

English II Pieces

2006-2007

Memoir

by Kelsey Mack

The car door slams, and I hear Grandma's voice echo through the hall: "My favorite grandkids are here!" Both Cody and I drop our overnight bag and race to give her the first hug. We follow the smell of semi-burnt pecans and sugar to discover the freshly-baked cookies. Mom picks up the left behind luggage, and greets us inside where she finds the two of us happily munching on freshly-baked freezer cookies. The taste of vanilla, pecans, and sugar rolls over my tongue. Mom gives Code and me one final kiss, and then leaves for a much-needed night on the town. Immediately we are off exploring Grandma's house, and our favorite hide-out.

Scratchy wool carpet rips my knees as I crawl through a tunnel of darkness. My eyes dart around, trying to focus on anything, but there is nothing to be found. Only deep steady breathing echoes through the tunnels, and with each breath, cold damp air penetrates my lungs. The musty smell of mold and cookies lingers in the air. I continue crawling. My brother flicks on the light and suddenly I am blinded, patting the ground to find my way. We creep to the secret room.

Relaxed at last in our secret dress-up area, we disguise ourselves. My brother Cody dresses himself to be a clown-fisherman-werewolf, and I dress myself to be a princess-bride-business woman. We crawl out, but not without taking one last whiff of the moldy room. It is quite damp in Seattle, so it is only right for a little water to get into our dress up room, the attic, penetrating the carpet and wood. Maybe that is why it smells like mold, or maybe it is from the leftover half-eaten sandwich from our last expedition. Either way: not a pleasant idea.

We once again present ourselves to the eagerly-awaiting grandparents. Laughter fills the peaceful room at the sight of our chosen outfits. We quickly run back inside giggling, and change into another outrageous outfit. Cody decides that might be fun to wear a girl outfit, so I willingly give him the princess-bride-business clothes and grab a pair of heels for myself. We leave with our outfits, and once again present ourselves. No matter what, I always look forward to the annual visit to Grandma's house. A whiff of fresh cookies, or a moldy-moss smell brings my memory

Psychosis

by Kirsten Wiking

Thick July heat suffocates the sterile corner room as I awake. My deep slumbering breaths crinkle the starchy white sheets of this alien bed and I rise, squinting in the harsh light of an early California morning. With my feet planted on waxy linoleum tiles, I stretch and observe the harsh severity of my chamber: a crude particle-board dresser, a plastic ceiling fan -- twirling uselessly -- lightly floating vinyl blinds; everything caked in bluish-white paint, the color of a snowstorm. The chilly whiteness clashes with oppressive humidity. I feel like I'm in a mental hospital, but this is only partially-true.

Ligouri -- my mother's brother -- is severely autistic, and permanently resides in a hospital here in California. The hospital where he stays provides little bungalows open for free use by the families of patients. In a desperate effort to unite her seven children while not spending any money, my grandmother has decided that one of these houses would be an excellent place for a family reunion. Now, I am trapped in a house full of lunatics.

Each concrete-and-vinyl house that the hospital built was given a name. This one was inappropriately christened "Magnolia House". There aren't any magnolias anywhere -- or, for that matter, any other vegetation, except an unruly, wilting rosebush, a sadly-neglected patch of crab grass, and the exhausted skeleton of an oak tree. The house itself looks like a hospital. Everything is white, and cold, and clean: a museum that has been stripped of its beauty.

My mother and I arrived last night and were placed in this corner room. She's already up, and I'm apprehensive about leaving its sanctuary to go mingle with the clan. I exit the room, and see Ligouri sitting on the couch---the only piece of furniture that I actually like in this house, as it sticks out against all the blankness. It is an enormous couch, more of a bed, upholstered with tough, dark-blue burlap that has pictures of ducks on it. Ligouri is holding his knees and is rocking himself gently, gazing wonderfully into outer space.

At the plastic table is Grandma. She's critiquing Aunt Teresa's clothing, again. I find this ironic considering my

whirling back to my beloved Grandparents home.

Ooo la la Cream!

by Garnet Kwader

The sweet, orangey flavor of Cream Savers never fails to give me a craving for *Smocka Dolls*. This is the name my mother gave to the fantasy board game *Mage Knights* upon our first introduction to it.

When I was eleven, Elder Smocka, one of the two LDS missionaries in the McCall area at the time, brought over his companion, Elder Willis, a box of his Mage Knight pieces, and a bag of strawberry Cream Savers. After the three of us convinced my mother to play, we seated ourselves around the antique kitchen table. While each of us sucked on a Cream Saver, we listened to Elder Smocka as he explained the rules of the game. The object was simple: to be the player with the last army standing.

He proceeded to empty the contents of his cardboard box, which was labeled *Mage Knights*, out onto the table. Little plastic figures scattered in all directions. Elder Willis shot out his hand to prevent a female centaur from plummeting to the floor. Tiny plastic warriors were everywhere. I could not see the table through the goblins, robots, centaurs, and elementals. They looked like they could have been plucked from a scene in *The Lord of the Rings*. Elder Smocka interrupted his arranging of his beloved Mage Knights to offer us each another Cream Saver by holding out the bag and singing the old Cream Saver jingle: "Ooo la la Cream! Cream, yum! Creamiest Creamiest Life Savers, yeah... Yummm!"

After each of us had accepted another candy, Elder Smocka told us about the combat system and how to use it. On the back of each little warrior was a number that indicated how much the unit was worth. Each player was allotted the same number of collective points. In this way, one person could have two extremely powerful units, or seventeen weaklings. The base of each figurine was a circular dial with an "L"-shaped hole, through which a player might view four numbers, some of which were highlighted with different colors to indicate special abilities. These digits showed the unit's speed, (the number of inches it could move in a turn), its attack, its defense, and its special attack number. With each counterclockwise turn of the dial, the unit lost one hitpoint and usually some attack, defense, and/or special abilities. I giggled at the other missionary. Elder Willis had obviously lost interest in the rules. He was animating an intense battle between a

grandmother wears a canary-yellow turban to hide her wispy white hair: a swami sitting in this California kitchen. While Teresa might not seem bothered by Grandma's ever-present judgments, she's strategically conserving that resentment until later, when she will end up lashing out in the cool of the night. It's a predictable equation that I can apply to every function where the two women will be in close proximity.

My eight-year-old cousin Jacob is now coiled around my leg, urgently seeking some attention. It is no use trying to shake him off, he is like the rest of my family, a python: the more I struggle, the tighter he coils, so I ignore him and sit down at the table.

The morning continues. More family arrives; more people are admitted into the house. Tradition requires that the men go outside, a beer in one hand and a spatula in the other, as they take turns poking at beef patties sizzling in the noon sun. The women, on the other hand, are confined in the house: toiling to assure that each person has one of the generic-brand sodas that Uncle Anthony has brought for the event. The kiddies are, for the moment at least, outside, fascinated by a queer rope that some previous tenant hung from the oak tree. It looks like a noose. It's the right length to be a noose too. But this is entirely unimportant, because today, it is a perfectly excellent swing. All the adults are in their appropriate places; they all seem awkward standing there.

As the evening cool and darkness slide through the house, the energy begins to change. Everyone starts to come on edge, to be more alert. With the children asleep, adult conversation shifts. We're testing each other, pushing each others' buttons: the sudden chill that's consumed the house does this to us. Our eyes shift from one person to the next. We begin a slow burn. Resentment fuels the fire that begins to blaze in Magnolia House kitchen. Testing. Twisting. Spitting flames over nothing. I have to escape; I notice Ligouri.

Separate from the group, Ligouri is still on the couch, swaying, oblivious to the nonsense. With his hands on his knees, he tilts forward and back-arching, then slanting ahead. A faint smile leads to his crystalline eyes: transfixed on something, but nothing that I can see in this material world. He is the only adult who is at peace tonight. I sit next to him. Ligouri has spent a big slice of his life in a mental hospital---but as far as I can tell, he is perfectly sane. Tonight, the other adults will work out repressed emotions: confused and angry. But Ligouri will not. He will be free, rocking gently within himself, and I

scantly-clad Blade Mistress and a goblin ranger behind Smocka's back. Elder Smocka noticed, and then stopped his homily on how to play. He peered out over his nerdy, round glasses with mock anger at his playful companion.

When the game finally got going, Elder Willis's army seemed to be the strongest. It took all of my pieces, and looked like it was about to do the same to Elder Smocka's when his turn came. Smocka flew a seemingly harmless unit into the middle of the battle and with some special ability that he "forgot" to mention, killed most of Willis's regiment and rendered the few survivors innocuous.

I began to wait all week for that one day when the missionaries were allowed to play games -- only, of course, after their weekly preparation of housecleaning and studying. Tuesday afternoon always saw them at our house with their dirty laundry, Smocka Dolls, and a bag of Cream Savers.

Maturity

by Kirsten Wiking

A pair of archaic lambskin slippers patiently rests on the floor of my father's closet, next to a pair of expensive Italian boots. Crafted of buttery leather that seems to be capped with polished glass, the Italian boots crave admiration and attention. The weathered slippers, however, maintain a modest sophistication of age and flaws. An initial glance at my father's slippers reveals nothing noteworthy or remarkable -- yet subtle details expose a humble beauty. Battered pastures of aged leather are bound by thick lines of charcoal stitches. Dashes of black weave across the lambskin like fences raised across ploughed fields of dirt. A small tear near the toe reveals a puff of spongy white shearling that cushions my father's feet as he walks to make breakfast and hunt for the newspaper. His morning routine has etched deep wrinkles that fan to the edge of the slipper: lines of laughter that spread from the corner of my father's eyes to his temples. My father's Italian boots are pretty, but boring. Blemishes, accumulated with age and wear, reflect the father whom I love.

will stay with him.

Sittin' on Top of the World

by Garnet Kwader

"Of all the places I've traveled, I think the place that is most memorable was my trip to Africa in 1980," says Dr. Herald Nokes as we sit in his cozy basement facing each other across an ancient, teal card-table. "This group of photographers organized this trip for a very small group to go. They asked my good friend Scottie Glen to go because he had given them a few pictures in the past. They asked him if he had any friends who would want to go, and he contacted me. It didn't take me very long to say yes. Of course I wanted to go to Africa. Scottie and I were the only two who were not either a wildlife photographer or a wildlife artist." My seventy-eight-year-old grandfather chuckles and says, "Off the record, my photos were just as good as any of theirs."

An air of thoughtful reminiscence flows over his face. "The highlight of the trip was climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. After a very frightening air plane ride from Arusha, Tanzania, to the Kilimanjaro airport in a horrendous thunderstorm, we traveled by vehicle to Moshe town Ð a small town at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro. "Wanting to exclude no detail, Dr. Nokes describes the plane he and the rest of his party flew in "The plane was a brand new 737 with a painting of a giraffe on the tail."

In Moshe town the travelers acquired all the equipment they would need on their hike to the tallest point in Africa. The next morning they set out. "It took us four days to reach the summit of Kilimanjaro," Dr. Nokes says. "It was interesting to see how the vegetation differed at various levels of elevation. In the rain-forest type country we passed through on the first day, there were exotic flowers like gladiolas, the wild African violet, and the blood lily Ð a brilliant red, four-inch cluster of small flowers. At the end of each day we stayed at a bunkhouse-type structure built for mountain climbers. The first night and second nights' lodges were made of wood, but the last was made of rock. In each, there was usually a central stove for warmth and for drying clothes. There were several simple wooden bunks around the inside of each building. The huts were fairly primitive."

"By the time we reached 18,000 feet I was experiencing high-altitude sickness." Dr. Nokes continues by scientifically describing his symptoms: "I was dizzy and

A Looking Glass

by Kelsey Mack

While looking at her silver ring, Kathryn Pope is reminded of the joys and humiliations of her vacation in Greece. Fifteen at the time, Kathryn would often leave on walks "just to get away from [my] annoying family. It was awfully humiliating to travel with [my] Grandparents because they were constantly making huge gestures like: 'we want two (holding up two fingers) salads.'" After much embarrassment, she would leave to walk it off. "Many times while walking," Pope said, "I would get weird looks, because I am an American, so I would often say I was Canadian."

Kathryn discovered the ring shop, which carried thousands of different bands, on one such walk. The man who sold her the ring was a paradigm of the typical Hollywood grandfather. He was "an old man, gruff and grizzly." Pope says, "I chose the ring because it [was] simple." This ring reflects her simple, direct personality, and her desire to be unencumbered by relatives. Kathryn Pope will forever be reminded of beautiful Greek beaches and towns, but also of humiliating experiences, when she glances at her silver band.

Drumsticks

by Katie McDaniel

"Shut in an empty bedroom with my drums, I'm alone in my own world and that's how I like it."

Garnet Kwader's drumsticks have been a part of her life for over two years. Before becoming a drummer, Garnet was also a violinist and played percussion in high school band. Her friend Sam Cambel picked out Garnet's drum set for her and led her on the drummer's path. "I mostly practice on an old rubber drum pad that belongs to a friend of mine. He says that he doesn't use it anymore so he leaves it at my house." Garnet likes to play drums while listening to ACDC with her earphones. "When I have my earphones on and my protectors over them, I leave reality and let myself absorb the beat of *Back in Black*." She can mimic the drum beats while improving her skills and listening to her favorite band at the same time.

"I listen to rock, so I can play the music I know I like to listen to." Learning this instrument has given her the

having intermittent spells of nausea. My body's response was very interesting. I would start to climb and slowly take three or four steps at which point I was overcome by nausea. I would sit down to rest, lean on my walking stick and immediately fall asleep." He abruptly snaps his fingers. "Just like that." He continues: "A minute or less later, I would wake up, stand up, climb another three or four steps, become nauseated, sit down, and go to sleep. This occurred over and over again until I reached the summit." Luckily for the climbers, altitude was not a problem until 1,000 feet from the top.

In order to remember his exact thoughts as he gazed out over Africa, he stands up, walks to his bookshelf, and pulls out one of many small, leather-bound books. The word *Journal* is engraved in the cover. He begins to flip through pages. They obviously spark his memory because he does not need the diary for long. "I was up there when the sun rose. It was really sunny when the sun came up. When you're at 19,000 feet, the sky is almost black. The higher you get, the darker the sky gets." He glances back at the open book in his hands. "Another interesting thing was that from the ground, Mount Kilimanjaro looks like it just goes up to a point, but from the top you see that it goes down into a crater. As I sat on the summit, I was enjoying the fact that I was able to get there at all." Two of the artists in the party were forced to turn back because of the altitude.

"You always think about whether it's worth it or not but it's one of those things. You set a goal to get to the top and you just have to do it. It wasn't easy. It was a really difficult hike to the summit. But it was worth it. Oh my, yes. It's always worth it to do those things." He pauses to grin and then he chuckles. "I've been bragging about it ever since."

Pulse

by Kirsten Wiking

Our feet clip along simultaneously,
drumming leather soles against waxy linoleum tiles.
Our bodies melt like expired candles into
a vortex of rebellious thoughts
eddy throughout the cavity of
this school.
Our tempos throb inside
each other-on-o-mat-o-po-eia-
our flow of connection, of conversation
continues steadily, tight union
gushes along adolescent corridors, perpetually

chance to start a band with Sam, Ray, Logan, and Patrick. Garnet says, "We thought about names before we even had a band so once we got the name, we started the band." With a name like *Vampire Squids from Hell*, who wouldn't begin a band? She loves her drumsticks because she knows she can't hurt them. "You beat the sides of the drums, but every little dent adds to the =drumsticks' character." Involved in music for most of her life, Garnet realizes she has to practice: "I have to focus on my form and my timing. After a while of that, it's kind of like when you say a word over and over and over -- it begins to make no sense. At that point, I take a break and rest my hands."

Beyond Numbers

by Kirsten Wiking

"People react differently when they find out I'm a math teacher," states Mr. Burns. "If they did well with math in high school, they react pretty normally; if they had trouble in math, well, they get sort of a sick look and the conversation usually keels over and dies." Bob Burns has been a teacher for thirty-one years-twenty-four of those years covering numerical functions, integers, imaginary numbers and graphs: Mathematics.

The stereotypical math teacher could be envisioned as that fellow with the vinyl pocket protector who's void of social talents, trekking home after a productive day of numerical puzzle-solving. Mr. Burns, however, does not fit this typecast. "I promise, I'm really not obsessed with math, it does not consume my time," says Mr. Burns. "My main hobby is music and the band I play my guitar with. It's really not that strange though for me to enjoy music either," he explains, "studies have shown that those who do well with math also are good at music. Also," he adds, "Arthur Garfunkel, from the group Simon and Garfunkel, had a PhD in Math." Mr. Burns plays music purely out of his love for it. He explains that when done well, music is a haven of creativity, where the subconscious reveals itself, and where the skill of listening to others develops.

"Really listening is a quality that, over the years, seems to have been lost in some of my students," says Mr. Burns, "that, and accountability. I guess if there is one major difference between students when I first began teaching and now-accountability would be it." By accountability, Mr. Burns explains that over the years, many students have adopted an attitude of my learning is other's responsibility or have discovered a method of "working the system" in order to achieve maximum results in terms of numbers and grades, with minimum effort. "Now don't get me wrong,"

intertwined.

Our lives are connected in these hallways,
these hallways connect our lives.

Dungeons & Dragons: A Devil's Game?

by Garnet Kwader

For as long as I can remember, my older cousin, Galen, has been a misfit. He never speaks to adults and very rarely communicates with children. He walks everywhere with his head down and either with his arms crossed or held over his stomach in a "Please don't look at me" fashion. When his family comes to family get-togethers, he sits in the car alone without any form of entertainment. He will not even get out for a bite of my grandmother's divine cooking! I have only seen him smile when a trick was being played, and even then he tries extremely hard to hide his amusement. I do not know why he is this way, but his strange mannerisms have cost him potential friends, potential jobs, and a lot of potential happiness in his life.

Three years ago, Galen started playing Dungeons & Dragons with me and a few of my friends. After his first night, my friends were reluctant to invite him back. They had some odd comments about him which, although almost cruel, were very truthful. They also expressed doubts as to whether or not he would ever be able to come out of his shell and be able to play a character.

Many people say Dungeons & Dragons is Satan's tool and should be avoided at all costs. Some people say it causes suicides by allowing devils to enter into a player's soul. I have even heard it forces teens to kill not only themselves, but their parents, their younger siblings, and a bank clerk who happened to be within reach of the "demon-controlled Satanist".

Perhaps this game can be a bad influence on someone who is looking for such trouble, but I cannot imagine D&D turning a perfectly level-headed teen into a Satanist who sacrifices animals every full moon. If a person becomes obsessed with D&D to the extent where it consumes his life, the game is certainly detrimental to his well-being, but could this not be said of any obsession?

A gamer who spends all of his time studying fantasy books is as deprived as a person so driven to be muscular that he spends all of his time at the gym. The gamer would probably be better than anyone else at defeating

clarifies Mr. Burns, "many goal-oriented students don't have this stance. But there's still that group of kids which spends hours watching the boob-tube and playing Gameboys, yet still expect to fly by in school." Mr. Burns believes this approach is like expecting to be on the varsity team without going to practice. Many students, however, fail to see the relation between their education and the sports analogy.

"I really don't think the administration has helped this problem either," Mr. Burns adds. "They have fine-tuned the art of the data-driven decision." Students, he believes, cannot be seen purely as statistics or simple numbers, which may seem like an ironic statement for a veteran math teacher. But sometimes, Mr. Burns believes, you just have to go with the choice that feels like the right decision—not automatically select the option pushed by data. "I remember when school seemed like a community," says Mr. Burns, "where problems were talked about between the students and the administration, but there isn't much of that action now." Slowly, he says, people have forgotten about gut feelings and the pure art of teaching.

It may seem odd for someone to decide to be a math teacher when he seems to oppose ideas centered on pushing or achieving numbers. "I've had a couple of opportunities for other jobs. I meant to be a doctor and continue the family practice, but then I dropped out of medical school. Or, I could have been an insurance agent," explains Mr. Burns, "but, both of these options would have sucked me into the city." Mr. Burns became a math teacher -- a profession focused on numbers -- in order to live a life that wouldn't be driven by them. "I wanted to live in a place where I could do outdoor activities like camping and rafting and hiking, and neither of these potentially high-paying jobs would have allowed me that." He states that sometimes in life you just have to sacrifice money and high numbers for time because, "in the end, time always trumps numbers".

the legendary dragon, Silt. The muscle man would be a solid bulk of strength. While both the gamer and the athlete achieve their goals, neither would have a social life, and both would miss days of school and/or work. Neither the nerd nor the jock would be able to have a real life. Neither one could provide a living for himself.

After several weeks of attending our D&D sessions, Galen slowly but surely began to emerge from his cocoon of timid strangeness. Galen created a gnome rogue named Tarvooni. He began to speak for his character and, much to our amazement, fleshed out Tav's personality. Those of us who knew him realized what a miracle this was. After a few months, he began to smile with my friends when they made a joke. A few months later, he even started to take part in our conversations. I never thought I would see the day when Galen initiated a conversation, but it happened about two years ago. He steadily normalized as we continued to play on a regular basis. The last I heard from his mother, he had actually told her about events happening in the game.

Thought-provoking instances occur constantly throughout the game of D&D. Riddles may be written on walls or pieces to a puzzle might create a map. Problem-solving skills need to be brought into play when characters face a twenty-foot-wide chasm without a way to cross, or when a key needed to unlock a fellow character's jail cell sits in the middle of ten dozing enemies.

Even the most basic of D&D rulebooks require players to exploit at least an 11th-grade reading level. Since players need to understand the rules to be able to have the most fun possible, D&D encourages an expansion of vocabulary. When words are encountered that the player does not understand, he is forced to employ the help of a dictionary in order to understand the game.

D&D incorporates mythology from all around the world into the game-play. Players learn what medusas are, what they look like, where they like to live, what they like to eat, what physical feats they are capable of, what powers they possess, and how to defeat them. The mythological creatures and deities in the game often give players a desire to learn more about the history of mythology on their own time. Any knowledge gained is useful in life at one time or another.

My addition becomes much faster and my understanding of difficult numerical concepts increases because of the game's die usage. Both Galen's and my socialization skills have improved. This evidence suggests that role-playing facilitates attitude change, increases self-concept, and

Skilled Crash

by Garnet Kwader

Silver crystals of purity:
racing, speeding, almost flying
through chill air as I perform
my controlled fall with skill and style.

At this time of year only.
Only at this time of year --
with soft flakes
clothing mountains in white.

Like an obsidian razor
I slice through air!
Sharp, toothed air! Gliding
over white heaven.

I leave my trail
for other tormented souls to follow
to discover this same bliss.

Shelter

by Kirsten Wiking

The smell inside my old, purple mittens lingers in my thoughts. Tantalizing-a magnet that pulls my thoughts back to the snow caves of my childhood. Saccharine, like dried fruit left in lunchtime sun, gummy against youthful paws spent clawing through wet February snow at recess. Pure determination would overtake my identity as the mid-afternoon break appeared each day. Mechanically changing into uniform, oblivious to the actions of my peers, I abandoned self-consciousness in my supposedly childish snowsuit.

Behind the snow hill was a prime site for cave building. The hill offered gracious protection from the two forces in opposition to my chosen lunchtime hobby and that of several other quiet children. Duties-often bitter and lonely middle-aged women-were against the caves, supposedly out of safety concerns. This, however, was a lie created because our supervisors felt insecure in our pursuit of unusual recess activity. The hill also concealed us from other little kids who, while entangled in the usual recess pandemonium, enjoyed trashing our efforts.

Once at the location, my arms, thickly wrapped in synthetic fabric, would begin their fixed burrowing. Everything fell

produces behavioral alterations.

Recently I was forced to put D&D on hold for two months because of conflict one player was causing, but I mentioned to Galen one day that I was going to start it again. He came over to my house a few weekends ago to borrow my D&D rule books. We laughed the night away as we sat at my kitchen table creating the oddest combination of characters one could ever imagine. And, thanks to D&D, Galen even got to taste some of my grandmother's famous pumpkin pie.

OPUS MINGUS NO. 1.5

by Garnet Kwader

Monotonous moments
whisper secret meaning:
calming
as psalms.
I sit, I think, I wonder,
living day after day after day. Understanding myself
and everything else; searching
easily with eons
to think. Do I make a difference
here on this earth? Is there a reason for existence?
I ponder, I pause, I take detailed note of possible answers
to numerous questions.
Alone with a dearth of required chores, I exploit
long hours
by trying to understand
myself.

Lost in Cartoons

by Kirsten Wiking

Each morning I check to see if Earl has landed himself in another sticky situation with Opal, or if Jason has devised another diabolical, yet half-baked plan for controlling the universe. Today it seems that Garfield is again tormenting Odie, while Bucky manipulates Satchel as a pawn in his disastrous schemes. Yet the most interesting thing about these magnetic characters is that they are nothing more than simply-drawn comics nestled within the daily newspaper.

For five years I have religiously read every comic: I've grown familiar with their mannerisms, quirks and quips, and I have observed these characters like a scientist

into a thick Trance; it was then that I experienced the deepest focus of my childhood. The rest of recess dissolved into the heavy grey snow. All I saw were my burrowing purple mittens, and my cave.

I had finally hollowed out a suitable-sized hole. After gingerly slipping off two slightly damp gloves, I would gently smooth the inside walls by rubbing my warm, bare hands along the snow, generating a glistening sheen within. Then, with a pleasant sense of satisfaction with my handiwork, I would slide, disappearing from the stickiness of childhood insecurities, into the snow, into my cave.

Inside, everything was comfortably numb and warm as I tightly curled up. I would deeply suck in the late-winter air, and then watch the exhale: watch my breath swirl and vaporize, fading into the atmosphere. As my fingertips lost sensation, I brought them to my mouth to warm. I would notice that dried-fruit aroma: the aroma within my old mittens.

The caves I made as a child were my sanctuaries. They were an asylum where I could escape from the chaos that surrounded my younger self: the yelling, melted crayon, stuck with glue, brown-bagged, snow boot, don't-wait-to-take-a-breath chaos. Away I would disappear, if only for one minute. Temporally, I could be invisible, with absolute freedom to relax, with my thoughts whirling throughout my cave. I have new sanctuaries now, new caves into which I can melt in peace. But for now, the scent of my mittens returns me back to the silence and the snow.

Live Like You Were Dying

by Bailey Hoover

Why live as though your life is plain?
One word will change your view,
possibilities can turn real.
A life to start anew.

Why live as though your life is plain?
Take one last holiday --
complete a dream that you have wished;
if only for a day.

Why live as though your life is plain,
when you could spread some truth
among myriad fans of Judas.
So help the world dear Ruth.

closely observing organisms beneath a microscope as they grow and develop. They are a sort of bizarre, early-morning family to me. Yet when my ostensible family does not appear on the driveway one morning, my entire day is consequently unbalanced.

Every year the newspaper company rotates morning delivery persons, and annually, as the new carrier delivers the paper three hours late, I deem him incompetent in his first week on the new route. On such days I have intense difficulty diverting my attention from one fact: I haven't read the comics. It is always particularly distressing when the one thing that I thought could always be counted on, whether at summer camp or visiting my Great-Aunt Camilla, is gone. I rely on my morning ritual to maintain my sense of stability. As long as the comics arrive each morning, my life can continue humming along.

There may be something wrong with my ritual. Headlines in magazines often read something like: *Break Free from Your Routine. Reinvent Yourself. Don't become a Slave to your Habits.* But I like my routine. People are often pressured into believing that change plays an essential role in keeping time turning and life continuously evolving. Well sure, if our lives ceased to evolve, I'd be reading my morning comics off a nice limestone tablet. However, perhaps we would be happier if there were just one thing that remained constant in our lives -- one thing that reminds us of who we are.

My morning comic reading has been a steady facet of my life since I was ten. I've changed drastically since when I once made toilet paper gowns to wear at impromptu galas, but I can still remember reading the comics each morning. I'm still connected in just one way to the person I was then. As we get older, it's easy to slip into a state where our younger selves seem like an entirely separate person: an old friend with whom you've lost touch over the years.

But you haven't lost touch with a friend. You've lost yourself.

Losing your past self is like losing a significant piece of a jigsaw puzzle. If our history is what defines us and who we are now, where do we stand once we've lost it? Having a ritual, even a ritual as insignificant as morning cartoon-reading, allows me to keep a connection with my past. I can remember my first morning with my new pug, and how her cries from the dog-carrier made comic-reading a fairly difficult ritual to complete. I can remember the distinct smell of my first three-egg-omelet with sautéed spinach that my Mom made while I read my

Why live as though your life is plain?
You only have a week.
Spend more time surrounded by love,
your end should not be meek.

You had some time to live your life,
Now live a life with risk --
the problem of death is cast aside.
Your life shall now be brisk.

You had some time to live your life.
Laugh more, and see the world.
Experience some freedom as
your life is now unfurled.

You had some time to live your life
sheltered from gory death.
Though life can come to sudden end,
you're only out of breath.

You change your life for these last days
to be out on the edge.
You exist in truth and liberty,
completing life's last pledge.

Meadow of Serenity

by Garnet Kwader

Crepe paper leaves flutter in swaying aspens.
Youthful sun bursts over royal mountains
sprinkling flakes of gold over young buttercups.
New speckled twin fawns shiver as chill breezes
brush soft skin. A view more august,
more breath-taking; there is no such thing.
This is heaven on earth

Why We Need Comforts from Reality

by Kathryn Pope

My day has not been a good one. From the exact moment
when I awoke thirty minutes behind schedule, to the
conclusion of soccer practice ten hours later, I have
experienced few moments of peace and comfort. In danger
of incurring another first-period tardy, I exited the house
without eating breakfast or executing the necessary steps to
tame my hair. I was tardy none-the-less, and doomed to
suffer with unruly hair for the remainder of the day. School
passed in a thick fog of boredom and hunger since I spent

still-favorite cartoon, *Get Fuzzy*. I can remember Garfield
at my first sleep-away camp, when my Dad mailed me
each week's comic strips. Just one ritual, one thing that
defies the phrase "change is good", allows us to retain a
bit of who we once were, and to appreciate how that
person has shaped who we might ultimately be.

Garnet, I am.

by Garnet Kwader

Five feet, seven inches of curvy, medium build, long
blond hair
flowing over broad shoulders, a stream of rippling golden
honey.

Calm pastimes:

reading, writing, and committing poetry to memory
are my favorites.

I fiddle away the morning with my German violin, Henry.
Molded one hundred twenty-seven years earlier,
made of wood older than that.

My midnight-hued pearl drum set
awaits my beats in a corner:

when opportunities arise, I dance and dance.

A rapid swing with a Big Band to back me up,
or perhaps a romantic tango.

Days always end with my closest friends
gathering at my house.

For countless hours

we play Axis & Allies

discovering, philosophizing about different battle
strategies

Hitler could have employed to win the war.

We debate the meaning behind the lyrics
of "Whisky in the Jar", often singing it into the night.

I am odd, but I am Garnet.

Riches

by Garnet Kwader

Silver-barked aspens waltz with autumn's gentle breath:
silhouetted against a delicate lapis sky.

Soft, dainty, dangling flakes of gold become brazen
wind chimes, rustling. Wind flows through morning
treasures, each

frame of emerald evergreens

encrusted with topaz maple and hawthorn rubies.

my lunch hour hastily completing forgotten homework. After school I planned to rush home, eat, and enjoy a quick nap before practice. Alas, I spent most of this time sitting in my Dad's truck waiting to pick up my sister from the Middle School that inconveniently releases its students thirty minutes after mine. And of course -- then came practice. The coaches were upset about a recent game mishap, which led them to treat us with a rigorous sprint circuit followed by technical lectures.

And now, at last, the pain is past. I am stretched out on the luxurious living room couch after a delicious, filling dinner, contemplating my options for the rest of the evening. *I do* have that math assignment that will take nearly an hour to complete, and the tedious narrative poem that succeeds in rendering my mind completely paralyzed every time I think about it. And there is a biology quiz tomorrow. But can I really throw myself right back into the horror of the day? Is it possible to return to the torture that I have endured for so long already? My body's point-blank refusal to move and the dull hum of protest in my brain tells me no: those options really aren't possible right now. I feel hopeless, exhausted. I must alleviate my mind from the trials of everyday life. I need an escape of some sort before it will be possible to come back and actually accomplish something.

Where do I turn? To the magical black and grey box attentively waiting in the living room. Resting in a spot conveniently visible from any seat or sofa. The television. As soon as I have pushed the button and waited the agonizing two seconds for images to replace the black screen, I feel much, much, better. No longer am I focused on the failed math quiz. The trauma of rebellious hair is freed from my mind.

The world that glorifies achievement and accomplishment: there is pressure from every angle encouraging us to work and to continue working without ever pausing for an instant. Adolescents attend school all day, work or practice in the afternoon, and are then expected to toil over homework for the rest of the evening. Retribution for failing to comply with this rigorous schedule is swift and harsh. An out-of-town soccer game followed by hurried homework in the dead of night while everyone else is sleeping soundly, leads to extreme exhaustion the next morning. Is it perhaps possible for me to snag an extra fifteen minutes of sleep and to be slightly late for teen living? No. *It most certainly is not.* But does it do me any good to go to school fatigued? Are people able to concentrate and learn under circumstances of extreme weariness?

I believe that times of relaxation and recuperation are as

Eschew

by Kirsten Wiking

Deep onyx eyes speak a wounded farewell.
Across a worried face is stretched a hide of tan,
her age is the lone secret she shall not tell.

Wiry limbs struggle to keep the most confident man.
Twisted lips mouth a reluctant goodbye
to the figure with the looks of a rusted aluminum can.

He ignores the sorrow his lover aches to imply
as he crawls into the shabby truck sheltered with dust.
The mood thickens with the humidity in July.

He speeds away-her hope for him begins to combust.
Her heart is left with him, yet he doesn't care,
because his only feeling for her is disgust.

Tercets

by Kelsey Mack

The sick, the weak, the devastated, leaving to cope:
the path is tough, the trail overgrown, but in the end
comes hope.
The living all climb for success, which comes at the end
of the rope.

Frosty mornings, beautiful, still, suddenly a piercing
moan
destroying the serenity, like the first gunshot of war; an
elk all alone
seeks a counterpart, full grown.

Gunfire? Am I dreaming? I hope so!
My room seems to be twisting like a knotted bow,
mother nature is my problem, and my mortal foe.

Hard to breathe, smoke engulfing my body,
racing to the door, blind, I cannot quite see.
Once out the door we run; down the road we flee.

necessary in everyday life as are eating and working. I am completely useless when I try to force extreme amounts of work and pressure upon myself. Without siphoning off the worry and anxiety of daily life, stress builds up in my brain like dirty laundry accumulating on my floor. Nobody can concentrate on a literary analysis when her mind is buzzing and fatigued. It simply isn't possible. Although our society seems determined to deny it, humans are not machines. We cannot keep going without rest. It is essential to unwind.

After having enjoyed thirty minutes of invincible New York detectives bringing homicidal maniacs to justice, followed by a healthy supplement of hearty sitcom humor, my mind is liberated from the swarming worries of the day. I am filled with a sense of success after having seen murderers put away for life, and I am in a jovial mood after having giggled at the clever one-liners of bizarre office-workers at a paper company in Connecticut. The brief period of rest has refreshed and relaxed my mind. I can now tackle those less-desirable tasks and perhaps accomplish something.

Jubilant Success

by Katie McDaniel

The lights illuminate the stands
while crowds cheer on their team.
Eager faces line the field
ready to live their dream.

The clock is set at forty-five,
and half the game will start.
The whistle blows for all to hear
and they begin to dart.

With racing legs and pounding hearts
the players run down the field.
The energy is pumping high,
in players who never yield.

A goal is scored with a left foot
the screaming crowd goes wild.
The game seems to take a turn,
the other team feels mild.

Half-time starts with much delight,
players trudge off the field.
Their legs drag on like giant weights,
their feet want to be healed.

But with this rest comes new-found hope
both teams come out and run.
A tie erupts with a header goal
The score is now one-one.

One lazy player fouls in the box.
Penalty kicks will decide the game.
A hesitant goalie now looks on;
the striker has flawless aim.

A goal is made by a perfect shot
the team has finally won.
A final whistle ends the match
the party has just begun.