Agate (á-g-it): a fine-grained crystalline mineral that forms in cavities in volcanic rock. Agate is prized for its beautiful patterned colors, and its hardness makes it ideal for delicate carving.
2011 SUNY DELHI
STUDENT WRITING CONTEST WINNERS

Best Research Essay
Hot Pockets, by Chloe Roth

Best Creative Writing
Blancmange, by Sasha Burwood

Best Personal Essay
Cancer Shock, by Nicole Iulucci

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Adeline Schowengerdt

Interview with Mark Beltchenko, Sculptor
Kirby Olson

Photograph
Kirby Olson

Notes on Contributors

Photographers and Artists
Farm Work, by Richard Giles

I started looking for a place of my own. A cottage, a cabin, a shack, a garden, a woodlot, a stream, a place to go to, a place to get away. Then I met a girl named Holley, and then came the forty acres along the river at the foot of the mountain. Her face is long and beautiful, her nose could slice peaches. I wanted somebody to fix me toast, and she needed a man to fix her toaster. She wanted two children, a girl and a boy. The land is silt loam four feet deep, laid down by the glacier and then overlaid by the river. Chocolate cake with sweet icing. The first time I walked over it was a Monday morning toward the end of October. Little bits of snow were flying into the thick corn stubble. The river ran clear as glass over rocks. I wanted to lie down and eat handfuls of the dark loamy dirt! I plowed and planted and named the patches of the farm. Holley tended wild flowers, and eagles cruised the river. I quit my job. After lunch we floated down the river on tractor tubes. It began as the story of Eden, but then things went wrong. Eden all over again.

JANUARY

I knock the snow off my boots and come into the dog room, but she’s re-arranged the room, and when I go to set my boots near the heater vent to dry, she says, “No, they go over there now.” This pisses me off and I throw my boots against the wall.

“I hate this fucking house,” she yells and goes slamming through the kitchen door.

I pull my boots back on and go outside with the kids, which is what they wanted anyway. Play with us, Daddy. I push them down in the deep snow, first Sibyla—which big startled, laughing eyes set in her mother’s fine face—and then Asa, puffed like a small bear in his snowsuit. They get up and attack me, and I push them down again and again. Out through the snow, beyond where my trucks are parked, we climb the big dirt pile, now a snowy mountain. Asa makes it to the top first and defends the peak. I remember that the bigger truck wouldn’t build up brake air when I started it last week and I go over to crank it and let it warm up. Asa yells, brokenhearted, from the top of his mountain, “Daddy, you were supposed to play with us.”

“I am,” I say and I head back to his mountain, but Sibyla catches him off his guard and throws him brutally down the hill. The snow is
bloody beneath his dripping nose and he’s making the most of it. A wail echoing already off the big mountain beyond the river, an inherited roar against big sisters, and I think of my sweet sister living away off in Mama and Daddy’s little dream house with the willow-oak and the blackgum tree in the yard and the owl in the big pines on the slope down to the double ponds where brother John and I skated on thin ice, years after the Christmas incident on the frozen creek.

All of this is too much. I carry my boy up the barn lane toward the house. The frost-proof water valve in the barn froze and cracked last week. I need to replace the broken head with the head from the one that broke its rod two years ago. Where did I put that piece of junk? Crescent wrench and a 14 inch pipe wrench, and I could fix it in fifteen minutes, half an hour at most. The iron pipe and the tools so cold my fingers stick to them. We climb on up the path toward the house. I tell Asa that, yes, he can stand on his chair and stir the cocoa into the milk for the hot chocolate. Wonder do we have enough milk, is that pint of cream still good. Yes, yes, Sibyla, you can whip the cream.

Holley comes into the kitchen with a book in her hand. Judgment on the cocoa dust and spilt cream. “Don’t,” I say, and she goes out. Then she comes back in without the book. She wants something, makes a stiff attempt at a gentle embrace, a skill she’s never learned. Truce, not reconciliation. On the counter I catch our reflection. A love scene reflected and exaggerated in the blank chrome of a toaster. Held briefly then broken.

Clatter of the egg-beater whipping the cream, the milky smell of the milk beginning to warm, licked cream, bitter brown chocolate, the blatant western sun slashing in through the side window, and the view out the back door—the bright barn, the broad field glittering with snow, cool black mountain behind it all.

And then I remember I left the truck idling in the barnyard.

January is the month of stillness and rest, the month to repair the broken machinery and read to the kids. The month of the haunting sleepless nightmare of the dollar, of loss, of failure—the harvest bins lying silently full in their protected room against the bank wall of the barn, but the list of needs for the new crop running to the margins of page after page of scrap paper stacked on my desk. I leave the small desk lamp turned on so I can come at any hour of the night and add another startling item to the list of need. Like a parent coming in the night to comfort a sick child, I come to chart the balance of my ailing farm, and to comfort myself that
naming the nightmare might make me a better man.

Monday morning the order comes in, and after the sun begins to warm the side of the barn, we staple sheets of plastic over the windows and thaw the rollers on the potato washer with buckets of warm water hauled from the house. Carolas, reds, and Kennebecks and a few cases of onions—two pallets all together. If we hustle we’ll have it out the door by early afternoon, on the truck and down the road. All this food in the dead of winter. And the money coming home like salvation.

JUNE

I’m crossing the barnyard to the shop, talking on the phone to Joe about Wednesday’s order, when I see the cloud coming up the valley. There’s more of everything in the field than I had expected, so we’re revising the offering, adding cases more of lettuce, collards, spinach, and escarole. From west to east the cloud rolls into the blue afternoon sky, silent, powerful, deeply American in its beauty. It’s the moment I’ve seen caught in some painting of agriculture and weather. The boys are running their tractors away off across the field. The girls run to fasten greenhouse doors, and I shut the doors to the barn and shop and then turn again to the west to see a brilliant curtain of white sweeping up the valley. In the moment before the storm hits us, I see the air go green, hear the odd clatter in the trees out on the mountainside, notice the precipitation leaping from the earth as the storm bounds across the field toward the barn, and I think: hail storm, as if the words might break the curse. Then the ice rattles suddenly, deafeningly against the trucks, the barn, the greenhouses, and stings where it hammers my head, and I run into the small greenhouse we call Brooklyn, where the girls are already gasping and tugging off their cold shirts.

It comes on for half an hour like grape-shot running horizontal in a forty knot wind, piling in great shoals along the windward sides of the buildings, hammering so loud on the greenhouse roof that we give up trying to talk and bow our heads in a kind of reverence, the girls and I, to what has to be. When, just at the end of the storm, the boys run in laughing and shedding their wet clothes, we look at them and know that they haven’t thought about those thousands of tender plants in the field but only of the wild adventure of weather.

Half an hour of clattering disaster and then sudden silence. “Go on home,” I say, and we head out across the icy barnyard. The children, home from school, run screaming across the yard and down the path. “Ice,”
they yell, scooping handfuls of it from beneath the apple tree. The magical reality of this summer ice storm will mark them more indelibly than all the other summer days, and the memory of this day—along with the story of the summer day three years ago, when we paddled the canoe across our flooded field and into our neighbor’s yard to see if he needed a ride to higher ground—will become the story they tell their grandchildren.

Kalan, big brother to my little farm team and de facto crew chief, lingers after the others leave. We take the camera from the shelf in the wash room and drive together out toward the field. Along the state road, a plow truck scrapes the hail into a berm on the shoulders. The yards and the roofs of the village are papered with leaves stripped from the trees. Down in our fields, ice lies five and six inches deep in the row middles. The leaves of the broccoli and kale and beans and Swiss chard have been shredded and flung to the ground or blown into the next county, and the standing skeletons of the plants are pocked with bullet holes. The lettuce looks to have been run over with a lawnmower.

Kalan takes pictures of his own hand holding the ice and pictures of our damaged crop. We walk together through the crop. Across the floor of the valley, a frosty fog rises from the mass of thawing ice, chilling our legs and threatening to freeze the battered plants, adding insult to obliteration. Above the mountain and above the hovering fog that hangs across the valley, the sky is again blue and still. The evening sun shines quietly across the disaster the way the sun will shine on a boat flipped over in a storm.

Kalan, this big boy with a big heart, asks me if I think the farm can recover from this. I don’t know and I tell him so. “It’ll take months to know that,” I say. “But we’ll live through it. And we have plenty to do.”

As we walk to the river I phone Joe to tell him we won’t have an order for him this week, or the next. Rafts of hailstones float down the river, and the inlet, a quarter acre of water that reaches into the field, is crusted with the shining ice. Joe refuses to believe that we have nothing at all to save of the crop that I offered him only an hour ago. I try to describe the lawn-mowed lettuce, the great heaps of ice in the valley, and the river in front of me. He tells me to sleep on it, call him in the morning.

I tell him I’ll send him a picture and I fold the phone and put it away. Kalan, who has overheard this, is laughing.

Next morning we all huddle around to look at the photos he made of a quiet field, where the reflected sun breaks across the pools of melt-water as
if the reflection were the sun itself. Outside the soil is soggy, and there is no need to go out and look again at our destroyed crop. The girls begin their work in the greenhouse, watering and tending their plants on the benches and then dropping thousands of new seeds into little blocks of soil that they have pressed and arranged on trays.

By noon the boys have torn the ruined axle out from under the smaller truck. We light into it with wrenches and pry-bars, tossing bolts into a coffee can. When we pull the gear chunk from its housing, the raw smell of gear oil fills the shop, and there among the cogs are pieces of disintegrated pinion bearing, some of them rolled flat like Quaker oats along the curved faces of the gears. Beautiful. The problem and its solution lie in the same heap at our feet. By tonight we’ll have the truck on the road again. We’ll be in business.
Jim Gaffigan’s comedic story on “Hot Pockets” discusses our country’s horrific cuisine. His comedic skit can be viewed on television, DVD, or any online mainstream broadcasting webpage such as Google or Youtube. Just look up Hot Pockets, and Gaffigan. Robert Buscemi interviewed Gaffigan for Chicago Magazine in a story entitled Laughing Matter: Jim Gaffigan on Chicago Comedy, Hot Pockets, and More. Buscemi asked, “You first hit pay dirt with a riff about Hot Pockets. Do you like performing that material?”

“Look, we wouldn’t be on the phone right now without that bit. Do I need drunk people running out of bars yelling “Hot Pockets” at me? No. But it’s not the end of the world to do it as an encore. And it’s always expanding, so as long as I can add new bits to keep it fresh for me, I’m happy,” Gaffigan replied.

In Gaffigan’s performance of “Hot Pockets,” he mentions many tasty, greasy, and fatty foods that our community finds delectable and satisfying. Our comedian states during this skit, “We’re never satisfied when it comes to food. You know what would be good on this burger? A ham sandwich, instead of a bun, let’s use two donuts. That way we can have it for breakfast. Look out McGriddle here comes the donut-ham-hamburger” (Jim Gaffigan). However, a health foods article titled, Junk Food Addiction: a Serious Threat, said, “there will be a need for some people to go into rehab for being a junkie, that is a junk food junkie. According to an article in The New York Daily News, the addictive power of fatty foods may be just as high as those of cocaine or heroin” (Testfood.com). This takes Mr. Gaffigan’s approach from a comedic upheaval to the level of a genuine health threat. How do we dare to laugh at such serious hazards to our health? “There is the vegetarian Hot Pocket for those of us who don’t want to eat meat, but would still like diarrhea” (Jim Gaffigan).

In March 2010, a study was published informing America about an increase in snacking, which now accounts for up to 27% of daily caloric intake. This increase has occurred along with a rise in childhood obesity. “Our study shows that children, including very young children, eat snacks almost three times a day,” said senior author Barry Popkin, Ph.D., the Carla Smith Chamblee Distinguished Professor of Nutrition at UNC’s Gillings School of Global Public Health. “Such findings raise concerns that more children in the United States are moving toward a dysfunctional
eating pattern, one that can lead to unhealthy weight gain and obesity” (Medical News). Another article, Obesity Statistics in America, claimed, “The average waistline of children, teenagers and adults across the globe seems to be getting wider every year. Increased intake of unhealthy foods, physical inactivity and stressful jobs are major factors that conduce to obesity. Urbanization has forced people to depend on processed foods rather than the traditional, healthy foods. Moreover, with the jet speed pace of life, people are driven to rely on fast foods to fill their tummies in the shortest time possible” (Johnson, Priya). Johnson’s statement opens a larger framework when we consider Gaffigan’s attitudes with regard to Hot Pockets. Gaffigan’s comedy is based on a tragedy. Gaffigan is making his unhealthy fans chuckle, but he may also be allowing them to continue their lifestyle. “Pie can’t compete with cake. Put candles in a cake it’s a birthday cake. Put candles in a pie, and somebody’s drunk in the kitchen” (Jim Gaffigan).

Can being funny sometimes not be funny, or even be based on horror, for instance when someone is making jokes about serious issues such as obesity? “Obesity is a leading preventable cause of death worldwide, with increasing prevalence in adults and children, and authorities view it as one of the most serious public health problems of the 21st century” (WHO). There is also the argument that every year 15 million children die of hunger-related causes. Is this something to joke about? For the price of one missile, a school full of hungry children could eat lunch everyday for five years. Did you know in 1991, 46% of African American children were chronically hungry and 40% of Latino children were chronically hungry compared to 16% of white children? (Thinkquest). How does that explain our silence toward comedic approaches to the race and hunger related issues that we may sense, but not have the facts about? Jim Gaffigan’s quote for his Hot Pocket skit, “I love how New York is so multicultural. I wish I was ethnic, I’m nothing. Because if you’re Hispanic and you get angry, people are like, ‘He’s got a Latin temper!’ If you’re a white guy and you get angry, people are like, “That guy’s a jerk” (TV.com). Gaffigan’s odd humor may offend those who have different ethnic backgrounds or those who may be suffering from hunger, but he gets paid for it, so he’s satisfied. Isn’t he a lot like the rest of us?

How many Hot Pocket consumers really know what they are digesting after eating the delectable microwavable treat? Do they know that they are eating hydrogenated soybean oil, corn syrup solids, generic
mozzarella cheese, artificial butter flavoring; plus distilled monoglycerides and L-Cysteine hydrochloride? (ScaryIngredients). “How much would America’s diet change if ingredient lists of popular processed products had to be put on the front of the packaging; instead of squished on the back in small print?” asks Siel Ju, the writer of the article Hot Pockets Scary Ingredients List. Ju makes an excellent point, if people were aware of what they were eating, their complete diet might change. At least some consumers would be turned off Hot Pockets.

Gaffigan himself is aware of the dangers inside of the Hot Pocket sleeve, and may in fact be doing public service when he brings the dangers of the product to our attention. He states, “What was the idea behind Hot Pockets? Was there a marketing meeting somewhere, ‘Hey I got an idea: How about we take a Pop-Tart and fill it with really nasty meat? You could cook it in a sleeve thing, dunk it in a toilet.’” Yet, this “nasty meat” only became nasty from cynical food manufacturing plants.

Peter Singer, a philosopher of food and animal rights at Princeton University, provides us as well with a larger framework to look at comedian Jim Gaffigan’s famous skit. Peter Singer delivered a speech “The Ethics of What We Eat,” and treated the audience to a better understanding of the consciousness of animals and how we are alike for sharing the same evolutionary history. He states “that man has certain duties to be kind to animals and to avoid being cruel to them, however producing meat and selling eggs cheaply,” might drive us in contradictory directions. Singer asks is there a problem with the way we treat animals. Most of us do not know what we do to them, nor do we feel we have any control over the matter. Peter R. Cheeke, Professor of Animal Science at Oregon State University, stated, “If most urban meat eaters were to visit an industrial broiler house, to see how the birds are raised, and could see the birds being ‘harvested’ then being ‘processed’ in a poultry processing plant, some, perhaps many of them, would swear off eating chicken and perhaps all meat.” Another secret is that any camera usage in the broilers is illegal. It is easy to see why. People would learn about the 20-25,000 chickens that are overcrowding the broiler houses or how pigpens are purposely made too small for lack of movement to make weak legs, thus making their meat tender and tasty.

Peter Singer continues that it is “our enjoyment of the way meat tastes and it is not a good enough reason to justify the amount of suffering animals are made to endure.” Singer encourages us to stop eating the products of modern meat production and put a stop to animal cruelty, but
can we overcome simple satisfaction and think about the larger picture? Gaffigan's audience is us and we are satisfied with the humor, we laugh because it is funny. But does it actually change our diet, or the ways in which we think about the animals in our overly processed food? Gaffigan jests about the viewpoint of many partial vegetarians, “I’m not a strict vegetarian. I do eat beef and pork. But not fish ‘cause that’s disgusting’! How do you know when fish goes bad, it still smells like fish?! ‘Hey this smells like a dumpster, lets eat it!’” (Jim Gaffigan).

Our health is not as important as the taste of what we consume; fast, cheap, on-the-go food that fills us quickly. Can we not think in longer-term cycles? The same audience that encourages our food manufacturers to continue treating animals the way that they do, immorally and inhumane; or treating people as lab rats that cut straight to the cheese, is the audience that laughs without thinking at Gaffigan’s Hot Pockets’ skit. Peter Singer encouraged his audience to stop relying on meat production and to depend on organic foods. However, many cannot afford the pricier lifestyle of such food. Still, if more people chose to eat like this, awareness too would slowly increase, just as the prices would come down, but all this requires us to think in larger cycles and not get sidetracked by cheap satisfactions.

Works Cited


The Cadence of the Short Order Cooks, by Tom Recinella

Back door ajar, the chill late January air creeps in through the wide open space. Mop bucket’s steaming tendrils rise and swirl around my legs like fingers grasping out of the dark; the sterile scent of the soap enmeshed within them awakens my senses.

I stand straddling the bucket, gazing out the back door, my glance transfixed beyond the snow covered, icy parking lot, with its mounds of rock hard, days old, plowed snow piles. I stare hard past the grease barrel overflowing, its sticky sludgy slime defiling the pristine virgin snow fall from the early morning hours. I lose myself in the storm clouds swirling above doing their best to block out the rising sun scanning the eastern sky as the sun fights to break through over the crisp suburban Detroit morning. It is one of my favorite times of the day to be in a kitchen.

It is quiet at a time of day when quiet is acceptable in our world, quiet is okay and therefore okay to enjoy. I smell the rich aroma of coffee as it floats on the return air of the hood fans and wafts back across the line into the deepest reaches of the kitchen to greet me with its earthy tones. I breathe it in deep and it hits all of my senses at once. It blends with the even richer and far more earthy smell of potatoes and onions stored in close proximity to where I stand. They lay untouched for now but soon they will become mashed potatoes and caramelized onions gracing the plates of our dinner customers. The faintest hint of bacon cooking comes next to my appreciative senses and I know that soon I will be smelling the wonderfulness that are fresh biscuits as their surface hits that magical temperature and they start to become golden. I close my eyes and imagine the flaky buttery morsels as they caramelized and become the high and light delights that melt on my tongue. I can just make out the sound of the ten pound block of sausage being rendered down. Crackling and spitting, hissing its declaration to all who listen that it is ready to meet its destiny and be transformed into a glorious batch of sausage gravy. I can imagine the flour being added and stirred in and a generous smattering of red pepper flakes. Topped finally by the heavy cream and simmered until it emulsifies together and becomes an artery clogging beautifully fat and decadent mixture to smother the biscuits with, but not today’s batch of biscuits. This batch of gravy is destined to hit the tables tomorrow and the day after, getting better as it sits for a day or two in the cooler, its flavors ripening and deepening.
The snow comes fast and sudden, swirling in the open door like small tournedos as the wind kicks up. With a sigh I shut the door, closing out the welcome frigid air. I complete my daily morning task of mopping the kitchen floor before most everyone else arrives. I end the night and start the day always the same with my silent partner the mop. I turn the bucket over into the slop sink and watch the previous night’s dirt recede down the drain. It always amazes me the amount of dust that accumulates between ten thirty PM and five thirty am. No matter how often we mop and how recently we mopped, it’s still there. My day will march ahead, building to a crescendo of orders on the line. But for now the march has just begun and the pace is slow, steady, and slow building, ever faster the cadence increasing, as my day progresses from the mundane tasks in the back kitchen to the maelstrom that is our line during the rush.

We are open and the “regulars” start to stream in. I take my accustomed spot on the line and await the assault, as eager as a child on Christmas morning. No matter how many times I cook the line it is exciting to me. It is fresh and new. Every nuance, every occurrence, every order: all exactly alike yet somehow absolutely different.

The first wave hits us a bit harder than expected due to the weather. But it doesn’t matter, we thrive on this. Us short order line cooks. It is what we do, the blue collar lunch pail carrying folks of the culinary world. No master chefs here, no chef d cuisines, no sous chefs. Just a gang of nobody line cooks jamming out the breakfast grind. Our line is clean, organized and our movements are crisp, precise and meaningful. No wasted movement, no wasted energy, no screwing around. My excitement climbs with the tempo of the orders. As the pace increases and the intensity grows so does my zeal and my focus. The smells are to me intoxicating and always have been. The blend of the griddle, the fryer, the egg pans, the coffee and the toast. The scent of golden hash browns fill my nostrils and the sausage sizzling on the griddle alongside the bacon sings its song to me telling me exactly when it is done and ready to go. The eggs that are being cooked further down the line hiss their own tune for their keeper to hear. The food we cook becomes the master. It speaks to us as it progresses through its journey from raw state to edible delight. It sets the pace and tempo, a pace that does not always match the desire of the customer. Most want it faster than the pace would dictate. We pump out the orders, as fast and efficiently as we can and with great care. The food sets the pace, the food dictates
the pace, the line ensures that we keep on pace, its equipment chosen for maximum production maximum volume. The line and the food are our masters, making the rules, calling the cadence. Today we move fast, today we move silent, no room, nor time for frivolous talk. The tempo increases and gets more harried, the orders come fast and furious, the sounds intoxicating, the smells more so.

I don’t need to see the dining room to visualize the waitresses moving gracefully as ballerinas weaving in and out, threading themselves through the mass of hungry humanity with plates lined up their arms. Plates full of our food. The din of the diners and the equipment reaches a crescendo of sound that transcends noise and seems almost quiet. We are in a sound tunnel and the air is virtually alive with layers of sound. So complete, so powerful you feel it in your bones: sound omnipotent.

The air is thick, the frigid temperatures that I love so much only dozens of feet away through the brick are now a memory as the line becomes hot, air close and oil spitting from the griddle splashing my forearms. Caramelizing potatoes fill my senses as they make that magical turn from white nothing to golden hash browns. Pancakes bubble, shouting to me to turn them; sausage hisses its objection to being so close to the bacon that crackles under the weight of the press, sending its rended fat in all directions, spraying onto its neighbors. The griddle is alive with its occupants all fighting to be the first ones finished, the first to hit the plate. Proteins coagulating and caramelizing, starches gelatinizing, moisture steaming as it leaves the food, fats melting; a frenzy of bubbling, hissing, and vaporizing. The orders pour in, the tickets are called, the wheel spins in fury as each ticket is clipped there and it is spun with a “thwack” by the waitress. My griddle can hold no more, even the burners are full and the tickets keep coming. I allow myself to glance at my line mate and his face says the same as mine. He loves this. Our day has reached its zenith. It doesn’t get better than this for a line cook, the adrenaline junkies of the culinary profession. The food speaks to us, in its own way, the equipment supporting our efforts. The food calls the cadence, we respond with vigor. It will all be downhill from here on. But for now we are in heaven, dancing the dance of the short order line cook, running the route, keeping in step. We move in unison complimenting and anticipating each other’s movements and never missing a beat. In tandem we dance to the cadence of the line.
Love Feast, by Jorge Suazo

Here’s an invitation for you, I’m summoning thee for a feast
One in which your soul can indulge in the enticing ingredients of this
recipe and become at ease
The ingredients are a compilation of hearty marvels
   Laughter, passion, intimacy, warmth.
I’d like to call the dish LOVE. As you savor this delicacy, I’m almost certain
your taste buds will appreciate the treat
In fact, a frenzy of emotions would have been evoked upon the first
   spoonful
A scramble would have been created out of your emotions at this point in
time,
   If allergic, perhaps vomit will suffice or an express pass to the ER
Nonetheless, your meal was prepared with my LOVE as a secret ingredient
Marinated it in a salty solution, pan seared it and lastly sautéed in flavorful
grease, added onions and served it banquet style
   However, serving portions may vary, so may reactions
Thus eat sparingly for it is a bittersweet item and may have unforeseen
   reactions
   MSG may cause addiction.
Blancmange, by Sasha Burwood

The ruddy-faced man at table nineteen glares up at me, his salad pushed away from him. My tired eyes note that his third martini is running low, and I know that if I want him to keep quiet and give me a decent tip, I should provide some more alcohol.

“Waiter,” he says, his bleached teeth clenched. I never cease to wonder that “waiter” coming from an irate customer usually sounds like the worst kind of insult. “I thought this salad was supposed to be one of your best dishes.”

He’s right. Our iceberg wedge salads were written up in the New York Times as one of the best appetizers in Manhattan. I have never heard a complaint about them before. I glance at the offending vegetation. It looks exactly the same as the hundreds I have served tonight. Maybe a bit more bacon than usual.

“I found a hair in the dressing,” his wife pipes up. She is a typical trophy wife; skeletally thin and alarmingly blonde, her features Botoxed into a state of perpetual surprise.

“A hair, madam?” I ask, forcing my face into a look of concern. I have a pounding headache from my over-indulgence in cheap vodka last night, and it’s not helped by the clattering of knives and forks or the insistent tapping of the wife’s Jimmy Choo knock-offs.

“Do you speak Swahili or something?” the man spits at me. “A friggin’ hair!” He brandishes the hair in question at me, glued to his fork by a gob of bleu cheese dressing. It is long and blonde; our kitchen staff is almost exclusively Hispanic and, therefore, dark haired, with the exception of the chef, who is French and has shaved his head weekly for twenty years. I struggle to control my eyebrows, which are threatening to launch into orbit.

“I am terribly sorry about that, sir,” I say smoothly. “Allow me to give you one of our desserts, free of charge, of course.” Lying yuppie bastards.

“Just bring the entrees and we’ll decide about that later,” he says in disgust, waving me away. I remove the offending item, along with their salad forks, and whisk them away to the kitchen.

The kitchen is probably a hundred degrees at this point, and smells strongly of truffle oil and sweat. The chef is glaring down at a pan of overcooked chicken. I see the wheels turning in his head – he could get
away with serving dry meat if he sauces the hell out of it.

“Jean-Baptiste!” I call, waving the plate.

“What?” he shouts over the sound of the dishwasher dropping an armful of scorching pans. He turns to swear colourfully at him in Spanish then fixes his attention on me.

“Table nineteen says they found a hair in their food.”

He stares at me in disbelief, unconsciously running a hand over his bald head. “A hair? Whose hair?”

“I think it’s the wife’s.”

He swears even more colourfully in his native French. “So what are you gonna do?”

“I told them I’d give them dessert on the house.” His face falls. Jean-Baptiste hates giving away free food almost as much as he hates the customers themselves. “Do we have any blancmange left?”

At this he grins at me. The blancmange was Tuesday’s dessert special and half of the pan has already turned a disturbing beige colour. “Two portions, you’re in luck. A special dessert for some special customers, n’est-ce pas?” He contemplates his chicken for a second, then turns back to me. “I ordered my toupee today.”

“The one you showed me?”

“Yeah.”

“The one that looks like Donald Trump’s?”

“Donald Trump?” He stares at me blankly for a few seconds, then crows in delight. “You’re sacked!”

“It’s ‘you’re fired’, you Gaulois twit.”

He laughs and flips me the bird. “Get out of here. Your entrees are in the window.” I skilfully grab the hot platters and balance them on my arm, navigating out of the loud kitchen and into the slightly quieter dining room. I deliver the plates safely and turn to go to the bar to make the now-purple-faced man’s fourth martini when a young woman grabs my arm.

“Waiter,” she whispers. “I found this outside the bathroom.” She slips something hard into my hand and I look down quickly. It’s an ornate glass pipe, still warm and smelling faintly of marijuana. I know immediately who it belongs to; Esteban, the saucier. I try not to smile and thank her quietly, heading back into the kitchen. Jean-Baptiste makes a grand performance of screaming at Esteban for smoking on the job, but I know better. After service is over, they’ll slip into the alleyway and get high before they share a cab back to Brooklyn. This piece of dinner theatre over, I
return to table nineteen. They have finished their saumon-en-croute and are looking slightly more amiable. I place the man's martini next to his empty plate and begin to clear the table.

“Was everything to your tastes?” I ask pleasantly.

“It was delicious,” the Botox zombie blurts. She's downed half a bottle of merlot by herself; madame is as potted as the shrimps at table twenty-four.

“It was fine,” her husband mumbles. “Bit dry. Could’ve used more salt.”

“I'll let the chef know, sir,” I reply, smiling as cheerfully as my hangover will allow. “Have you decided about dessert? The chef asked me to tell you that we have a very special dessert tonight.”

“What is it?” the wife asks, her glazed eyes widening.

“Blancmange, madam. It is the chef’s specialty, a delicate pudding with fragrant rosewater and local raspberries, finished with a warm sauce au chocolat.”

“There’s no dairy in it?” the now-magenta man asks suddenly, after gulping his new martini. “I'm lactose-intolerant.”

This information probably would have been helpful before he had ordered the salad, which is smothered in bleu cheese dressing and bleu cheese crumbles, but looking down at him, his watery eyes struggling to focus on my face and his chest swelled with a sense of his own importance, I swap my fake smile for the real thing. Poor monsieur wouldn't be feeling so high and mighty when the cream-based time bomb hit his stomach around nine o'clock.

“No dairy whatsoever, sir.”

When they leave, he is all but smacking his lips in satisfaction.

“Thank you for the great service, buddy,” he slurs, his six beverages hitting him like the entire defensive line of the New York Jets.

“My pleasure, sir. Please join us again soon.”

He grunts and guides his more than slightly swaying wife out of the door. I go to their table and glance at the cheque. A ten percent tip. I bite my lip and turn around with a smile for the next customers.
The Etiquette of Golf, by Dylan Thompson

The game or sport of golf can be considered both an ugly and a beautiful thing. Golf possesses several characteristics that make it beautiful. The competition held within the game, the intricate layout of the golf course itself, the fact that it is supposed to be a gentleman’s game, and the satisfaction of victory that it brings when one betters his opponent or personal best score are all components of what makes the game beautiful. The exact opposite of these components is what makes the game ugly. If the golf course is in poor condition, if a player does not have proper etiquette, and if one fails to achieve victory, the game’s ugly side begins to show. The United States Golf Association understands both sides. That’s why they created a rule book - a set of laws for the golfing world - to preserve and maintain the game’s beauty. If everyone abides by this book, the game’s true beauty will always remain intact.

I will never forget my senior year League Championship Golf Tournament. It was the most beautiful experience I ever had on a golf course, even though a couple ugly moments did emerge. The tournament was the last match of our season and there were two trophies on the line: the low medalist individual trophy, which I wanted greatly for myself; and the team Championship trophy, which I wanted for my team. I spent that entire week preparing for the tournament, spending countless hours meticulously practicing all of the aspects of the game. I was determined to make sure that my tee shots were accurate, my irons were up to par, and my short game (chipping and putting) was dialed in. I hit countless golf balls that week during my long afternoons of practice until the sun went down.

The tournament was held on the third Thursday in May 2009 at our team’s home golf course, Colonial Country Club in Tannersville N.Y. I woke up around six in the morning and headed down to the course an hour early to practice my short game. I will never forget the nervous, anxious feelings that were running through my body the night before.

As I was practicing, five other members of my team showed up, all dressed in our khaki pants and neatly ironed, green collared shirts that read “Hunter-Tannersville Golf” stitched in white. Three other teams that had qualified for the tournament began to show up, wearing their individual school colors. We knew who our main competition was: the Windham-Ashland-Jewett Warriors dressed in the blue and white collared shirts. Their captain was my main personal competition. His name was William
(name changed to protect the guilty). He was a very thin, tall young man with acne covering most of his face. His demeanor was very self-centered, although he was a talented golfer. William and I had competed against each other since freshman year so we knew each other well. There was no conversation exchanged before we teed off.

As I was about to tee off, my coach gave me a few simple words that motivated me: “Dylan, today is your day. This is your tournament, and no one else’s.”

The first tee shot was mediocre, but it allowed me to make a par four on the hole. So I was on my way, heart racing and hands shaking. Through the first seven holes I was three shots ahead of William, with a mix of bad and good shots. At that point in time, I had the momentum. After the first nine holes, I was still ahead of William (by four shots), and was even par. Over the next five holes, we were both hitting good shots and bad shots… but his were better than mine, we were tied.

This is where things got ugly. At this point, I knew that I could lose if my game didn’t change. I began to get nervous. William probably felt similar pressure.

On the sixteenth green I found myself watching William analyzing a six-foot-putt for par, hoping to tie my score. I was sure that he was going to make the putt… but to our surprise, he missed it. Now, keep in mind that golf is supposed to be a gentleman’s game. The first section in the “Rule Book” is on proper etiquette. According to The Rules of Golf, written by the United States Golf Association, it reads in section one, “Players should always show consideration for other players on the course and should not disturb their play by talking, moving or making any unnecessary noise.”

This sentence hadn’t really affected anything until William began to take out his anger about the missed shot on his bag by striking it and howling a wide range of obscenities. Unfortunately, unless a coach or the golf pro is witness, there is no penalty. His actions didn’t bother so much as the fact that he was showing disrespect to me and the game itself.

The rest of my game was fantastic. By the time we reached the last hole, I was ahead of him by two strokes. At the final hole, being watched by all the teams and coaches, we both made par. I’d won.

When our game was finished, I went over and shook his hand and congratulated him on a great round of golf, as he did to me. It was beautiful: the team had won by nineteen shots and I had won by two. I felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfied with how I played. I will never
forget that feeling: it was indescribable. After things settled down, though, I thought about how William acted and how he was not penalized for it. His behavior hadn’t affected my game, but it had disrespected the game. That was my real problem.

Unfortunately, this behavior has to be observed by a coach or professional to be penalized. We were alone that day. I feel that in a tournament, there should be an appointed official who walks with each group to make sure everyone is following the etiquette guidelines, and to remove them from the tournament if they are not. This is just part of what should be a much greater emphasis on etiquette among amateur golfers. When you watch a professional event on television you will notice that they rarely make etiquette violations. The reason for this is that when they violate the rules, they get fined a huge amount of money. The problem lies in the difference between amateurs and professionals. According to the dictionary, professionals are “people engaged in a field in which they receive financial return for what they do.” On the other hand, amateurs engage in an activity for entertainment rather than reimbursement. That said, I believe that it is logical to fine professionals who act out of line, due to the fact that they make a large sum of money - you take away what they want. As for amateurs, take away what they love, which would be the sport itself. That memorable Thursday was beautiful, everything considered. I will never forget the victory, the competition, and the beauty of the course, nor will I forget the ugly side of that day. William did not ruin the beauty of that day. Something that is truly beautiful will always be beautiful no matter what - he only marred it.

Two brilliant quotes come to mind when discussing Williams’s actions and etiquette. One of the great golfing legends of the world, Bobby Jones, once stated “you might as well praise a man for not robbing a bank”. Mr. Jones said this at a press conference after a national tournament in which he penalized himself for accidentally moving his golf ball while in play, nobody had witnessed this but he had the etiquette to penalize himself. People commended him for what he had done, but he knew that it was the right action to take and in his mind the only action to take. He felt that having etiquette on the golf course was a standard procedure, like having etiquette in day to day life. And the other quote is from my high school golf coach and long time mentor Chris Glennon, who would constantly preach to all of his players. Chris said, “how you act on the golf course is a reflection of how you act in life.” I agree wholeheartedly, I
believe that if a person carries themselves with integrity on the golf course then they will do so in life; and if you cheat or act immature on the golf course, you will do so in life.

Think about it. William went unpunished. In society, if one breaks a law, rule or code of ethics, there is typically some type of punishment. Yet on the golf course, this was unrealized. I feel strongly about etiquette on the golf course, and I hope other people begin to as well. It isn’t just the greens or the fairway. There must be a greater emphasis on enforcing etiquette if the game’s true beauty is to be maintained.

**Works Cited**

1. USGA. The Rules of Golf. Copyright 2007
Hooked, by Marty Greenfield

The news spread like wildfire through the halls of the Boardman Junior High School, and most of us greeted it in total disbelief. How likely was it that the WMCA Good Guy Cavalcade of Stars would actually be coming to Oceanside, New York? Much to our shock, it was indeed true, and the date was announced for Friday, November 15 on posters hung all around the school with the official WMCA logo. Good Guy Jack Spector would be appearing live, along with the Lenny Welch, the Dixie Cups, and Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, plus special guests in the boy’s gym of the Walter S. Boardman Junior High School.

This was truly earth shattering news. The closest thing to live rock and roll that had ever appeared at the Boardman School were the Met Cats. They were a group of 4 very clean cut looking guys who dressed in orange blazers and blue pants and played in-between loses at the New York Mets doubleheaders. This, however, was to be a true rock and roll show, complete with long hair, high heeled boots, and electric guitars.

The irony of this event being held in the gym did not escape me in the least. The boy's gym at the Boardman Junior High was the shared domain of Mr. Arthur Malamo and Mr. Edward White. For those us who did not play varsity sports, or meet their warped standards of physical fitness, it was truly a house of horrors. Both Mr. Malamo and Mr. White seemed to take special joy in humiliating non athletes in what served as an excuse for regular physical education classes.

The physical education classes consisted of either calesthetics or dodge ball, depending on the mood of either of the teachers. Both of these organized activities were thinly veiled exercises in torturing students like me. When it came to dodge ball, the teams were stacked by the teachers so the activity resembled something that might have been seen at the Coliseum in ancient Rome. Those of us on the non-athletically inclined team would be bombarded with rocket shots to the head, even after we were struck by the ball, and should have been out. Any complaints or protests were simply told, “You’re not out until we say you are out”, or had the word “VOIGHT” imprinted backwards on their forehead from the impact of the ball.

The only people that Misters White and Malamo had less use for then non-athletes were the few boys who dared to sport long hair, keeping in mind that in the year 1964, any guy’s hair that touched their
ears or collar was considered long. For whatever their reason was, these two gym teachers who both had to be pushing 300 pounds and specialized in wearing pull over, knit shirts about two sizes too small, had become the self-appointed standards and morality ministers of the school.

Misters White and Malamo both stated that they would personally be there for the dance, and would not allow any performers with long hair on to the stage, which was actually just the podium that they stood on to abuse us in gym classes. They further stated that they would personally cut off the long hair of any sissy musician that tried to enter into their gymnasium.

Anticipation built as the night of the Cavalcade of Stars drew closer. Over 300 tickets had been sold, and rumors were rampant as to who the special guests would be. Brian Novack, who assured us that his father knew two of the Beatles, told everyone that the Dave Clark Five would be appearing. The threats of the gym teachers continued right up through the day of the show, and made the impending show seem all the more exciting and dangerous.

Shortly after 8 PM, Good Guy Jack Spector took to the stage. It was kind of a let down to see him in person, because, with the exception of his bright yellow WMCA blazer, he was just so plain and ordinary, looking nothing at all like he sounded on the radio. In fact, he could have been teaching science or math or maybe even someone’s dad. After a little crowd banter, he introduced the Dixie Cups.

The Dixie Cups were all wearing matching gold beaded mini-skirts that afforded those of us pressed up against the front of the stage an unexpected show as we gazed upward. They were followed by Lenny Welch who performed several of his recognizable hits, and danced across the stage in a style reminiscent to Jackie Wilson’s recent performance on the Ed Sullivan Show. This was all very cool so far, but seemed so much tamer then I had envisioned.

Things really got going after the break, when Jack Spectator began to hype the special guests. Much to my disappointment they were not from England, but actually a band from Long Island called the Hassles. Any disappointment vanished immediately as a group of five guys with long hair crowded on to the make shift stage, and let loose with about 20 minutes of hard, raunchy, rock and roll.

Up next, were Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. They happened to have the WMCA Pick Hit of the Week, with “Jenny Take A
Ride”, so we all knew who they were. They were the epitome of everything that I thought was rock and roll. They all had long greasy hair, high heeled boots, and the lead singer was wearing black leather pants. I can vividly remember watching the stage bounce up and down as they rocked through their set. I wondered if it was going to break. as I thought that even with both Mr. White and Mr. Malamo’s fat asses on the stage during gym class, it had never seemed so stressed.

These guys were rock and roll. They sneered and spit on the stage between songs as if they knew who’s domain they were defiling. They did their pick hit of the week and a lot of other songs and reminded us all to buy their new hit single and album on the Tamala/Motown label.

Then it was all over. Two hours had flown by in a flash. Misters White and Malamo never showed up to follow through with their threats. Those of us who were there took great joy in knowing how their sacred domain had been totally desecrated by rock and roll.

On the way out, standing in the parking lot, were several members of the Hassles and Detroit Wheels. Doug Sprague, Ralph Hernandez, and I summoned up the courage to go talk to them, and sheepishly asked for their autographs. We were shocked to find them all so friendly and approachable, especially the piano player from the Hassles who asked us how we liked the show, and who our favorite bands were. He autographed our programs “Good Luck from Billy”, and told us to hold on to them because he was going to be a famous rock star some day.

More then forty five years have passed since the night when I got hooked on rock and roll. I have seen thousands of live shows, some as a roadie, some doing security, some as a promoter, but all as a fan. While I know that I have seen many better shows, I can not name any show that had such a lasting effect.

Years later I did get to see Billy from the Hassles again, but from nowhere near as close up. I was seated in the far distant lodge seats of Madison Square Garden at a Billy Joel concert. As I enjoyed the music, I thought for a moment about my first ever live rock and roll show some 25 years earlier. I thought about how far Billy Joel had come since he began his career with the Hassles, and that night in the parking lot of the Walter S. Boardman Junior High School in Oceanside. I also wished that I had taken his advice, and held on to the autograph he signed for me on the night I got hooked on rock and roll.
Telephone, by Jackie Parslow

I thought about calling to gossip and shoot the breeze, as they say, but I feel like a blob on a bed. We could have talked about the moon and the stars and blueberries and spices and horrible stories that wouldn’t engage a gnat. Not that I know anything about a gnat’s attention span. But you get the point.

My mind would wander and you could have asked me if I was there and of course... yes, but I would have thought about how I wished I asked you what you think about when you first wake up; my thoughts go to coffee and why I have that weird song in my head, the one that was popular before I was born, but after you were born.

I pushed 6 numbers and stopped. We could have talked about your parents and how they used to fight but stayed together even though they sounded like they hated each other. Or how the neighbors seemed perfect with their astroturf lawn and freshly painted garden gnomes, but they broke up when he came home with the scent of freedom on his neck.

When you hear about this, you might laugh. Or you could be upset that we didn’t talk about the time you took your cousin to the prom. We’d laugh about how cliché it is, and then we’d talk about all of the cliché things we’ve ever done. Until one thing is not cliché at all, and you warn me never to do that one thing again.
Cancer Shock, by Nicole Iulucci

Throughout my life I had always known I wanted to work in the medical field as either a doctor or a nurse. When doctors diagnosed my grandmother with lung cancer two months before I started college, I still had no idea what I wanted my major to be. When my grandma had an episode and almost passed away in my arms, I knew right then and there that I wanted to be a nurse. Picking my major was hard for me up until that point, but once that moment happened I knew right away that there was nothing else I wanted to do but help people get better and make my grandma proud in heaven.

My grandma was such a special person; she always knew how to make people laugh with her silly little jokes and she had a great sense of humor. On the other hand, she was really tough and, never let anyone talk bad about her family. If she didn't like someone she would tell them. She had the best personality; she was funny, smart, loving caring and so much more. I knew I could tell her anything and she would never judge, she would just talk to me and give me advice. She was the only elderly woman I knew that played video games and could actually play them well. My brothers and cousins still laugh about how many times she beat them in Donkey Kong. Her cooking was a whole other story. She made everything from chicken cutlets with mashed potatoes, to pasta and meat balls. Anything she cooked always turned out amazing, especially her desserts. Her famous ice box cake was what everyone looked forward to on Christmas.

When she got sick my family thought it was just a bad cold. When she ended up in the hospital on my birthday because she couldn’t breathe, the doctors had no idea what to tell my family. After a few days and multiple tests they confirmed she had a growth on her lungs. The doctors had a poor sense of communication; they seemed confused and every doctor had a different diagnosis. None of them communicated with each other, and they really didn’t explain much to my family or my grandmother. The nurses became our lifeline, they answered every question with sympathy and always explained answers that we didn’t understand.

After a few days in the hospital, the doctors confirmed it was definitely lung cancer but that it was treatable. My family had faith in her ability to heal, and she also had faith in herself. She was the strongest woman I knew and she told me she was going to fight this and get better
so she could come up to see my school. I spent every day with her in the hospital just sitting, or talking with her. We would watch television and hang out. Even while she was sick, she worried about everyone else. It had been only two weeks that she had been in the hospital when she started getting worse. Her breathing was heavier, and there were more machines and more doctors coming in every day to check on her. By the end of that week the pulmonary doctor came in and said that it was stage four lung cancer. He said there was not much he could do. He thought it would be best if we stopped the radiation and just let the cancer work its course. He was extremely cold about the whole situation. He talked as if this case did not really matter, and his tone was calm and collected. He looked like this was news he told people every day and it no longer fazed him. He walked out and went on with his day like what he had just said was no big deal. He left my family in shock with unanswered questions.

On her third Sunday in the hospital, my family thought it would be a good idea to have Sunday dinner like we used to back at home. The nurses needed to put my grandma in a private room because our family was too big, but that’s the way my grandma liked it. She was a grandmother to nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Every single one of us visited there at least once a day, if not all day. Going through this rough patch together made us all closer as a family, and it made my grandma happy to see that everyone looked out for and supported one another. Every time someone was upset, we all tried to comfort that person and let them know that it was alright because we had each other.

That Sunday dinner was very memorable because everyone happened to be there to share it with her, even though by that time she was no longer eating solid foods. There was a lot of food to go around, everyone was reminiscing about good times, and laughter filled the room. My grandma was the glue that held this family together, and we all starting to realize how much she impacted us.

A few days passed and her condition got worse. Nurses came in more frequently, checking on her and asking my family if we needed anything. I started to watch what they did just in case I needed to help, and I became interested in what that they had to say. I started asking the nurses all sorts of questions and I learned as they worked. The nurses that had helped my grandma were very sweet and always there even for the littlest problems. Doctors on the other hand were just worried about when a new bed was going to clear up for a new patient. They made me sick with
their terms and conditions, also their lack of feeling. Don't get me wrong; it wasn't all of the doctors, just a certain few that should have been a little more supportive.

It was now August third and my grandma was fighting a war that she was determined to win. I have never seen anyone so strong in my life and I was very proud of her. Even though by this time she was not talking or opening her eyes, she still was a fighter. In the back of my mind I really thought that she could beat this and get better. I would hold her hand, tell her stories about my days when I wasn't in the hospital and she would listen and nod her head. She would squeeze my hand when I asked her to let me know she was still all there. She still smiled and laughed when I said something funny. I never stopped telling her I loved her, and those were the three words she never stopped saying in return.

My mom and my two aunts stayed the night and when I came in the morning they told me that she wasn't doing well. She kept choking on the fluid building up in her lungs, and there was nothing anyone could do. We knew the time was coming so we wanted to spend time with her. My cousin Dom and I were the only two in the room; it was early in the morning and really bright outside. When I walked in the room I could hear all sorts of machines making all kinds of crazy noises. We were pretty tired so I snuggled up next to my grandma and held her hand while I fell asleep. She was sleeping but I could see her chest heave up and down every time she took a breath, and the gurgling noise rushed from her throat every time she coughed. She looked helpless, and all I wanted to do was take her out of that bed and make her well again.

I woke up to horrendous coughing and my grandma clutching on to me for dear life. I jumped off the bed and rolled her onto her left side just like the nurses had taught me. He eyes were wide open; you can see in them that she was scared to death, and they were screaming,”Help me!” I was in shock with no idea of what to do. I couldn't breathe for a moment until I came to my senses and screamed for my cousin who was sleeping in the chair next to the bed.

“Dom! Dom! Wake up and get someone to help!” I said.

He jumped out from his sleep eyes wide open and ran to get a doctor. The doctors came in and just stared at me like I had ten heads. I was so frustrated. They simply stood there while they watched me hold my grandmother, tears falling down my face, telling her that everything was going to be all right. She kept choking, I really thought she was going to
pass away in my arms. I kept rubbing her head and holding her hand trying to keep the warmth that I felt from her. I knew soon that when I touched her she would be cold and her pulse would be no longer there. I smelled her hair and kissed her head, never wanting to let go of this person. When she finally stopped choking and relief took over, I gently placed her head on the pillow, and she closed her eyes. Tears were still flowing down my face as they turned to anger and I grew hot.

The doctor told me that this was the body’s way of letting go, that she was going to choke and there was nothing they could do about it. I was very frustrated, confused and angry! Nothing they could do? I wasn’t going to stand there and watch them wait for my grandmother to pass away. I was shaking with anger and crying out of grief because in the back of my mind I knew they were right. There was nothing they could do, the cancer had taken over. I was so shaken up about the whole situation that I couldn’t stay in the hospital any longer. I felt weak and sick to my stomach, so I decided to go home and nap. I kissed my grandma for the last time and told her I loved her with all of my heart. Walking out of that hospital room I knew that for the rest of my life I wanted to help people in need, just like these nurses had helped my family. I wanted to be a nurse and my grandma had helped me make that decision. The nurses who helped her had inspired me to achieve greatness and become the best nurse I could be. I don’t ever want a family to feel as confused as we were and I want the patient to feel as comfortable as possible.

Later that night my grandma passed away, and I was devastated. No matter how long we know that someone is going to pass away, the initial shock is still the same. We cried and cried until our eyes ran dry. The funeral and burial passed as very long days that no one will ever want to re-live. There were so many people who came to pay their respects and say goodbye that we saw much she was loved throughout her life.

When I finally realized that I wanted to be a nurse, I knew that my grandmother would be proud of my decision. I still miss her every day. Knowing that I am going into nursing not only for myself but also for my grandmother will make the dream much sweeter. When I finally get my degree I know it will all be worth it; all of the hard work and studying will pay off. Every day I will wake up and go to work with the feeling that I am doing my job in memory of my grandma.
Abandoned Citgo Station, Arkville, NY, by Luke Dougherty
Mother and Daughter, by Samme Chittum

Fine creases cross and merge on the old Polaroid – grey now and faded. The two of them, mother and daughter, stand side by side on the outer edge of a backyard that borders a Midwestern cornfield. Spring grass meets plowed land. Grey meets black. The sky is blank, the horizon flat and treeless. The girl is wearing a white first communion dress, sterile and stiff, its bouffant skirt flaring out over a ruffled petticoat. Her black hair, parted in the middle, is pulled smoothly back and held in place by a bride-like headdress sprouting a swath of sheer netting that floats out and around small shoulders. The mother’s hair is wavy and wind licked around her ears. She is slender and her dress is plain – an A-line skirt and short sleeved, black shirt. Behind them the furrows of the field are buried beneath a jumble of broken cornstalks, sheared away by the beating steel blades of combines harvesting the fat, golden ears of field corn, their purple tassels turning rust red.

This is what I remember. The way storms moved in from the west across the fields, picking up speed as they approached. Heavy, black clouds that blotted out the sun and filled the sky, spitting out swirling black tails that rose and dipped, hurling trees, knocking over our silver septic tank and splintering the old shed where we kept our lawn mower. The photo in my hand reports a moment, records the click of a shutter during which a small calico cat, its tail curled into a question mark, performs a neat feline turn around bare calves. My mother gazes steadily at the camera, her left shoulder is tilted downward, leaning into me, pressing me against her side. Our left hands are joined together, like the square knot of a bow tied at my mother’s waist.
Crack smoke filled the hallway of the apartment building that I have resided in for the past twenty years of my life. As I blocked the stench with the sleeve of my hooded sweater, I entered my grandmother's apartment. I noticed my uncle on the couch and instantly engaged in conversation. He was bald and stocky with a distinct scar on his cheek. There was no doubt in my mind that he had been the favorite of all my uncles. We always held long, meaningful, and healthy conversations. We spoke about everything from life to sports. He had spent time in prison for a big chunk of his life. He always had a story that ended with some kind of moral lesson. He had overcome so many obstacles in his life and wanted to prevent me from emulating his past mistakes.

I thought back to the time when my stocky, athletic uncle would outperform the competition. He had many trophies and medals that all read differently. One trophy inscribed the words “Gold Glove” and the other “MVP”. He played many sports but his favorite of them all was baseball. He was very strong with outstanding reflexes. He played the game very smart and stuck to the fundamentals. He was simply a natural born leader. On his days off from work he would take me to the park to play catch. Words of wisdom always seemed to roll off the tip of his tongue. I always listened because the gems he dropped never let me down, with enough practice of course.

One day I decided to attend one of his games to show support. I cheered as he put on a show without fail. The smell of the fresh cut grass excited him beyond belief. He was the starting first baseman for an independent team in the Bronx. From the flashy plays to his leadership skills, he let it all out on the diamond. There was one particular at bat that I’ll never forget. It was the bottom of the ninth inning with two outs and two strikes. The bases were loaded and the bleachers were roaring. My uncle was the teams’ last hope as they trailed by three runs. He stepped out the batters box and tightened his gloves. He took a deep breath and waited for the pitch he wanted to hit. The pitcher hurled a curveball and watched it leave the park as quickly as he released it. My uncle hit a monster shot to right field and immediately began trotting the bases. He was smiling from ear to ear as he fist pumped to home plate. His team waited for him to reach home plate while forming a big pile. This would be a day that my uncle would always remember and one I could never forget.
When we got home later that day we celebrated with good Spanish food and a few beers. You could smell the aroma of seasonings that filled our plates. Rice, beans, and pernil kept our stomachs content. To top off the great meal we watched a classic film entitled, “A Bronx Tale”. I started to realize how much I had looked up to my uncle. Regardless of everything he had been though he was always a good person at heart and never wanted any harm for his family. About twenty minutes into the movie he went to the hallway of my building to go smoke a cigarette. He had borrowed my phone earlier in the day and forgot to give it back to me. Five minutes after he left I went to go find him because I needed to make a call. I went looking for him everywhere and finally found him on the 4th floor. As I walked over to him I noticed a glass pipe that was sticking out of his mouth. The strong stench from before hit the hairs of my nostrils yet again. I walked away filled with disappointment after discovering the person I had looked up to for so long smoking crack. When I walked back into my grandmother’s apartment I caught a glimpse of the movie we had been watching. A character named Sonny was talking to a little boy named Calogero. The last thing I heard was Sonny saying, “There’s nothing worse than WASTED TALENT”…
Przewalski’s Horse, by Samme Chittum

The pandas at the National Zoo are sleeping.  
I wander down to the lower level and gaze at  
The gently humped black-and-white backs  
Of digitized pandas.  
A large woman tramps past toting a wailing boy slung over one shoulder. 
I stand three deep among my species, and peer past heads to see  
A silent giant tortoise, his deep-set eyes black as anthracite. 
I side step strollers and a father and three sons clad in identical blue nylon jerseys. 
They block my view of a sleeping Burmese tiger, prowling the jungle of dreams. 
Dodging toddlers, I claim a space the width of one body along the next rail and read: 
“The Przewalski’s horse is the last surviving sub-species of wild horse. This horse once freely roamed the steppe along the Mongolia-China border. Never again seen in the wild, Prezwalksi’s horses have since been kept and bred in captivity.” 
Fertility treatments have been tried and failed. Not a single equine womb has quickened. 
Not a colt has been born here for years.
In our politically correct world today, we often lose sight of the importance of fairy tales as a teaching tool for our very young. A clear example of this political correctness is but a short distance from our classroom. Santa approached the SUNY Delhi daycare center and was willing to schedule a visit. They proudly proclaimed that they do not celebrate Christmas. The tradition of Santa Claus traveling via sled pulled by reindeers started in Finland many centuries ago and has been a part of American Folklore since the early eighteen hundreds. It was over seven decades ago when Santa Claus told author Robert L. May the story of Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer (May). “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was printed commercially in 1947 and shown in theaters as a nine-minute cartoon the following year. The Rudolph phenomenon really took off when May’s brother-in-law, songwriter Johnny Marks, developed the lyrics and melody for a Rudolph song. Marks’ musical version of “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was recorded by Gene Autry. In 1949, ”Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” sold two million copies and went on to become one of the best-selling songs of all time. A television special about Rudolph narrated by Burl Ives was produced in 1964 and remains a popular perennial holiday favorite in the USA (Snopes.com). “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” is a positive teaching tool for our children. Although the story has been altered many times since 1939, the clear point to our children is that all of them can identify with Rudolph. It causes children to think about shunning another child because they are too small, toothin or just plan different. Another major point is triumph of good over evil, since this reindeer was able to guide Santa Claus’s sleigh during that very extra-dark and foggy Christmas Eve. A child hearing the story for the first time learns hope.

As stated, political correctness has entered the world of our children at SUNY Delhi daycare center. It also manifests itself at the federally funded Head Start program in Walton NY. At Head Start, Santa can only visit after hours and not in the regular classroom. However, due to Santa’s advanced age and inability to hear very well he has been known to get down on the floor and play with the children in the forbidden classrooms at Head Start. One looking at the big picture can also find political correctness at The Boston Globe. This article lists politically correct facts from many prominent individuals and organizations such as
Lou Dobbs, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, American Medical Association, and many others. However, the primary one for this paper is People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) whereby “Speaking of reindeer, PETA is protesting the lengthy work hours of the reindeer, whose journey spans many time zones. The animal rights group is also looking into reports that Rudolph was targeted for bullying by the others not because of his red nose but because he is gay” (English). Rudolph has caused his own problems in our politically correct world. In Wilmington, N.C., “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” caused a stir at a New Hanover County school. A parent complained about the song’s religious reference and got it pulled from her child’s kindergarten Christmas show at Murrayville Elementary School. The song was pulled “because it had the word Christmas in it” said Rick Holliday, assistant school superintendent (Charbonneau). The politically correct pundits fail to understand that Rudolph, Santa Claus and Christmas provide an inspiration and teaching tool for our youth.

A child’s first experience with Rudolph is usually somewhere between the ages of two and seven. This preoperational stage of learning is when they begin to tease, empathize, and persuade (Myers 144). It is when they learn that their playmates are different. In a form that they can understand, they learn how Rudolph’s fellow reindeer would laugh at him and call him names. Rudolph was also very different in that he was small, thin and had a very large red nose. A child would certainly feel sorry for poor Rudolph as they read about him crying as he was teased by the other reindeer. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. describes the child’s feelings when he states “The classical tales tell children what they unconsciously know—that human nature is not innately good, that conflict is real, that life is harsh before it is happy—and thereby reassure them about their own fears and their own sense of self” (616). Nevertheless further reading reminds the child to be good, obey their parents, and that when Santa Claus delivered presents “He’d get just as much . . . and this is what pleased him . . . as the happier, handsomer reindeer who teased him” (May). From personal experience, I understand what Rudolph teaches our young. On a Carnival Cruise ship late last October, I entered an elevator. A seven year old girl looked at me with her eyes wide open and asked “Are you Santa Claus?” I replied in a slow quiet voice, “I am on vacation.” Her next question was “Where is Rudolph?” She was showing care and concern. My reply was, “Rudolph is in the kennel with the other reindeers.” She was fine and
happy with the answer. That same question is the one most frequently asked by the children as they visit with Santa Claus in December. I always pick a local farm and tell them he is resting at that farm. Therefore, a child in their early formative years learns to respect all their playmates, even those who are a little different; they learn to always try to be good and to show caring and concern for animals.

There is more to the story than the preceding paragraph. The author sums it up the best in his forward to “Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” asking “What child doesn’t thrill to Rudolph’s triumphant return after guiding Santa Claus’s sleigh through the extra dark and foggy night?” (May). Even at a young age, a child begins to understand good and evil. The child can relate to teasing by other reindeers as evil and the weather that could prevent Santa Claus from his appointed rounds also as evil. However, upon reading all of the articles in chapter twelve of Writing and reading Across the Curriculum, the consensus is clear that a child does see the joy when good overcomes evil (614-679). My observations are personal because, while reading the story to many children I observe the sorrow in their eyes when I read how the reindeers treated Rudolph. You can always hear a pin drop in the room as I describe the difficulty Santa was having due to the terrible darkness and fog. That sorrow slowly transforms into hope. Finally, when Santa gets Rudolph to help him and the packages are delivered, the room is always filled with smiles of joy. Therefore, a child does learn to always be the best that they can be. Although there is evil in the world, it can be overcome by goodness.

“Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” is similar to many other fairytales today. In “Cinderella: A Story of Sibling Rivalry and Oedipal Conflicts” by Bruno Bettelheim, the author states that “No other fairy tale renders so well as the ‘Cinderella’ stories the inner experiences of the young child in the throes of sibling rivalry, when he feels hopelessly outclassed by his brothers and sisters” (652). The same way “Cinderella” teaches a young child about sibling rivalry, “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” also teaches sibling rivalry to a very young child. Almost all fairy tales have some form of discrimination, a choice between good and evil, a hero and a villain. Most teach children morals in a way that they can easily understand. Today many of our politically correct police are attempting to take this teaching experience away from our children. If successful, all they will do is remove fairy tales from transmitting cultural values that have been used for hundreds of years.
Works Cited


The Woman in the Mirror, by Michael McKenna

As I sit on the edge of the bed, I catch my reflection in the mirror over the dresser—shoulders slumped, t-shirt wet with sweat after an hour lifting weights and riding the stationary bike—and suddenly I see her too, though she’s hundreds of miles away: searching through her drawers for socks and underwear to put on after her shower. I watch her as she turns and heads for the door, kissing my head as she passes without a word, her footsteps light but purposeful as she walks down the hallway and into the bathroom. I hear her run the water while she hangs her robe on the back of the door, then pulls the curtain closed behind her after stepping into the tub. I can hear the steady jet of water hitting her body, running off her body, while she hums the Ode to Joy. Then afterward, the door ajar, I feel the warm, steamy air suffused with the scent of vanilla shampoo and avocado body wash. I love that smell, that warm moist air, those firm, familiar footsteps.
I am sixteen years old and my room is filled with stuff. Most of it is clothing, shoes, CDs, and books. Now that I look back and return to my sweet sixteen age, I realize most of these things cluttering my bedroom are insignificant and materialistic. I could live without most of these materialistic things because they possess little to no meaning in my life. They were always what I “thought” I needed and wished for growing up during the various stages of my life. Looking back at my high school teen years however there were three very important and diverse things situated in my room during this time: my violin, my grandmother’s ring, and my dog, Scooter.

Upon entering my room, my violin is located along the furthest wall from my bedroom door. The case leans against an old wooden chest underneath my window that looks out on the front lawn and the street beyond that. The case is a hard, black, shell-like structure which is closed and secured by metal buckles that lock into place. When opening, the case will creak softly to reveal the violin within. My violin lies upon a violet colored lining that is soft and protective. Not a scratch graces the surface of my instrument. It’s smooth, polished and free of rosin. Each tuning knob is as black as the case in which it came and when my bow glides across the strings a soft, rich sound ensues from it.

My violin was once my mothers. She learned how to play at a young age and it grew with her throughout the years. My mother played the violin throughout middle school and high school. She attended NYSSMA and All County and she was a member of the middle school and high school orchestra. She once loved to play the violin. When I was a small child she would take it out from under her bed, dust off the case, tune the violin and play me songs that I would dance to. Even if I didn’t know the song, at such a young age each song she played was magical to me. A couple of my favorite songs that I would always plead and beg her to play were, “Greensleeves”, “Danny Boy,” and “The Butterfly Gig.” Each note of the slow sad songs would ring out into the air and I would slowly twirl or rock in place to the beat. I usually would imagine I was a princess at a ball dancing and being escorted by the prince. When a fast song began I would jump in the air and run dancing in circles as fast as I could with a huge smile crossing my face. Through these songs my mother inspired me to grow up to play the violin.
When I reached the third grade I knew in my heart I wanted to take up the violin. Instead of buying me a new violin which possessed no meaning, my mother passed down hers to me. She wanted me to have it. She no longer had time to play and she had told me she knew that it would be good in my hands and the music that would come out of it through my fingers would be beautiful. That violin has so much meaning to it and throughout high school I played it with a passion. Now, whenever I take up the violin I think of my mother and the little girl who was once me, twirling and swirling to the music.

The second item you will find when entering my room at the age of sixteen is my grandmother, Beverly’s ring. When it is not on my finger it’s in the small wooden jewelry box that is always on the glass table beside my bed. The glass table and my bed are located next to the wall directly opposite the door. I never met my grandmother because she died before I was born however she had a beautiful silver ring, with a sort of Aztec style design on it that had been passed down to my mother when my grandmother passed away. My mom and my dad told me it was one of her favorites and there had never been a day where she had not worn this ring. My parents gave me the ring because they knew my grandma would want me to have it.

When my grandmother’s ring sits on my finger it seems to gleam and I know in my heart she was as beautiful as the ancient, Aztec design that weaves around the center of the ring. Each time I look at it I think of a beautiful woman, with curly brown hair and wide rimmed glasses telling jokes and her family laughing all around her. My parents always told me she was a woman with a great sense of humor and could make anyone smile even on the worse day. She was a strong, confident woman who would never let anyone tell her what to do. Ever since I was given the ring I have always worn it on my finger. I wear it because I feel close to my grandmother and I know it will give me strength when I am down. It serves as my own personal lucky pendant because I know that it’s very special and it possesses a lot of meaning. I always make sure to never run a race without wearing it. If I am out on a cross country course or am running a hard workout and I begin to feel defeated, down or like I just can’t go any further, feeling the smooth surface of my grandmother’s ring on my finger reminds me that I can do anything and for me to be as strong as my grandmother because she would expect nothing less.

The last item you will find in my bedroom isn’t an item at all. It is
my dog, Scooter. Scooter has been my first and only dog. We rescued him when I was nine years old from an abusive pet shop. I remember the day we got him as if it was yesterday. We had been back to school shopping at Latham Circle Mall in Albany. When we were leaving the mall I spotted the pet shop located right before the exit out into the parking lot. I begged my parents to let me go in for just a couple of minutes so I could look at all of the animals. They reluctantly agreed because they knew how much I loved animals. When we entered the store I immediately went to the dog cages because dogs are my favorite animals. My mother, father and brother were behind me and we all seemed to notice Scooter at the same time. We fell in love with him instantly and he was the type of dog my mother always wanted, a Pembroke Welsh Corgi. We noticed that the pet store owners were not taking care of the animals there and we immediately indicated that we wanted to have this dog. We bought him and I remember how happy he was when we walked him out to our car and on the way home. We noticed there were sores all over his feet and he had fleas and sores on his body. Our vet told us that he had been abused and neglected while in the cage in the pet shop. Not long after we adopted Scooter the pet shop closed. It gave me a sigh of relief knowing one less place was able to neglect innocent animals in this world.

I was so glad that we could rescue this wonderful dog from the abuse and the cage which he had lived in for six months of his life. I now have a goal in my life to try to rescue other dogs and other animals from the abusive environments they are living in and to find loving homes for them or to provide a home for them myself. Now whenever I am at a mall I will go into the pet shops to see how they are treating their animals. I have never seen a pet shop quite as bad as the one we rescued Scooter from which makes me very happy and somewhat optimistic for the future. I love my dog Scooter and he is one of my best friends. Whenever I am down he comes to my rescue and cheers me up. Throughout the years he has always spent time with me in my room and he is here now, lying beside me as I write this.

Each of these three things that I have described are very significant to me in different ways. At the age of sixteen and even to this day they are in almost the same spots in my room as they were then. My violin, ring and my dog scooter act as physical inspirations in my life. They have altered my life in some way. The stories behind them are what are most important and will follow me throughout the course of my life. They have
not changed (except Scooter who is a little older and a little slower than he once was). I will continue to incorporate these very special things into my life. As I grow older hopefully I too can pass down my violin or my ring to my daughter or my grandchild. I wish to tell them the stories of my dog Scooter and hope that they will carry these stories with them throughout the course of their lives. These stories are what will make a difference, what will build character and what will make my loved ones strong individuals in this world.
“There is urgent need for intelligent interpretation of the world’s workers, not only for the people of today, but for future ages.” Lewis Hine.

Although many of Lewis Hine’s photographs are instantly recognizable, mention of his name still draws a blank stare. This is true despite Hine’s contribution to photography and the social reform movement of the early twentieth century. Much information is available about the revered Lewis Hine, who died in 1940 and is buried in a small cemetery in Franklin, New York. Articles and books discuss his work among immigrants at Ellis Island, his evocative and haunting child labor images and his 1930 series on the workers constructing the Empire State Building. Yet many questions remain. What does Lewis Hine mean to America - its early twentieth century past and its early twenty-first century present? And what role does his corpus of work play in the broad sweep of modern American history?

One cannot talk deeply about immigration, child labor reform, and the Great Depression in rural America without referencing Hine. His published images are artistically appealing and visually arresting, showing fine composition and technique. They are also incisive historic documents. Shortly before his death in 1940 he was just being “rediscovered” by a new generation of Americans led by Berenice Abbott, Elizabeth McCausland and others associated with New York’s left-leaning “Photo League.” Abbott and company considered Hine as an artist and documentarian whose largely un-retouched work formed an important body of historic reference material.

Hine’s photographs serve as tangible reminders of the sometimes painful and protracted birth of the United States as a twentieth century world superpower. From the early photographs of arriving immigrants and children laboring in the mines and mills of a burgeoning American industrial sector to the efforts of idealistic American Red Cross officials to rebuild Europe after World War I, Hine followed and recorded the woof and warp of the American ascendancy. He also documented the results of the worldwide crash of 1929 and the early 1930s and its devastating effects on working Americans. Hine the man could not escape these tumultuous events, however. As the American twentieth century lost its luster during the late twenties and the 1930s, the Hine family found themselves buffeted
by forces beyond their ability to control. At the end, Hine himself was forced to rely on handouts from friends and the nascent social welfare system of Roosevelt’s New Deal - a bitter irony for someone who had done so much to document and ameliorate the suffering of others.

Although their permanent home was in Hastings-on-Hudson in Westchester County, Hine’s wife and son, Sara Rich Hine and Corydon, usually spent their summers and other holidays in Franklin, NY during the 1920s and 1930s. Franklin was where Sara’s family had lived and farmed since relocating from Wisconsin in 1918. Lewis himself spent as much time as possible at the farm in the summer months, traveling to Franklin via train or, in later years, being driven by Corydon. He never learned to drive. Harriet Rich Law was the last family member alive who could remember Lewis Hine with any clarity. Although she recalled her father Homer pejoratively labeling his brother-in-law a “radical” and a “socialist,” she and her siblings referred to him fondly as “Uncle Lewie.” She remembered how he took many images of all the cousins and neighbors’ children in and around Franklin. The extended Rich family is still the repository of numerous Hine images.

While in Franklin, photographs of picnics and family outings were Hine’s favorite compositions. Harriet Rich Law recalled that: “He wanted us to look natural, but we wanted to be dressed up. He didn’t believe in that. He was always very good natured and we all got along. He always carried his camera with him. When he took a picture he had a big box of a camera and put a big black thing over himself. He developed his own pictures down in the basement. There were vats and everything else, but no kids could go down there. He refused to touch up a picture.”

Hine must have enjoyed these moments of respite in the countryside. Although he often brought his photographic equipment along with him, sometimes he traveled to Franklin deliberately without it. During September 1925, the family spent ten days in Franklin, “sans camera ‘n everything impedimentary,” as Hine noted. Over the Christmas holidays of 1938, soon after his son and wife had been released from a stay in hospital, the Hines spent a couple of weeks in Franklin. Hine subsequently wrote, “The farm visit was a good investment. I was stretched out pretty thin.” However, he wasn’t above making a little money from his photography while at the farm - money that he desperately needed by the late 1930s. Harriet Rich Law’s brother George Rich was married in Franklin in 1938. Harriet noted that, “It was 1938, we were still recovering from the
Depression and we couldn’t afford a ‘real photographer’ so we had Uncle Lewie take our pictures.”
They’re called pinkies.

When I discuss irony with my students, I describe my first winter in the Catskills. One morning I opened up a kitchen drawer and found myself eye-to-eye with a mouse sitting in a cup, chewing on a rubber band. I calmly carried the cup outside and deposited its occupant on the snowy driveway. “Live and be free!” I declared. Later that day, I drove downtown in our rugged two-ton Jeep for some errands. On my return I looked around to see where my timid, little friend had wandered off to. Back to the house? Into the garage? I looked down and saw a bright smear of blood in the tire tracks.

We are plagued with mice. They crawl around the kitchen drawers and pry open my carefully prepared daily vitamin dispensers. They nibble on the pot holders, leaving rubbery green crumbs of neoprene and shreds of cotton. They leave their droppings in the spice drawer, the food container drawers, and even the junk drawer, where they punctured a bottle of Elmer’s Glue, leaving its contents to coagulate into a stiff, semen-like wad. All of these drawers I inspect once or twice a day, cleaning up the pellets and wiping all items down with paper towels soaked in rubbing alcohol.

In the early years I tried to heed advice gleaned at the Green Nations Gathering – a conference devoted to herbal healing and being at one with the universe – about establishing a rapport with devas, which are nature spirits. One woman urged us to communicate telepathically with mouse devas, letting them know that they were unwelcome. But you can’t reason with mouse devas. You can’t tell them that eating your soap, tunneling holes in your pineapples, shredding your toilet paper, and stuffing dog kibble under your sofa cushions is unacceptable, and that shitting in your kitchen drawers is downright disgusting. I made pledges, bargained with them, to no avail.

The whole sordid struggle of the last eighteen years is rich with analogical fruits ripe for the picking. But the harvest in which I have been engaged is more akin to rustling or deportation. I tried a Have-a-Heart contraption, but it’s clear why they’re considered humane: they’re feeding stations, not traps. Then I found these small plastic live traps. They’re about 28 grams – an ounce. I began setting them in the basement, but they tipped closed at the slightest jostling and needed to be placed on smooth surfaces, not the pebbly concrete of the cellar floor. I caught a few mice, but by the
time I found them they may have been in the boxes eight or more hours. The miserable buggers emerged soaked with their own urine, the boxes gummy with feces.

The invasion subsided. I soaked the traps in soapy, bleach-water and put them away. Then, the Baby Boom. The attacks on tea bags, vitamin bottle lids, and Ziploc bags escalated, showing a curious, hungry generation excited and frustrated by a tempting kitchen that was kept quite clean, except perhaps for the toaster. Thus began my vigilant evening trap-and-release campaign, with the kitchen as base camp. A day before guests arrived I set two traps, back-to-back, and I caught two. Our two granddaughters watched with giggling glee as a mouse emerged from behind the stove, inspected the inside of the trap, backed out, stood on its hind legs, looked at us with curiosity, then tipped the trap on its side to better extract its dinner. Entertaining, yes, but too close to fraternizing with the enemy for our company.

Oh, back to the metaphors, which I can’t really go back to since I didn’t really begin them. A terrible thing happened during this time. We learned that we would be audited by the IRS. My husband had been, for the last week, in sheer terror. One night, as I lay beside him (he had been in bed for most of the day), I kept thinking about mice cringing in their dark boxes, streaked with fearful sweat. Some get out, I think by thrashing about and tipping the trap on the side, although I don’t see how the door reopens. They rifle the interiors for peanut butter, or rattle the closed traps if the doors have been triggered, waking me up at night. I can hear Number Fourteen tapping. I creep into the kitchen. The trap has clattered shut and a tiny figure scuttles back behind the stove. Not as tiny as others, though. I can see the generations, and some of them are very young indeed.

The cycle begins anew. It’s December and Grey Poop and his offspring are once again leaving their calling cards in the spice drawers. In the upstairs bathroom cabinet, a roll of toilet paper is shredded and when I lift it, a handful of dog kibble spills out. I run downstairs into the basement to check one of the heavy duty dog food bins. The corner has been neatly chewed away. Nothing remains of the three pounds or so that I was sure had been there last week. I recall that when I put on my rubber clogs the day before, the toes rattled with kibble.

So now to my initial announcement: They’re called pinkies. Last summer, I grabbed an evening bag that I hadn’t used in a year. I peered in and wondered why there was shredded silk coming out of the inner pocket
and what kind of pink candy had I left in the interior pocket. Then the “candy” stirred, tiny appendages waving slowly. I zipped up the bag, did a quick Google search, and realized that there must be nine to fourteen day-old pinkies in my bag. No wonder that brave mouse momma kept running across the living room for the last two nights, defying the obsessive curiosity of the dog (who at 75 pounds is afraid of mice). I went off to the concert but all I could think about was what I would do. I couldn’t let a large tiny family be raised in my art supply closet. I imagined dangling the bag in the pond. I wound up wrapping it in a Ziploc bag, gently rolling the contents, and sliding the seal tightly, and trembling with guilt. I had become a mass mouse murderer.

Driving mice far from their community where they are likely to suffer: Is that humane? Inadvertently leaving a live mouse in a live trap, where it dies of terror, starvation, thirst or a combination thereof: Is that compassionate? My husband says I should write a children’s story about a woman who gets lost in the woods and is rescued by all the mice she had liberated. I think about the book, Opal: Journal of an Understanding Heart (lent to me by the ever-humane Dawn of the Liberal Arts division), in which the child, Opal Whiteley, befriends a man she calls The Man Who Wears Grey Neckties And Is Kind to Mice. I just want to do the right thing, but it seems no good deed goes unpunished.
The beginning was a small accident. At this time, I did not even think I was going to believe in him as deeply as my mom wanted me to. I think I was too little to understand what mom meant me about him. For me, he was too far away from me, and he was not real. But now, I can understand what mom tried to tell me. As I grew older, I understood faith in an archangel was believing in a positive figure that mattered.

One day, when no one was at home yet, my little dog became sick. I panicked because he didn't move at all. I couldn't figure out what I should do except cry. I felt my cheeks were wet because of tears and before I could dry these, I felt more tears on my cheeks again. My tear drops fell with a plop to his little paw but he didn't lick me like he always does when I cried before him. Since I met him, he always reacted to every single thing that I did, but not this time.

His name was Ken; my mom named him when he came to our house. He always was a small dog, but he was tiny when he was a baby. He had white fur at first, but his fur changed to light brown as time passed. He was a mix of toy poodle and some other kind of small dog. I was in kindergarten when he arrived, so I spent time with him every day after school until someone came back home.

I came home after lunch that day. I watched a TV show with Ken at first and then I took a nap with him, as we did every day. He loved to sleep with me. He was laying down right next to my stomach. I don't exactly remember, but he was fine before we went to sleep. When I woke up to go the bathroom, I realized that he didn't even open his eyes. I called his name, but he never moved. “Ken? Wake up. What’s wrong with you, Ken?” My voice was shaking. It made me even more anxious. I don't know why, but I suddenly thought I might never watch TV or take a nap with him again. I was so afraid of losing Ken because he was my best friend, and also he was part of my family.

I was in panic but I just remembered a story mom told me over and over again. I knew that both my hands were ice cold, and the inside of my mouth was completely dry, so it was hard to say anything comforting to my little dog. Even if I tried, I do not think he could hear it because my voice was shaking and it was so small. I held one of his little paws and thought of the archangel Michael. Just at that time, my older brother came back from elementary school. Mostly he would hang out with his friends after
school. I don’t even know why on this day he came back early. He called my mother, and we went to the hospital. My little dog, Ken, came back two days later from the hospital, and I cried again when I saw he was fine. I hugged Ken and felt he was licking the tears on my cheek. I thought of the archangel Michael again.

My brother is five years older than I, so I guess he was in about the third grade of elementary school. His name is Takashi, and he took care of me all the time when my parents were busy and could not spend time with me. I was such a crybaby at the time because I could only see my parents about twice a week. When I was crying, Takashi held my hands and stayed with me until I stopped. He cooked dinner for me and my older sister when we said we were hungry. He took care of us when we were sick. For him, I was a little sister who could not live without him at the time. I needed Takashi; I believed in him, and I loved him absolutely as my family. Ken loved him, too. My brother played soccer with Ken sometimes after dinner. Takashi belonged to soccer and baseball teams at his school. He often was hanging out with his friends after school, and he practiced for the team every weekend. I think he had so many things to do even when he was a child, but now I understand that he took care of my sister and me as much as he could, so we would not feel sad about our parents. He did this without the least complaint. The day Ken got sick, he was not going to come back early, but I think he came back early on this day because I was waiting for him. As I said before, my parents were busy with their jobs every day, and that made me sad sometime. Yet I had my brother who was extremely important to me. My parents felt confident that he would take care of me. However when I was little, I was a mischievous child. My mom told me that I tried to do every bad thing and good thing because I was both impulsive and curious. One day I watched a story on TV of a person who traveled all over the world just by hitchhiking, and I thought I can do this. I packed all my things that I needed to live in my huge backpack and left my house. My parents were terribly worried about me and they found me after two days. I don't remember where I was, but I remember my parents were angry with me so much. Another day, I tried to be a bird to go see Santa Claus. I made huge wings in a manual training class at kindergarten, and I used them from the second floor of my grandpa’s house. I hit my head quite strongly on the ground, and I was sleeping in the hospital for a week. I lost my memory for two weeks after I woke up. I cannot get back the memories from during that time even now.
My parents worried about me so much, but they did not get angry with me because they found the letter I wrote to Santa Claus. It said that, “I will be a good girl. I will never be mean to my friends. I will listen to my brother all the time. I will be a good girl, I promise. So please, please give my parents back to me every night.” My parents were crying and apologized to me.

I realized now that I caused great worry to my parents many times, but I was not trying to do it. They knew that what happened was not intentional. So my mother taught me to believe in the archangel Michael when I was in trouble that I could not handle. She is not Catholic but every time when I made mistakes she encouraged me to believe in him. So I started to think about Michael when I needed help, and somehow I was able to get help from someone else. I have no idea about God because I have never read the Bible in my life, so actually I don't really know about the archangel Michael either. I did not even research him or have never tried to know about him. My mom told me to think about this angel when I am in the trouble, and she also told me to think about him again after a problem was solved.

I think it was okay even if I did not know much about the archangel Michael. Anyone could take his position. My mom tried to tell me to believe in someone, because she wanted me to feel I was not alone. Mom always said to me that she thinks, “Believing in someone who you don’t know is harder than suspecting your friends. Lying to yourself is sadder than lying to your mom. Getting pain is better than hurting someone.”

At the time, I didn’t understand the true kindness of my brother who spent time with me and loved me. I didn’t understand the true strength to say to my parents that I missed them all the time. I didn’t understand the true love from them, people who were working for me. But when I thought about the archangel Michael, I could feel many people around me, protecting me. I could say thank you to them more easily after a huge problem. I could cry when I wanted; I could get angry when I needed; I could laugh when I was with people who I loved because I had the angel every time. Now I know how hard believing in someone from the bottom of my heart is, but I do want to believe in my friends. I know it is hard to be honest with my parents, but I am honest with them as long as I am honest with myself. I know the feeling when I get pain and fall down, but I won’t hurt others because I know how hard it is. I still believe in the
archangel Michael and think about him when I need help. Now I believe anyone could be the archangel Michael for me as my brother once was. I hope I can be the archangel Michael for someone who I love someday.
Iambic Turtle Crossing, by Miriam A. Sharick

One spring, when I was driving up a hill,
I saw a painted turtle start to cross.
I figured it was probably a male;
Young males disperse to look for breeding grounds.
The turtle was in danger, too, I knew:
He couldn’t possibly avoid a car.
And I could not just stop right there and help;
It wasn’t safe to carry him across.
So up I went, and over, looking for
A spot where I could safely turn around
And safely send the turtle on his way.
Back down the hill I drove, and saw
The turtle on the double yellow line.
I parked against the guard rail and stepped out,
Intending just to quickly scoop him up,
When suddenly a giant tanker truck
Appeared atop the hill, forcing me back.
I watched in helpless horror as the tires
Steamrolled his scuted shell, crushing him flat.
The truck felt nothing. I just stood and sobbed,
“T’m sorry! Oh, I’m sorry!” to the earth.
Bikers, by Cassidy Goldstein

Leather Jackets covered in patches; Limited types of bikes allowed into the family.
Harley Davidson without question.
Vicious biting cold, only a bandanna on your face… Quiet stern faces with empty eyes- only thoughts they will ever know individually…
  unless the same thoughts are on their minds:
  a family mission, a destination only the crew knows
the thunderous pipes of hundreds shake the ground as they roll through town
  the same deal every time
  red lights don’t stop a single one
  they would rather get hit by a car then fall back from the crew
  the ride leader puts up his fist
the long hair stops blowing as the bikes perfectly in unison, come to a halt.
  this IS the real deal
  shined and immaculate chrome blinds the crew, they don’t flinch.
  they are used to it. riding for years or not…
everyone knows that bikes BETTER be lined up side by side, two feet apart on both sides. Although stereotypes of bikers are careless rebellious crazy 6-foot guys…
  when with the crew riding…
Strict unwritten rules are always in order out of respect for the family they worked so hard to create.
Sore asses from the long ride mount back on and everyone rolls out exactly as they came
  The ride goes on.
  Back to anticipating bumps in the road,
  the only words I hear over the defining roar of the pipes is “STAND”
although I know the deal, daydreaming is typical of the passenger on a long ride
  precaution is just standard.
Cops protect the crew and the crew protects them back it’s a two way street.
An eggcream is a New York staple. It is a mixture of milk, seltzer, and syrup (usually chocolate, but vanilla is better). In the 30's 40's and 50's, you could get them anywhere, and they were always made with Fox’s U-bet chocolate syrup. Fifty years ago, you could get an egg cream anywhere, you can still get them at diners, but no one makes them better than me.

I work at a world famous ice cream parlor in Queens. It’s over 100 years old, and most pieces of the store are original. All of the ice cream and toppings are home made, and the best I’ve ever tasted. I have met people from all corners of the earth at my job, but no one spewed as much bullshit as this guy.

The first time I saw him, I didn’t think much of him. I was sitting on the counter talking to my coworker about the upcoming baseball season. He asked if we made eggcreams, and even though I wasn’t working, I told him we did. He ordered 3 large chocolate ones, and then told me his first lie. He told me that the car he had outside, was one he just purchased from Jay Leno. He said it was called a Ferrari Zimmer, and that there were only 3 made. Reggie Jackson, and Ted Kennedy had the other two, if you were wondering.

He took me outside to show the car, and I thought it was gorgeous. He told me some history that Enzo Ferrari made it but no one liked it, so they stayed in the back of the shop, until the three previously mentioned multi-millionaires found out about the cars, and wanted to buy them. He told us that he just purchased it yesterday, for $800,000. I didn’t really believe him, but I wasn’t sure how much he was lying.

He wasn’t dressed particularly nice, not like someone who could afford a car more expensive then some homes. He wore a gray shirt, and blue jeans. Nothing really special about him, but he did look Native American. I at first gave him the benefit of the doubt, and thought maybe he had a lot of money because of a Mohegan Sun, or another casino on a reservation. I gave him the benefit of the doubt until the lies started piling up.

He told us he also had a 1974 Rolls Royce, but his son put a penny in the car cigarette lighter, and it screwed the whole thing up. We didn't believe him this time but went along with it. We were all doing research to find out what the car he actually drove was. I google searched everything I could think of that related to that car, and nothing came up for it. Another
coworker did a little more research and found out what the car was. It was a Zimmer Quicksilver. It was a car from a failed car company in the 80’s. They sold for about $15,000 and were made with all American parts. We now all knew this, but weren’t sure how and when to call him out on it.

Next time he came in, he told us that he saved a girl from being raped. The time after that, he told us that his cousin killed someone, but the governor wanted to drive his car. So he let him borrow it for a week, and the case disappeared. The time after that, he told us that the former wrestler Lex Luger was taking his kids to play paintball. We were all fed up with the crap he was saying, just because of how ridiculous it was.

The final time he came in and was trying to joke around with us. He wound up saying he was going to put snakes in the fridge for when we open it. We joked back and said that our boss wouldn’t do that to his antique refrigerator. He told us that everyone had his price. That’s when I lost it, and I snapped. I couldn’t deal with his crap anymore.

“Yeah, everyone does have their price, but you wouldn’t be able to afford my boss’. Even if you did sell your fifteen thousand dollar piece of crap you parked in front of the store. You’re not rich, you don’t own this super incredible car that you tell us about, it’s a fucking Zimmer Quicksilver. Your cousin might have killed someone, but no governor would want to be seen driving that shitbox. No one that works here believes anything you say, and everyone is fed up with your bullshit.”

I finished my sentence, and he got pale as a ghost. The whole store looked at me, stunned at what just happened. My coworker dropped a glass out of shock, and we never saw Mr. Feaux-rarri again.
Rabbit Redux, by Sharon Ruetenik

To Journey and Charlie

Humans tethered to hounds, we walk this memorial field, lilacs planted for dead but beloved pets, clustered blooms announce I yawned, I shat, I gave meaning to someone’s life.

But our companions are shelter dogs, kennel mates, incorrigible, kin by choice. He a Shepherd cross, she a Mastiff mix—just one more canine love story beyond our ken.

Then a rabbit, as if on cue, leaps from his bushy haven, counting coup, crosses the dusty road; the other bunnies betting against the strength of leashes, power of human restraint.

Long after the rabbit snickers safe on the other side, our dogs continue to pull and whine, that cunicular temptation, vestigial vision, hopping and mocking, long after the living, bustling bunny is gone. We envy their picture, its replays of perpetual flight. Oh that we had such clarity for our desires, such trust in our senses.
Journey (dog), from “Heart of the Catskills” Website
Tick Tock, by Adeline Schowengerdt

The smoke from the incense rises slowly, a steady solitary stream like fragrant satin responding to any semblance of a breeze, but the air is still and the room is silent save for our breath and the ticking of a clock somewhere in the distance. Grey light seeps in through the dirty windowpanes as a light rain falls and I thought I would’ve been cold, if you weren’t there to warm me. Somehow I know this won’t last long so I close my eyes and breathe, filling my lungs with you before you are gone. Tick tock.

In that moment nothing exists beyond the small, white walled room, the mattress on the floor, the sweet earthy scent.

I circumvent tangles of sheets and blankets, making my way through the downy labyrinth to you. Your skin is warm and I rest my cheek on your chest, feeling the slight rise and fall - synonymous with my own - with each passing breath. The motion calms me, a reminder that you haven’t slipped away just yet, and for an instant the ticking wanes.

A hand emerges, fingertips tracing a path up my side, down my arm, alighting upon the back of my own hand. I grasp at them sleepily. Tick tock. Your hands are rough, patterned with creases and calluses formed by years of carpentry and copper strings. I run my fingers along the faintest lines – one for life, one for love – feeling your muscles relax and your pulse quicken. Something tells me these lines have something to say, that I should know what they mean, but as they begin to twist and intertwine your palm becomes a map I can’t quite navigate.

The steady tick of the clock morphs into a dissonant series of chimes and I turn to face you. Smoke swirls around us as the rain hammers against the windows and your presence begins to fade.

One.
Your hand finds my cheek; I plant a few soft kisses on your wrist.
Two.
Colors begin to fade and the air grows thicker and thicker until I can barely see your face.

Don’t go.
Three.
I close my eyes and breathe you in one last time.
Four.
The air is still and the room is silent save for the ticking of a clock.
Grey light seeps in through the dirty windowpanes as a light rain falls, and I am cold. Without opening my eyes I bury my face in the pillow and take a deep breath in the vain hope that your scent would again fill my lungs, but I don’t need to see to know that I am alone.

You’re hundreds of miles away, and my lonesome bed is inhospitable.

*Tick tock.*
Interview with Mark Beltchenko, Sculptor, by Kirby Olson

Kirby Olson: Your sculpture Sidewalk II was originally positioned on the quad in front of the library. However the quad was completely redone last summer, and it’s now been moved to a circle between Farnsworth, Sanford and Evenden Tower. Do you think this changes the sculpture?

Mark Beltchenko: I do not mind that the sculpture has been moved from its original location but I am curious as to how it relates to its new environment.

Kirby Olson: My students in English composition are supposed to write about the sculpture but we don’t know what it means. Does it have a political meaning?

Mark Beltchenko: The work at the University is titled SIDEWALK II and has no political implications. It is a spatial work whose inspiration comes from my exploration of how man-made forms relate to natural forms from a visual standpoint.

Kirby Olson: How did you make it?

Mark Beltchenko: To create a piece such as SIDEWALK II I will use sheet steel and structural steel, the latter coming in a multitude of sizes and variations: angle, channel, tubular and square to name a few. Prior to ordering the steel I’ll usually have made a scale model (maquette) and some full size templates. I will do the welding and grinding. I am generally a one-man operation and I derive a great deal of pleasure from working the material myself. Also, it is at this point in the process that I am able to make changes or adjustments in the design.

Kirby Olson: How did you get started in your career?

Mark Beltchenko: My decision to become a sculptor started with a career in jewelry design and fabrication. Following a 3-year jeweler’s apprenticeship I went to work for a jeweler that gave me the freedom to let my imagination run free. It was then I knew I was meant to work 3-dimensionally and gave up the painterly aspirations that I had held
through my undergraduate days. It was a relatively easy transition from
jewelry to sculpture; fabrication is fabrication large or small. I bought a
welder, a torch and grinder and went from a millimeter scale to a foot scale.
I was finally able to make a statement with my work other than that of a
decorative nature.

Kirby Olson: Can you make a good living in your career?

Mark Beltchenko: The business of art is a very elusive one. The fact that
there seem to be no guidelines to follow, no format for “success” is very
intriguing and inviting to many of us but only those artists who treat their
calling as a business will survive in these times.

Photograph of Mark Beltchenko’s Sidewalk II, by Kirby Olson
CONTRIBUTORS’ NOTES

Hannah Backus is a student at SUNY-Delhi.

Mark Beltchenko is a professional sculptor in Detroit, Michigan. His sculpture Sidewalk II can be found on a landscaped circle between Farnsworth, Evenden, and Sanford Hall.

Sasha Burwood is a student at SUNY-Delhi who hopes to go on to earn a doctorate in Medieval Studies.

Samme Chittum is an assistant professor in Public Speaking and Humanities. She is earning a doctorate at SUNY-Albany.

Tim Duerden directs the Delaware County Historical Association, and is a history professor at SUNY-Delhi.

Richard Giles is an organic farmer in Hamden, NY. His family runs the Lucky Dog Farm Store in Hamden. He has an MFA in Fiction from the U. of Alabama. He grew up in the Mississippi Delta and on big farms in the Blackbelt of Mississippi and Alabama, and farmed there until the late 80’s. His Hamden, NY farm supplies organic food to Suny Delhi cafeterias and to the culinary competitions. His children attend the on-campus program at DC-4.

Cassidy Goldstein is a student at SUNY-Delhi.

Marty Greenfield came to Delhi in 1970, and has been here for over forty years. He is Director of Student Activities and is responsible for most of the good music that happens on campus.

Nicole Iulucci is a liberal arts student at Delhi with an eye toward the Nursing Program and also toward Creative Writing.

Mike McKenna is a professor of Humanities at SUNY-Delhi. He lives in Oneonta.

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Kirby Olson is a professor of humanities at SUNY-Delhi. His interest in contemporary arts led him to be an arts reporter in Seattle before receiving a doctorate in English at the University of Washington.

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Adeline Schowengerdt is a student at SUNY-Delhi originally from Staten Island. She plans to transfer and major in English literature.

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Luke Dougherty is a professional artist who lives in Bovina, NY. He draws the struggling businesses of the Catskills. He studies boxing at SUNY-Delhi.

Dana Matthews is a photographer living in Franklin, NY. She is working on a book with writer Richard Giles about the declining farm communities in rural New York. The book will be centered on Giles’ farm and the struggling farm families in Hamden, NY, and in turn will look back to the collaboration of James Agee and Walker Evans’ Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

Mike McKenna is a professor of Humanities at SUNY-Delhi.
Farm Worker, by Dana Matthews