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Literary Review

Fall 1998

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1998

Fall

Meridian Community College

Review Winners

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Cover design created by Amy Miller,
Graphics Communication Technology
student.

When We Were Purple

-Christine Maust

When we were young, we danced and sang like we were purple.
Our legs were not black—they were just a blur as we raced around the playground
chasing each other to nowhere.
Our faces were not white—they were just happy, smeared with smiles and whispering secrets.
Our arms were not black—they were just strong for climbing skinny trees and
pushing the swings too high.
Our hands were not white—they were just swift with the tara-tara rhythms we pounded
out between our palms.
But somewhere between playground and grown-up
like the fading of a fawn's innocent spots
we lost our purple.

Justification

-Bess Harwell

If I said I didn't lie,
I would.
And lying comes from saying.
But what about believing?

Does a lie not believed
Become Truth?
Or unbelieved Truth
A Lie?

Leaving Believing to be the Judge.

If life is a parade:

-Bess Harwell

The past is in front of me
The future is behind me.

Leaving me to look at Present
Before it goes Past.

But who said life's a parade?

Then again-
Who said it's not?

Gonna Be Big

-Christine Maust

I'm gonna be big.

Mama tells me I'm gonna be a superstar.

She says I'll wear those fashion dresses like Vanna White and the game show ladies.
She says I'll ride in a long shiny car and travel to those places on the cruise commercials.

Mama says I'll marry a man that will love me and buy me lots of big flowers.

But, Mama says she never had a man with flowers.

She said I don't have a daddy and it's better that way.

Mama don't have a car.

But, she don't really need a car cause she only leaves the apartment
to do the laundry at Mr. Jonas's house on the corner.

Mama only wears her house coat with the little faded flowers, but she says its her favorite.

But Monday, she does wear her red town dress to go to the store.

Mama watches the noisy talk shows that come on channel 7 and
she says she hates rich movie people.

She cries sometimes.

I wish she would be better, but, someday I'm gonna be big for her.

Real big.



Bathroom Break

-Bess Harrell

Timmy's attention evaporates the minute she begins the lesson. Everybody knows addition—so why does she go over it everyday? He scribbles in his shiny new textbook and yawns. Just a few more minutes until Juice Break. Pbbllth! He sticks his tongue out at Shanetta, spraying his crisp, neat shirt with bubbles of spit. She's so fat and ugly; plus, she stinks. He wants to make her cry—just for the fun of it. She's so stupid—no wonder she flunked the third grade twice. She needs to pay attention to Miss Lackey because she can't do addition if someone doesn't do it for her.

Timmy notices Shanetta wiggling in her seat—like a worm being stuck on the end of a fishing hook. Tee-hee. Shanetta's got to tinkle!

"Hey, Mary," he whispers to the blonde pigtails in front of him. "Tubby's going to wet her pants! Better watch out or we'll drown in the flood!"

Timmy giggles at the thought of seventeen little third graders being swallowed by a warm, yellow sea. A brown blob of plastic clips, braids, and purple ribbons turns to face him. Timmy makes goofy faces at her, and Mary starts catapulting pink Care Bear pencils into her face. Shanetta cackles in amusement. She thinks they like her. Girls are so dumb.

Miss Lackey hears the laughter and calls her to her desk. Shanetta tiptoes to the front, careful not to trip on her broken shoelaces. She slowly lifts her head, and her glistening brown eyes blink back tears. Miss Lackey breathes heavy words into her wincing ears, and Shanetta shuffles to the corner. Timmy and Mary smirk at each other. They watch as Shanetta continues to squirm in agony on the stool, her scabby legs not quite reaching the floor. She stares at the kitten-in-a-yellow-rainhat poster in the Reader's Corner and the cursive letters taped above the blackboard. Her eyes eventually fixate on the pink door to the bathroom in the rear of the classroom.

"She's not going to make it," Mary whispers to Timmy.

"I hope she doesn't pee on the carpet by the cubbies—I've got my lunch over there!" he replies.

"I hope she does. That would be funny. Timmy eating a pee-sandwich for lunch! Hee-hee!" Timmy glares at Mary and yanks on a pigtail.

"Oww! Miss Lackey! Timmy pulled my hair again!"

"Children, why can't you be nice to each other for once! I'm tired of always having to watch you."

Miss Lackey drags the two to her desk, and they sit in Time-Out chairs. Timmy scowls at Mary as Miss Lackey turns her back.

"Goody-two-shoes."

"Booger-brain!"

"Teacher's pet!"

"Pootie-head!"

"You watch the Care Bears—you're a BABY!" Timmy snots to Mary.

When Juice Break finally comes, the troublemakers have to stay inside as usual while the class goes to the playground. The aide remains inside. Shanetta asks Miss Stacy if she can use the potty. As she rushes to the bathroom, Timmy juts out a tanned leg, and Shanetta tumbles to the shiny, cold cement. He notices a small wet spot on her skirt, and laughs. Tears stripe her chubby face as she scuttles to the bathroom.

The class returns from break, and tangles of dirt and hair take seats on the carpet near Big Chair for story-time. Timmy and Mary join them. No one besides Timmy and Mary notices that Shanetta is still in the bathroom. But, even they forget she is gone as they are absorbed by an interest in Matilda.

Two chapters and lunch break later, Timmy feels the need to relieve himself. He shouldn't have gushed down those three Capri Suns at lunch. But the pleasure of watching Mary cry when she discovered hers was missing made it worth the discomfort.

The class is beginning Naptime when Timmy gets permission to go to the restroom. Stretches and yawns serenade him as he saunters in the dark to the closed door. Innocently, his sticky fingers grasp the knob and begin turning it. Suddenly, just as the door is pulling open, an earsplitting clatter propels the children from their mats. Rapids gush out, slapping the floor open wide. Timmy's shoes get soaked as he jumps out of the way. Bottom half bare, Shanetta sits squealing in the shattered sink. Dripping above her, a pink skirt and white panties hang from the air vent. The sight of so much water is too much for Timmy. He feels warm relief trickling through his spine, down his leg, and finally, to the floor. He jumps back into a corner, face flushed with embarrassment, before anyone sees him.

Shrill screams of laughter and bewilderment at the sight of Shanetta echo across the classroom. Chaos erupts as Miss Lackey stumbles through the rolling children at the bathroom door.

"SHANETTA! What have you done to my bathroom!" Miss Lackey chokes in horror at the scene. "How did you break the sink off the wall?!"

The half-nude figure trembles with tears. Still tangled in the sink, she shivers, "I'm...I'm...so sorry, Teacher. I...I...just wa-wa-wanted to dry my clothes." Shanetta's sobs silence the roar of children. "Mommy would be so mad if she found out I wet my pants."

Miss Lackey's face softens. Miss Stacy leaves to find some towels and clothes for Shanetta, and Miss Lackey silences the children. Timmy keeps quiet in a corner while the others take their seats. Miss Lackey helps Shanetta out of the sink.

Miss Stacy returns with towels, clothes, and a custodian. With her fresh clothes on, Shanetta trudges out of the bathroom, careful not to slip on the wet floor. A few minutes later, the custodian

has the water cleaned up off the gritty floor, and the class is dismissed to the playground. Timmy, however, faces the wall. He is the last one left in the room besides Shanetta.

As Shanetta is leaving the classroom, Timmy feels her gazing at him in the corner.

"Timmy," she quivers, "why aren't you coming outside?"

He remains silent, his wet face bright red. Why do girls always have to talk! She should just shut up. If she comes any closer, she will see the wet pants. He presses his freckles to the cold wall, refusing to face her. This could be embarrassing.

Shanetta stands directly behind him.

"It's okay," she soothes. "I won't tell anyone."

What?! How does she know? Oh great, now she's going to go and make a big scene. Why can't she just shut up and go to the stupid playground!

Timmy is shocked when Shanetta hands him a clean towel and some gym shorts that were in his cubby-hole. She leaves him standing, still plastered against the wall, as she joins the class outside. Timmy, confused, eases away from the wall. He looks carefully to his left-right—behind-and once again, to his front. Satisfied that he is alone, he slinks into the bathroom and observes the newly strange conditions. There is no longer a sink: the custodian took it out when he mopped the floor. Instead, a huge hole with a silver cap glares at Timmy with an evil eye. A smudged mirror with a child's handprint (too big to be anyone's but Shanetta's) looms eerily above the plugged hole. He notices a few pink threads tangled and swirling in the air vent near the ceiling. He shudders. Timmy moves into the space once taken up by the sink and fumbles with his shorts. He runs out of the haunted bathroom before the blue elastic waistband is all the way up. On his way out, he vows never to step his dirty sneakers into that bathroom again. The one in Mrs. Slagle's room will do just fine. Before being gobbled up by the bathroom monster, he runs out to the playground to chase Mary.

I'm Bout It

-Christopher B. Stringfellow

I was born in Evanston, Illinois, a place where drugs and death filled the city like a toxic gas that no one could escape. As a matter of fact, there were only three ways out for Evanston's young black males: to die, to go to jail, or to move as far away from there as you could.

Death or jail was definitely the road I was going down cause I was " 'bout it, 'bout it." " 'Bout it, bout it" is a term we used to represent "being down for doing whatever," meaning being willing to do whatever it takes to get paid. "Being down for whatever" simply meant you would rob, steal, sell drugs, and even kill, if you thought you could make a profit. The crazy thing is, for some strange reason, I cared more about the way I died than the way I lived my life. It was like that for most of my partners that grew up on my block. We had all reached the conclusion that we wanted to die like soldiers. That is to die with a gun in hand a blazing, for to do so on our block was respectable death. We got so caught up in going out like soldiers that we ran around calling each other soldiers. The only way you could call yourself a soldier was to be " 'bout it."

I'll never forget December 12, 1995; it was my partner John-John's birthday and I was about to learn what being 'bout it really meant. We decided to go to a club called Big 7 to celebrate. It was Friday night, the hypest night to go clubbing, and everybody was out trying to "floss" (bragging and loud talking) in front of the females. The club was so packed that we had to wait outside for people to leave before we could go inside. It was so cold out there that night that the wind made tears come to my eyes and the cold turned them into what felt like small ice cubes on my face. As we stood in line less than five feet away from the door, we could hear the music bumping from inside the club and on their own, my feet started tapping the ground to the beat of the song. However, my boy John-John had something else on his mind. I could tell by the way he kept looking nervously over his shoulder like a war was going to pop off or something. I asked what was wrong; he just shook his head left-to-right like everything was cool and asked me to watch his back. He later went on to tell me a couple of "player haters" (people who hate you cause you have a lot of women liking you) had put word out on the street that they were going to "peel his wig back" (shoot him in the head) next time they saw him, all because he allegedly "fronted on" (disrespected) them in front of some females. One thing you don't do is let someone disrespect you in public. I have known many people to die for respect as well as for lack of it.

We continued to stand outside the club freezing our buns off while wondering if we were ever going to get a chance to go inside. I remember my boy John saying jokingly, "Man we ain't never gonna get up in this bitch!" He then proceeded to the car to warm up. That is when I heard a loud clap of thunder that tore through the cold, crisp air like a hell bound train through tinfoil. Damn, my partner had been shot! As I turned around to run towards my falling partner, I witnessed the impact

of the second, life-taking round that ripped big hunks of flesh from his body leaving his insides exposed. I stood there in the fog of the war, civilians running every which way; I firmly took my Colt 9mm in hand, aimed, and began to send my rounds down range, cause if I was about to go out, I had to go out like a soldier. I quickly ran to the aid of my fallen friend. When I got to my partner's body, I was horrified with disbelief. I pulled him close to my body and cradled him the way a mother would do her newborn and began to rock him back and forth. I did that so I could try and ease his pain and to add warmth to his ice cold body. Yet, he was still dying. The closer death came to him, the tighter I held him and the faster I rocked. I thought maybe if I rocked fast enough and held on tight enough, death would not be able to pry John's life out of my hands. I knew that this might be our last time fighting together side-by-side, and if we lost, John would go on to fight no more. I promise, better yet, I swear, I fought for as long as and as hard as I could, but death was just too damn strong. He whipped my ass and stole my closest friend's life.

When I could not fight anymore, I begged him for my friend's life back. I told him, "Please, please don't take my homeboy's life away!" I even told him he could take mine instead. For some reason, death was hellbent on taking John's life instead of mine. We did not get a chance to tell each other good-bye. We just kind of gripped each other's hand in that old brotherly love way. That was the way we always shook hands whenever we showed each other love. However, this time it was different. We were both crying and holding on to each other's hands so tight that only death could pull us apart. As we looked into each other's eyes, neither one of us could bring himself to speak; it was somehow understood that we loved each other and we would meet again one day next lifetime. I felt my partner's grip becoming weaker and weaker until the point it no longer existed; I knew he was dead. With his final gasp of air his last tear fell and with it, all my will to live. I then felt a warm breeze brush gently against my face. I knew it was his soul leaving and I watched it journey gently into outer space.

Watching my boy fall victim to the game like that, I knew it was time for me to make a change. Now, do not get me wrong; I'm still "bout it", just in a different way. I'm all about getting an education, making a better life for myself, and most importantly, not letting my boy John-John's death be in vain.

The Teacher Who Makes A Difference

-Andrea Lucas

Throughout my years in school, I have come in contact with many teachers. Most of my teachers have been nice and encouraging. One instructor who stands out from the rest is my multicultural and economics teacher, Mrs. Shirley Burton. Not only is she an outstanding educator, but she is also very concerned about the welfare of the students that she teaches. For this reason and many others, she has made a significant impact in my life.

Mrs. Burton teaches me to always be proud of accomplishments and to hold my head up high. Whenever something good happens to me, like receiving an award or getting first chair at a band clinic, she always congratulates me in front of the class and gives me a hand for a job well done. She does not just do this for me but for all of her students. This makes me feel good about myself because most of my teachers do not take the time to congratulate me when I excel outside of the classroom. She builds up my self-esteem and makes me feel like I am on top of the world. Therefore, her never ending encouragement and motivation is one way she makes a difference in my life.

Another way she influences me everyday is by serving as a good role model. Mrs. Burton shows me that a black woman can have a successful career and maintain a family. This is especially important to me because I want to have a great job and a family also. She demonstrates that as long as you strive to do your best, success will be yours eventually. This means a lot to me because even today, the black woman is still having to prove herself. Seeing her life inspires me to reach my goal and anything else I want in life.

Mrs. Burton gets involved with her students and tries to make learning fun. She is the type of teacher who wants to help a student in any way that she can. She once said to my class, "I care, but you've got to care for yourself." She gives students opportunities to pull their grades up by doing retests or extra credit. She wants to make learning an enjoyable experience for her students. She will often put her students in groups and let each group do a presentation in any format they wish about the material to be presented. She makes a difference in my life by trying to help me whenever possible and making learning exciting.

In conclusion, Shirley Brown is more than just a teacher to me. She is a friend, a counselor, and a role model. She has affected me in various ways since I have known her. She also influences me to work for the excellence she has already attained. Through her dedication and enthusiasm for teaching, she makes a difference in the lives of the students she teaches everyday and has made a substantial difference in my life as well.

Divorce: *A Two-Way Street*

-Courtney Boswell

Divorce happens all of the time to many families due to many different reasons. Divorce can be a very hard aspect for children to deal with, especially young children. Children seem to suffer more than anybody else in a family undergoing a divorce. Children look to their parents for support, love, and affection. These children tend to lose a lot of these qualities when they lose a parent to divorce. Divorce can leave children in a state of depression, anger, and helplessness.

Divorce can leave children feeling very depressed. Children feel lonely and feel they have nobody who loves them. During their years as a whole family, with both parents, children are usually told how much they are loved and supported by their parents. When parents get a divorce, the child feels that his or her parents lied about their love and support. If the parents really love their child, they would not put the child through the pain and heartache of divorce. A child may be depressed and not accept affection for a while. This is because he or she is afraid of being hurt again by a loved one. Parents should understand their children's feelings when deciding on a divorce.

Divorce can make children very angry. They may be angry at themselves or their parents. This depends on the child. Most of the time, children blame themselves for a divorce. This is mainly because when something bad happens, children tend to believe that it is a result of something they have done wrong. All children want to have a mother and a father who love them, and when their parents split up, the children become angry with them. The children feel that their parents are taking their love away. Parents usually do not let their children encourage them to change their minds about a divorce, because the parents feel that the divorce is for the better. Children get angry at this most of the time because they feel that, since they are a part of the family, they should have a say in what their parents choose to do, especially if it involves the feelings of their children.

When parents divorce, their children are usually left feeling very helpless. They feel like they have nobody to turn to. They feel like nobody cares about them, not even their parents. In some divorce cases, the children are asked to decide which parent they want to live with. Most of the time, children have a hard time choosing because they do not want to hurt either parent's feelings. Children really feel helpless when neither parent wants them. This can put a child in a great deal of pain. Children really have a lot to think about in a divorce, especially if choosing between parents is an option.

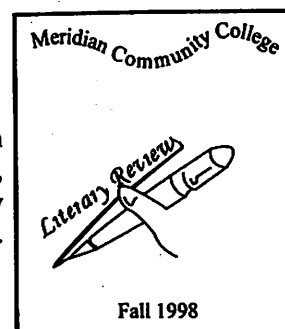
Parents should think twice before getting a divorce. They should consider how it affects every person in their family, especially their children. Children are very delicate and learn almost everything from their parents. If a child grows up being told that they are loved and cared about, and then his or her parents go and take that love and care away by getting a divorce, the child is left feeling hurt and confused. This can affect the way the child develops later on in life. Divorce does not only affect the parents; it has a major influence on children.

Blockbuster

-Wendy Feruson

I sit here turned inside out as the crowd
illusively piles to the aisles to leave.
The credits begin to roll.
I am turned outside out slowly
with each screen of no-names.
I feel a tug on my shirtsleeve.
It's my boyfriend who looks nothing like Leonardo DiCaprio.
I must let go to the fantasy world
they helped create, I think as I stumble from
getting up too fast. He balances
me with a hand on each hip and
we waddle toward the crude red EXIT.
When the lights pop, I can be found
looking back as the unread names
of somebody's son or sister slink up or down the BIG
screen as if waving good-bye, only serving as a window
from reverie to reality.

Third Place graphic design
created by, Janet McDonald,
Graphics Communication Technology
student.



Healing

-Jimmy Smith

Each spring, I am aware of good fortune
when my soul emerges from the grip of winter's chilling hand.
The phoenix that arises from the ashes of ambitions, burnt
to fuel the hope of life's lenten stand.
Recall, for me, the faces that I am missing
and I will count the parts reborn, intact.
Eroded by wind and ice this season,
they could not restrain my spirit's rekindling act.

Beanies

(From a Sales Clerk's Point of View)

-Lennie Reed

This is insane!
People got Beanies on the brain.
Phone calls galore,
Strangers knocking at the door.
Friends have shown up I've never even met before.

I tell you...

This is insane!
People got Beanies on the brain.
You've got 80—that's just fine!
But they're making new ones all the time.

Just when you think there could be no more,
Oh No! There's Beanies by the score.
Still everyone's searching store to store.

Dreaming production
Of Beanies had stopped.
Caused one woman to get
All tied up in knots.

This is insane!
People go Beanies on the brain.
Excuse me, please.
The phone just rang.

Phoenix

-Barbara Hanna

The
Bird
of
Long
Ago

Consumed in fire and ascended
From its ashes,
Sacrificing yesterday's dreams
For tomorrow's promise.
Enduring a rebirth of pain
To soar free and high
Above life's troubles,
Facing the future
Brave, eager, expectant,
Confident of the new challenge
Of a new life
More promising than
The one left with
The ashes of yesterday's dreams.

The Judgment

-Gail Winfield Miller

I choose not to put a label on you,
for you came with a label all your own.
I do not place my judgment upon you,
because I am not fit to judge.

I dare not look upon your faults,
for I am too busy sorting out mine.

Instead,

I choose to focus on the good I see in you,
for there is much to be seen.

I wish only to see inside your soul,
and draw from your warmth and strength.
I hope just to mirror the value I see in you,
that I may somehow find some of it in me.



Second place graphic design
created by **Mike Hayes**,
Graphics Communication Technology
student.

Postcards

-Wendy Ferguson

This postcard at Riverwalk was sixty cents.

This 'n of Ponchatrain was twenty-five.

These two were a dollar apiece on Bourbon Street.

If I were sending one, I'd say: This came from a tattered old Hard Rock Cafe bag with plastic handles held by a roughly looking black man with white hair who studded as he handed us dirty fliers for the "House of Blues" while talkin' of celebrities he'd met, talked to or touched. "I got a gift for you," he now addressed one of my eyes not hiding behind my new acquaintance. "I just tryin' to make a few bucks...you know, without beggin'," he managed while frantically digging in his bag like a sewer rat. "That CD for ya is in here somewhere," he said and unconvincingly scrambled. "Thought it was in here,..." he said holding out this worn postcard about a chef in the French Quarter plus one as two bucks simultaneously floated from one pocket to another. I'll send the one featuring a green-haired Ani DiFranco to your favorite ex and call you if I get home.

Dust to Dust

-Kathy Foley

"Where have you been, Mother?" Sandy asked with a noted tone of exasperation in her voice. She definitely wanted her mother to know that she was quite upset with her, having tried all morning to get her mother on the phone. It was now 3:00 P.M. and Sandy still had clothes to wash, dry and fold plus prepare her lessons for tomorrow. Teaching was certainly a full-time job.

"Honestly, Mother, you know that I always call you every Sunday morning about 10. The least you could do was be there when I call. This is going to be such a busy week for me. Every fourth grade teacher must have a lesson plan on endangered species, and I haven't even started mine," Sandy groaned.

"Well, if you are that busy on Sunday, call on another day and at another time, Sandy. I'm tired of sitting around every Sunday waiting for your call, anyhow." Margaret Higgins replied matter-of-factly.

"Mother, are you all right? What is the matter with you? You don't sound like yourself! Sandy said, baffled by her mother's response. Their conversations every Sunday followed a very strict menu: first the family health, the grandchildren's schooling and extracurricular activities, the weather, and finally Sandy's husband of twenty years, Joe. Margaret neither liked nor disliked Joe; she just acknowledged that he existed and was the reason who her daughter lived so far away. At first Margaret resented Sandy marrying Joe and moving but as the years came and went, realizing mother and daughter got along better on the phone than in each other's presence, she rather enjoyed their long-distance relationship, thanks to Joe.

"What were you doing, Mother?" Sandy asked again rather annoyed.

"I was burying your father."

Silence.

"Mother, what did you say?"

"I said I was burying your father. What's the matter with you? Can't you hear anymore? Do you need a hearing aid?" Margaret smiled to herself, thinking: "Gotcha!"

"Mom, get serious. What's going on? Where's Dad? I want to talk to him."

"You never want to talk to your father; why do you want to talk to him today?"

"Just put him on the phone."

"Larry, your daughter wants to talk to you." Margaret yelled from the living room to the bedroom where Larry Higgins was lying down, watching TV.

"What does she want?" he yelled back. Larry usually kept in touch with his children through a paid mediator—his wife of forty-five years. It never occurred to him to pick up the telephone and call them himself. Margaret informed him of the important things—births, deaths, divorces, first

teeth, no teeth, etc. The rest she spared him, for which he was grateful—when he thought about it.

"How should I know? Ask her yourself?" she yelled back. "I'm hanging up."

"Sandy, are you O.K.? do you need something? Is everything O.K. with you and Joe?" Larry asked. If Sandy wanted to talk to him, then it must be really serious. Serious can only mean J-O-E.

"Is Mom O.K.? She just told me the strangest thing. She said that she was burying you. What is going on?" Sandy demanded.

"Darn if I know. She didn't bury me. I'm right here, just where I always am every Sunday evening. She was outside fiddling around. But I don't know what she was doing. You probably misunderstood her. We're fine. Talk to you later, honey. Let me know if you need anything. Bye. He hung up the phone and never thought about their conversation again.

Margaret smiled to herself and looking at the clock on the kitchen wall, figured that the next call would come in exactly twenty-two minutes later and it probably would be from Elaine, her middle child. About twelve minutes later the phone rang again, rather noisily. "That was sooner than I expected," Margaret thought.

"Mom, this is Elaine." the voice on the other end said.

"Yes, I know," Margaret said. "Your sister called you and she is all upset because I told her that I had been outside burying your father, right?"

"Something like that, only she said your were rude and in a bad temper," Elaine added.

"Well, I guess I was, but I just had had enough, and Sandy was the first person available. Your father and I had a fight, but he didn't even know it. Do you have any idea how frustrating that can be? If you have a fight, at least the person you are fighting with can fight back."

"Tell me about it, Mom." Elaine responded with one of those good therapeutic communication techniques she learned in all those psychology classes she took in college, even if the degree didn't land her a job.

"Your father just wants to sit around the house all day and do nothing. I wanted to rent a cabin in the country and spend a weekend away from here. Do you know what he said? Without giving Elaine time to consider the question, Margaret went on with her tale of woe. "Why would you want to do that?" That is what he said. Can you imagine that? He finished reading his paper, worked the crossword puzzle, and went to the bedroom just like he does every Sunday. So I got mad." Now Margaret's voice was strong, her diction clear, and her emotions controlled.

"Mom, is it snowing there, like it is here?"

"Yes, but what difference does that make?" Margaret countered.

"Don't you think it might be a little dangerous to take a trip now?" Elaine said rather meekly as not to provoke her mother.

"Of course it is, but don't you think he could have at least realized I just wanted a little attention."

I remember at least six winter days like today that eventually resulted in the birth of one of you kids nine months later. Hasn't it ever occurred to you that all six of my children's birthdays come at the end of summer or in the fall, including yours? I guess you figured the stork just made extra trips that time of the year because the weather was good for flying." She tried to imagine Elaine's face; Sandy would have dropped the phone, but Elaine was a little easier to talk to. She wasn't sure what the reactions of the other four: Donald, Rick, Betsy, and Diane, would have been. They all would probably call this afternoon after checking out the latest on Alzheimer's via the Internet.

"No, I'm not getting senile; I'm just tired of being taken for granted by your father and by all of you."

"So, what is all this about—burying Dad?" Elaine knew better than to argue with her mother at this time or to try to talk down to her as if she were a child. Her mom was quite a woman, and she was right—her children did not really know her very well. "We do take her for granted," Elaine admitted to herself.

"I took a picture of Dad and me on our honeymoon, one that you all have never seen, and buried it in the snow under an old tree way in the back of yard," Margaret bragged.

"I'm listening," Elaine responded, knowing that if she said the wrong thing now she would not get this chance to meet her mother again.

"I went to a workshop once on Stress Reduction, as if a workshop could stop stress, but I remember one thing that this young man said, and it had sorta stuck with me during the years. He said, 'Take your stresses and put them in a mental paper bag, and toss them in the garbage.' For years I have been doing this mentally—tossing David's divorce, Rick's business dealings, Sandy's rituals, and even your foolishness, and tossing them into the garbage before I go to sleep every night."

"But this so-called fight with Dad was different?" Elaine questioned very slowly.

"Yes, and it called for drastic measures. So I thought about it, and I finally realized that we are not the same couple we were forty-five years ago, and nothing is going to bring it back. The dad you know is not the same man I married and not the same man he is today. I can't change that, so the only way I can handle it is to bury it. And that is what I did. I buried it—deep in the snow, down in the ground—sorta like 'dust to dust and ashes to ashes.' He is gone; now I can live with it."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, what choice do I have? I guess in all fairness he could bury his own picture of me if he even realized how much I have changed. That is what is so frustrating; he doesn't even realize how much we have changed. Growing old together is not as romantic as it sounds. Do you understand what I am trying to tell you?"

Margaret asked this child of hers, this child who was trying so hard to understand something that

could only be understood by living it.

"I think I do, Mom I'll call your eldest child and told her that you are sane and it is not time for the little men dressed in white with straight jackets, yet. But I won't tell her that she was conceived on a cold winter night many years ago. I don't think she can handle the fact that she was the result of sex between you and Dad." They both laughed and hung up after exchanging some small talk.

"Sandy, I just got off the phone with Mom. She is fine. You must have misunderstood her. She said she was 'burying Dad's old slippers in the garbage.' You jumped in before she had a chance to finish her sentence. By the way, when is your birthday?" Elaine asked her older sister.

"You know my birthday is the same month as yours. You were born on October tenth, and I was born on October first, five years before. What is that all about? And I certainly didn't misunderstand her. She definitely said she was burying Dad."

Ignoring her sister's last remark, Elaine asked, "Have you ever wondered why all our birthdays are between September and November? Someday we'll talk about birthdays; till then keep in touch. Maybe we can get together for the holidays this year; it has been a while. Do you think we could tolerate each other for two or three days?"

"Elaine, I don't understand what you are talking about. I called you because I am worried about Mother; I have tons of schoolwork to do, plus everything else. And you talk about birthdays. You sound as crazy as Mom did."

"Next time, you call Mom," Elaine interjected. "Try talking with her rather than to her. Ask for her opinion; talk politics; talk about your dreams and ask her about hers."

"I have no idea what you are talking about. Can you please talk plain English, so I can go back to work." Sandy was ready to cry. All she could think about was the precious minutes disappearing unproductively.

"It's rather simple. We call Mother every week, but we never call Margaret Higgins. Think about it. Thanks for calling and I'll talk to you later." Elaine hung up before Sandy could moan again.

Margaret Higgins stood in the doorway of the bedroom and looking at her husband of forty-five years, smiled knowingly and slowly walked to his side of the bed. Larry opened one eye and smiled at her.

"I know this is an old cliché, but I was just thinking, 'Today is the first day of the rest of our lives.' I think I'll take a nap with you."

Anatomy of a Drive-by Shooting

-Leonard Steward

I can still remember it just clearly as if it were yesterday. The images are still very clear in my mind. There was panic in the crowd. There was a certain terror in their eyes. There were feet scurrying in all directions. There was fear in their faces. There was mass confusion as bodies ran in all directions with all their might for fear that they might be the next target. Some even left behind their young to fend for themselves. To this day I still am not sure what made me do it. I must say that I have paid dearly for that indiscretion. And the lessons I learned, will last me a lifetime.

I must admit, I had it planned for quite some time. I carefully mapped out the route. I knew exactly how I was going to go in. Where I would come out. I knew how long it would take to run the route. I checked to see if I had enough equipment. Made sure I had backup equipment, in case my first choice, God forbid, might jam.

My partner, my wife, was my wheel man so to speak. I knew that when we first drove up we had to drive very slowly, so as not to arouse suspicion. One wrong move could have betrayed our best intentions. We were just like "Bonnie and Clyde, Thelma and Louise, Sun Dance and Butch." We were a family. We were in this together. Together to the end. Only we were a family of the eighties. We were a family before the phrase "Children First" was coined. We took our children with us. They did not understand at the time. We, at the time, thought that we were doing the right thing. The children played in the back seat completely oblivious as to what we were going to do.

The big day came. The day I had planned for so long. I loaded my equipment in the car. I even packed a picnic lunch. I really planned to make a day out of it. I filled the gas tank in the car. That would not have been a good time to run out of gas. I could not have imagined having to call the auto club. Actually, we were not members of the auto club anyway. I loaded all my equipment. I checked it twice.

The drive to our destination seemed endless. We even argued once or twice about the way she was driving. I told her that her driving would give us away. She ended the dispute with, "Then drive yourself." I was tempted, but that would mean that she would have to do the shooting. Which option was worse? I knew that she could not hit an airplane with a pickup truck. I also knew that this was a one time chance. It had to be right the first time. That was not the time to be arguing. I had in the beginning entertained the thought of choosing a different partner. She complained then that we did not do anything as a family. For that reason she ended up driving. I relented. She drove. I sulked. As we drove closer I tried to concentrate on what I was going to do. I took one of my instruments of immortality and placed it on the seat between my legs, never once considering the possibility of a spontaneous misfiring. I placed one on the floor. The morning traffic was heavy. There were cars everywhere. I wondered to myself if we could still pull this off. The first part of my plan was a wash. I had figured that if we got an early start, we could

get in and be gone before traffic picked up. It did not matter. We were determined to go through with it. I took a chance at counseling her on driving. "Not to make you mad, Dear...", I hoped I could be diplomatic and preserve the peace. "Try not to get too close to that car in front of you. We don't want to get boxed in." She didn't answer. She just kept driving. She kept looking straight ahead. I knew things were getting bad now. When a woman does not answer you, you are on her list. I did not try anymore. I did not want to chance making things any worse.

She eased up to the designated spot. I slowly rolled my window down, trying hard not to make a sound. The kids had fallen asleep in the back seat. By that time she was driving at a very slow but steady pace as I had planned. I thought, maybe she can pull this off. Still not speaking, she followed through on all the strict instructions I had given her earlier. A scary thought flashed through my mind at that moment. She could really be a woman about this. After I take the first couple of shots, she could just stop the car and get out. I should have gotten another driver. I tried hard to concentrate on the business at hand. By then I was sweating, even though it was the cool part of the morning. I wiped my brow on my arm and began to look for a target. I scanned the area quickly at first. Then I looked back a second time to choose who was worthy of my first shot. How did one decide at a time like that? Was I to have done as others have done? Just point and shoot. I was bound to get at least one. No, I wanted to make the first shot special. I wanted it to be something that would be remembered for a long time to come. I could see, in my mind's eye, that scene being recaptured on the cover of TIME, and LIFE magazines. I would be famous, or was it infamous. I spotted a young female. She was playing; there was an unsuspecting innocence about her. Nearby, I assumed, was her very protective, and yet equally unsuspecting mother. Neither the mother nor her young one saw us as we eased slowly into position. I poised for my first shot. Slowly I raised the instrument of my choice. My hands began to shake. I tried to steady them against the door post. Again, sweat beaded up on my forehead. This time I did not wipe. I took aim. With sweat in my eyes, my finger on the trigger, I spotted my target. I slowly began to squeeze the trigger. At that precise moment my wife ran over a rock. She sent it skipping towards my otherwise unaware victims with the intensity of a fire going on a still silent night. First, they were startled. Then disbelief flashed in their faces. This was quickly replaced by fear. In the brief seconds that our eyes met I could read the young female's entire life history. It was her autobiography of her own short time here on earth. Her eyes screamed at me, Why? Why me? What have I done to you?" Her eyes told a story of a young life that was happy, playful, and carefree. They spoke of a life that did not know of the harsh realities that laid just beyond her small world of tranquility. Her eyes next betrayed the fear in her heart as she realized that her mother had already left her behind. Quickly I tried to aim; right between her eyes. I knew it would be just a matter of milliseconds before she would regain her composure and try to evade my attempts. By that time the car was swerving from side to side, making it difficult for me to focus on any one target. Out of sheer

frustration I started to point and shoot. Bodies began to stumble over one another. The uninjured quickly scrambled to their feet and resumed their efforts to escape. I was beginning to get frustrated. I did not think that I hit anybody. I then began to wildly point and shoot, catching a foot here and an arm there. Then filled with anger I turned to my wife and pointed in her direction. For lack of good sense I shouted, "You did this on purpose! I ought to..." She cut me off with, "If you shoot that thing at me..." That was all she needed to say.

I had to live with the memories of this mess every day of my life since then. A day does not go by that my wife does not remind me how stupid an idea this was from the beginning. I have since repented of my ways. The next time I get the urge to take wildlife videos in one of these drive through safari parks for my children, I will instead go to the local video rental store and rent them.

You should have seen those animals scatter.

The Battle of the Bar

-Richard J. Scott

It's Saturday morning at the Navy Enlisted Club in Naples, Italy. All is quiet. Our usual customers are at their work place performing tasks of technological wonder and diplomacy or at home planning strategies for the evening's entertainment. Meanwhile, in the club we are cleaning up after the previous night's battle. The carnage from the night before has been cleared. The stench of spilled beer, snuffed cigarettes, vomit, and thirty-one flavors of cologne have been replaced by the perfume of bleach, air fresheners, and Physohex. Brooms and mops, paired with buckets and dustpans, are stacked like rifles and ammunition at a military campsite. This is the day after, inside the fortress of the only American drinking establishment in Naples, Italy. The attacking multitudes, who were believed to be part of the army of humanity, had stormed the ramparts and overwhelmed the small garrison of employees tasked with defense of the structure. However, we live to fight another day.

Now that the cigarette smoke has settled it is much easier to perform battle damage assessment. The number of tables and chairs are counted, mended, and returned to their strategic positions for the next onslaught. Replacements, as always, are difficult to come by. During this lull in the action I can count the surviving ashtrays. Ashtrays absorb most of the fire and always suffer the heaviest casualties. They fight to the end and, more often than not, are taken prisoners. New replacements, Hienekein green as they are, are stationed at the vulnerable table-top positions and I can only pray that they will make it through the night.

During this respite, if you listen closely, you may hear the songs of the video game machines, melodious, captivating tunes rarely heard or paid any heed to. In the midst of battle, they are distorted by the bombardment of sounds from the masses and the music. The noise can be deafening. As I call across the room to my custodial staff, I can hear a strange return. It sounds remarkably like my own voice. I tone it down a little. Had I used the necessary volume needed last night, I would have shattered crystal and made dogs howl. As I scan the damage and ponder the offensive for this evening, a strange sensation fills my head. I believe I can actually hear myself think, quite a contrast to the clamor of the previous night, when I did not know if I was animal or vegetable. Cognitive thought seemed unattainable amongst the din.

Replenishment is of the utmost importance. We must rearm ourselves. The bar is resupplied with all the necessary armaments to withstand the next invasion. Our spies have infiltrated the enemy camps and acquired information on enemy numbers and expected time of attack. We must also revitalize our supply lines. Those vital links of needed equipment were hampered by extremely slow movement through the battle zone. During the previous engagement, the bartenders were

serving salvos of ten shots every fifteen seconds. It was necessary. The enemy had charged in a suicidal blitzkrieg of booze under a constant volley of incoming stirstick missiles. Our coaster Claymores are of little use in this style of fighting.

I have learned to distinguish the difference between rearming a bar and a sudden salvo of serving. The clinking of bottles and glasses during rearming has a more diminutive sound. A burst of serving sounds like twenty-five pound "wind chimes" in a hurricane. When new ice is poured into the bins it flows like cookies dropped into a cookie jar. If we are in a full assault, it sounds like hail hitting a tin roof. I have also learned to discern the distinct difference between stepping on an ice cube, a piece of broken glass, and a plastic lighter. These are the minefields of bar room nightlife. During the evening's barrage, equipment belonging to the attackers is often abandoned or discarded. These spoils of war are highly desired battleground souvenirs. Many times we will find injured attackers in the flotsam. The Geneva Convention require us to care for their injuries. We lack the facilities to provide such a triage. The best we can do is patch them up and point them to their line. Damage is not limited to the equipment. Last New Years I lost three good men, Auld, Lang, and Zyne. As one of the staff commanders, I have found myself in the midst of many heated exchanges. My clothing and skin bear the scars from the flaming arrows of tossed cigarette butts, the stains of spilled Bloody Mary's, half empty beer can grenades, and the pungent odor of every conceivable drink concoction served. As they say, war is hell.

According to intelligence reports, the hour of open confrontation is approaching. All hands are in position. Lighting is reduced in accordance with black-out procedures. A quiet falls over the front. Scouts have just returned with reports of movement in the parking lot and adjacent structures. Tense bartenders wipe their sweating hands with bar towels. Waitresses clutch their tray shields and cover their respective stations. Rumor has it that the oncoming army has been reinforced by seasoned German regulars from the battle of Oktoberfest. This is sobering news, but we stay calm.

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RULES!

SHORT STORY: Limit one (1) entry. Must not exceed 12 typewritten, double-spaced pages with regular margins.

ESSAY: Limit one (1) entry. Must not exceed 5 typewritten, double-spaced pages with regular margins.

POETRY: Limit three (3) entries. Must not exceed 50 typewritten lines.

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