that you had to pump up by means of a long lever below the barrel to get air pressure. It had a little breech loading lever mechanism which I would uncock and into which I would insert a small pellet or BB. It made a strange sound when fired: *Fuossh!* This gun was pretty powerful. To me it was no ordinary BB gun. My brothers, whose first gun it had been also, falsely told me that if I could pump it up 22 times, it would have all the power of an actual 22- caliber rifle. I would labor for fifteen minutes trying to pump it up to the magical number of 22. *Fuossh!* It

would literally blow a lizard sleeping on a warm board in half. It was like hunting mosquitoes with a hand grenade.

I pretended the lizards were mountain lions and I was the bounty hunter. At that time lions had a \$500 bounty on them. I would see huge pumas hung by their hind legs from trees in photos in the Santa Ynez Valley News with the grinning hunters standing next to them, cradling their guns in their arms. \$500! So I went hunting. one afternoon I methodically shot all the lizards I could find in a big pile of old boards up the hill. When I couldn't find any more, I left for lunch. For days, I returned to the pile to shoot more, but there never were any, at least during that summer. I began to feel badly about the massacre, even guilty. I thought about capturing lizards elsewhere and repopulating the site, but I never did. I avoided the place finally, feeling sort of crummy about it.

When I was still pretty young, ten or eleven, my parents bought me a Napoleonic flintlock musket when we were on a trip to Canada. I was proud of the huge musket with its dark-oiled wood, shiny metal parts and brass fittings. Of course, they also bought me two sizable cans of black gunpowder, one with finely ground powder for the touchhole and one with coarser powder for the charge in the barrel, so that we could fire it. We would usually only shoot it on special occasions, such as when weekend guests were just about to leave.

The touchhole flash of the musket would burn off our eyebrows, so we started using the ranch's bulky, black, medieval looking welding helmet for protection, as well as wearing a very heavy Levi jacket. You could hardly see through the helmet's darkly tinted plate of green glass, meant to protect one from the intense light and heat of a welding torch flame. Consequently, whoever was firing the musket could really not see anything at all, which was sort of dangerous when a lot of us kids were standing around watching.

It was nerve wracking to fire it: sometimes the hammer would fall with a shower of sparks, but nothing would happen, just a dull empty click. Sometimes the small charge of powder in the pan would explode with a sound like woossh and a small cloud of gray smoke would hover mysteriously over the head of the black helmeted shooter. This might happen three or four times, making the growing suspense almost unbearable until there would be an unexpected double sound: woossh--one one thousand--BLAAM and a ten foot long, beautiful cloud of white smoke would erupt from the barrel and a huge cheer would automatically arise from the onlookers.

We would all run out into the dry summer weeds and stamp out the grass fire the burning wad of Kleenex blown out of the barrel would inevitably start. It was all part of the ritual. The satisfied visitors would drive off, and I would clean out the warm barrel with a cloth soaked in oil. Once my brother and I shot a lizard with it at close range. The lizard died, but, oddly enough, there were no marks on its body. It must have been crushed by the overpressure blast.



For years I always carried a gun whenever I left the house. When I was eleven or so, I took over the pump action 22-caliber rifle. I never shot big animals, mostly just cans, ant holes, glass bottles, or a small brick fort I had built and filled with rubber GI soldiers. A 22 has a two-mile range, and I did all of this within a hundred feet or so of our house. Amazingly, my parents pretty much ignored my nearby little high tech war games.

Sometimes I would ceaselessly bombard ant holes at close range and watch them helplessly swarm in mad swirling patterns. Once, probably when I had run out of 22 cartridges, I decided to build real bombs and teach the endless streams of furious ants a lesson. I took down my cans of gunpowder and got a roll of toilet paper. I filled three or

four sections of the toilet paper up with black powder, set them on the brick garden steps that were covered with the angry ants, lit the toilet paper on fire, and ran away. Several impressive explosions with fifteen-foot high clouds of white smoke covered the garden and drifted past the front door of our house. Bricks lay scattered about. I remember my father coming out of the house, still holding his newspaper, wondering what on earth was happening, and then going back inside when he saw that it was just me playing with gunpowder.

Later, I got the idea of asking my father to drill a touchhole in a tiny brass cannon I had bought. It had already had the barrel drilled out, so if my father could drill a small hole in which to insert a fuse, I could use it as an actual artillery piece. I remember him measuring the length of the barrel in his metal shop and slowly drilling the tiny hole. The barrel was only two and a half inches long. Admiring his careful work, he handed me the cannon, and I immediately ran off to stuff it full of gunpowder and BB's.



I went up to the pile of old boards behind our guesthouse to find a victim. There it was: a long black bluebelly lizard napping on a weathered redwood board. I slowly wheeled the tiny cannon up to the lizard's head, tilted the barrel down at a slight angle, lit the fuse and ran off in case the toy cannon were to explode into fragments. I looked back from what I thought was a safe distance. It was a strange tableau: the little brass cannon pointing down at the sun drunk lizard, the fuse sparking furiously, and then BLAM! When the smoke eventually cleared, there was no cannon and there was no lizard. I finally did find the cannon. It had flown a considerable distance backwards, but I never did find the lizard.

One day my brother and I were rummaging around in our ranch's old blacksmith shop. It's a dark and dusty little redwood board and baton shack on the hill just below our house. We were digging through some dusty boxes of old rusty pipe fittings for no good reason when we both let out a scream: a big yellow alligator lizard had run out of the box and up above the window. It lay on a board hissing down at us. We had a deathly fear of this strange, harmless creature.

Once, at a nearby ranch near Las Cruces, my brother and his friends had chased one down a gofer hole. One of the frenzied boys put his hand into the hole. The alligator lizard bit his finger and would not let go. They all ran around screaming in panicky circles until the lizard at last unlocked his jaws and escaped. My brother, oddly enough, would never recover from this childhood nightmare experience, and somehow he inculcated me with his own deep level of absolute horror whenever I encountered one of these beautiful, glimmering creatures that only inhabited the very darkest corners of moldy barns or dim, spider web-filled shops.

So we both screamed at the top of our lungs and ran like hell out of the blacksmith shop, up the hill to our house, directly to the gun rack with the 22's and BB guns. He grabbed his pump action 22 and a box of bullets, and we raced back down to the shop that held the unspeakable horror.

We crept back into the shadowy darkness and peered above the window. There it was, just where we had left it. I remember it raised its snake-like head and opened its mouth, hissing at us. BAM! BAM! Three, maybe four shots ran out, each illuminating with a spooky orange flash the queer looking lizard writhing around and being blown to bits. Then came a strange silence, after which we heard my father shouting up the hill. The bullets had whizzed all about him as he had been walking to his metal shop. We didn't really get into trouble, but I don't think we never got into quite such a state over an alligator lizard again.

At some point, however, my two brothers, who were both older than I, were finally sent to a 4H-gun safety course. In the evening, they would go down to the local school at Gaviota and hear lectures on how to check guns to see if they were loaded, how to go through fences when carrying a rifle, and so forth. I was jealous of all of the secret knowledge I thought they were acquiring, and I envied the little, gold pins and badges they earned while taking the course. They would fasten these merit badges onto their little green 4H caps.

I took the bright red cans of gunpowder out into the middle of the barnyard, my breath smoking in the icy night air.

I remember the night they both graduated from the gun safety course. My parents and I picked up them and Earl Oliver, one of their classmates, on the last night of the class. We stopped by the neighboring San Julian Ranch to take Earl home. Earl's father, a tall Nevada cowboy named Tex, was the cowboss on the ranch, and he and his wife and my parents all sat down in their living room and started talking. I sat in a chair by myself. Earl and my two brothers, all wearing their green 4H caps, disappeared into Earl's room to mess around. I dozed off.

BLAM! A bullet suddenly flew through the wall of Earl's room and went through the ceiling just above where Tex was sitting in his well-worn armchair. Tex looked up at the hole in the ceiling and slowly drawled, "Now, THAT was a bullet." Tex had guns in every corner of every room in his house, and my oldest brother had picked one up and, gun safety or no gun safety course, simply pulled the trigger for no particular reason.

Probably fearing for their lives, my poor parents, at some point, finally got us all situated in various boarding schools around the state, and our passion for guns quickly faded. Not one of us ever became a mighty hunter or a member of the NRA. I think we had simply worked all of that out of our systems at a fairly early age.

After about thirty years, my mother finally called me and told me to come over and get those cans of gunpowder out of her house. I had forgotten all about them for all those years. At that time my daughter and I had been reading a Grey Rabbit story about Guy Fawkes Day, so we decided to detonate the remaining powder to help the English celebrate the foiling of the famous gunpowder plot, in which Fawkes and his cronies had planned to blow up the House of Parliament, as well as all of its members. The fifth of November finally came. It was a cold, crystal clear night, a night without a breath of wind, a sure sign that time of year that a heavy frost would come later, in the early hours of the morning.

I took the bright red cans of gunpowder out into the middle of the barnyard, my breath smoking in the icy night air. I found a large cardboard cylinder about a foot wide and eight inches high. I poured the remaining gunpowder into the cylinder and tucked some Kleenex underneath the bottom of the cone-shaped pile of black powder. I lit the edge of the Kleenex, which I had left sticking out of the side of the pile, and ran quickly back to the edge of the barnyard, where my daughter was waiting. We chanted the old rhyme, "Remember, remember, the fifth of November, / Gunpowder Treason and plot, / I see of no reason why gunpowder treason/ should ever be forgot."

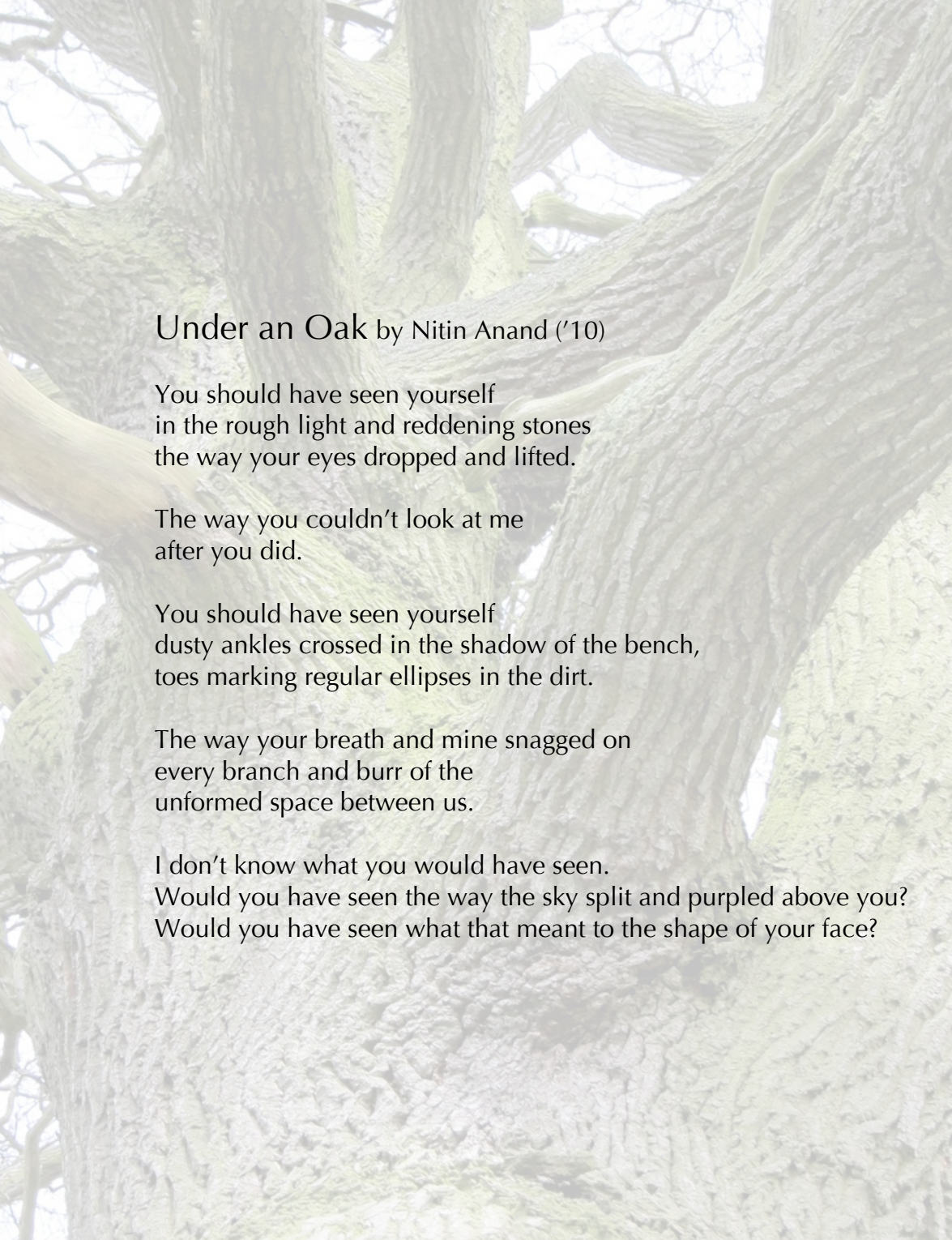
We waited maybe twenty seconds, wondering if the flame had gone out. There was no way I was going to go over and peer into the cylinder to find out. Then it happened: There was a frightening hissing noise, almost a roar, and the next thing we knew, before we could blink, a huge, perfectly symmetrical mushroom cloud, maybe thirty feet high, had blossomed in the middle of the barnyard. It hovered, magnificent, perfectly white, and even monstrous in the perfect winter darkness of the black barnyard.

Very gradually, as there was no wind whatsoever, the mushroom cloud began slowly to collapse, to fall back down into itself, like a huge, clumsy punctured balloon.



I suddenly realized that this image was a dreamscape, the strange fulfillment of my darkest childhood fantasy and fear, the one I had lived with tacitly all of my life, the one I had thought about in my bed at night before sleep came. It was the bomb to end all bombs, the bomb to end all wars, especially the ever looming war with the goosetep marching Russians, the Chinese troops massed and waiting at the Bering Straits, the missiles streaking downward, out of the darkening sky. But, really, I guess it was just was the end of my own gunpowder era. The smoke, a sulfur-smelling cloud, now covered the dark, chilly barnyard, dissipating itself like a low ground fog.





Under an Oak by Nitin Anand ('10)

You should have seen yourself  
in the rough light and reddening stones  
the way your eyes dropped and lifted.

The way you couldn't look at me  
after you did.

You should have seen yourself  
dusty ankles crossed in the shadow of the bench,  
toes marking regular ellipses in the dirt.

The way your breath and mine snagged on  
every branch and burr of the  
unformed space between us.

I don't know what you would have seen.  
Would you have seen the way the sky split and purpled above you?  
Would you have seen what that meant to the shape of your face?

## On Botanical Peregrinations by Nitin Anand ('10)

I carried two leaves  
across the country,

tucked into a book about primitive shelters  
hand-axes,  
fire-starters,  
or some other anachronism.

Two leaves  
of tulip-poplar,  
lobed like a cat's face.

You laughed when I mentioned the similarity.

I wanted you to see why I would bother,  
why I cared.  
So I tipped the knife into the green, pliant branch.  
The ash-gray bark split for you,  
waxy cambium and the grassy scent of  
slow, pulsing life.

Your fingers plied the sheath apart, and you  
leaned,  
breathed,  
and looked up.

By then, those cat-faced leaves  
had turned the color of the sun.

And they lay all around you,  
all around us.

Those two leaves,  
are brown,  
pressed in glass,  
and hanging on my wall.





## Arrival by Nitin Anand ('10)

There was that graying fence rail, dried and splintered and stretching on.  
The long grass, nodding its head, dead and searching.

The shadows thrust and flung themselves into their meeting spaces,  
to whisper and collude.

How can shadows grow so long?  
From what deep well do they draw their impossible mass?

You were there too. In greener times.  
When we measured the shadows with the spans of our hands.

And there was the hem of your dress, lovely and worn.  
Shaded beneath it, your knees together, calves pressed and pressing.

You were shrugged shoulders and too-red cheeks.  
You sat upon that fence rail, gently to avoid the splinters,  
gently because you only know gently.

Then you were gone.  
A cactus wren, briefly alighting,

anchored to a foreign world.

## Speaking Volumes by Christine Penko (Kravatz) '07

*Never mark in a book! Not even a question mark!*  
Child of the Great Depression, my father  
viewed those physical bodies as sacred.  
He also liked a bargain. Long before Amazon,  
he purchased mail-order and in bulk.

"Childcraft" the 1949 edition, lived in the narrow hallway  
just off our kitchen—thirteen orange covered volumes,  
the fourteenth gone missing before I was born.

I memorized

*Bye Baby Bunting, Daddy's gone a hunting,  
to get a little rabbit's skin to wrap his Baby Bunting in,*  
chewing over the choice between human and rabbit  
then moving on to black and white photos of children  
performing plays. The Pied Piper had instructions  
for making Paper Mache rats. When my parents fought,  
I'd drop to the cold linoleum,  
daydream myself following the Piper—weight  
of the book against my lap, ballast against their storm.

We had two sets of encyclopedias. I sailed through  
fourth grade shamelessly lifting swaths of information  
from the brown bricks of the *Britannica*,  
spreading it like personal knowledge over  
Sister Gertrude's assignments. Then came the "World Book".  
Cream and gold with full color photos of savannah wildlife,  
Amazonian tribes. In volume "H" an illustrated man and woman,  
their innards, veins, muscle, veiled under tissue.  
There was something holy about having to wash  
my hands before lifting those waxy, revealing, papers.

My mother thought that second set a waste of money.  
The gangly young man, dressed like a Mormon missionary,  
spread his wares over our sofa cushions.  
*They're free at the library*, she argued.  
My father wouldn't budge.  
Owning those books was owning  
an education at your fingertips.  
Weeks later, our front porch filled with cartons  
of information waiting to be shelved in alphabetical order.  
I loved the gold lettering, rich, rounded spines, order.

Later came my mother's Reader's Digest  
Condensed Books. Great works, abridged.  
Cheesy, perhaps, but an early lesson  
in concise language. Whatever came after,  
those books, "A" to "Z", were my canon.

And my father, it turns out,  
was right about their physical bodies. Sacred.

## Seasons by Veronica Gallardo ('14)

We have a small season to guide our kids  
To teach them  
To make the learning space big enough so they can fall  
Deep enough so they're stretched  
Warm enough so they feel safe  
Strong enough so they feel secure  
Kids we call our children  
Kids we call our students  
This is their season  
They are watching  
They are learning  
Sights of nature  
A bird to us  
A new discovery to for our kids  
Let's not miss it  
Don't let this season fly away.

## Water by Veronica Gallardo ('14)

Together we build a house  
Small enough to clean  
Big enough to lean  
Solid it withstands the storms  
Facing the morning sun  
Sights of green, yellow, and  
splashes of red  
Blue skies  
Rich in soil  
We toil  
Fruit grows  
We grow  
Living water fills  
Together we build a home

## Dreams of Animals *by Carolyn Hay ('14)*

My golden retriever dreams of  
Rich, tumbling earth below her paws  
Digging, digging, what moist treasures lie?

The small bird nesting in the planter of my entry way  
Dreams of the now familiar rustling sound  
of a new supply of birdseed in the nearby bird feeder  
suspended,  
fast food for her offspring

The rabbits, darting – then freezing, who find their way into my yard  
dream of next season's vegetables  
in the planter outside our kitchen  
Ah... the delicacy of a young carrot, or the still dewy lettuce

The crow perched high in the sprawling live oak tree  
dreams of a bountiful feast  
left near the picnic tables  
after sticky fingered children  
race away to fly overhead in the swings

The neighbor's cat,

crouching

planning,

calculating

Waits in silent shadows beneath the hydrangea plant  
Dozing off only to delight in dreams of the wren's noisy nest in my entryway  
And the plump little victims whose first attempts at flight  
May end up in her clever lair

## Nostalgia by Nancy Maase ('12)

Sand feels different here than it does there  
here it's more fine  
And if you grab a bunch in your fist,  
It can be molded like clay.  
Over there it feels like the lava it is.  
It's chunky and it's coarse,  
And you can't build a sand castle with it,  
Unless you use your baby brother as base.

Make sure the grains are slightly damp,  
And slap them around his skin like you're putting up plaster  
Some may crumble off,  
And that's okay  
Add a cowrie shell here,  
One there.

Now grab some of that stringy seaweed  
not the ropy kind  
not the kind with the thick leaves  
And beads you can't quite pop.  
Don't go looking for the kind your brother used as a jump rope,  
Or the kind you wore as a scarf last summer in Cali  
when you were teased for never bathing.  
You did bathe daily.  
The salt, the cleanser  
The ocean, your tub

And so just grab some of that fine, stringy seaweed.  
Go ahead and chew on some  
As you arrange the rest atop your mini palapa  
Your sandy heiau  
Built with your baby brother as base.  
Pour seawater over his face to keep him hydrated,  
And feed him opihi that you pry from the rocks.  
They are raw and runny, but he is hungry  
And your offer to him tastes better than candy.  
Opihi will be the trigger  
that has him returning to this moment  
When he's a man.

But for now, he lays there parched, and buried in coarse sand  
An unbathed, crusty corpse with salted spit and sea stench breath  
A willing pawn  
in your carefree ocean play

## Calico Cat Café by Mary Adler ('14)

At first he looks like any other homeless man stealing a seat in a warm café, what with the long white beard, full mustache long gone out of style, stained polo shirt, overstuffed backpack, and a banged up metal coffee cup wrapped with three fat red rubber bands. A large black cat silhouette with creepy yellow eyes stares down at him from the wall above his small wooden table.

But some things don't fit my comfortable scenario of homeless man in a café. I stare at the binder clip on the brim of his brown baseball hat, securing a white golf tee. It bobs up and down as he scrolls around furiously on his tablet computer. While his hands are tapping, his knees in their grey mechanics pants are still, but when the hands are still, the knees start tapping.

Wait, what? Tablet computer? Homeless guy? Plate with crumbs from a rather pricey scone on the table? And why the golf tee on his hat? I wonder most of all.

Maybe his brother was a golfer, semi-pro, a soldier killed in Vietnam; maybe the golf tee is a thing he carries. Maybe it's a memento of younger years, of a father lost to suicide, a brother to war, a mother who helped break the gender barrier on the Santa Barbara golf circuit. Or maybe, like a shim under a bookshelf, it just keeps his hat properly balanced.

As I focus on his words  
I realize I can't process  
all of them, something  
about how he used to  
write poetry in journals  
but that's for therapists  
and perverts.

I want to ask him, but it seems rude, an invasion of privacy, and as an opening line, not very subtle: "Excuse me, I know you're busy with that expensive tablet computer, but what the heck is that golf tee doing pinned on your cap with a binder clip? Don't you have pockets?"

I pace back and forth behind his table, pretending to wait for the bathroom, a one-room stall, which unfortunately is unoccupied.

Whoever isn't in there is taking a long time. Finally I take a breath and walk up to the man, who has never ceased tapping on the tablet, his hand moving left to right and up and down, and I ask him the only civilized, not-rude question I can think of, which is, "Excuse me, sir, but I was wondering—what are you reading on that thing?"

And I find myself staring into, drowning, even, in the bluest eyes I've ever seen—bluer than Paul Newman's—and I feel in my heart the impact of an extreme yet partial lucidity combined with a fierce and roving intelligence. All the while he is answering my question, and as I focus on the words I realize I can't process all of them, something about how he used to write poetry in journals but that's for therapists and perverts. I blink.

And I think I have passed a test there, simply by not reacting to the pervert line, because he laughs and shifts in his chair, and then he says he'll show me something on his tablet. He opens a video file. It's a movie he's made, on the summer solstice, he says, which was just last Saturday. I lean in closer to see, thinking that it's awkward with me standing up and him sitting down, and I feel like a teacher examining his work, but I can't sit down because I haven't been asked.

Over the next thirty minutes, we cover a lot of territory, like two old school friends catching up on the hundred small details that make up a life.

The movie begins with a close-up of grass, lingering on a lawn. It's sunny and green and so bright. "Look at that resolution," he says, and then the camera pans up to the clock on city hall. It's 11am. It zooms in for a closer look and then, as though the cameraman takes a fall backwards,

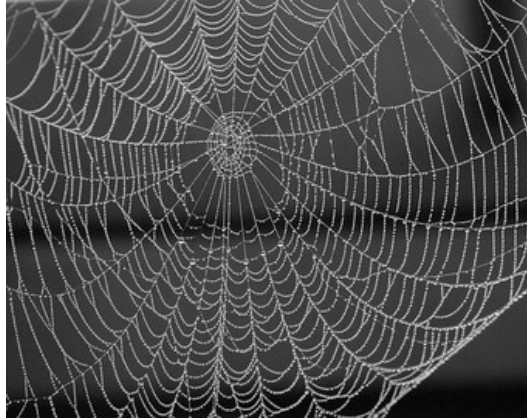
shoots straight up overhead. The sun explodes into view and I narrow my eyes, as though I am looking into an eclipse, and maybe I am.

Over the next thirty minutes, we cover a lot of territory, like two old school friends catching up on the hundred small details that make up a life. He went to Cal Poly Pomona, in 1958, majoring in Industrial Engineering. There were 5,000 students, and 200 of them were women. Now women are 45% of the college population, he tells me, and they are busy emasculating the men. Women today walk their husbands around like they're on leashes.

I can't help it. "I don't walk my husband on a leash," I say. To my surprise, he nods gently, sagaciously. I know, I know, it's a stereotype, he admits. And we move on.

We have a lengthy discussion on the increasing problem of guard stands in libraries and the joys of living outdoors. From there we move along at the speed of sound to such topics as dyslexia, syntax, artificial intelligence, rhetorical modes of communication, the Jesuits, the Anglican church—and puberty, the fake genius of Allen Ginsberg, the theories of Noam Chomsky, the indecipherable thoughts of an Indian named Mohammad, and the deconstruction of language. Words are bricks, he says. I write that down, right next to "I was a war orphan" and "Ginsberg was a faggot." Words are bricks.

I back out slowly, heavy with story, as though I'm leaving a burned out basement cocktail party after doing shots with twelve professors, a couple of jocks, a poet, two clerics, three generals, four engineers, two political dissidents and a crazy man. He gives a half smile through rotten teeth. "Next time I see you, I'll tell you my favorite dog story," he says, waving goodbye.



## Two Harbors by Gabe Arquilevich ('01)

Anchored boats rock in the cove  
as my father and I walk up the hill  
over Cat Harbor. Buffalo rest on the hillside,  
and yesterday balk eagles glided over  
as I lay on the summit dreaming I could fly.

My father ascends slowly, jokes to the seagulls  
about his busy mainland life of construction/  
He takes so much time explaining  
the center of a spider's perfect architecture  
that I forget I'm dangling in the cold wind myself,  
afraid of climbing into a job and a home.

He leads me to the summit, and I'm so glad  
to be here with him, to watch the hills  
rolling to Avalon, to have the sun  
spotlighting the Pacific  
through a broken roof of clouds.



## Unique and Valuable *by Monica Kaplan*

When I think about teaching, I think first of my mom and her life as an educator. During her years at Digueno Middle School, my mom provided her English classes with weekly positive affirmations to write about, discuss, memorize, and apply to life. When students come back to her, grown, through college, married, they don't talk to her about Atticus or the persuasive essay, but instead they express that her energy and positive affirmations have stayed with them throughout the many exciting and challenging years beyond 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Just last year, she ran into two former students, now young men, at the local Encinitas coffee shop. They greeted her, exchanged a few words, and made their way to the door, but before leaving, they both stopped, turned, "Hey, Mrs. Huston," they yelled in unison across the room. Everyone paused. "I am a unique and valuable human being."

This is her favorite affirmation to give to students. She carries it with her throughout life.

My mom is now retired from the classroom, but she'll never stop teaching.

If you visit her house, you'll see notes taped up on all of the mirrors, "I love and approve of myself exactly as I am." Or "Life is sweet and so am I." It was like this through my entire childhood, including the pink flowery note in the bathroom reading, "Please put the lid down after use...for good energy." Not an affirmation, but it adds to the picture.

Recently, I sat at her kitchen counter staring at my computer. She floated into the room having a sincere conversation with the houseplants, her dark straight hair loose and long against her Asian robe. (My mom was Chinese in a past life; she will tell you this without flinching). She came in next to me and started reading a narrative entitled, "Attitude is Everything." (Does she just keep this in her pocket for random readings?) Then she filled a silver vessel with water from her alkaline, mineral water system and fed her plants. "Filling and replenishing water is so Zen," she said.

The stickers on her water jug read *joy, love, peace, courage, strength, vitality, gratitude*, because, as she tells me, the vibrations infuse the water and become a part of you.

This image is a powerful metaphor for my mom, the teacher: nourishing her plants and gardens with love and strength, just as she does for her students and children, quietly helping beings around her to grow and flourish.

But another lesson that she models is that good teachers don't just spew positive energy, they also empower their students with valuable life skills and push them beyond their comfort zone. I can clearly recall my six-year-old self, propped up on the flannel pillows on my mom's bed, reading Roald Dahl's *Mathilda* out loud to myself. The moment I completed the book is seared into my brain because I remember feeling so proud and empowered. I had triumphantly completed my first novel all on my own. I was a competent, independent reader, which was a big deal in our house. Now, as I watch my mom read with my six-year-old niece, I realize that every single night I was reading *Mathilda*, there was a second set of eyes quietly poring over the words along with me.

When I was eleven, on our yearly summer trip to Michigan, my mom mentioned that it would be pretty cool if I tried swimming across the lake. She dragged the sun-bleached canoe to the shore and insisted on paddling by my side while I swam. When we reached the other side of the lake, I hopped in the canoe for a ride home. "Good job, honey. Wouldn't it be great if you could swim all the way back too?"

"If you find you don't love it, don't do it. Leave the profession. "

Almost seven years ago, after my first week as a real teacher, I called my mom. "This is too hard. It's crazy. Totally out of control. I can't do this for the rest of my life." I was expecting her usual encouragement. Nothing. She just listened. And listened, and listened. Then she responded, "Teaching is not for everyone. If it's

not right for you, that's okay. Give it a little time. If you find that you don't love it, don't do it. Leave the profession. And that will be okay."

My mom is now retired from the classroom, but she'll never stop teaching. There's a list of awards, accomplishments, student and colleague testimonials that say my mom is a really good teacher. She is endlessly positive, a quirky yet genuine soul. She knows her subject matter, and encourages independent readers, writers, and thinkers. She's not afraid to push people a little beyond their limits, while making sure to keep watch from a boat well stocked with life jackets.

I believe these are important qualities for a teacher, but my mom could do and be all of these things without having that intangible spark that makes people constantly pause and say, "Linda Huston is an incredible teacher." I believe a part of it is that her actions are deeply rooted in love. She understands and appreciates the importance of loving what she does. The vibrations infuse her practice.

This is why, when I struggled through the challenges of a first year teacher, rather than push me or feed me energy-laden alkaline water, she gave me a piece of advice that I keep in my pocket. "If you don't really love it, don't do it."

After finishing my sixth year of teaching, I've found that even when the terrain gets steep and rocky, and the elements oppressive, I really do love it.

Maybe it's all utterly meaningless. Maybe it's all unutterably meaningful. If you want to know which, pay attention to what it means to be truly human in a world that half the time we're in love with and half the time scares the hell out of us. Any fiction that helps us pay attention to that is religious fiction. The unexpected sound of your name on somebody's lips. The good dream. The strange coincidence. The moment that brings tears to your eyes. The person who brings life to your life. Even the smallest events hold the greatest clues.

*Frederick Buechner*

## Unanswered Prayers by Rosemary Cabe ('87)

Not all my dreams have come true  
not all my prayers have been answered  
I thought I'd be a cowboy's wife  
Step out on the screen porch and holler  
out the door, "Supper's ready, come and get it."  
Married to sort of an Atticus Finch on horseback  
a quiet man, steady and dependable  
never held late at the office  
He'd ride the plains rounding up the cattle  
plant his crops, treat the workers fairly  
A good man, respected in the community  
he'd probably call me "Mother" in front of the kids  
who'd ride their horses to school  
but no 4H--they could't bear to part with  
the calves they raised. It would be a simple life  
with a man who loved his home  
liked to sit in the easy chair by the fire  
read his paper every night after dinner  
"Time for bed, Mother," he'd say as he  
folded the paper and slapped it against his knee.  
There would be no stamps on my passport  
I'd have more kitchen aprons than suitcases  
My heart would be easy  
My life would be smooth  
Little ripples in the water  
But no tsunamis

On this day I give thanks for unanswered prayers

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