



THE SCRIBLERIAN

Fall 2011 Edition

Sponsored by the English Department and the Braithwaite Writing Center, the *Scriblerian* is a publication for students by students. Revived during Fall Semester 2004 after a two-year hiatus, this on-line journal is the result of an essay competition organized by Writing Center tutors for ENGL 1010 and 2010 students. The Fall 2011 Scriblerian Contest was planned and supervised by Chair Blake London with the help of Jacqui Harrah, Vanessa Hunt, Dana LeCheminant, Violet Wager, and Wes Van de Water. A total of 26 essays were submitted for the Fall 2011 contest.

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Argumentative- English 1010

1st Place Winner: Vincent Bundage II, "Game Design: Is it the End of a Knowledgeable and Social Society?"

For Professor Joy Sterrantino

Today we live in a world of technological advancement and achievements. One such advancement has been in the realm of video games, which we have seen dramatically expand since its introduction in the 1970s. We see them in our everyday lives on billboards, in magazines, and even during the commercials of the Super Bowl. This is the modern age where technology has reigned king and video games have become one of the high points in our ever-changing society.

Despite how big the video game industry has grown, there still are stereotypes and critics against it. Many would like to believe video games are childish and have no contributing factor to the world. Others would think they are damaging to the health of our society and communities as people would rather play them than associate with their friends or family. This is not the case, however. Even though some may think video games are for children and degrade our minds, game designers bring art and culture to their players, and they create video games to inspire and help the world.

Something on which game designers put a strong emphasis when developing video games is the art. It is the key factor to a game being visually appealing and having the ability to capture the attention of a person that may consider wanting to buy one. Some have suggested video games can never be on the same level as definitive art. Notable film critic Roger Ebert created a storm when he stated video games could never be art because "Video games by their nature require player choices, which is the opposite of the strategy of serious film and literature, which requires authorial control." I believe this to be wrong as Stefan Hall, in his article "Video Games as Collaborative Art," suggests they are a form of collaborative art much like what we see in major film production today (Stefan 19). This would refute Ebert's claim as game designers work together, making different portions to create a final product for their audience to enjoy; whereas film producers do the same by employing actors, directors, and crews to try and create a movie. Ebert also never takes into account the artists behind those games.

Video game companies hire many concept artists to bring out the feel of what their games should aspire to be and some of them happen to be very successful artists in the industry. A perfect example would be Cory Arcangel. Arcangel is a digital artist and has some of his work is being displayed in the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitey Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art – Chicago. People like Arcangel bring proof to the opinion that video games are art because it requires artists like him in the developing process, laying down the foundation for other designers to create the world and characters many have grown to love.

Game designers create places a person may travel to that they admire time and again because they could never see something like it in real life. Video games have an effect on our imaginations of what we perceive to be the world around us. Game designers take much time and effort into studying places around the world so they can use them for reference to create their own environments. They would have to learn about the physics of all sorts of materials and objects to know how to manipulate them for a realistic setting. It takes an active imagination t

o take something we think is just normal to us and make it into something that can never be forgotten.

Much research goes into the development of games that no one takes the time to realize. When creating a story, designers usually look to a certain time period, a book, or even an event. A good example would be Bioshock. Philip Deen, from Gamestudies.org, states in his article "Interactivity, Inhabitation and Pragmatist Aesthetics" that Bioshock "tells the story of a city built according to Ayn Rand's Objectivism but comes to consume itself under the banner of 'No Gods or Kings. Only Man'" (Deen). In developing Bioshock, the developers looked towards Rand's political and social ideologies. The game introduces through backstory and subtle characterization the concept of Rand's Objectivism—her philosophy of rational individualism that holds there is no greater moral goal than achieving happiness. It can be seen in every aspect of the game. One of the main antagonists, Andrew Ryan, is much like John Galt of *Atlas Shrugged*. Ryan creates a utopian society he wants no one to find and administers it under the principle that man should not be limited by government, religion, or nationality. The problem is there was no control among the people and the scientists were able to experiment without limitation causing anarchy among their civilization and the sudden collapse of normality. The designers would like to inform people of the possible dangers a society like this could have, wreaking havoc upon an educated populace if not executed correctly. Researching history is also a must when creating a game that is in homage to the times. In a game like *Red Dead Redemption*, the designers had to look at the myths and culture of the Wild West. The protagonist was an outlaw trying to put his past behind him in an unforgiving point of American history. For the time period, they chose the end of the Wild West, when industrialization was sweeping the nation and cities were beginning to be built across the country. Within the game we see the emergence of electricity in buildings and even the foundations of automobiles.

Video games have become a large part of our lives, shaping our culture. In the present day, it has been increasingly popular to play video games amongst many different types of people. Michael Jindra talks about the statistics of how many people in America play video games today. Over half of all Americans play video games, 76 percent of children, 69 percent of heads of household, and 25 percent of those over 50 play them (Jindra 67-73). Critics of video games cannot deny that game designers are making games that appeal to a wide audience. Much like movies, they have created products that find themselves in the homes of many. The main reason is many people want entertainment. To a great extent people play video games because it gives them a chance to have fun during their free time. Today, younger children can play video games to learn to read. Adults may play them during their time off or because they want something different away from their usual working lives. Someone even wanting to give playing the guitar a chance can find the time to do so through a game. Games have also been able to keep family and friends together through multiplayer gaming. With so many people living in places far from each other, it makes it easier when a person can have fun and hear the voice of their relatives or longtime friends as if they were sitting right next to them. One of gaming's redeeming values for people is keeping those connections with whomever they meet.

Game designers are not just children who grew up to keep living a fantasy of staying a child and playing video games forever. They work very hard during sleepless nights and often do not see their families so they can bring a fruitful experience to their audience. For them it is a job worth doing as they get to be creative and innovative in this technological age in which we find ourselves. Game designing is not the death of modern art and culture; rather, game design keeps it alive and growing through a time that would otherwise diminish it without these people doing something new every day.

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2nd Place Winner: Amber Overson, "Thin Is In, or Is It?"
For Professor Toa Tawa

Puking every day after every meal, or not eating at all; sounds good doesn't it? This is the most common way for female teens to be thin and sexy like the celebrities they see on television. I see celebrities on television that are thin and beautiful, and during commercial breaks there are advertisements for Oreo's™, Coca Cola™, and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups™, and to complicate things there is a miracle weight loss cure endorsed by the celebrities I am watching. This is such a mixed message. What I understand from viewing all of this is that I can eat whatever I want, take their miracle weight loss cure, and look like these beautiful celebrities, right? Wrong! The image that the media and celebrities portray, "the ideal," is not one that is healthy. Yet, as a society we submit to this; it affects both our young and adolescent females: this "ideal" has lifelong and sometimes deadly consequences.

It is important to understand that there is a connection between obesity and eating disorders. Obesity is an eating disorder of over-consumption. Some young women are overweight. As a result of being overweight, they become depressed because they do not fit the image of the "ideal." Their depression may lead them into other eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia. Research shows obesity in girls under the age of twelve is caused by lack of physical activity. In the article "Associations between Body Satisfaction and Physical Activity in Adolescents: Implications for Programs Aimed at Preventing a Broad Spectrum of Weight-Related Disorders," author John Collins state ". . . an improvement in body satisfaction is important since youth who do not feel good about their bodies are unlikely to engage in physical activity" (127). This article included a study examining the "associations among body satisfaction and physical and sedentary activities" (125). The results were that "...46 percent of girls showed trends of lower body satisfaction, they spent 8.5 hours per week in physical activity, only 56 percent were engaged in team sports, and 17.9 hours per week were spent watching TV" (130). I concur with this study; younger girls need to get more physical activity, and spend less time sitting in front of the TV.

Isn't it interesting that the very thing that influences girls to suffer from lower body satisfaction is the same thing that in excess causes them to be overweight in the first place? As a former fat kid (FFK as I call it) I was not as physically active as I should have been, and I didn't want to be active in front of other people because I was overweight; it was a double-edged sword.

My experience exemplifies what researchers have found: the internalization of the images presented on television is the next step in the risk for having an eating disorder. I wanted to be skinny more than anything; the images of the ideal were so deeply internalized in me that as a result I became bulimic at age fifteen. I struggled with my weight up to this point, and I thought that bulimia was the answer. I was overweight, and definitely not the ideal; this caused me to have a negative body image. This, in conjunction with internalizing the thin-ideal, was disastrous. Harrison and Hefner discuss media and thin-ideal internalization in their article "Media Exposure, Current and Future body Ideals, and Disordered Eating among Preadolescent Girls; A Longitudinal Panel Study":

Internalization of the thin body ideal has long been implicated as a critical risk factor in the development of disordered eating. Thin-ideal internalization refers to the extent to which an individual cognitively accepts the thin societal standard of attractiveness as her own personal standard and engages in

behaviors designed to help herself meet that standard. The implied theoretical process is straightforward: extreme dieting and exercise aimed at weight loss are done in the service of an internalized thin body ideal that was learned via exposure to social sources espousing that ideal, one of which is the collection of mass media depictions of thinness as the epitome of female attractiveness. (153)

I agree whole-heartedly with a statement made by Gutierrez-Maldonado et al. "Body-image disturbances have been frequently and strongly associated with the development and maintenance of eating disorders" (521). Tiggemann and Hargreaves suggest that: There are two key sources of empirical evidence that suggests the media do negatively influence body image for many individuals; first, correlation research demonstrates that greater media consumption is related to higher body dissatisfaction, particularly the consumption of media high in appearance content, such as fashion magazines, television soap operas and music videos. Second, experimental studies demonstrate that brief exposure to 'unrealistic' beauty images as presented in fashion magazines can increase negative mood and state body dissatisfaction. (466)

This was true in my case; as an overweight child I spent many hours in front of the TV. The programs I watched most showed images of women that looked the way I wanted to, and none of them were overweight. I wanted to be like them because they were socially accepted and I wasn't. The TV programs that I watched and the magazines I viewed all showed these 'unrealistic' expectations. I believed that these women were naturally this way; I didn't understand that many of them had eating disorders. The article continued "Tiggemann (2002) suggests that ongoing exposure to naturally-occurring idealized media images serves to continually maintain and reinforce levels of insecurity and concern about appearance, shape, and weight" (466). As a teenager, the topic of discussion with my friends always seemed to have a connection with the way we looked. I often heard them say, or said myself, "Does my butt look fat in these jeans?" or "I can't believe I wear a size 5!" My entire high school life was based around the way I looked and what I thought other people thought of me. After I lost 60 pounds, I went from a size 14 at 165 pounds to a size 1 at 105 pounds. However, I still had a negative body image. I couldn't tuck my shirt in, because I still felt fat. It didn't matter if I weighed 165 pounds or 105 pounds; I had a distorted body image.

Research shows that female adolescents make significant errors in the way they view their own body. John Collins confirms this: After studying the effect of a respondent's body build on body recognition Schonbruch and Schell (1967) concluded that individuals with deviant body builds make significantly more errors in estimating their bodily appearance than persons with normal physiques. They found that both overweight and underweight persons tended to overestimate body size and shape. The concept of body image is extremely complex. In psychiatric terms body image appears to include surface, depth, and postural pictures of the body as well as the attitudes, emotions, and personality reactions of individuals to their bodies. (393)

A control group was also used in this study, comprised of adolescents without a prior history or risk for an eating disorder; the results indicated these "female adolescents are extremely accurate in estimating their body image" (397). As a young adolescent, I believed when I lost weight and became skinny that I would feel the way I perceived the women on television felt. However, over time I realized that being skinny was not the only factor in the way I viewed my body image. My mind is a very powerful tool, and it was the reason that I still had a distorted body image. My mind was not healthy, and until I changed

my mindset I would always have a negative self image. When I was younger, I watched a documentary about a woman in her twenties who was suffering from an eating disorder. She drew on a large paper a life-sized image of how she viewed her body. The image she drew was far larger than her small, frail frame. At the time it didn't make sense why she thought she was bigger than she actually was. Through this study, more insight is given to show why this woman who was suffering from an eating disorder had a distorted image, and therefore did not view her body image the way it truly is. My body image is a lot more realistic than it was when I was bulimic, but there are still situations in which I won't show my body for example wearing a bathing suit in public.

The environment a woman is in may be a direct impact to her eating disorder. In the article "Body Image in Eating Disorders: The influence of Exposure to Virtual-Reality Environments," Gutierrez-Maldonado et al emphasize that "Several authors suggest that body image might be more of a state than a trait, and may change according to situational or emotional variables, especially in participants who are concerned about their body shape and/or weight" (521). This particular case study was conducted through virtual-reality (VR) technology. Women with and without eating disorders were evaluated in different VR situations. These situations included being near a swimming pool, and going to a neutral room after the patient had consumed high or low calorie foods. Patients with eating disorders "displayed higher levels of anxiety and depression mood after eating (in both high-and low-calorie-food modes) and after visiting the swimming pool than in the neutral room" (522). The environment I was in during my active bulimic years definitely played a role in my anxiety level. There was a specific time I can think of when I went with my friends to Red Cliffs near St. George, Utah, on an all-day excursion. I distinctly remember not bringing a bathing suit, only a pair of shorts, because I was too afraid to show my 105 pound body. I recently viewed a photo of myself taken that day; I was extremely skinny and boney, and I can't believe that I was afraid to wear a bathing suit. But this was completely normal for me; my environment was always the biggest factor in what I did or didn't do in life.

As a junior in high school, I scored in the top 97% on the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) test. I was invited to meet President Clinton at the White House; the cost of the trip was just under \$1,000.00. I told my parents I didn't want to go because of the expense, when in reality I declined this invitation because of my bulimia. I couldn't fathom being with a group of students from all over the country for an entire week, not knowing when I would be able to purge induced such great anxiety that I didn't want talk about it. My thoughts were solely focused on my bulimia during this time. I had a bad case of the "what if's": what if I couldn't purge, I would gain weight; what if I gained weight, everyone around me would notice. I felt trapped; what if I lost the image I had gained. What would people think of me? At this point I became very good at avoiding any situation that did not fit my bulimic lifestyle. I wanted to maintain the image I thought I had gained, but in reality I hadn't gained anything but anxiety and a distorted body image.

This distorted body image is something that we should all be aware of, and take seriously. In the article "Girls Who Starve To Be like TV Waifs", the London The Daily Mail states "watching stick-thin actresses on U.S. sitcoms seriously distorts girls' body images and forces them into eating disorders, an alarming new study has found. The study backs up the theories that television waifs such as Calista Flockhart and Jennifer Aniston are to blame for the dramatic increase in eating disorders among young teens" (31). I remember these and other actresses very vividly, and the struggle I had to look like them. The image of Calista Flockhart from the article "The Culture of Thin Bites Fiji" (Goodman 609), was very controversial when I was in high school; it was said that she only weighed around 85 pounds in this particular picture.

I knew what was being said about her weight, yet at seventeen years old I wanted to look like her, and so did many other teenage girls. This is definitely evidence of a distorted body image. More recently, one of the Olsen twins was admitted to a treatment center for eating disorders, and still we see our young society subscribing to this way of life. As a society we don't take seriously the long term affects that eating disorders have on our young daughters. Let's use some common sense, and stop submitting to this ideal. There are many places around the world where beauty is not determined by the size of a woman's body.

Ellen Goodman writes "In Fiji before 1995, big was beautiful and bigger was more beautiful— and people really did flatter one another with exclamations about weight gain" (608). In 1995 television was introduced to Fiji; television programs such as *Melrose Place*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Seinfeld* and *E.R.* were viewed by many in Fiji. Goodman continues: Within 38 months, the number of teenagers at risk for eating disorders more than doubled to 29 percent. The number of girls who vomited for weight control went up five times to 15 percent. Worse yet, 74 percent of the Fiji teens in the study said they felt "too big or fat" at least some of the time, and 62 percent said they had dieted in the last month. (608)

This shocking evidence shows the connection between media influence and eating disorders. This is not the only evidence; another article, "TV May Play a Role in Body Image", shows that eating disorders are connected to media influence: After surveying 303 children age's six to eight in Midwestern elementary schools, Ms. Harrison concluded that television viewing was a factor among both boys and girls who showed symptoms of eating disorders. She found that children formed opinions about body size from television. For instance, boys who watched a lot of TV tended to form strongly negative views of fat girls, but not of fat boys. Also, girls who were attracted to thin female TV characters were more likely to view their own body as heavier. (Wetzstein A2) Given all of this information, is it really reasonable for the young women of Fiji to look like the young women portrayed in the TV shows they watched? In reality, heredity may hinder young women from achieving this 'image' of being thin.

The mainstream marketing image is mainly of white females, and not African American, Hispanic, or Pacific Islanders. Caruthers, Merriwether, and Schooler write in their article "Reports estimate that Black women make up 5.6% of primetime television characters, and appear in only 2-3% of mainstream magazine advertisements" (38). Actress Halle Berry and model Tyra Banks are examples of the few black women in the media. Many young women are dissatisfied with the way they look; the article continues "Body dissatisfaction has such a pervasive hold on young women in this country that it has been called a normative discontent. This ideal is unattainable to the vast majority of women, contributing to depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders" (38). I couldn't agree more, especially for non-white females. Genetics and other factors contribute to what a woman's body looks like. Some of these factors are difficult to overcome, even with an eating disorder. Eating disorders just aren't healthy, period. They take a toll on the body, and there are many side effects that aren't discussed by the mainstream media, or by celebrities with eating disorders.

There has been a rise in the number of young women with eating disorders, and the media is at the core of this problem. Cherry Norton stated "women on television including news presenters and actresses are 'abnormally thin' and are causing a rise in the number of young women suffering from eating disorders, doctors said yesterday, ...with every family doctor in the country (UK) treating two patients suffering from anorexia and eighteen with bulimia nervosa" (5). This is a growing epidemic that needs to stop now. I stopped being actively bulimic, but it's like being an alcoholic; I will struggle with bulimia for

the rest of my life. This lifestyle has cost me in many ways, and many ways that I didn't even realize. Fortunately, I had a life-changing experience, and I never want to go back to being actively bulimic.

During my last pregnancy I was hospitalized and my diagnosis was hyperemesis gravidarum. This is a medical term for extreme morning sickness lasting more than three months. Ninety percent of the women who are diagnosed with hyperemesis gravidarum have or have had an eating disorder. My stomach was tied in knots, and I couldn't eat or drink normally for six months. I was fed TPN (elemental diet) intravenously for four months. I went to sleep many nights wondering if I would wake up in the morning. My doctor told me that I was the sickest patient he had ever had. I was reaping the consequences of being bulimic, and my baby was at risk of being aborted as a last resort to save my life. After my daughter was delivered, my doctor told my husband and I that there were several times he considered talking to us about aborting her. My heart sank when I heard this. It was at this point that I truly understood the severe consequences of my choice to be bulimic.

Bulimia was a choice I made in high school. Back then I thought I was invincible, but I wasn't. Bulimia plagued me deeply for several years, until I made the choice to stop. I thought I had control of my bulimia, but in reality bulimia had control of me. Eating disorders aren't portrayed on television, and you won't find very many celebrities willing to speak publicly about their eating disorders. There is a very good reason for this; if they did they might be out of a job. Thin may be in, but at what cost? It almost cost my life and my daughter's life. This is my reality; I live with it every day. Take it from someone who knows, being the "ideal" truly isn't worth it.

Expressive- English 1010

1st Place Winner: Sherrin Rieff, "My Father's Choice"

For Dr. Rosalyn Eves

My father committed suicide December 20, 2009 and we buried him on Christmas Eve. As I stood in the doorway of the funeral home I was totally frozen. I didn't want to see his lifeless body lying in his casket. I was still holding on to false hope that this was all just a bad dream; that it wasn't really him in the casket at all. A horrible misunderstanding had taken place. But I was so wrong. I heard a yelp of pain from my mother and thought to myself, "Oh God, it is him." I felt a lump grow in my throat and I couldn't swallow back the tears. He was really gone.

I tried to busy myself arranging some pictures we had gathered of him on a small table just inside the door. They were nothing more than a small assortment of snapshots showcasing a lifetime of happier moments. Insignificant pieces in a jigsaw puzzle that if completed would show a life of misery and alcohol abuse. I needed time to prepare myself to see him. How does one really prepare themselves to say goodbye to a man they've loved all their lives?

I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked up at my mother. She didn't have to speak; I felt what I needed to do. I put my arm around my mother's waist and we crept to the side of the casket. The walk felt as though it took centuries. I thought when I saw him I would be in hysterics, but I only felt a numbness run through my body. If it wasn't for the baby kicking inside my swollen stomach, I don't think I would have even remembered how to move. I just stood there, staring at him, lost in another world. He looked so peaceful. As if he had fallen asleep in his recliner watching Star Trek again. I watched his face waiting for him to open his eyes.

Finally, I realized he was really gone and I had to say goodbye. I looked at my mother, who was sobbing, and it was as if I were snapped back into reality, the gravity of the situation hitting me all at once. The lump in my throat had gotten bigger and I felt myself losing control. My legs began to shake and I couldn't bite back the tears. I leaned down and kissed dad on the cheek, my tears wetting his face a little. He no longer smelled of his aftershave and his cheek felt smooth on my lips. I ran my fingertips along his large familiar hands. His fingernails were purple and he felt so cold. Almost as if he was made of clay. I lifted up his folded hands and my mom helped me tuck pictures of my two girls under them. I wanted him to remember them, even in his death.

Sitting down on the first row of chairs I laid my hands on my stomach. I could feel my baby boy kicking still. I couldn't believe that my father would choose to leave us. I still don't understand how someone can make a choice so selfish. How can you get to that point of no return where your state of mind is so clouded, so distraught, that you actually believe this world would be a better place without your presence? I couldn't wrap my head around the fact that he would choose to never meet his grandson, and his other grandchildren to come. He would never be able to dance with my baby sister at her prom, or walk her down the aisle when she married. He would never be able to see his two sons grow into men. How could he be so selfish to choose to take himself out of our lives? My mind would not quit racing. All the questions, all the anger, and all the regrets kept pounding into my brain one after another.

My grandparents arrived just as we were about to start the small program we had prepared. I'll never forget the pain in my grandmother's face. You could read her broken heart as if it were written in the deep grooves that encircled her eyes and mouth. There was no light in her eyes, only dark shadows of grief. This would be the third child my grandparents would bury.

After the program and prayer we decided to shut the casket. My family said our goodbyes first, then the extended families. As they were shutting the casket lid, my grandfather, weeping terribly, fell to his knees and cried out, "Oh God, not my boy. Not my baby boy." Those words still linger in my mind. I'm haunted by the cry of pain from my grandmother as she reached out to my grandfather, trying to comfort him, yet on the verge of losing control herself.

We had the graveside services immediately following the funeral service. Mother Nature was very cruel that day. It was only thirty-four degrees outside and the wind was blowing harshly. The cold air stung my face and made my tears feel like needle pricks. My four sisters, two brothers, mother, and husband huddled together, wrapping our arms around one another to shield us from the bitter cold. We watched the men carry the casket through the cemetery and set it in place. We wept as a family friend sang an old ballad my dad used to love.

After the funeral my husband and I decided to go home to salvage what we could of Christmas Eve for our girls. But all I wanted was to be alone. I couldn't bear to hear one more person tell me how sorry they were. I was so angry at him for leaving us. I felt so betrayed, and I felt as though no one could understand what I was going through. I went straight to bed when we arrived home and cried myself to sleep.

The next day we celebrated Christmas with our daughters. Haylie, who was six at the time, woke us up at five-thirty to see what Santa had brought her. After I pulled my fourteen-month old, Kimber, out of her crib, my husband and I put on our happiest faces and tried to enjoy the ripping of wrapping paper and squeals of delight from our little girls. They were so young they wouldn't have understood why mommy was upset.

Later that evening, after all the Christmas festivities were over, I was once again left alone with my thoughts. I came to the realization that I was foolish to try to understand what it was my father was thinking. How could I have ever understood what was going on inside his troubled mind? I decided it wasn't his mind I had to get a hold of, it was mine. For the first time in five years I prayed. I sat on my knees and prayed to God, begging him for answers, pleading with him, but all I got was a sickness in the pit of my stomach. I had sobbed silently to myself so hard that my head was pounding and I couldn't find control. I felt as if I had no one to turn to, no one but God, and he wouldn't hear me.

I prayed fiercely twice a day for a week. At first I prayed for understanding. "Please make me understand, God." After getting no response or comfort, I cried. I begged God to just let him have his life back, let him take back all the horrible decisions he had ever made; again no response, no comfort. I truly believed that if I prayed hard enough God would send a lightning bolt with all the answers.

It's been almost two years since my father decided to leave us. I still have no answers as to why he left, but I have found comfort. Forgiveness was no easy task. I was so filled with hatred, disgust, and hurt that I couldn't see straight. I was grief stricken for over a full year before I came to the realization that it isn't my understanding of the choices my father made that matter. His choices were of his own agency.

He made the choices in his own life for himself. I don't have to accept them; I don't need to understand them. They were his and his alone. I honestly believe that God opened his arms to my father and let him come home. I find immense peace in knowing Heavenly Father has a plan for us. I will always love my father, and I'll miss him every day. That is a choice I have the power to make.

2nd Place Winner: Megan Spence, "The Life of a Thread"
For Dr. Julia Combs

I pull the thread up for Tyler. I pull the thread down for Alyssa. I cross for John. I look down and see Kelli. The thread doesn't mind the pulling. She understands. She allows my fingers to stretch her across long inches of canvas. I drift her in and out of the slight slits in the fabric. She emerges from one opening to create another. At last, the shape has been made. The people's voices are emerging. Every hue is a face; every shade a memory.

My family always thought my hobby was odd. What teenager spends her day sewing? But I don't sew; I cross-stitch. I stitch together pieces of my soul. I create images with my hands. With each piece of thread, I stitch a person and a memory. Usually I stitch birth announcements, but today I am making something different.

It all starts with a piece of blue thread. This small string smiles at me, and I smile at him. I have a story. He has a story, so I help him speak. I thread him through our pen, the needle. We begin to write. Our tale starts on a soft piece of fabric canvas. The canvas is a soft cloth with sporadic holes placed in the material. My thread and I make the slow up and down motions through the holes. We start at the bottom right corner, and then we glide over to the top left corner. He enters the second opening, and I pull him through. Now we have made a diagonal stitch. Our work isn't done yet. I pull him up through the bottom left corner, and he enters the top right slit. Finally, our "X" shape is made. The blue thread radiates against the pale canvas. It reminds me of Tyler.

Tyler was the first person I ever lost. He was the first person I ever knew who died. I was eight, and he was crippled. I only saw him at school, but he had such a radiant smile. We passed one another in the hallway sometimes. Our souls recognized each other. I look at my thread, and my thread looks at me. This blue "X" will be for Tyler. The funny thing about cross-stitching is that it's made up of small "X's"; they don't seem to be much at first, but the image gets clearer the more I add. It's a lot like my soul. The more memories I add, the clearer I see myself. Tyler was my first stitch, and my most favorite one. He passed away quietly one night, but his spirit is with me every day.

I pick my next thread: pink. The thread is subtle but beautiful. She smiles at me, and I smile back. I start to guide her in and out of the little holes on the cloth. She is so elegant when we stitch together. We have made a lot of "X's". Now there is an entire section full of perfectly stitched lines. They don't look like "X's" anymore. This pink thread reminds me of Alyssa. Alyssa was the most elegant dribbler I had ever seen. I played basketball with her for years. When she ran down the court, I could barely see the ball touch the floor. She was like my older sister. She thought I was sweet and full of laughter. Alyssa made me see myself; she made me like what I saw. We worked together as a team at every game. The car accident occurred on Saturday. I heard about her death on Sunday. Alyssa is a culmination of all my pretty stitches.

The brown thread starts to become restless. He likes to be heard. I laugh at him, and he laughs at me. He is rougher than other threads I've used. We start making our stitches. The thread is clumsy, but he makes me giggle. His "X's" aren't perfect, but they look so unique. I like him. When we weave in and out of openings, he is stubborn. Brown threads don't like to be told what to do. He reminds me of John.

John was my grandfather. He was funny and full of life, but I never knew him. He died long before I was ever born, but I recognize his spirit. Every now and then, I think he's with me. John is all my stitches I wish I had made.

My work is finished. The "X's" on the cloth look at me. They are no longer "X's"; they are a face. This face I don't know, but the warmth it gives is unforgettable. The face has radiant blue eyes, beautiful pink lips, and dark brown hair. This face has always been with me. This face belongs to a woman who gave me the gift of stitch. Her name is Kelli. She made me my first cross-stitch. It has hung in my room my entire life. The cross-stitch has my name and my birth date. Kelli couldn't have children. She always wanted to be a mom. Instead, she decided to make cross-stitched birth announcements to expecting mothers. I was one of the babies she made an announcement for. She put a little of herself in that cross-stitch. Every time I look at my little cloth, I feel the love she put into her gift. Now I put that same love into the birth announcements I stitch. I put a little of Kelli into them, too.

Stitching is more than just sewing. Stitching is putting a little bit of myself into the canvas. I share my memories with the thread. The thread helps me create my soul; the thread helps me remember. I pull the thread up for Tyler. I pull the thread down for Alyssa. I cross for John. I look down and see Kelli; and if I am lucky, Kelli sees me.

Argumentative- English 2010

1st Place Winner: Tonya Stratton, "In My Wildest Dreams: Insightful Messages"
For Dr. Julia Combs

A few weeks after her grandfather died, Jennifer Lambert had a dream. In her dream, her grandfather visited her at home. She recalls being so excited to see him that she ran to him and hugged him tight. His first words to her were, "Don't be angry with your sister anymore." When she awoke, she cried for 30 minutes. At the time, she and her sister couldn't be in the same room together. Calling her sister a few days after the dream, she told her that she felt bad about how neglected their relationship had become. She expressed a desire to have a relationship like their mother and aunt always had. She said that things have been better since that dream and that phone call. Jennifer found both clarity and courage in her dream to fix the relationship with her sister (Howard, 2011, p.116). This ability isn't unique to people like Jennifer. Dreams can be the brain's way of clarifying what is really important to us and can give us courage to improve matters (Howard, 2011). Dreams can be messages from the subconscious that can help to clarify daily problems and innovations, to heal emotional stress and trauma, and to examine true thoughts and feelings.

Everyone dreams. Some people don't recall their dreams and assume that they didn't dream. The reality is that everyone dreams. It could be that a person who can't remember any dreams is unmotivated to recall them. Reed (1978) believed that when a person is more motivated to remember dreams, he or she will remember more dreams and in greater detail. Incentives for remembering dreams vary. Each person has his or her own reasons for wanting to remember dreams. Some may only wish to be entertained by them, while others are looking for deeper meanings behind the images.

Throughout history, a variety of people and cultures have used dream interpretations. All the Aboriginal societies in Australia believe that dreams are of significant importance. They believe that dreams come from external sources like deceased relatives, spirit beings, and ancestral figures (Glaskin, 2005). Like the Aboriginal people, other diverse peoples such as Mexican villagers, Haitian peasants, Zulu tribe members, and Moroccan Arabs also believe that dreams are received from external sources containing messages from spirits who can predict the future (Robbins & Tanak, 1991). Over time, this belief has slowly changed. As recorded in an article titled "Theories of Dreams Held by American College Students," Robbins and Tanak (1991) surveyed American college students to measure their beliefs about what is the purpose of dreams. The majority, 91% of students surveyed, believed that dreams are related to the events of the day preceding the dream or events of the recent past. Of the students surveyed, 63% believed that dreams help the dreamer to work through problems. Only 17% believed that dreams can predict the future. A low 6% believed that dreams were messages from an external source. This study suggests that American students have fairly sophisticated ideas about the meanings of dreams. Their theories relate closely to leading dream theorists' current views. Though the reasons to interpret dreams have changed over time, people looking to dreams for clarity of personal issues continues.

As early as biblical times, records show that kings, pharaohs, and common people also used dream analysis. Dreams were believed to be messages from their God or predictors of the future. Men who claimed to interpret dreams were in high demand (Gregory, 1999). People then didn't think they could

self-analyze their dreams. Over time, this belief has changed. Now, a person can use a dream dictionary, either in print or online, to find meanings to their dreams. This technique brings the dreamer the most direct meaning of a dream image (Jennings, 2007). Most experts agree that the details of a dream are symbolic of greater meaning. They argue over whether these details are disguised or not. Many experts believe that dream dictionaries are not necessary for meaningful analysis to occur. They feel that dreams simply need further study by the dreamer to link the dream content to their waking life (Jennings, 2007; Pesant & Zandra, 2006; Reed, 1978; Syboda 2009).

Several experts suggest keeping dream journals to help retain dream details. They advise that upon waking, a person should write down their dreams with all the details that they can recall (Gregory, 1999; Jennings, 2007; Pesant & Zandra, 2006; Schredl 2000). Jennings (2007) warns not to make immediate judgments about what the dream or dreams mean. He suggests coming back to the dream journal later in the day. Then, explore the details. Consider the emotions of the dream. Look for links to recent events that the dream could be pointing towards. While analyzing dreams, remember to watch for recurring elements. Notice characters, places, and patterns in dreams. Don't skip details that seem mundane; they could hold great insight later. Don't take dreams literally. Dreams are seldom straightforward (Syoboda, 2009).

Often dreams replay events that need further reflection. Perhaps the dreamer missed an important perspective during a conscious event that the subconscious brain is working through. Dreams often solve problems, which cannot be solved during consciousness. Dreams are personal to ourselves and our experiences. Auguste von Kekule, a German chemist, had been diligently working to figure out the structure of benzene molecules. Exhausted from the work, he took a nap. During the nap, he had a dream in which a snake seized ahold of its own tail. This was the solution to his problem. He discovered the ring structure of the benzene molecule (Schredl, 2000; Ruggiero, 2003). His dream helped him to clarify his breakthrough work.

Ruggiero (2003) suggests that "The unconscious mind may simply have completed a process that was begun by the conscious mind." He continues by saying that these insights seem to favor people who have devoted years to an area of expertise. Essentially, what Ruggiero is saying is that dreams continue the thinking of the day. A person who has dedicated years of work in a certain field is more likely to have an insightful dream in that area. For instance, a musician is not likely to have a breakthrough dream about chemistry. The musician is more likely to have a dream about musical melodies and song lyrics. An example of this happened to a famous musical artist. He dreamt a melody that intrigued him. When he woke, he searched musical records to see if this melody had already been written by someone else. It had not. He then wrote the music out on paper and created lyrics to compliment it. That famous artist is Paul McCartney, and that song is "Yesterday" (Schredl, 2000). It is experts who tend to have these breakthrough dreams about their life's works and passions. It is what is on their mind most, conscious or not.

Dreams could be the brain's way of helping people with emotional stress and traumas, which will help them sleep better, feel happier while awake, and answer bothersome questions about their lives. Dreams can be a healthy part of their emotional coping process (Syoboda, 2009). Cooper (1999) asserts that dreams can help anyone, but especially children when there is a death in the family. Feelings related to the loss of a loved one must be expressed before a person can heal. Dreams can help children to start to express such feelings. Often, children are more comfortable discussing a dream and the

emotions in it over their real life experiences and emotions. Dream analysis can help therapists begin the coping process while building the confidence for expressing emotions of these patients.

In Howard's (2011) article called, "Field of Dreams," she mentions some real life examples of dreams helping people with their daily problems. In one of the samples, Lisa Espich tells about her dream. She wakes in the dream. She notices that her husband isn't in bed, and she can hear loud buzzing. She goes downstairs to see where the buzzing sound is coming from. In the dark backyard, a spotlight hangs from a large tree. In the middle of the lit up area stands her husband running a table saw. As she walks forward, she can make out the bloody trunk of a woman's torso as he cuts off a limb. Then she notices severed limbs all over the lawn. A panic feeling comes over her as she looks around. She sees her neighbor peering over the fence and knows that he'll call the police. She runs to her husband and tells him that they must bury the evidence; the police are coming. Together they dig but in the process they are unearthing other dismembered body parts. Sirens fill the air, so she runs to the front door to meet the police. She answers the door acting as though everything is all right. The police make her drink a truth serum, and she tells them everything. At this point, Lisa really wakes up. She states that she felt sick to her stomach.

Lisa visited a dream expert, named Dr. Emery, to learn more about the meaning of her bizarre dream. Dr. Emery helped her to see that the spotlight is symbolically shining on her life. She had been hiding something. During the digging, the severed limbs that keep turning up are the facts that are becoming known with the people who are closest to her. The truth serum actually represented the truth. If she could tell people the truth about what she has been hiding in her life, it would set her free. Lisa did open up about the truth. It turned out her husband had a drug addiction that she had been hiding from her family and friends. From her dream, she realized that she had to tell them the truth. Her family was supportive of her. They helped her when she decided to leave her husband. He was devastated by her leaving him, and he finally found the courage to seek out drug treatment. He has now been clean and sober for over five years, and their marriage is stronger than ever (Howard, 2011, pg. 114). Lisa solved a big problem in her life by analyzing and listening to the message of a dream. Dreams are honest. If a person can be open to an honest interpretation of the dream's message, he or she can gain valuable insight into what really matters.

Every person can look at the details of a dream and find applicable meaning in them. According to Jennings (2007), there are certain techniques that therapists use to help interpret dreams. These techniques could also help the dreamer to explore their dreams thoroughly. Once dreamers are aware of the techniques and begin to practice them, they can start to self-interpret their own dreams. Through these techniques, the emotional quality of the dream is relived, and pinpointing the meaning is easier. Chronology of the dream is one important technique. That is why the phrase "Start at the beginning" is so frequently used. Describing as many details as possible will help to bring the best results. Nothing should be overlooked. A technique used by therapists is to repeat important details. By repeating key words from the dream, a person can hold onto his or her dream image longer. By reflecting on the emotionally themed or emotional message, dreamers can often find meanings that they weren't even aware of. Another technique, reviewing, can help the dreamer to find any patterns in the dream (Jennings, 2007). These methods all use a trancelike state called awake dream to get closer to the original dream.

In an article written by Deborah Gregory (1999) titled "Sweet dreams?" she shares her personal experiences with dream analysis. After a troublesome dream when she was young, Deborah sensed that her younger sister was in trouble. The sisters had been placed in separate foster homes miles apart. She tried to contact her sister, but the foster mother blocked her attempts. She later found out that her feelings were right. Her sister was so unhappy that she had tried to commit suicide. Bothered for many years by these events, Deborah decided to do some research into dreams. She found a dream therapist who would teach self-interpretation skills to clients. When Deborah called to make the appointment, the therapist told her to begin a dream journal and bring it to their first session a week later. The therapist told her to write down four important elements of each dream; she said to title each dream, determine the theme of the dream, describe the general feeling or emotion of the dream, and ask herself, "Why am I dreaming about this?"

Over the week, Deborah noted tidbits of the dreams she could remember. With the therapist, the dream-bits were analyzed. She noticed that these bits of dreams really were relaying things that were going on in her life. She decided to meet with the therapist for five more sessions. Deborah's dreams developed during this time. When she began the therapy sessions, her dreams were anxious and somewhat negative. In one dream that she recalled, her teeth were shedding layers. Big chips of her teeth were falling out of her mouth into her hand. She was standing on a busy street in New York City. She tried to get help from the strangers passing by, but no one would look at her. Together, Deborah and her therapist unraveled the dream. It related to her foster mother who would take out her teeth at night. Sometimes she would yell at Deborah with her teeth out, which would scare Deborah to death. The lack of help from the people passing by related to her lack of control in her life at the time (Gregory, 1999). After therapy, Deborah's dreams became more positive. She went from having nothing to having everything she could desire. She has gained confidence in her real life by looking back at her childhood through dream analysis.

While reading all of this research for my essay, I have been growing increasingly excited to try some of these suggestions to analyze my own dreams. I found that the process is harder than it sounds. I have tried for weeks to write down a dream that I could use for analysis like Gregory (1999), Jennings (2007), Pesant & Zandra (2006), and Schredl (2000) all suggested. I noticed right away that if I moved around after waking, my dreams would disappear. I had to hold still and just think about the events of the dream. I learned this technique after reading Reed's (1978) article titled, "Improved Dream Recall Associated with Meditation."

This process led to oversleeping on several occasions. I'd lay there thinking about my dream and its details in such a state that I'd end up falling back asleep easily, which also resulted in the loss of the dream. I was getting frustrated. In a way, I'd given up. I started to look to family and friends for their dreams to analyze. Without the urgency that I'd been feeling earlier, I had a dream that I could completely remember. I woke up about 30 minutes before my alarm was set to ring. Doing what Reed (1978) recommended, I was able to lay still, to think about my dream, and to write the dream down. I wrote a full page of details in the correct chronological order like Gregory (1999) and Jennings (2007) suggested. I included all the details I could remember. I titled it and thought about the overall emotion of the dream the same way Gregory's (1999) therapist instructed her to do.

My dream was quite long in relation to the dream journal information that I read about. I was very pleased with the details I'd been able to remember. Though the dream wasn't very bizarre or flashy, it

was a great example of an everyday dream. My dream began in the Kanarraville Town Hall. I grew up in Kanarra, and this location is a sentimental place where everything related to the town seemed to happen. I have thousands of memories in this location, second only to my childhood home. In my dream, I'm sitting in a crowd of people. A wedding starts to take place on a stage. The bride is my childhood best friend and cousin. She is wearing a large curtain-like wedding dress. Her hair is exactly how I'd pictured her in my conscious mind. I don't remember the groom. I'm not sure if it was her real life spouse or not.

The ceremony is going through the usual process, and as it nears the "I do" part, someone in the foyer yells something. I don't hear the exact words, but from the crowd's reaction I can tell that the building is on fire. It is chaos. The adults are screaming and running towards the doors. The children are smiling and running away from the doors. I see that the children will be trampled. I yell over the noise for everyone to calm down and walk towards the exits. Surprisingly, everyone listens to me. The crowd calms down and I start to see parents picking up their children and walking to the doors. I head for a door too. I see that the sky is orange and smoky. I remember that there is a wildfire near New Harmony, a neighboring community. I think to myself that an ember must have blown over to the town hall and started the fire. I hear someone in the crowd say that the bomber is coming to hit the town hall with mud. They continue by saying if anyone has a white vehicle, they'd better get it out of there quick. The mud that the bombers use is orange, and it stains quite badly. Now, I feel panicked. My truck is white. I start pushing on the crowd to break free of them. I can hear the bomber getting closer. Once I'm free, I run towards my truck. This is where I wake up.

I had to keep reminding myself of Jennings' (2007) advice to not analyze the meaning until later in the day when I came back to my dream journal. Finally, I decided that it was time to analyze it. My son was in the room. I decided to share my dream with him because he has been reading my essay as it has evolved and has an interest in the process of dream analysis. I think it really helped me to have someone to discuss the possible meanings with orally. He was great to just ask me what I thought, rather than push his ideas onto me much like Gregory's (1999) therapist did. It seems that my dream had three different parts: the calm wedding, the panicked crowd, and the incoming bomber.

The beginning, a calm wedding, seemed to relate to a wedding I'd recently attended in that building. My cousin got married there a few weeks earlier, and I attended it. He is a brother to the dream's bride. I believe that is why that connection can be made. The second part, the panicked crowd, seemed more symbolic. After discussing it with my son, I decided that the crowd represented all of my major assignments that are coming due at the end of the semester. They are out of control until I decide to take control of them. I've recently gotten on top of some big assignments in my waking life. My time is more organized. I have felt more in control and better about what still lies ahead. The third part, worrying about my white truck getting stained by the fire retardant mud, represents the deadline of this essay. I have been worried that I won't be able to write a thoughtful ten page paper by the time it's due. I know the due date is coming and I'm doing what I can to be ready when it gets here.

By analyzing my dream, I feel more confident about my impending assignments. I'm in control, and knowing that my truthful subconscious seems to agree with me is so reassuring. I will continue to look to my dreams for any insight that they could be declaring to my conscious self. Dreams have been used in nearly every culture and time throughout history. Dreams obviously hold great wisdom. As more research is completed in this area, dreams could be found to have even more potential than is currently

thought. The brain is so complex. Its capabilities seem limitless. This means that each dream's messages are also limitless.

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2nd Place Winner: Jack Shumway, "The Environmental Movement: Is It In Good Hands?"
For Professor Eric Morrow

Imagine America's greatest cities, such as Los Angeles and New York, submerged under the ocean. This and several other tragedies are the potential consequences of global warming and people not embracing the environmental movement. Because of these disastrous consequences of inaction, environmental writers and other advocates of nature are charged with a very important task as they attempt to persuade society to take action. Are they holding up to this monumental task? Is the earth's future in good shape? Is the environmental movement in good hands? These questions can be answered by evaluating the effectiveness of several examples of pro-environmental publications. If these publications are to accomplish the task of persuading an audience to support the environmental movement, they must contain some key components. These components include the ability to appeal to the audience logically and emotionally, as well as the ability to entertain the audience. Based on these criteria, the environmental movement seems to be in good shape because environmental supporters have consistently provided good information, made the movement very personal, and captivated readers with unique methods.

A key component that a critical reader or viewer looks for in an argument is relevant and supported facts. This holds true with critics of the environmental movement. Fortunately, advocates of the environmental movement have effectively employed statistics, case studies, and other factual resources in their persuasive pieces. Paul Hawken effectively uses facts to persuade readers several times throughout his book "The Ecology of Commerce." The third chapter of this book examines in some detail the problems associated with consumption and waste production. In this chapter several statistics are used to further this point. Such examples include the fact that every American consumes 136 pounds of goods a week, that the world uses 4.1 billion pounds of pesticides a year, and that the top 50 products of the chemical industry generate 539 billion pounds of toxins a year (37). Many people don't realize the severity of environmental issues, but when they hear numbers in the billions, an issue becomes hard to ignore. Quantifying these problems really puts the urgency of the environmental movement into perspective. As a result, statistics like these are very alarming to most people, and as a result of their use, the environmental movement has gained some leverage. Alan Weisman, in his essay "Polymers are Forever," also uses factual evidence very effectively. This essay, which chronicles the growing problem of plastic use, discusses several studies that have been done to measure the amount of plastic in the ocean. One such study involved a contraption that, as it was pulled behind boats, sifted out small pieces of plastic for analysis (114-15). The use of studies like this one explains to readers the source of concern for environmentalists. Many people doubt the reliability of environmental researchers' studies. By guiding an audience through the process by which researchers come to their conclusions, environmental writers leave little room for doubting information. By exposing readers to these factual examples, those supporting environmentalism take others to the source of concern, and effectively appeal to them using logic.

Perhaps equally important as logical appeal in creating an effective argument is emotional appeal. Emotional appeal is very prevalent throughout works supporting the environmental movement. The documentary series "The Planet" has a very strong emotional appeal. One of its most memorable uses of emotion deals with the fact that the electronic waste of western society is dumped on the helpless

people of third world countries. The video showed mounds of used and useless electronics encumbering the people of Nigeria, as sad music played in the background to accentuate the problem ("The Planet"). This example made the problem seem very personal and left a feeling of guilt in the viewer, which made this emotional appeal very effective. Anyone who has ever disposed of a TV, radio, computer, or other electronic device was left feeling as though they had directly inflicted trouble upon these unfortunate people.

Banksy, in his image titled "Save or Delete Jungle Book," also very effectively put emotion to work. In this advertisement for the environmental group Greenpeace, Banksy portrayed the cartoon characters from the movie *The Jungle Book* lined up for execution in front of a clear cut forest (Banksy). Because most people associate these animated characters with innocence and their childhood, it is difficult for this image not to elicit an emotional response. This emotional response for many may be a pang of guilt, or a sense of anger, either of which lead to a desire to act in support of the environmental movement. Environmental problems lead to very personal, and therefore emotional, consequences. Environmental authors realize this connection and seem to have successfully exploited it to their advantage by bringing the problems of the environment to life.

While factual evidence and an appeal to emotion are important, they are useless if an argument does not garner the reader's interest. This is why a piece of literature must entertain. While many would immediately discount the environmental movement as bland, it is actually surprisingly captivating. An ideal example of an entertaining environmental piece is T.C. Boyle's "Carnal Knowledge." This fictional short story follows a man as he is prompted to join the environmental movement by a beautiful girl he meets on the beach. This story relies heavily on satire and humor, as it tells about this man getting beat down at an environmental protest and getting trampled over by the turkeys he attempts to liberate (Boyle). By using these humorous methods, Boyle effectively holds the attention of the reader, while touching on some important topics.

Other environmental publications hold the audience's attention because they are relevant to the reader's life. This is the case with many environmental blogs. One such blog discussed the benefits of electric and other "green" cars (Autoblog). Because of current high fuel prices, this article is very attractive to both environmentalists and those who are less concerned about the planet. Whether it's through alternative energy, a polluted community stream, or severe weather patterns caused by global warming, every person is affected by environmental issues. Because everyone has a stake in the environmental movement, people have a tendency to be interested in environmental publications.

By using this ability to gain a reader's interest, coupled with the ability to provide relevant facts and emotional examples, environmental composers seem to have effectively argued in support of nature. Through the effectiveness of environmental books, essays, films, and other sources, it seems that the environmental movement is in good hands. While it may be limited, there is evidence, such as improvements in government policy and business practices, to show that environmental advocates have had some success already. However, there is still much need for improvement, and it seems that environmental supporters have the potential to make these much needed adjustments to the views of society.

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Expressive- English 2010

1st Place Winner: Lauren Sams, "The Conqueror"

"Beep! Beep! Beep!" As that damned mechanical rooster jolts me out of yet another peaceful slumber, I groggily drag myself out of my bed, unready and unwilling to start my day. I know I'm not alone in my contempt; many of my fellow Americans share this negative view of being yanked out of a watercolor dream and shoved into reality. However, one individual who doesn't share my pessimistic perspective, who never has, is my little sister.

It has been just over sixteen years since Nicole was born with R.T.S., or Rubinstein-Taybi Syndrome, a condition that affects only 1 in every 125,000 people. There is very little known about R.T.S., but it is known to be caused by a mutation of chromosome 16 and is most closely related to Down Syndrome. Individuals who receive this cursed blessing are prone to mental and physical delays, moon-shaped eyes, broad fingers and toes, and an uncanny ability to touch the lives of everyone they meet. My sister is no exception; she wakes up each morning with a smile that could melt the coldest of hearts and an attitude that is best summed up by her daily motto: "Today is my best day ever."

Memories from age four are typically blurred, faint images that are permitted to run amuck, almost never first in line for recall. However, the day of my sister's birth is one I find myself reflecting upon frequently. It is a memory that stands out in my mind like vivid red paint splashed across a background of grey. I couldn't understand it; I suppose Nana and Papa sitting quite literally on the edges of their seats and jumping to grasp the phone like it was their only lifeline could have been seen as eager anticipation, but even my naive senses could tell something was off. Maybe it was the hurried, hushed tones of voices they used or the way they seemed to purposefully be trying to distract me, but something was definitely not right. I felt trapped in their home that I typically adored, and angry butterflies assaulted my stomach. I was only four years old, but already I had that heated sensation of resentment that usually accompanies the years of teenage angst. I had gotten my first taste of undeserved entitlement; that gut feeling when you know you deserve what is being denied to you. And in this case I was being denied the truth. It was a foreign feeling, but already it had been marked as completely unpleasant.

It wasn't until the next day that I was allowed to go to the hospital and things were properly explained to me. It was my stepdad, always the solid rock of our family, who sat me down and told me that my baby sister had been born with a rare condition. This condition, this thing that we knew nothing about that had been suddenly and unexpectedly sprung upon our family, was a newfound blindness. Even worse, it was the cause of my sister being held like a prisoner behind glass. She was fragile, only hours old and already a victim of life's hardships. Her heart was weak, containing eleven defects that further threatened its already delicate state. And only years later would I come to find that the anxiety I felt back at Nana and Papa's house the previous day was the fear that our family's angel wouldn't make it through the night. I've never been a religious person, but I still thank God to this day that she did pull through. With a strength I thought only possible of comic book super heroes, we all pulled through.

Seventeen days later my baby sister was freed from her I.C.U. prison and allowed to be welcomed into her new home. She was a miracle; we knew that much for sure. I myself was convinced of it as I got to hold her warm, miniature body close to mine for the first time and feel that faint but incredible

heartbeat. “Her name is Nicole,” my mom informed me. Nicole. I thought the name over slowly with silent distaste. Fortunately, my ill feelings were short-lived. Learning that Nicole meant “conqueror” was all it took for a loving bond to form. And as time went on, we would all come to see the extent to which her name held truth.

Over the years, my family and I developed an invaluable trait: adaptability. Life would continue to throw many curve balls our way, but through it all we leaned on each other and rolled with the punches to the best of our abilities. In the beginning years of her life, Nicole was unable to tolerate food like most babies. She spent the majority of her early childhood drinking Pediasure, a foul-smelling children’s drink that provided her with the valuable nutrients that she needed to gain strength. Unfortunately, even this mild drink meant for children was often too much for her sensitive body. It became routine that with almost every meal, Nicole would get sick. The smell would be nauseating, an immediate appetite suppressant, but even worse was watching my tiny sister not even be able to get through a simple meal. But as always, we adapted. Eventually, it was like waiting for the sound of the gun at the beginning of a race; once we heard one little cough, we took off running. I would sprint to grab a towel, my mom would launch herself in my sister’s direction, and my stepdad would fetch a new outfit and whatever else was required for clean up. In less than four minutes, the situation would be under control, and we would be gathered back around the table as though nothing had occurred. It didn’t matter where we were: at home, a friend’s house, or a restaurant, we were always waiting and ready. Working together as a team was what we did best when it came to Nicole; she held us together, uniting us with a common goal.

Another struggle for all of us was the surgeries. Slicing a person open and meddling with his or her insides is just wrong at any age. Of course, the procedure is typically carried out for a reason and with the hope of a worthwhile end result, but that doesn’t make it any easier. Making it even more difficult for Nicole was the fact that all of the slicing and meddling began at age one. And from age five, I had to quickly get used to the surgeries as well. Over the years, I’ve trudged into far too many typical white, sterile hospital rooms complete with pathetic attempts to make them kid-friendly. Even the thought of their headache-inducing florescent lights and sharp scent of disinfectant makes my stomach toss and turn. It was always there that I would find my sister, dwarfed by the seemingly enormous beds and taking on the pale color of her surroundings. I still to this day can’t fathom how much pain each of those procedures caused her. Attempting to comprehend her hardships was made even more difficult by the fact that every time I would visit her, she still had that sunbeam smile on her face. Negativity has never been Nicole’s specialty. Even the bleakest of moments have a bright spot somewhere if only you’re willing to look hard enough; Nicole taught me that.

It is now 2011, and Nicole just recently celebrated her sixteenth birthday. To date, she has endured five excruciating operations, including two open-heart surgeries and most recently three reconstructive surgeries on her leg and knee. As if this weren’t enough, we recently received the news that the reconstructive surgeries didn’t achieve the desired goal. With each step she takes, Nicole continues to wear down her leg, and the unavoidable end result will be her permanent reliance on a wheelchair. Even just relaying this news to others typically results in sympathetic “awwws” and saddened expressions. But of course, Nicole would never resort to that approach. After finding out this newest update, it took awhile for my parents to harness the strength to sit their little girl down and tell her what new twist her future entailed. No one said being a parent was easy, so they did what they had to do. And in typical

Nicole fashion, she didn't even hesitate when replying to their words with, "Can my new wheelchair be pink?"

Moments like these make you realize that one person's unique view can change another person's entire life. Growing up with or taking care of a child with special needs can be strenuous at times. I myself have experienced that first hand. However, and more importantly, I have also learned that in such a remarkable situation, you gain much more than you lose. The experience grants you a whole new outlook and a kind of strength you never thought possible. Not that such strength is even comparable to that of Nicole's or others with special needs, but it is still life changing to say the least.

As if I hadn't received enough blessings from my sister's presence alone, I have also been exposed to countless experiences that have truly opened my heart and changed not only myself as a person, but my future as well. It all began with my interest that was piqued on the very first day Nicole started elementary school. I discovered I was intensely curious as to how a class for special needs students would be run, and I also found it difficult to restrain my fiercely protective side. What would they have her do at school? Would the other kids be nice to her? Who would watch over her while she ate and played? I demanded to know the answers to my questions, and it was this fierce determination that led me to begin my work in special needs education programs. So it was in my elementary school days that I was fortunate enough to find what most people don't find until many years later: my passion. I began helping at Nicole's school and never stopped. How could I? I got to be surrounded by some of the most amazing children this world has to offer. Not many people get to discover the feeling of walking into a room of individuals they've never met before and being loved the instant their foot hits the doorway. That feeling is something truly incredible. Being surrounded by children just like my sister whose only goal is to hug you, get to know you, and be your new best friend is an experience that cannot be compared to any other. It is this passion and these influential children that have now taken me to college. With my degree, I will be able to make a career out of working with the children that I love. And of course, as always, I have Nicole to thank for this opportunity.

My baby sister stands at only 4'10", but this has never stopped me from looking up to her. From her very first night here on earth fighting for her life, she has been my hero; this is a place in my heart that she will always hold. She has taught me a new way to look at the world, she inspires me every day to be a better person, and I am able to look to her strength when times get tough. To say that Nicole has changed my life would be a serious understatement. She has made me the strong, compassionate, driven person that I am today, and that is something for which I will never be able to repay her.

2nd Place Winner: Eryn Whiting, "Life, Death, and Science"

For Dr. Bryce Christensen

Humanity has much to learn regarding biology and the physical limits of human life. How is it that medical science can keep the tiniest of pre-term babies alive and thriving, yet is unable to revive and save a young victim of a tragic accident? Science has made great strides in the art of temporarily replacing functions that are vital to the preterm infant, even creating an artificial womb of sorts. Yet bodily damage resulting from an automobile accident is irreparable. As complicated riddles are solved on a daily basis, many questions remain unanswered.

My career as a medical professional spans more than twenty years. At one point in time, I pursued the specialty of Newborn Intensive Care nursing. I was a premature infant myself, and four of my own children were lost to miscarriage. I knew I wanted to be a piece of the puzzle that is newborn life. This wish was solidified one evening as I worked my shift in the laboratory at Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs. A young woman brought a carefully wrapped bundle to our Receiving window. It turned out to be the tiny body of the infant she had miscarried only hours before. In the lab it was our job to assist, at her doctor's request, in defining the cause of her baby's untimely death. Unfortunately, it was not the first time this had happened to her.

I worked in the capacity of phlebotomist and lab assistant at the time. For the uninitiated in medical terminology, phleb- is Latin for "vein," and -otomy means "to remove from." Patients were never happy to see me and my tray walk into their room. The tray carried lots of sharp things and glass tubes, which translated to an unpleasant procedure. Children, in particular, dreaded my appearance. Though I wore smiley pins and stickers on the front of my lab coat, I was not a welcome addition to a patient's room. I went on rounds every hour, so I saw a lot of scared people on a frequent basis.

While there is only a minimal amount of science to actually drawing blood, considerably more is involved with processing the specimens. When blood was received in the lab, it was also part of my job to spin the tubes in a centrifuge to separate the plasma from the red cells. There is a wait time involved, and specimen tubes have a variety of additives to consider as well. If not properly processed, blood specimens must be redrawn and reprocessed. If my job is done correctly, the physicians and nurses have answers and can proceed with treatment in an educated manner. The laboratory is capable of delivering results that are life-changing. From this end of the process, nothing seems incurable.

Laboratory machines cannot replace the human touch. Extra care must be taken when drawing from some patients. I speak particularly about the tiniest of humans: premature neonates. Only the smallest of samples may be taken from these tiny beings as they don't have much blood to begin with. Drops can literally mean the difference in life or death for them. If the sample is not adequate, it will have to be repeated, placing the child in greater danger from a second draw. Even with the utmost in care, other factors (such as dehydration) can alter the blood chemistry enough that, when the sample is spun in the centrifuge, the cells may hemolyze and disintegrate. This, unfortunately, also requires another draw.

With these factors in mind, phlebotomists proceed with caution when entering the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU). I was paged one evening to draw a sample from a tiny three-month premature "crack" baby. When I entered the unit, a nurse led me to the infant, who was fussing and fidgeting from the

withdrawal symptoms her mother had inflicted on her. She was a beautiful child, with tiny tight curls on her head, and her skin still held a shade of translucence due to her extreme prematurity. Her hands were smaller than my pinky. The baby's grandmother was sitting patiently by her side, obviously caring and concerned, and I could see she had been crying. I went to work quickly, advising the woman that her granddaughter was not going to like what I was going to do, but that it was necessary. She only smiled and nodded. I found a surprisingly good vein in the child's antecubital region, and having already calculated exactly the amount I would need, proceeded to withdraw the blood. I was very conscious of the NICU nurse standing behind me, literally counting the drops as they came out through the butterfly tube. She, too, knew how much was needed, and was there to make sure I took no more than that. Thankfully, the baby had nodded off to sleep as I began and did not reawake before I finished. I returned to the lab and began spinning her bullet-tube sample, which I then handed off to the medical technologist who would finish the testing procedure.

In the process of phlebotomy, the sample must travel from the vein into a needle, pulled by the pressure of a vacutainer tube. If it is not done correctly, the blood cells will lyse, or break up. If drawn and processed correctly, the building blocks of life are visible when viewed under a microscope. There are several different types of cells in the blood alone, not to mention the many other kinds in the human body. Blood cells transport oxygen and nutrients, as well as carry away waste. Their shape and condition inform doctors about a patient's health and bodily processes.

With the abilities medical science has to intervene in so many ways for good, why is it that the art so often falls short of saving a life? I was made to ponder this issue a little later that same evening, when I was called to visit the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). This was on the saddest of missions: a draw on a brain-dead toddler. I had been told the story before I went up, as it was necessary to know how to deal with the family on this issue. The little girl had drowned in a mop bucket that had not been emptied. Her parents were occupied watching the Super Bowl and were honestly unaware of their daughter's predicament. She had apparently bent over the bucket from curiosity and fallen forward where she had become wedged and drowned. By the time she was discovered, it was too late, and paramedics could not revive her. At the hospital she was treated and placed on life support but did not recover consciousness. Five days had passed and the grieving family had made the decision to offer her organs for donation. Small patients were already waiting in other states for the life her death would provide. As I drew her that night, I could not help but ask God why, with all the knowledge physicians possess and all that can now be done for tiny preemies in the NICU, could we not do something to revive this lovely child? We can remove her organs and place them in another, and that other person will live. Yet she cannot be saved.

One small but significant miracle of medical science is the PKU (phenylketonuria) test for newborns. Phenylketonuria is a severe inherited metabolic condition which, left undiagnosed or untreated, will cause severe seizures, mental retardation, and possibly death. This disorder can be detected in a simple blood test done with a heel prick on a neonate within days of birth. Because of the many lives saved due to this screening, there are now many more conditions included in this first basic blood test. Yet, as I have found personally, many parents choose to remain ignorant of the consequences if the test is not done, claiming it is "barbaric" and "uncivilized" to stick a baby's heel so "inhumanely." The parents are provided with literature explaining the life-saving diagnoses that can be identified from this simple procedure, yet many will not consent to the test until they are informed that it is a state law and can be done without their approval. I have been called many unsavory names for performing this procedure on

an infant while their protesting parents stand by and watch. Many forms of misery and ill-health can be alleviated by a simple test on a few drops of blood.

While science is miraculous in many instances, it is composed of finite limits. Medical knowledge has been allowed to progress only so far and only so fast. Many preterm babies, born with life-threatening physical problems, can be treated and do survive and thrive. Some full-term babies die shortly before birth for reasons that are never understood. Still more infants die prematurely inside the womb of mysterious causes. While I have had opportunities to personally observe both disasters and miracles, I am still awestruck with the event that is life, and the great strides the medical community has made to physically understand it. While many questions remain unanswered at this point in time, it is encouraging to attempt to comprehend how far mankind has come in attempts to solve the riddles of life and death and to ponder how each answer brings more questions.

Honorable Mention: Madisen Hayes, "In This All Honor Lies"
For Dr. Jessica Tvordi

White. Everywhere there is white, blinding white light, and unsettling white noise. My eyes burn with the brightness that penetrates there. I hear everything and nothing. The steady tempo of pounding blood suddenly increases in my ears. Beads of sweat begin to form upon my brow, and my ragged breathing is growing wilder. My nerves are on fire, and then, everything falls silent. I lift my head. It is time.

Relax. Everything is going to be just fine. I take a deep breath to steady myself. I open my mouth and let the words flow. I hope I remember everything.

"Oh hateful hands, to tear such loving words..." (Two Gentlemen of Verona, 1.2.264). The poetic phrases of sorrow and regret roll over my tongue as I kneel. The emotions and character lives through me, in me, as I perform. A pause. I can't forget now! I have one line left! Damn it! A breath. Anger and frustration fluster me. I force my momentum to carry through to physical movement to fill the time. My hands act out on their own, clutching for the invisible scraps of paper laid scattered around me. I worked too hard on this Shakespeare piece to just stop now! Please. Just say something! ANYTHING! What was that line?! I shift my focus from left to center, and slowly bring my face up to stare directly at the light in front of me. Got it!

"Thus will I fold one on another/ Now kiss, embrace, contend, and do what you will" (1.2.288). With trembling jaw and shaking voice, I finish the line, reveling in every word. The last word echoes in the black. Silence takes its place, deafeningly ringing in the vastness of the theatre. One Beat. Two. I begin to sweat. Three. Applause breaks the oppressive quiet. I grin and bow deeply, quickly hiding my glee as I stand erect once more. I did it! I can't believe it! I am AWESOME!! Ha!!

A disgruntled voice shatters my euphoria as it booms boisterously over the crowd, "Finalists for Shakespeare monologues will be announced in three hours. You can watch or you may be excused." I nod and curtsy to the disembodied voice and vacate the stage. Another monologue, perfectly executed! I hope that I make it to finals! That would be the first time that anyone in my school has! I love coming to the Fullerton festival! Stepping outside of the theatre I am greeted by shouts and cheers. High fives, pats on the back, and smiles surround me. This is my passion, my place, my pleasure.

"Group hug!" Nick shouts. We all embrace. I love you guys. This unlikely group of theatre kids is a family, my family. I look to our leader, teacher, and most importantly, my friend.

Mrs. Lord beams at me, the soft wrinkles around her eyes lift heavenward, and her eyes shine with glee. "You nailed that one! Alright, finals will be up in three hours, and you still have to compete in a Shakespeare scene from Two Gentlemen of Verona, a contemporary monologue, and a cold read! You also need to eat something. Come on gang! Let's move!" Running in mass we arrive at the next event where three friends and I compete. Hugs and laughs are exchanged. Again, as one large bundle we make it to our next stop: more competition, more fun, and more life.

An hour and a half until the list goes up and we finally break for lunch. We sprint over to the cafeteria to order. Ham sandwich, milk, apple, and cookies, SCORE! Silence envelops the grassy knoll where we land,

our mouths full of our well-earned spoils. After the quick disappearance of the victuals, we chat and laugh about the events of the day. I lean up against a tree, taking everything in, absorbing as much as I can, committing this perfect picture to memory. I am going to miss this. My last competitive festival. I wonder if [cough] the others will [cough] remember this [cough cough]. Why the heck is my throat so dry? [Itch] What the [cough] is going on? Why can't I [cough itch] breathe!? What is...?

People are shouting. I don't understand. Everything is starting to go a little fuzzy [thud thud]. There is a harsh pounding on my back. Ow. What's happening? I see Mrs. Lords' face right above mine. How did I end up on the ground? Hands are cradling my head, and more faces are rushing into my quickly blurring view. Why do you look so scared? Please don't cry, everything's going to be... white minivan... hands are running through my hair... Gianna's telling me something I can't hear... white room...strange people dressed in white...white ceiling...bright white lights...so much, too much. Then an empty blackness...Strong arms pull me forward and a tube is shoved down my throat as black goo is forced down my gullet. As soon as it hits my stomach, I begin to wretch. Someone is standing there with a bucket and rubs my back. The contents of my stomach reappear for all to view.

Nurses are frantically stabbing me with needles, one is talking to Mrs. Lord, and a woman's face emerges right before me. Commanding and stern, she asks direct questions.

"What are you allergic to? What did you eat? Do you have allergies to any medications?" "Turkey, shellfish, and some others... um... Iodine," I manage to mumble. Turning to the nurse with the bucket, the stern one orders, "Test the contents, and find out what's in there." She turns back to me, and while administering a shot, she says, "I'm giving you Benadryl, some steroids, and this lovely cocktail. Sleep." Not willing to put up a fight, I follow her instructions and I promptly lose consciousness.

I wake to a calmer environment. Mrs. Lord is gone and one of the mother chaperones is with me. I glance up at the clock. The list should be up any minute. Mrs. Covey sees me awake and tells me what happened. I started coughing and blacked out. I was rushed to the ER where they pumped my stomach and found that the sandwich I had so enjoyed was turkey. Mrs. Lord was back with the rest of the gang and waiting with them. In the meantime, I was being ordered to remain in the ER for at least another four hours before release. Holy Moo. I can't stay here. The show must go on. In my minds' eye, I see the faces of my friends and remember everyone is counting on me. I quickly voice my opinion about my rapidly improving condition and demand that I be released immediately. A heated discussion with Mrs. Covey, ever the Jewish mother, and a brief but convincing talk with the doctor later, I am let go. Being 18 has its benefits.

Arriving just in time to see the list go up, I stand with my clan. After the straining events of the day, I feel too weak to stand for too long. The sunlight is bright to my eyes and my head begins swimming. Taking a seat on the cool grass, I wait for the news to spread. Shrieks of laughter and piercing sobs fill the air. Nick comes bounding out of the crowd at full tilt, heading straight for me. Practically radiant, he grabs me up in a tight bear hug and swings me around as he rejoices.

"You did it! You're on the list for two of your monologues and a cold read!" My friends are ecstatic. I am one of two in the group to be moving on to the finals. I stand and begin walking toward my trial. My head spins, and my stomach gives an unfriendly lurch. What did I just get myself into? Lord, give me strength.

I manage to stumble in to my events and the judges are quietly informed about the situation at hand. I am asked to perform first. I stand and take center stage, the audience quiets, the air stiffens, and the lights rise. I steady myself as my nerves begin to set in. If you can do this, you can do anything. Just breathe. Breathe. I steel myself and let the first line lose. All the events of the day, all of who I am, fall away. Julia takes my place as the verses ebb and flow. Natural.

“Now kiss, embrace, contend, and do what you will.” The last line delivered, I bow, and hurriedly exit stage right. I nearly collapse into the nearest chair. Two more to go. Heaven help me. I miraculously finish out the day, and manage not to black out or spew over everything, even though my stomach has many times attempted to. A brief nap later, the winners are announced. No familiar name is called. This is expected. My peers approach me and we all exchange one final round of hugs. I laugh at their remarks about the judges, and quips about being ten times better with the funky cocktail than without. Packing up our lot I realize something, I won. I had made it farther than anyone else had. I kept going.

We are about to climb into the cars when Mrs. Lord approaches me and grabs me up in a big momma-like hug, “You did a good job today. Granted, it was stupid, but I’m proud.” She hands me my score sheets. I skim the first round, and delve quickly into the final score sheets. Amazed at all the positive feedback, I laugh at myself. What a long day it has been! I scramble into the car and buckle in between Gianna and Megan. Mrs. Lord climbs into the driver’s seat and hands another score card back. “Here Maddie, this one got mixed in with Audrey’s.” I take the paper and read over the comments. Getting towards the bottom of the page one little something catches my eye. I read it and smile. After placing the papers in my bag, I lean back and put my arms around my girlfriends and give them a big hug. We all laugh as Mrs. Lord turns up the music and we pull onto the freeway. There will never be a more perfect day. I will never forget.

Scribbled in the bottom corner of that last score card, was the best comment I had ever received, a short and slender cursive phrase: “Act well thy part, in this all honor lies.”