



THE SCRIBLERIAN

Fall 2007 Edition

Sponsored by the English Department and the Braithwaite Writing Center, the Scriblerian is a publication for students by students. Winners are chosen every semester in a competition open to ENGL 1010 and 2010 students. As always, the Fall 2007 contest was planned and supervised by Writing Center tutors. Chelsea Oaks chaired the event with the help of Amanda Utzman, Tim Coray, Trent Gurney, Gregory Burbank, Lauren Coleman.

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Argumentative- English 1010

1st Place Winner: Kyle Bodily, "Preparing Future Generations"

For Dr. Kurt Harris

Have you ever studied the night before a test, taken the test, and then forgotten all of it? What was the point? What was gained? How were you better after the test than you were before? How do we change this erroneous process? What students learn early in their lives in school has a very strong influence on the lifelong path they will follow, and, therefore, schools should be laboratories to mold the students' minds and solidify strengths and life interests. Education is the foundation for our prosperity individually and globally, and public education should be designed with the successful future of those being taught as the goal. Our education system should mold students to be well-rounded while it teaches them to think for themselves and be allowed to choose classes of their interest. They should be taught by teachers capable of adapting to the needs and interests of the students in ways that allow challenge, satisfaction, and growth.

Students should be knowledgeable in all the basic areas of study such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science. In these required areas of study, there should be many different classes that would fill required expectations and allow the students to learn in class settings that develop their individual aptitudes. This would allow them to actually enjoy their time in school, and, more importantly, their time learning. Of course, there must be a foundation of basic classes before moving on to more advanced classes. Students will progress a little at a time until they reach a level where they can comprehend and use what is being taught in different situations. One objective of these required fundamental areas of study is to provide a broad spectrum of possibilities from which knowledge can be gleaned and put together, creating a far superior individual than otherwise would be expected. It is a well-rounded person who knows something about many areas of study, and not everything about only one or two particular areas of study.

If students are allowed to choose the classes they want to take to fulfill a required area, they must be more proactive in their learning and cannot use an excuse that they "have to" do something because they chose to take the class. They will be more involved in something that they chose to do than in something that someone else decided for them. As was previously stated, there must be fundamental skills instilled from previous years in school. Age must also be taken into account since most eighth grade students cannot handle advanced calculus. There must be time and preparation to handle these classes, which will teach the students to plan for their own futures, make their own goals, and be accountable for their own successes or failures; these skills are essential for success in any sphere of life.

I remember being in sixth grade and being told that each student would meet with a teacher and talk about future careers plans. I wanted to be a computer programmer. Although I knew almost nothing about the job at the time, making games sounded fun to me, and I wanted to pursue it. For the next three years, I was still determined that I was going to be a computer programmer. I did not have any classes about it or really any instruction about what it involved. I wandered blindly through the subsequent three years, without a plan or preparation, and there was nothing else to dissuade me from my course. Finally, in my sophomore year of high school, I enrolled in a computer programming class. Although I enjoyed it, I started questioning whether or not I really wanted to do that for the rest of my

life. It was not until I had taken a drafting and architecture class that I realized where my true interests lie. Had I had the opportunity earlier in my schooling to become familiar with these different opportunities, I would have been more prepared and had better goals in place concerning where to go in my schooling. If students are allowed more class options, they will be able to experiment until they find what they really enjoy and will gain many other skills along the way to broaden their knowledge of the world and how things work.

In each of these classes the students must be guided by a teacher capable of adapting to the students' needs and interests. Doing this provides more incentive for students to actually learn. Many times this presents a problem because of the large number of students in the class and the students' levels of ability. Some will learn faster, and some will learn slower. Many teachers just are not ready to cope with such differences. Dr. Ray Thompson of BYU Hawaii suggests that "The easiest solution would be to cut our classroom numbers down That would free up the teacher a lot more to seek out that kid that is having trouble learning." The difficulty with this idea is the necessity to hire more teachers, which means more money. If this money cannot be found, increased training for the teachers on how to deal effectively with both high and low level learners in a large class should be considered. When teachers cannot teach effectively to all students, and they therefore focus on the average students, the higher level learners may become bored and create difficulties for the rest of the class, while the lower level learners will just fall behind.

Paulo Freire, speaking of thoughtless learning, stated, "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (320). The time a student has in the public school system is a time to shape how that student will see and interact with the world. If the student is not applying things that are being taught, they are of no use. It will be dead information. Without the ability to think critically and come to conclusions about how to make the world a better place, the student may as well have been asleep in class, for the knowledge will be of no use to him or the world. But how does a teacher teach critical thinking to a student? The answer lies in how the problems are presented in the classroom. Is the student being taught two plus two is four? Or is the student being taught two dollars plus two dollars is four dollars? The difference is real life application. When students can see how the things they are learning pertain to their lives, they make more connections and will not just shut off their brain. The workforce into which these students will enter needs this type of application. The world needs critical thinkers. Gordon Ambach, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, warns that "The attainment of basic skills in math and language is no longer sufficient for productive employment" (qtd. in Clark). There must be a change in the way students learn if the rising generations are to continue the progress we presently experience.

At BYU Hawaii, many teachers use a grading rubric instead of the standard letter grades. This grading rubric has three areas: unacceptable, acceptable, and exemplary (Thompson). Using this method, the students are not subjected to comparison with other students, but a comparison with the students' own efforts. This approach allows the students to see where they are and to improve at their own pace without worrying about how the other students are doing and how they may be looked at as a slower learner. Thus they learn to progress, not just accept their current state, but to better themselves bit by bit until they achieve acceptable or even exemplary status. This also eliminates much of the anxiety that students feel before tests or major assignments by knowing that the only person to beat is themselves, for this is the true measure of a successful education: being better today than they were yesterday.

Another necessity is a change in the evaluation process, or testing. Monty Neill, executive director of Fair Test, points out that "Looking at the actual work that kids do in school ought to be the central part of an accountability measure" (Jost). Cramming the night before a test and then forgetting everything after the test is taken is of no use to anyone. The test scores will inaccurately represent what students are learning because if they were to be tested again after two weeks, they most likely would not remember any of what they had supposedly learned. Dr. Thompson proposes the use of cooperative learning. Instead of just sitting at a desk "regurgitating facts," the students form groups in which they will do a project based on what they are learning in the class, and applying those things in a real-life model. This project would be a summary of all that was learned and would take the place of the final exam. All members of the group will receive the same grade and therefore must participate or the other members of the group will drop them. This not only overcomes the fear and anxiety of taking a test, but also teaches other important life skills of leadership, communication, teamwork, accountability to the group, work, and many others. Not only are they learning the material in a way that is more involved, they are also teaching each other. Those students who are higher level learners will help the lower level learners. The need for night-before-the-test cram sessions are also done away with because these projects will require much more thought, time, planning, and preparation.

The question is, "How will this change come about?" For a start, each individual teacher can apply these principles in the classroom. Students and parents can petition their local and state representatives for a change in teaching methods. School administrators can make changes in their schools and talk to superiors about talking to government representatives. As those in power see the desire of those truly involved in education, and see answers to the problems, new methods and practices will be implemented. The public school system will be strengthened. The rising generations will be stronger and more prepared for the world that they are entering, and they will become valuable assets in the workplace and in furthering the greatness of our society.

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2nd Place Winner: Danielle Josephson, "On Top of the World"
For Dr. Bryce Christensen

To anyone who feels the pressures and frustrations that come with living everyday life, running can be the ultimate stress reliever. It is through running that one can remove him or herself from this hectic world for a small moment and feel the complete relaxation of body and mind. To some, running means competition. To some, it means exercise. But to others, like me, running means that for a short time, we can run away from our problems, and when we return they are no longer as big as we made them out to be. The ideal leisure runner is one who can clear her mind, relax her body, and find the renewed strength that comes with running.

My mother is the perfect example of the ideal leisure runner. She has been running every morning for the past 24 years. She started running after having her fourth child, and at first running started out as a form of exercise to keep her in shape. The more she ran, the more she saw it as a way to clear her mind and find solutions to the problems that come with being a mother. Every mother needs time for herself. Whether it is scrap booking or going for a jog, mothers just need a small portion of the day to get out of the house and escape their crazy lives. Between juggling a husband, seven children, and nine grandchildren, my mom's life can get pretty stressful. You can now see why my mom took the time every morning to go out and just run. As soon as she starts to run, she is so good at just letting her mind go completely blank and allowing herself to leave all her problems behind her. She is no longer thinking of her moody teenage daughter, the pile of bills on the counter, the dirty dishes in the sink, or her husband who won't clean up after himself; all of these things are left back at the house. While she runs, without the distractions she is faced with at home, her mind is allowed to ponder on the things that are important to her, and the things that make her happy. When she then returns back home, hoping the house is not engulfed in flames, her mind is sharper than ever, and she is able to logically think out solutions to her once overwhelming problems.

The ideal leisure runner is one who cannot only clear her mind, but she can also relax her body. Unlike leisure runners, competitive runners never let their bodies relax. These competitive runners, like the legendary Steve Prefontaine, who at the peak of his career held every American long distance track record, and Dean Karnazes, the Ultra Marathon Man, who recently completed 50 marathons in 50 states in 50 consecutive days, are always pushing their bodies to move a little faster, and to go a little further. They are constantly pushing themselves to catch up to a certain person, or beat a certain time. They compete to become the best and not to just relax. Runners that compete rarely give their bodies rest. They are always involved in intense training. The ideal leisure runner doesn't force her body to run, she runs because she wants to. She sets a steady, comfortable pace and allows her body to relax. She doesn't force her body in any direction and allows it to create a flow that is easy on the body. She doesn't put any strain or pressure on her body. As she begins to run, she allows every muscle in her body to loosen, and she can literally feel the pressures of life, which feel like a ton of bricks crushing her body, slowly being removed. The longer she runs, the more relaxed her body feels. It gets to a point that her body is so relaxed that she no longer has to tell her legs to move; they keep moving on their own. One foot follows the other without her having to think about them. Her body is relaxed, and now she can build up the strength she needs to conquer the remainder of the day.

Along with running comes a renewed sense of strength. The ideal leisure runner is one who can recognize that renewed strength. She allows her weakness to leave her body as she runs. She can feel both her body and mind gaining strength. Because of this characteristic, I believe that I am the ideal leisure runner.

I love to run because I know that when I get back from running I am a stronger person than I was when I left. I have the strength to accomplish what I need to that day. Especially since coming to college, my life has gotten pretty crazy, and I need that renewed feeling of strength everyday so I don't explode from the inside out. When I feel like I am so overwhelmed with homework that I am going to be crushed beneath my load, and I feel like I am never going to get things done, I just put on my running shoes, and I run. I run and run and run, until I am no longer thinking of my entire workload at once, and I feel that I have the strength to conquer that pile of homework one page at a time. While running, I can feel weakness leaving my body like Heinz Ketchup being poured out of the glass bottle. Slowly but surely, I feel the weakness making its way out of my body and strength replacing it. The longer I run, the stronger I feel. I can recall many times in high school when I just got so frustrated with my friends, my family, my job, and my school work that I didn't think I could make it through the day. During those times I would make it a priority to go running. When I would return from running, I had felt that I had the strength to make it through the week until I could go running again the next day. As I run, I feel invincible, like no one on earth can catch me that I can accomplish any thing, or overcome an obstacle that is placed in my way. This is a feeling that, for me, can only come from running.

To become the ideal leisure runner you must be able to clear your mind by allowing yourself to leave your problems behind, relax your body by creating a rhythm, and allowing your body to go with the flow, and discover the renewed strength that comes with running. To the ideal leisure runner, running brings a natural high and is the ultimate stress reliever. Running is the one thing that can make the ideal leisure runner feel like she is on top of the world.

Expressive- English 1010

1st Place Winner: Brandon Romero, "Action Packed"

For Dr. Kurt Harris

It sounded like an avalanche. My vision was blocked by a wall of solid white. The wind was howling like a giant pack of wolves. Trees were snapping like twigs all around. I had never felt the icy grip of fear like this in my entire life. I suddenly was struck by an almost unbearable wave of pain coming from the side of my head. My hand instinctively darted to the origin of the pain and immediately was stained crimson. Then, everything went black.

I had met a few people from Utah--Kendell, Cameron, Alyssa, and Kate--on a school trip to California a few years ago and had instantly bonded with them due to our mutual love of snowboarding. We had become good friends on the trip and since then had been snowboarding together every year. This year's trip was going to be exciting. It was the first trip we had planned out of the state of Utah. We researched extensively for good snowboarding areas in the western United States and found the perfect place. The mountains in northern New Mexico were not crowded like Brianhead or Park City and had excellent snowfall. It was my last Winter Break of high school and my grandma had recently bought me brand new equipment, which was ready to go at my front door. Kendell was driving down to Vegas and was going to be arriving at my house in a few minutes. We were going to meet Cameron, Alyssa, and Kate in a small town called Chama, which was fairly close to the mountains. After what seemed like an eternity, I finally heard a knock on my door. Kendell greeted me with his usual "What's up?" and started helping me put my gear into his car. I then bade my family farewell, kissed my girlfriend goodbye and we were on our way.

"So, you know where you're going?" I asked Kendell as we drove down the freeway.

"Oh, you know I do," he replied with one of his many comedic remarks.

"So, is this trip going to be pretty action packed?" I inquired.

"Oh, you know it is."

"Shut up," I said with a chuckle.

We talked about everything from snowboarding to baseball to college for a few hours, but the drive was pretty boring, and I soon fell asleep. I woke up, and it was dark outside. I glanced at the clock and realized I had been sleeping for four hours. Kendell had a worried expression on his face, and snow was falling violently outside.

"I think we're lost, man," Kendell said as he struggled to see through the torrential snowfall.

"How long have we been lost?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "I thought we were on the right road, but I haven't seen anything for the last few hours. We should have passed a couple of towns by now."

"Well, do you have any idea where we are?" I asked.

"I think I might have turned off on the wrong road. If we're anywhere I think we might be in southern Colorado. Oh yeah, I might have a road atlas, check in my glove compartment right there," he said as he glanced over at me.

Suddenly, Kendell slammed on the brakes and swerved hard. Every muscle in my body contracted as I looked up to see a fallen tree blocking the road. The agonizing sound of metal being crushed roared in my ears as the left end of the car smashed against the toppled pine trunk. It sounded like an avalanche. The car flipped off the side of the road and down a small hill dotted with aspen trees. I could not see anything; my vision was obstructed by a wall of solid white. We first hit two small trees, which snapped; we rolled over, and hit a much larger tree. The latter brought the vehicle to an abrupt halt. The force of the collision with the second tree caused the side of my head to slam against the window, which immediately triggered an excruciating bolt of pain to seemingly stab through my entire skull. My hand instantaneously shot to the point of contact on my head. I looked at my hand, which was covered in my own blood, and everything went dark.

The freezing cold woke me up. Light snowfall was sprinkling through my cracked open window. There was a faint light outside. The sun would be rising soon. The car had landed sideways with my side in the air. My head was pounding with the worst headache I had ever felt in my life. Remembering what happened, I looked over at Kendell, expecting the worst, and let out a gasp of horror. His head was resting on a severely cracked window. He must have slammed his head, also. Blood was splattered all over the window as well as his shirt.

"There's no way this is actually happening," I thought to myself.

I let out a sigh of relief as I saw his chest expand slightly. He was still alive, but unconscious. The cut on his head must have only been superficial. I remember my brother getting a similar injury, and they look a lot worse than they really are. I sat still for a few more minutes, contemplating what I should do next. I decided I probably should get out of the car first. I cranked the handle on the door to open the window. Next, I pressed my legs against the dashboard so I could stay in place when I unbuckled my seatbelt. I pressed the button on the buckle, and the belt released. I then grabbed the edges of the window frame, and my badly bruised shoulder protested in agony as I slowly pulled myself out of the wreckage. I dropped off of the side of the car and sank into about eighteen inches of snow on the ground. I realized how lucky we were to be alive as I looked around at the outcrop of large rocks we had landed right in the middle of. This was going to be a long day.

I walked around the car and saw that the trunk had popped open. Our snowboarding equipment was scattered everywhere. I found my backpack and rummaged through it for a moment and finally found what I was searching for--a small bottle of ibuprofen in case of a snowboard wreck. I silently thanked my mom and girlfriend for packing me a first aid kit. I started gathering all of the bags together in a pile next to the car. After I was done, I removed the first aid kit from my bag and took it with me as I climbed back into the car. I carefully balanced inside the car around Kendell's body. I took the gauze out and carefully wrapped his lifeless head. The dressing was rudimentary, but it would do for now. Afterwards, I climbed back out of the car and collected all of Kendell's snow clothing and most of my own. I threw them into the car and got back in. I then wrapped him in the clothing to the best of my ability and propped his head up with a rolled up t-shirt. I exited the car and began the hike back up the hill.

The hill was fairly steep, and under normal circumstances would be a moderately easy hike, but with the deep snow and bitter cold, the difficulty was increased by tenfold. After about twenty-five minutes, I had made it halfway up the hill. The snow started falling harder, and the wind picked up. Another blizzard was on the way. I did my best to ignore the razor blades of pain cutting every inch of my body and pushed myself up the hill as fast as I could make myself move. I finally got to the top and took a second to catch a much-needed breath. I looked to the left and silently cursed the tree that was the cause of this series of events. I remembered Kendell telling me that we had not passed anything in quite some time from the way we came, and decided to head in the opposite direction. I set off at a jog, as desperate to warm myself up as I was to find any sign of humanity.

I stopped after about a half-hour. Each breath I took fed the fire that was burning in my lungs. I sat down on a boulder on the side of the road, feeling completely desolate. Thoughts of never seeing my friends, family, or girlfriend again poisoned my mind, when I heard something--a barely audible rumble of some sort. I held my breath and focused all my energy on listening to my surroundings, hoping that I did not imagine the sound. All I heard for a few minutes was the gentle tapping of snowflakes on my jacket, when I heard it again. It was coming from up the road, the direction that I was going before. I speedily stood up and started running up the road with renewed vigor. The noise got louder with every step I took. My legs and lungs were begging me to stop, but I pushed on, and eventually saw a blurry shape through the snow. I set off at a sprint. I had never felt fatigue punish my body like this before, but I exerted myself harder than I ever had. I yelled. An undistinguishable yelp of desperation was all that escaped my lips. I heard an answer. I do not know what was said, but it was the best sound that had ever greeted my ears. I stumbled to the side of the snowplow and collapsed. The driver put the vehicle in park and helped me up. It was the happiest I had felt in days.

Kendell was treated for a concussion and some cuts and bruises. He would make a full recovery. We could not thank the snowplow driver enough. I do not know what would happen to us if I did not run into him. The next town was 12 miles down the road from where I was. We had to reschedule the trip for the next year, and when we finally made it to the mountain, it was just as action packed as Kendell said it would be.

Throughout my life, I have always been taught to never give up. In school, sports, and just life in general, I was told that quitters do not make it anywhere. I have tried to apply this philosophy to everything I do. It now not only has saved my pride, but also has saved my life, and possibly the life of one of my best friends. It is not often that you find yourself in a situation where your determination is the only tool you have. Thankfully, it was the only tool I needed.

2nd Place Winner: Amanda Kapcsos, "Hollywood Sweethearts"
For Professor Alice Kane

The make-up caked, the actors drilled, the stage set, and the adrenaline illegally high; this is the theatre. I came bounding onto the stage my sophomore year at Tuacahn High School and haven't been able to get enough of theatre arts since. However, the life and times of the actor isn't the fairytale so many Hollywood sweethearts make it out to be. What goes on backstage and what the audience sees are two very different things.

Acting is like a rollercoaster. It takes you through the twists and turns of rehearsal. The climbs of auditions and job hunting at times makes you feel like you'll hit rock bottom. It tests your limits, sometimes flipping you upside down. All the while, the butterflies in your stomach encourage you to reach for the stars. Some people can't wait to jump off the fast paced ride. While others, including myself, jump right back in line. A show I performed last year illustrates this.

Thirty-eight students had been drilling Les Miserable for hours on end until this moment. It was time to perform after only three weeks of rehearsal. I stood in the wings waiting for my entrance; feeling tired and yet having an energy coursing through my veins that always lured me back to the stage. From eight in the morning until six, sometimes seven, in the evening, the cast hashed and re-hashed the Broadway masterpiece. When we weren't working on scenes in the show, we were working on set pieces because we were also our own stage crew. As for me, I had to maintain a part time job four to five nights a week to pay for simple necessities. I had never done anything this intense before, and the effects became obvious after the second week of rehearsal.

I heard the queue that signaled my entrance into the world I had so vividly created. I was in a dirty French factory. My bones ached, the pneumonia in my lungs had spread because I had no means for a doctor, and I hated life. The faces in the audience seemed like phantoms waiting for their moment to strike. People I didn't know and would probably never meet held the power to accept or reject everything my colleagues and I worked so hard to accomplish. One quick change and I was back on stage; this time in the body and mind of someone completely different. Now, I was a disease-stricken whore desperate for any gentleman, sailor, or vagabond with enough change in their pockets to steal after they drunkenly dozed off. The girl singing next to me wasn't a friend and the fellow actress I had laughed with only hours ago; she was stealing my part of the dock.

Finally, I get a moment backstage to breathe. The crowd seemed to be captivated; we were winning this one night stand. I found time to joke around with a friend backstage while the character on stage went to her death like she would dozens of more times before her next birthday. The sleep that had once invaded my body was gone. I had drilled my guts out for three weeks and wasn't about to let some silly thing like rest stand in the way of a flawless performance.

By the final bow, I felt as happy as a fat kid with cake. There wasn't a single audience member sitting. We had triumphed with no casualties...at least for tonight. We had another 36 shows before we could go back to probing through ads for more auditions in low end productions.

I made my way to the dressing room with a euphoric feeling. The costumes I had thrown off in a rush got neatly placed back in their appropriate places. The make-up that had taken me a good hour and a

half to apply was scrubbed off using several baby wipes and a load of astringent. I was finally ready for that date with sleep that I kept on canceling for my love affair with acting.

The next day, after my make-up and hair were masterfully put together, I made my way to an empty stage. The dark set pieces loomed behind me. The seats were empty except for two. I imagined my dad and step-mom sitting there with expressionless faces. Would this be something else they could use against me for choosing such a humiliating profession?

"Why don't you become a doctor?" I can hear her nag, "That's a respectable job." Then there's dear old Dad, his tone mocking, "The theatre is a fine goal. Just don't be surprised if you have to give it up for a real job." I had come to expect half-ass support. They had their points, and I had mine. My contemporaries began to file in to get their notes from the director. "Good show," she remarks, "but..."

How can there be a 'but,' I thought. We did spectacular. The audience loved us. "But, the third entrance was a little slow. The volume during the finale needs to be much louder, and you really need to die tonight." For 36 more shows we had audiences on their feet cheering with elation, and for 36 reviews after, we had something we could have done better... directors!

At first glance, you might think acting is just a fun little hobby done by recitative quacks. But anyone who acts for the love of acting knows there's so much more required. They know the rollercoaster looks exciting, but they also know what endurance it takes to step in line and finish the ride. The spotlight flaunts the character, but it's in the dark wings practicing, stressing, aching, and believing where the actor really is.

Argumentative- English 2010

1st Place Winner: Megan O'Hanlon, "Abandoned or Embraced?"

For Professor Edward McNicoll

"People from all levels of society read Westerns," wrote author and Western lover Jane Tompkins. "In one way or another, Westerns . . . have touched the lives of virtually everyone They carry within them compacted worlds of meaning and value, codes of conduct, standards of judgment, and habits of perception that shape our sense of the world and govern our behavior without our having the slightest awareness of it" (6-7). If this is true, the lives of most Americans have been shaped by the myth of the old West. Some historians question whether or not this influence has been beneficial. They question if there are any good lessons and values embedded in the myth. They also wonder if perhaps some parts of the myth are outdated and potentially harmful. Therefore, they have asked if the Western myth should be abandoned altogether.

Well, I agree with President Ronald Reagan when he said, "If we understand this part of our history, we will better understand how our people see themselves and the hopes they have for America" (qtd. in Murdoch 1). So, I say no, we should not abandon it. It is our past, our mistakes, our victories. With a few tweaks and adjustments, the Western myth is what embodies the characteristics, values, and lessons that make us the Americans we are today.

Many stories of the old West offer valuable lessons that can still be applied today. Some stories are full of trials, hardships, and disappointments. Stories like these show that faith, perseverance, and hope can go a long way: "Carrion Spring" by Wallace Stegner, for example. At the verge of giving up after losing everything, a young couple instead chose to grasp onto the smallest inkling of hope. They have some small hope that they can start again and make it work in the West. The couple expressed their hope: "We're never goin[g] to have another chance like this as long as we live. . . And we can sit out here . . . with good hay land and good range and just make this God darned country holler uncle" (161). Some historians would say that these stories just show how many failures there really were, and how disappointing the West was. However, everyone goes through hardships and disappointments, and I believe it is good that we can look to our past to find some encouragement and hope when we find ourselves at a cross-road or up against opposition.

Similarly, there are stories telling of taking risks and standing up for what is right. For example, "We Shaped the Land with Our Guns" by Louis L'Amour tells the story of two partners who traveled far and worked hard to start a homestead. They took a chance opposing the powerful, but criminal, men who ran the town. In the end, their bravery and courage prevailed. Now, with this type of story a historian might point out the over-dramatics and exaggerations, summing it all up to another story encouraging violence. Yet they dismiss the important values and themes embodied in the story. Yes, they may have resorted to the use of guns, but it was their courage and willingness to stand up for justice that should be taken into account. These are characteristics that are exemplified in heroes of the West over and over again, and I say these traits are definitely worth keeping around today. Also worth keeping are lessons of community cooperation, individualism, and democratic integrity shown in Western myth.

Unfortunately, the myth does need a few adjustments concerning some outdated and potentially harmful ideas. Violence, for example, is littered all throughout the Westerns. Violence is used to solve disputes, carry out justice, and even just for pure entertainment. They had shoot-outs in the streets, fights in the saloons, and all-out civil wars between rivals. As one historian puts it, "The Western is a story as ancient as warfare, about solving problems with violence, the great simple solution" (Kittredge xix). Violence will always be a part of life, but it does not need to be used so excessively today. In the old West they did not have a very strong justice system, and the people took the law into their own hands. In America today, we have a much stricter government and many more resources to help diminish the prevalence of violence.

Racism is another aspect of the old West that is outdated and harmful. The treatment of the Native Americans during that time was especially despicable. One historian explains the roles of Indians in the old West:

By the time [the Indian] had stopped oscillating between the roles of noble savage and fiendish redskin which public opinion had assigned him, he had become dehumanized. Much of the story presents the Indian as alien, implacable and irredeemable, an aspect (perhaps the most fearsome aspect) of the untamed land to be conquered by the march of progress. (Murdoch 9)

This is a sad fact of American history, but the worst part is that they were treated as "less than human." Blood Meridian by Cormac McCarthy tells the story of a group of white bounty hunters who brutally massacred a village of Indians just for money. Journalist Jim Stiles also discusses the horrible treatment of the Native Americans. "We could not see the value in a way of life that didn't mirror our own," Stiles explained, "and so Americans chose to destroy it, by any means possible" (13). Fortunately, this is one mistake from our past that we can and have learned from. This is not the attitude most have toward Native Americans in today's society. Now, we believe that they should be treated as equals, and that they should be respected as such.

Not only were there ethnic clashes involving the Native Americans, but also the Chinese, Japanese, Hispanics, and European immigrants. Some of these people were even left out of the Western myth altogether, when in reality they all played a part in America's past. For example, "White fears of Chinese job competition inspired the West's virulent anti-Chinese movement" (Brown 417). There was also conflict between Indians and Hispanics, and Hispanics, Whites and Europeans (Brown 416- 18). Most of these conflicts led to more violence, riots, and massacres. We definitely do not want these actions and attitude to continue today.

Another outdated tradition of the Western myth is sexism. Women were just stuck in the background most of the time. They were usually bound to their gender roles, and these roles were seen as almost meaningless. "That the qualities devalued here are associated with women," explains Jane Tompkins, "is essential to the way Westerns operate as far as gender is concerned" (14). The roles of women in America now are taken much more seriously. They can still be doing some of the same things they did in the old West, like taking care of the home and doing the shopping, but the everyday things women do are more valued today. Not only are the simple things they do more valued, but the tasks some women accomplish as individuals are highly valued as well. The attitude toward women today is much like that toward the Native Americans, that they should be treated as equals and given more important roles in society.

For all the bad, there is much more good in the Western myth, and it should never be abandoned. It is part of our history, and just like any other part of history, we need to examine and learn from it. I am not completely convinced by some historians that the old Western myth cannot offer some good influences on our society. Granted, there are parts of the myth that could use a make-over or an update. Yet, we can learn just as much from the mistakes of the past as we can from the successes. We all have different interpretations of the Western myth. These interpretations give us a different perspective on life issues. This is what makes our country so diverse and unique. So, instead of abandoning the Western myth, we should embrace it as an essential part of our American culture.

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Expressive- English 2010

1st Place Winner: Thy Vu, "Mind, Awakened"

For Dr. Julie Simon

"Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears."

- Audre Lorde

Inspired by my thoughts, experiences, ideas, and memories, the collection of poems and stories that decorate the following pages are the precious elements of my mind. My work here is to explain the substance that lies within the mind, and to describe to you what questions, ideas, and thoughts provoke the activity of the mind. Hopefully, when you have finished reading and analyzing my collection, a little questioning will enter your system, and my goal of describing to you what makes up the mind will be reached.

Our minds begin as a shade of white; simple and pure. Day after day, our minds are filled with observations, ideas, thoughts, and questions. Each of these have a face, and that face is a color... the more vibrant the color, the more profound the thought. The smaller ideas and everyday observations still have a face, but the face is just a hue of color... not as profound, not as vibrant and vivid, but of course, that aspect is still of the mind. Similar to a rainbow, vibrant colors and dimmer hues lie within the mind, and no matter how vivid, all are just as valid. Knowledge has contrasting areas, some shady ones, and a few blended and even blurry ones... just like colors. It all depends on the eye of the beholder to understand an idea, and that idea will then process into the mind with a face, a face to be recognized further along the way if needed again. The understanding of ideas and being open to learn will help a person achieve the ultimate goal of having a colorful mind, which will help a person achieve a certain beauty: love, life, and growth.

My pieces in this collection will each be presented with a face, and of course, that face will be a color. Fill your mind with questions as you read on, trying to figure out what Red may mean to me, or Green or Violet. I start off the collection with a piece about a comfort food that I grew up with, simply because it explains a lot about my past and why I am who I am today. Another piece that I chose to include is a piece that captures my memories as a child, and again explains the reasons for my attachments now. I also chose to include a couple excerpts from my journal. Intrigue yourself, and fill your mind with ideas of your own. My work here is to describe to you what makes up a mind. Don't be afraid to explore the unknown. Too many of us fear the truth, and fear the power of the mind. The mind of one person has the power to stir the hearts of society, and to fear that kind of power is to suppress the one thing that should be most cherished. Explore your mind and discover the colors that make your mind beautiful. The only mind I can explain to you is my own, and I may be the face of one of your fears because of the plethora of colors that make up my mind, but if your mind is filled with more color by the time you are finished exploring my mind, then my work here is done.

Red

The dinner table was never without the rice bowl centerpiece. Rice was a staple... a necessity. White grains, softened just enough to ease our chewing capability, but not too soft where it was more like a mashed potato dish. Rice kept our stomachs full on the days where we couldn't decorate the plain white

grains with other foods and seasonings due to a lack of grocery money. Although I understood the reason for our plain dinners was due to being poor, I was never melancholy. Digging my chopsticks within the many grains of rice was never an empty feeling, no matter how simple the rice really was. I was always satisfied, never disappointed. There were times when we had stir fry vegetables, seasoned to perfection, line the edges of our bowls. Rice was the perfect complement to anything. If done properly, rice can be turned into a dessert, or eaten plain with some soy sauce, made into a soup, and even turned into the infamous fried rice.

Pink

"Will you set the table? Napkins, chopsticks, and the small bowls." Of course I will. I always set the table. I always do what my parents ask. Setting each bowl down on the placemats to the rhythm of the growls in my stomach was always my favorite chore to do. It was a melody, pleasant to my mind, and satisfying to my stomach, for my stomach knew it was about to be fed. I walk over to the kitchen counter, and carefully place my small hands on either side of the large rice bowl, and carry it over to the dining room table, placing it gently in the center, where all our anxious hands can reach. "Thank you, Thy. We aren't having any legumes tonight, just soy sauce, okay? But I have a Popsicle for you in the freezer for after dinner." My mom always knew how to keep me happy. My mom always knew the smallest things would keep me satisfied. My brother and I always had a deeper appreciation for the smaller things in life, simply for the reason that we didn't have much. We cherished our books, and our colored pencils and paints. We never whined and yearned for more food, or asked for anything significant. We were simple.

Orange

I always like my big brother's room
 best
 Late at night you can draw
 and paint
 and color
 and not worry about making a mess
 on the floor
 and watch old movies
 and stay up late and not worry
 about Mom and Dad getting mad
 When it is thundering outside
 you can hide
 and feel safe
 and be warm
 and be happy
 all the time
 even when Mom and Dad get mad
 because we can play video games
 and eat candy
 and cookies
 Even when we are tired

we dream
and we are warm

Orange – Yellow

Growing up ten years apart from my brother was not an ideal situation for me as a child. My memories of summer nights were always filled with the events that took place in his room. I always missed him during the day because he had a job and spent time with his friends. The time we spent together was always late at night when he would first step foot into the house. I would run downstairs into the basement with excitement glittering in my small beady eyes. My brother's room served as a safe place for me because the room was filled with familiarity, and warmth that exuded from his heart.

Being an artist, my brother had every ideal art medium that I could dream of. I would create segments of my dreams alongside my best friend: my brother. He encouraged my creativity and never made me feel inferior. I always felt ten years older when I was with him. My parents would never be upset about my staying up late with my brother, so it was a worry far from my mind. There were never worries in my mind when I was in that magnificent room.

If I ever felt fear, pain, or sadness, I would flee to my brother's room even when he wasn't there. I could sense my brother in every aspect of his room, and that alone, calmed my nerves. I always felt safe there; never out of place or not welcome. When it rained outside and the thunder clapped near my upstairs bedroom window, I would quickly flee downstairs and take refuge under the covers of my brother's bed. I was always happy there. I did whatever I wanted, laughed as loud as wanted and felt warm... just like I wanted.

There was never a moment that I didn't enjoy in that room. A sense of security overwhelmed my soul, and when my brother and I would grow tired our adventures would never come to a cease. We would lie together, and he would tell me stories until I fell into a nearly lucid dream. I was warm. I was always warm.

Yellow – Orange

My mind numbed as my hands reached. It used to be enough. My eyes cloud up as the fog of your breath settles in. I tried so hard to keep you out... the drops seep in, the drops seep in. After a moment, a haze comes through... pains my sight, and pains my soul. The haze is thick. The haze is brutal. It spoils my world and the substance within it. The deafening haze finds a deep way through, and takes grasp of my breath. The grip is unbearable. I withstand it for only so long. The effluvial possession of my life is on fire. The timbers within my world fall. All that is left of an engaging, serendipitous, galactic whole is now a pile of forgotten ashes. The wind will come, and none will remember. The wind will come, and none will care. The emotions that stir within the heart take tide as the ocean loses its sunshine and regains its mischievous moon. Pulsate. Pulsate. Pulsate.

Yellow

I want this, everyone else has this. "Do you have to be like everyone else?" I guess not. "Don't eat that, it's fattening." I won't. "Have you exercised today? What did you do? Did you run? Do crunches?" Yes, you asked me already. "Remember to eat more vegetables." I know. "You know, I love you." I love you too. "Don't date just one person, date a lot of people." That's not my style. "Don't do that, nobody else

would." I thought you didn't want me to be like everyone else. "Drink more water, it flushes your system. Be aware of sodium, it makes you retain water. Don't eat anything fattening." I do drink a lot of water, I am aware of sodium, and I never eat anything fattening. "If you don't keep thin, nobody will want you to model anymore." I am aware of this. "You better get good grades." I do. "You don't try hard enough, otherwise you'd do better." I'm sorry. "How much water have you drunk today?" Haven't we talked about this already? "College isn't easy like high school, you need to try harder. It's a lot different." I know. I'm the one that is attending, not you. "How many hours are you working a week?" I work enough hours to get me by. "You need to work more because you spend a lot." I don't spend half as much as the other people I know. "Oh so you're like everyone else?" I guess not. "You care too much about your appearance. You care too much about what other people think." It's a curse. "You need to study more. Remember to drink more water and eat healthy. Have you taken all your vitamins today?" I do drink water. I do eat healthy. I have taken all my vitamins today. "You live on your own now so I'm not around to remind you to do all these things." Thank God. "What do you spend all your money on?" Why does it matter? "You live on your own now, you need to save and spend wisely." I know this. I know all of this. "How many hours do you work in a week?" I work as much as I can. "You shouldn't work too much, you won't have time to study and your grades will show for it." I thought you wanted me to work more. "You know, I love you." I love you too. "I didn't notice you working out this morning." You weren't home when I was working out." I don't believe you." You never do. "Drive safely and don't talk to strangers." I never talk to strangers. I never have. "Why can't you just listen to me without arguing?" I listen too much. "Have you done your homework yet?" Yes, I did it earlier. "Wake up, why do you sleep all day?" I am exhausted. I am tired of everything. "What do you do to be tired? You don't do anything." Of course you'd think that. "Why don't you eat?" I'm not hungry. "Eat some food, you're too skinny." I'm not hungry. "Have you practiced piano yet today?" I practice every day. "Play your scales and your major and minor chords. You have a competition coming up, and you need to do well." I win every year. I practice every day. I know my scales and chords. "There is always more practice to be done." You're trying to live your dream through me. "Why didn't you finish your dinner?" I'm not hungry. "Don't starve yourself just because you have a photo shoot." Just leave me alone. Let me be. "Have you done your homework yet?" I do my homework every day. You don't have to remind me. You always remind me of things I have already done. "I love you very much." I love you too. "Why do you read all day? Why don't you do something active?" You wouldn't understand. Reading is my escape. "Why don't you go hang out with friends more often?" I stay here, for you. "High school is your chance to spend time with friends. There won't be time for that in college." I don't want to do anything. Nobody is interesting. I would rather read. "You need to eat more. You are too thin. People will think you are malnourished and that I don't take care of you." Who cares what people think? "Have you done your homework?" No. I want to hang out with my friends today. "If you don't get into good study habits, high school will be hard for you." My classes are easy. I don't have anything to do. "You don't study enough. You won't do well in high school, and if you don't do well in high school you will never get into college." I'm smart. I will do well in high school, and I will get into college. "You won't if you don't study and do your homework." Don't worry. I'll be fine. "Will you help me with the dishes?" Of course! "Will you mop the floors?" Yes. "Help us with the cleaning and then you can go out and play." It's a deal! "Have you practiced piano yet?" No, I don't want to. I hate the piano. I want to quit. "You'll regret it if you quit. Practice piano every day." Fine, I won't argue with you. "If you don't practice you'll never be good. I want you to be able to play certain things by the time you're 16. They are very advanced. I want you to be able to do it."

I'll practice if I can go play with my friends afterwards. "Is that all you care about? Playing?" I'm a kid. What else am I supposed to care about?

Light Green

Paper airplanes never know where they are headed, but never care. Each fold in a paper airplane is much different than the last... making each and every airplane unique in itself. Paper airplanes can go anywhere, reach anything, see any sight and not be afraid. I am a paper airplane. Carefully put together by the hands of those who love me, and headed... where? I'm not sure. The difference is, while a paper airplane has no fear... I have fear. I have no idea where I am headed. What for. To see whom. Or anything. I am terrified of making new creases, because I'm not sure if those will be the right ones to make in order to complete who I am, to build my substance. I'm not sure if these new creases I want to make are going to make me fly higher, better, and more smoothly or if they are going to cause me to fly crooked, jaggedly, roughly, and somewhere along the line eventually crash.

Green

It might interest you to know,
 Speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
 That I am the sound of water dripping from the faucet.
 I also happen to be the dining room table,
 The clock ticking in the living room,
 And the jug of milk chilling in the fridge.
 I am also the dream in your sleep
 And the blanket that covers you at night.
 But don't worry, I am not the bread and the knife.
 You are still the bread and the knife.
 You will always be the bread and the knife,
 Not to mention the crystal goblet and – somehow – the wine.

Baby Blue

I've come to realize that time cannot protect me any longer. I've always had the endurance of my youth to hide behind, but my days are accumulating behind me, and the opportunity for me to make a difference in my life is marching in by the minute. I haven't done a single thing that is worthy of the time I have consumed during my life. I have finally found the light that is trying to guide me out of the hole I have buried for myself.

Blue

As I arise in the morning, the symbol of femininity that lies across my scalp is a tattered mess from being pressed one way, and turned another, as a result of the force of droopy night lids. I walk over to the magic chest of powders, potions, and instruments of beauty. Facing myself, I take my cold hand and run my dainty fingers through the soft strands that cover my lonely scalp. I begin with a perfectly pigmented powder and brush it across the fatigued visage and finish with a rose-colored splash to liven myself up. I take a long, black, plastic stick with small plastic pins striking out from one end and pull it through the scalp coverings. I clamp my femininity between two hot plates to smooth the kinks that are a result of my droopy night lids. I spray it with a magical serum to keep it straight and voluminous. All of these

steps seem so unnecessary, but crucial at the same time. I take out a potion, a thick one, a black one. I cover a bristled wand with this thick, black potion and run them across the protectors of the eyes smoothly and slowly. The protectors become fierce. The protectors are enticing. Powders, potions, serums, and clamps create a different visage; a visage more pleasing to the eye... a visage ready to face the day.

Indigo

One's understanding and perception of the world is so genuine that those words can never be duplicated, but ought to be shared. Reading stories, novels, essays, and poems aids me in discovering more about myself.

Why write? Write to share. Write to explain. Write to get all those vibrant thoughts on paper. Write to review your life. Write to capture a memory, so that in later years you can look back and feel the emotions that overwhelmed your body. There is no right or wrong way to tell a story. The context and grammar, whether correct or incorrect is a part of the art of writing. Writing is an art, and in writing our voices shine through. Our minds shine through. Even though some minds are black and white, that darkness will shine through in writing. Without a doubt, someone will gain insight from reading. In order to read, there has to be something written. Writers combine their creativity with their innermost feelings to create beautiful masterpieces. There is so much to learn, and reading has always been and always will be the ultimate learning skill. Our hearts and minds aren't designed to be open to new ideas, but if one can learn to be accepting and inhale the ideas of others, one can add a little bit of color to their mind.

Violet

I once asked my cousin whom was also my best friend at the time if she has ever looked in the mirror or down at her body and skin, and the overwhelming sense of being a human being takes her over. She looked at me as if I was completely insane, and at the time I thought maybe I was. I then realized that she simply didn't care to think. She is so disconnected from everything that isn't a material possession. I believe that was the day I realized we were very different and I couldn't trust her with my thoughts or feelings.

It is heart-breaking, really, when you realize that the person you thought was your dearest friend is now a person you don't respect. This person will never understand you or any of the things you think about. What is even more heart-breaking is that this person doesn't care to.

We all know that materialism is nothing. We all know that it all means nothing. We know that all the materialism, the fame, the popularity... it all means nothing in the end. Yet, we are still consumers. We still find ourselves lusting over ridiculous possessions that others have. Sadly, for many, that is the driving force to go to school and get an education. Many people don't care about enriching their minds, and they possibly graduate even less intelligent than they were from the beginning. Why? Simply because these people don't think for themselves. These students graduate and they are our lawyers, our doctors, and our teachers. They buy nice homes, and they have what they want materially, but they are still unhappy, just like "we" are.

I sit in class while others talk, and it makes me sad because they are speaking, but are saying nothing. Of course, there are many ideas that go on under the surface, but all these people look and sound the

same to me, and it makes me sad that these are going to be my colleagues, my friends, and my children's teachers. It makes me sad that we have become so separate from ourselves. We have let greed overcome us, and we do horrible and atrocious things to obtain what we want. We let fame and popularity dictate our lives and "who we are," and we allow other's thoughts to determine many of the actions that we make. It is all so sad when you look at the situation from a faraway glance. All these people, all the same.

I wonder what happened to people like my cousin; people who show a minimum amount of compassion and have nothing in their minds to differentiate themselves from everyone else. Sometimes I listen as my cousin speaks, and she gets frustrated, and she says things that make me hope that there is a possibility that she wants to expand her mind and her heart, learn and grow, but she never does. She is stuck in that constant state of frustration. She is not happy. She has never earned a dime in her life and whenever it comes out that perhaps she should, she winds up spending her money on useless things. My cousin always wants more. She finds all the things that are missing, and she wants more. She wants and wants and it never ends. She is going to die wanting, and she'll never be content. I never want to die wanting. I want to die knowing that I spent every moment of my life fulfilled, not empty.

We all just want so badly to love each other that where love doesn't exist we create the illusion of love. Some people want love so badly that they lay themselves all about town trying to find it, only to go to sleep at night feeling lonelier than ever, and lonelier than anyone. Why? A person shouldn't seek comfort in somebody else, but within the heart and mind. Some people stay with the same person day after day hoping to feel something and never do. These people stay there because it's safe, and it's comfortable. They know there will always be someone there to come home to and it brings them a sense of security. Their whole lives they will wonder if this is really the great love that everyone talks about, and when they die they will know that it wasn't. They will have wasted their entire lives. All this can happen simply because someone wasn't true, and got mixed up into superficial world. The want will take over.

Some people don't lay themselves all about town trying to find security, some people don't stay in relationships to find it either. These people simply don't know what to cherish. These people don't cherish the one thing that would have gotten them through their life somewhat smoothly, their mind. The mind is the most important tool of any human being. Cherish it. Use it. Fill it with questions, and fill it with answers. The mind of one person has enough power to touch the tortured souls of the world. The mind has infinite powers.

People have let themselves become so disconnected with reality that materialism gets the better of them. Know who you are, and cherish that. Don't let people tell you otherwise. Learn something. Love someone. Love yourself. Most of all, love your mind. Don't destroy it with superficiality and hatred. Don't destroy it with greed. Don't pollute your mind with ugly aspects. Your mind is the most natural thing that has powers over every facet of life. Fill your mind with beauty, love, and kindness. Share your thoughts with others, because you may shake their core and change their lives. Share your thoughts with others because only then, will you be able to fully understand yourself. In the end, you and your mind are all that is left. In the end, your mind is the key to happiness.

2nd Place Winner: Anna Moesinger, "My Golden Sister"

For Dr. James Aton

I was born into a home where there was little structure and much neglect. Often times, as a little girl I felt alone, ignored, and like a fly on the wall to my family members—a pesky bystander that wouldn't be missed. As youngest of seven, I was occasionally reminded that I wasn't as highly regarded as the older, more experienced siblings. My parents were divorced when I was five. Following that, smarmy men were in and out of the house. My siblings were consumed in alcohol and other drug abuse. The sister I felt closest to went to prison, and I was virtually alone. I missed considerable amounts of schooling during elementary and middle school, and because my family didn't fit the "norm," acquaintances weren't allowed over. I was practically friendless.

Did these unfavorable circumstances doom me to a life of failure, sadness, and loneliness? Thanks to Tessa, golden retriever extraordinaire, I survived. Not only survived, but came off conqueror of a battle that most infants, children, and young adults won't have to face. My triumph over challenges was due to the relationship I built with Tessa, my loyal dog, whose patience and love taught me more lessons than anyone else in my young life. Though many would not esteem her as more than an animal, I am forever indebted to the great female hero she was.

She had been around the house for years before I entered the scene. From drippy muzzle to shaggy tail, her four foot body was always on the go. She had a long snout with a wet nose. Her coffee eyes were sincere. Her tongue hung from her mouth like a sponge slinky that dripped happy spit droplets that added to her endearing licks. Though she sported a beautiful golden coat, the belly I always scratched was a grubby white.

There were an odd number of children and each sibling had their "partner." I was constantly the third wheel in family activities—unless, of course, Tessa came along. She was my partner, my constant companion. She was my advocate when I was neglected. She was a friend to the friendless. From as early as I can remember, she was the one who I would run around the house with, whose shoulder I would weep on, whose ears I would vent in, whose arms I would sleep between, and even who I would share meals with.

It all started at age one, when I began my quest to walk. Naturally, after pulling myself up with the help of the skinny banister of the stairs, I would attempt a step and then fall, plummeting to the retro, long-haired brown carpet. In order to master my first step, I needed something my height to hold onto until I could get my balance—the banister was too tall. This is when Tessa first *stepped* into my life. She guided my very first footstep. Wobbling around, I finally reached out to the big dog trotting past and grabbed a handful of her long golden fur. She patiently waited for me to regain my balance and then cautiously progressed so I wouldn't fall. Time and time again this would happen, until finally I had mastered the art of a stride.

This was the basis on which my relationship with Tessa was built. I never bore any burden alone; I never encountered a trial that was too hard to face, because I knew that Tessa would support me through it. With her around, I could lead any expedition and surmount any obstacle; I became who I am due to

her influence, more than anyone else's. She helped me triumph over tribulation and overcome my various real-life and child-like fears.

Generally, the living room was dark at night. I normally could not sleep out there without getting scared. There was an ebony grand piano in the living room that Tessa would slumber under. I was five years old, and it was Christmas time. My mom left the Christmas tree lights on all night. The yellow glowed so brightly and sparkled magically, so that "Santa" could see his way around. Unimpressed by the stockings and ornaments, all Christmas season I would take advantage of the glow from the tree and sneak out of my room to go sleep under the piano with Tessa. She always looked so peaceful and satiated, and her coat glistened in the light. I would snuggle into her warm, long hair, and place her foreleg over my body. Though my mom kept the house at 65 degrees in the winter, I was never chilled. During the wintry months of the year, when most kids are cuddled up with their parents and siblings, I snuggled up with my dog. She kept me warm and never protested to my slumbering by her side. As I look back on it now, I suppose that I was too busy enjoying her company to realize that I was missing out on the love of family members at the time of year when most families celebrate being together. Tessa acted as my savior, and during each Christmas, when we celebrate the Savior of the world, I celebrate her too.

If Tessa and I weren't exploring, watching a movie together, or sleeping, we would generally hang out in the front yard. I loved to pick out globs of filthy smoky-white hair and throw them into the wind. One such day when I was eight years old, we were laying down on the overgrown grass. Tessa lifted her paw to nudge me, obviously trying to get my attention. I put my face level with hers, and she brought up her paw again. Accidentally, she smacked me in my right eye. I broke into tears and felt betrayed. I was confused and didn't understand how Tessa could hurt me so badly. Who was I to run to now? How could she do this? As my little heart grew angry, I took her ear and bit it as hard as I could. Tessa howled loudly and then quietly whimpered. Expecting to feel gratified, having taught her a lesson, I was surprised at the great guilt and sadness that overwhelmed me.

After this experience, I learned that often times striking back causes more pain than the initial blow. In my adult relationships, people who love me still unintentionally hurt me. I can see past the early feelings of pain and don't retaliate. Tessa also taught me about loyalty and commitment. After our conflict, Tessa didn't run away or strike back. Rather, she sat patiently by me and forgave me instantly for the wrong I had done to her.

At eleven years old, I started taking frequent trips to what most called the infamous "dead woods," a square mile of lifeless trees and bushes that sat in the middle of a suburb of Saint George. Weekly, I walked the half mile between my house and the woods with my steady companion Tessa. Before adventuring into the woods, Tessa would dart off and splash into a huge pond of filthy water. Happy as could be, she would swim around, occasionally looking at me, trying to persuade me to jump in with her. I never did, but it was always a lot of fun to watch her enjoy herself. When she was through with her pursuit, we would journey into the woods and crawl through the tentacles of black tree branches. We would cross a raging river of *deadly* insects and slippery rock enemies. Avoiding the quicksand pits of despair and poisonous "weed pokies," Tessa and I would travel for hours on end. Oftentimes we would hear voices or animals near us. Tessa's ferocious bark scared away most of our predators, and both of us would run for our lives if the sound seemed to get closer.

Regardless of imagined threats in the woods or real threats in the home, Tessa offered protection—whatever demon existed, I had a consistent strength. Conquering the wild beasts of nature or the monstrous circumstances of my abode, I could always triumph and move on when my accomplice Tessa was there. She taught me what it means to be a faithful companion; she showed me that it was okay to run away for a little bit, as long as we came back to face problems later, displaying confidence that everything would turn out all right.

My first experience with the death of a loved one came from Tessa. She experienced a common disease for golden retrievers: hip dysplasia. I mourned over the loss of my pal, although it prepared me for future losses and moved me to a greater understanding of life and death. I hope to leave this world as Tessa did: making life a little easier, a little happier for the people whose lives I enter into. The philosopher William James said, “The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.” Tessa’s influence will surpass her life, and I hope my influence will outlast my life.

Children need to know that at least one person will love them regardless of their actions, their faults or appearance; a child needs to feel fully and completely accepted by at least one individual during their young life for proper development. I feel I fulfilled this stage solely due to my relationship with Tessa, despite the things that I had to face at home. Tessa provided me with a sense of security and peace; she taught me that, sometimes, being silent is more considerate than speaking—just knowing that somebody was there to listen to my problems helped me many times. The warmth and love she brought to my life helped me to stay grounded during my childhood. She taught me lessons about the importance of fun, forgiveness, loyalty, and most importantly, unconditional love. She is a great example to me of what a big sister, caregiver, advocate, and best friend really is. Even though she died, my memories of her still live on. I can still see her beneath the piano, splashing into the pond, waiting to walk with me through the woods.