

English II Pieces

2009-2010

Salty Summer

by Kiana Chapman

I was put in charge of making the ice cream at a corn feed last year and was busy finding all sorts of flavors: combining ingredients together in the mixer and filling the surrounding space with rock salt. My friend suddenly dared me to put a small handful of salt in my mouth and suck on it until it dissolved. I looked down at the salt in my hand, then back at my friend, contemplating my next move. I don't know what made me do it, but I put the salt in my mouth and waited for it to dissolve. After about five minutes, I gave up. Spitting out the overpowering taste, I grabbed a glass of water, which I started swallowing in huge gulps. But the water didn't taste like water. It was sweet. Instantly, I was back in the Bahamas.

Transparent turquoise waters surround our small thirty-two foot boat as we make our way into the half-moon-shaped bay of Big Major Spot. After my dad drops anchor just off the shore, next to my grandparent's fifty-five foot boat, my little brother and I jump into the water, testing it to make sure we have picked a good spot. The salty water feels good after a long day of traveling. After drying off and agreeing that this spot is worthwhile, we start rowing over in our little dingy to the large ship next to us, to eat dinner with Grandma and Grandpa.

The next ten days of our family reunion consist of stories, swimming, and traveling back and forth to Staniel Cay, the island just past the one we are anchored by. I mostly swim. Putting on a mask, complete with snorkel, I dive in, then swim ten to fifteen feet to the bottom, where I grab a handful of sand, kick off, and shoot through the water. Reaching the surface, I only let the top of my head pop through so I can blow all the water out of my snorkel like a bottlenose dolphin. Before completely blowing the water out, my open mouth fills with sea water, making me spit and blow faster and harder in an attempt to rid myself of the powerful taste. Swimming around to the bow of the boat, I find the anchor chain and follow it down to the anchor, which is half-buried in sand, glinting in the sun's rays that pierce through thin water.

This is my regular "warm-up" routine before each family snorkeling trip. After making sure I'm the first one in, I end up patiently waiting for the others. Waiting isn't too bad when I can occupy myself with the many wonders of a world beneath a world. Swimming along the bottom, I find an orange starfish. I pick it up and take it with me to the surface, but never take it out of the water. I hold it underneath, looking at it through my plastic mask's lenses, running my fingers over the rough exterior, studying it, and turning it over; memorizing its texture and shape. After looking at it long enough, I swim back down to where I had first picked

Nothing Lasts Forever

by Danny Kaiser

It was always magical: wonder and excitement usually reserved for Christmas morning greeted rows of treats and candy lining shelves in a cornucopia of sugary goodness. We would run into The Candy Company, noses red from cold, and press our hands against glass displays, wondering at the sheer amount of sugar. A wall devoted to rich fudge of exciting and unknown flavors towered over little bodies.

Underneath, a multitude of homemade concoctions beckoned. Just about everything imaginable had been dunked in chocolate and put up for sale. After examining that treasure trove, a young boy would find himself walking past the smiling cashier and into a world of dazzling color. From Jelly-Bellies to Skittles, vibrant sweetness hid behind circular windows that adorned the next segment of counter. Children found it hard to choose between individual treats in such a vast array of spectacular candy, so a wide selection of ice cream beckoned kids who wanted something familiar.

Opening the door, a rush of warm air and overpowering scents of baked sugar surge past me in a desperate attempt to escape. The shop is smaller than I remember, with tall shelves towering over all who are confined within their perimeter. I browse the selection of McCall-themed candies. Overpriced and waxy looking, most of the shelved items are meant to be souvenirs, yet are tantalizing for young minds. The bell tinkles as a group of customers arrives. A swarm of excited children sprint up to the displays, pressing dirty fingers against smudged glass. Their parents tiredly follow, reprimanding here and answering questions there. The children gape in awe, arguing with and yelling at one another. After a few minutes, the children have all chosen their

it up, and place it back where I found it.

Now, the others are in the water. On our first snorkel together, we cross the bay to the coral on the side of the rock cliff. There had been a big storm a few years back that had damaged the reef pretty badly, but now the underwater plants are starting to come back. I become fascinated with one plant in particular. It's fan-shaped and hot pink, with magenta veins. It's not very big, no larger than two of my fingers, and it has a tube base. As if its color and shape aren't interesting enough, I discover that if I move my hand over it to cast a shadow, it sucks itself into the tube, completely hiding itself from sight. That's when I move my hand away and let the sun shine on it once again. Slowly it comes back out to sway in the tide. Once it's fully spread out, I cast the shadow again to make it disappear. And so this game continues.

After the snorkel, when we are back at the boat, something interesting draws my attention and preoccupies me, making me the last one out. A sting ray swims along the bottom, searching for a place to shimmy into the white sand. Following it, I hover at the surface above and watch as it finds its perfect location, then dives under the sand to hide in its disguise.

It's time for me to get out. As I climb the little ladder hanging off the boat, I pull my suctioned, secured mask off. Rinsing in the fresh water shower on deck, I let water pour over my face and open mouth. The salt on my lips makes the water sweet, a distinct and powerful taste.

At the corn feed, the salt that collected on my lips and tongue, flashing these memories before me. Once I returned from this other world, I told my friend to suck on the salt just like I had. At first she stared at me, giving me the "you're crazy" look. But once I told her what water tastes like after sucking rock salt, she had to see if I was telling the truth.

It's War

by Gerrit Egnew

A burst of wild rashness takes
the minds of fighters bored.
They plot, they plan to make offense
against the raging horde.

Mobilizing for the great fight
the heroes they make haste.
With so much trouble being took,
time is not to waste.

Pouring out of barracks strong;
arranged in battle rows.
Weapons arrayed: stakes, ski poles,

treats and the procession moves on.

I try not to make eye contact with other customers, feeling slightly self-conscious about being in a candy shop. The variety of sugar is overwhelming; I am indecisive. Beginning with bulk candy in the windows, I browse the colorful collections, realizing that the once-mesmerizing wall of candy is really a rather lack-luster collection: slightly less variety than can be found in supermarkets, but with a glossier presentation. Disappointed, I move up to the counter to view the selection of fudge. It, at least, has enough variety to keep my interest. About to make my selection, a half-mint half-chocolate piece of fudge, I glance at the prices. Aghast, I take a second look. The price per pound of fudge is higher than that of the expensive salmon my parents had cooked the night before. Fudge fades: a childish chimera.

Everyone who goes into the Candy Company enters with expectations of magic. For children, that expectation is always fulfilled. They run in giggling -- they have been anticipating this moment since their parents mentioned a possible trip. For them, nothing is better than sugary treats, and the Candy Company has no shortage of these. For parents, watching happy children is a delight. However, parents rarely order, and when they do they rarely have the same experience as their children.

Children's actions are influenced much less by knowledge than by desire. Many kids have never had to spend their own, hard-earned money. However, experience, school, and peers make the situation cloudier. Most of the items in a candy shop are completely new to children, providing a special experience. The more candy a child eats and the more times he has that experience, the less special it becomes. By the time he is an adult, candy has lost its ability to amaze him because of the sheer amount of time he has had to experience and ponder it.

Browsing the individual homemade items, I frantically search for something that stands out. I can feel eyes on the back of my head,

a branch, a broom, two hoes.

Two lines ready to strike upon
the deadly hostile force.
Clammy hand grips slipp'ry stake:
along the path they course.

Wild cries ring out across the land,
emboldened fighters charge.
They fall upon the dreaded foe,
vicious anger they discharge.

Green flesh meets wild, whipping stakes
and falls before the mob.
Leaves and heads alike are speared
as on a shish-kabob.

What permeates the dense warm air
is skunk-like cabbage smell.
The bright green menace of the glen
is sent right down to hell.

Unstoppable

by Danny Kaiser

It permeated everything. The ground was scorching, the wind was sweltering -- even our suntan lotion was always hot and melty. Just getting to the pool was a trial. Stepping out of the echoey, cool blue changing room, I would squint as the summer sun dominated my senses. Every visit, I would immediately regret having forgotten how hot concrete gets on days like this. My feet almost starting to blister, a mad dash for the nearest wet ground would ensue. Forgetting everything except the searing pain of the molten-feeling ground, little feet would try to make as little contact with concrete as possible on each bounding leap. The ground in the immediate vicinity of the pool was always soaked by exiting swimmers, and was therefore the most obvious haven for victims of painfully hot concrete.

My mom, who always brought sandals, would stride calmly after me, laying down blankets and food on grass near the pool. Then came the sunscreen. She would rub me down with hot, oily lotion that made me feel slippery and smelled mildly of aloe. Because it was so warm, the lotion never really rubbed in; it just stayed greasy and slimy and left a trail of cloudy water wherever I swam.

One July day, the heat -- at around one hundred degrees -- was almost overwhelming. It hung on my shoulders, as heavy as the weight of the task which I was about to undertake. My goal was a lofty one, and alone could separate man from child, tiger from cub. I had been preparing for

waiting for me to make a move. Pressured, the distinction between a chocolate-dunked Reese's and a chocolate-dunked Oreo begins to blur. I start to lose my appetite. I am in the way. Panic accompanies the drone of country music filling my ears. Giving the cashier a sheepish look, I step away, exiting the store. No one can ever return home.

My Life's Music

by Kiana Chapman

Fingers pressing down on the cool strings of my guitar vibrate with every strum, sending notes that engulf me with their individual sounds into quiet air. It's easier to feel the music move around me when I'm not thinking. With an empty mind and closed eyes, I feel myself sway in beat with the sounds. I let the guitar sing as it pulls me deeper and deeper into its magical rhythm. It lifts my spirit up; lets it soar among the high notes. Barely breathing, almost holding my breath, I make sure I hear every pitch, sharp and flat, loud or quiet.

Friction increases and strings begin to warm, becoming pliable and softer. Still firm, strong calloused fingers turn black in little indents on the tips caused by pressing down. Each finger knows exactly where it needs to be. They belong on the fret board, sliding and stretching to reach the next chord. Each one has memorized its exact location; they know just how much pressure is needed to form a certain sound.

My right hand, either picking or strumming, knows the familiar beat. It longs to race ahead of the other hand and wants to prove it knows the music better than I do. To look good is its main goal. Showing off is its habit. It takes strong concentration to keep that hand going at the same pace as the other. If my attention is drawn to something else, my right hand feels the distraction instantly, and takes the opportunity to speed up. This is the only time when thoughts go through my head: I have to force my right to slow back down to its normal pace and

this day the entire summer; now that it was here, all I could do was ignore my butterflies and do my best.

I went through the normal routine with a little less zest. There was less passion in my struggle to avoid my mother's sunscreen, less spring in my step during my initial race to the water. The heat did not help, distracting me from my goal and augmenting my misery. One by one, my friends arrived at the pool. I could see that they, too, were barely coping with the mixture of heat and nervousness.

After a few hollow attempts at having fun, we found ourselves drawing closer and closer to the point of no return. In silence, we watched a line of people, each waiting calmly and coolly, seemingly unaffected by the heat. Hiding in the water with only the tops of our heads exposed, we marveled at the ease with which the older kids completed the task. Each one jumped into the water, swam a quick lap, and slid out of the way so the next kid could perform the ritual and receive the most sacred possession imaginable: a star drawn in sharpie on the back of his hand.

When we had finally had enough, anxiety driving us crazy, we climbed out of the water and found our way to the back of the line. At first, the heat was bearable. The water that clung desperately to our bodies counteracted the sun, but it did not take long for the water to evaporate into hot air. After suffering through the heat and slowly advancing toward our goal for what seemed like an eternity, we arrived. Everything became a blur. I wasn't even aware when all of my friends had finished and the lifeguard was leering at me. I only heard, "Hey, kid. Snap out of it. It's your turn and you're holding up the line." Without another thought I leaped into the water and started flailing as hard as I could. I kept my eyes closed and struggled until my head bumped the floating boundary. Startled, I swallowed some water and surfaced, choking.

Looking back towards the expectant lifeguard, the distance seemed much longer than it had from the side of the pool. For a moment, panicking, I accidentally went under and came up gasping. I almost went under again, but my friends' voices brought me back to the heat and the pool. With renewed strength I closed my eyes and started flailing again, taking hurried breaths whenever I got the chance. When my head collided with concrete, I knew I had completed my journey to the end of the pool and back. Clambering up the side of the pool, I emerged next to the smiling lifeguard, who congratulated me for passing the swim test. "Good job," the lifeguard said, "you did it." Before I had a chance to comprehend what he, or maybe she, was doing, my hand was adorned with the illustrious star -- the object of my desire.

All of a sudden, I saw the heat in a new light. It no longer subdued, but energized me. I let it envelope me, wearing it proudly like a badge. Throughout the rest of that summer and many of the subsequent ones I welcomed such heat. It reminded me of my victory, of my ability to overcome any obstacle presented. Even today, summer heat comforts me. Its constant pressure, its permeating omnipresence no longer subdues, but invigorates. The constant nagging of the summer sun is a

make sure it stays in proper timing.

After years of playing, the woody smell of my guitar has become inconspicuous. You can only smell it if you know what scent you're searching for. It finds me and embraces my soul, reminding me of the security I feel with my guitar. It's a subtle scent that calms me no matter what's going on in reality. Releasing all tension, I relax as I hold my six-stringed instrument close.

Resonance

by Gerrit Egnew

That sound fills quiet spaces in the air; never forgotten, but rarely noticed. A perpetual hush of water, reminiscent of wind toying through innumerable leaves, has narrated my life even before birth. The trickle and tumble of the river perpetuates my soul.

Huddling under a tarp in full winter wear, shivering, shuddering, mumbling and smiling through chattering teeth, I remember fighting for room with my sister and friends, trying to stay warm in unseasonably frigid weather, our clothes rustling as we struggled to fit in the raft. Excited and frightened, we battled for space under the tarp and inside slick tubes. Whenever the noise dampened, I would lie there and listen to the splash of water against the hull; to wind rustling our plastic tarpaulin; to parents arguing about whether to stop; to the steady drip of melted snow off trembling bodies onto the floor of the boat; to the unceasing drone of the river.

When I was eight, my family began embarking on yearly trips down the Grande Ronde with a fairly constant group of good friends. Our favorite pastime, while the adults were ostensibly discussing important matters and drinking strange-smelling liquids around the fire -- their low daytime babble punctuated with raucous laughs -- was to carve miniature boats out of whatever wood we could find. These would then be raced in riverside obstacle courses, constructed with the utmost care from hefty

reminder of all of the trials and adventures that lie ahead.

Thrills

by Kiana Chapman

Little frosted stars falling
from cloud-covered sky collect
on frosted goggles as I float through smooth
powder. Skiing is my passion -- skimming
soft surfaces, I'm quiet, observant, careful.
Diving off cliffs forces commitment: once
metal skis travel downward, my
daring will finish
what I started.

Memories

by Danny Kaiser

Baring her wrist, Kiana Chapman proudly displays a bracelet. Six guitar strings intertwine with one another and are bound by cut guitar strings. The bracelet looks very nice, and could very easily have been made by a professional jeweler, but it simply represents one of Kiana's most cherished memories.

Her aunt Christie had come to McCall for Kiana's middle school graduation. Kiana does not get to see her aunt, who she describes as "Crazy, spontaneous, and loves to party!" very often, so visits are always special. It was her aunt's spontaneity that gave birth to Kiana's bracelet.

During her stay, Christie and Kiana, who are both talented musicians, had spent a lot of time playing guitar together. During one of their jam sessions, Kiana jammed a little too hard and snapped a string. When Kiana looked up at her aunt, Christie's face lit up and, with a gasp, she said, "Kiana! Let's make you a bracelet!" So they took off all of the guitar strings and created the bracelet together. Replacing Kiana's strings with new ones, they continued to play and write songs and even had a family concert.

Today, Kiana still plays guitar regularly and even performs at local venues. Whenever she plays, she wears that bracelet, remembering how much fun she had with her aunt. The next time she sees her aunt, at her cousin's wedding, they plan to add guitar picks to her favorite bracelet.

stones. This was such a spectacle among our party that even the adults became engrossed, and often gambled their camp duties on the outcome of their respective child's boat. One father, whose name I cannot remember, became so involved that when his daughter lost, he threw the winning boat out into the river. I think he was the same man whose raft was left untied, floating away during the night. Although it was found again, I never forgot that poetic justice.

When it rained, my sister and I cloistered ourselves away with our friends. In Rosalyn and Rhiannon's tent, important matters were discussed, ranging from the carving and naming of our boats to our opinions on the latest Redwall novel. Eventually we tired of these debates, and if our parents failed to brave the rain and rush us back to our own tent, we often fell asleep there, the hypnotic taunt of the water outside nudging us towards our dreams.

In my river experience, I have discovered that it takes at least two days to embrace the river mindset, which is a difficult state of mind to get out of. Our eighteen days on the Colorado River catapulted me into this state for over two weeks. Living and breathing the river spirit for so long was an exhilarating spiritual journey. Every facet of the Grand Canyon -- its changing strata, peaceful flatwater, raging whitewater, unique wildlife and exquisite side canyons -- evoked indescribable feelings. Once, for a mere hour, a torrential rain tore through our camp: it came upon us like a train, the sound of huge droplets slamming against calm waters with a vengeance. Along with the downpour came a howling wind, which carried our tents into the kitchen with an uproarious clamor. Usually, though, the canyon mutterings were benign: softly-flowing water over clacking stones, a breeze in the trees, the odd cry of a hawk in the sky.

Rivers have not changed who I am; they have created me. Unforgiving rapids forge courage and a love, or possibly an addiction to, excitement. Long, peaceful floats on flatwater nurture an enjoyment both of conversation and of peaceful contemplation. Camping, and the duties it entails, teaches

Memories in Rivulet Ripples

by Kiana Chapman

Trickling water over countless tiny rocks soothes
me: I drift off to sleep. The river
seduces with its calm call.
Wading out into powerful current until cool
water touches my shoulders, I feel
the river tugging like a small child asking to be held, begging
me to lift my feet and let my head go under; to travel along
its winding path to someplace
new. Rushing water completely submerges --
hair spread out to its maximum limit, I promise
to stay under as long
as possible. When the last bit of oxygen
leaves, only then do I take a deep breath, re-enter the sky world,
float on my back, watching white clouds traverse
overhead. After a peaceful forever, I stand up
in beautiful simplicity.

Monostiches

Arriving...

...NOWhere
-- Bennet
Roper

Ocean Cruise

Diphthong.
-- Danny
Kaiser

Sick Day

Sixteen inches of
fresh powder.
-- Gerrit
Egnew

Recycling bin in an African village

USEless.
-- Gerrit
Egnew

Is McDonald's Making Us Stupid?

by Gerrit Egnew

me a fair work ethic and a willingness to
take a role, even in the horrors of "groover"
duty. My family and I grow closer with
every river trip: working, eating, sleeping,
observing, and running rapids together.
Rivers generate tranquility and an ideal life.

Lying back in my kayak, water lapping
against the hull, I watch the sky spiral above
me, filled with the cries of birds and the
murmur of conversation. Little breaks the
low drone, save for a jumping fish or a
cooler closing. Closing my eyes, opening
my ears, I think I could stay like this
forever. Around the corner, though, I hear
the river.

Sudden Relief

by Kiana Chapman

Eyes slowly drooping,
her body quivers, releasing all tension as she
breathes slowly, quiet and deep.
Hovering above, he takes her hand, vowing
never to leave.

MEEEEEE!

by Bennet Roper

I slump into my hard chair, observing my
peers file into the classroom. My eyes
bounce off a variety of styles: four preps,
two emos, three nerds, and one loser. My
brain automatically catalogs the
presentation, putting people in their places,
while my head bobs along to the tune of the
Papa Roach song that blasts in earbuds
under my hair.

We each live in our own empires, being
watched by followers, friends, cliques, and
groupies. But our self-important, unique
style is nothing that hasn't been seen before,
and friends can be read like open books.
Personal individualism has been drowned
out by mass media: replaced by stereotypes

It used to be that the rich were fat and the poor were thin. "Fat" was an attractive state of existence; it reflected one's wealth and status. The poor, the vast majority of the population, grew and tended their own food, putting nearly as many calories into the process as they got out of it. The rich ate creams and spices and sauces because they could afford it. The poor ate healthy food because it was their only choice.

Today, it is not so. Since the vast majority of Americans do not grow their own food, they must purchase it. Indeed, socially-aware, wealthy Americans pay many times more for "healthy" organic food. At the same time, the corporate jungle has discovered that primarily synthetic ingredients are cheaper, therefore nearly all fast food is partly composed of synthetic materials. These ingredients are cost-effective, yet unhealthy.

More money was spent on fast food in 2009 than was spent on education in America. Everything takes a back seat to simplicity. Today, fewer than a third of American families cook their dinners from scratch, and while seventy-five percent of families eat at home, they are usually eating takeout or delivery. This is an easy way to do dinner, but what is it doing to our future?

Thirty-one percent of Americans are obese, with a Body Mass Index over thirty. Sixty-six percent are overweight, with a BMI over twenty-five. Ingredients in even the most common fast foods are nutritionally questionable: one cup of canned soup contains half the daily recommended intake of sodium; a 20oz Starbuck's Caramel Macchiato, a drink intended for the morning to start the day, contains 312 calories, whereas a regular cup of black coffee only has two calories, containing no unhealthy fats. Coffee is completely natural, but flavored-coffee drinks are chock-full of cheap, synthetic nutrients. The quality of food consumed by Americans is dropping like an anvil.

According to a study by *Trust for America's Health*, a non-profit, non-partisan organization committed to protecting the health of the nation, adult obesity rates are up in thirty-one states. Even more alarming, a new study has linked obesity to severe brain degeneration. Published in the online journal *Human Brain Mapping*, a study by Paul Thompson, a UCLA professor of neurology, and his colleagues compared the brains and body weight of elderly individuals. What they discovered was frightening: obese people have eight percent less brain mass than people of healthy weight. They have lost brain tissue in the frontal and temporal lobes (which control planning and memory), the anterior cingulate gyrus (attention and executive functions), the hippocampus (long-term memory), and basal ganglia (movement). Essentially, the obese have a brain mass deficiency equal to those of healthy individuals sixteen years older.

This adipose-induced atrophy of the human control center also affects people who are simply overweight. These average Americans have four percent less brain mass in roughly the same areas. This equates to a brain eight years older than it ought to be. This does not mean that an

we notice only in others.

We are not at fault. Parents, the root of all evil, have treated us like we are special from birth. Prizes and rewards are doled out equally, never earned. One sweltering Saturday afternoon watching little league soccer, I, along with a crowd of other family members, cheer my brains out for my little cousin, who is running up and down the soccer field on his stubby legs, chasing after a soccer ball like a small heat-seeking missile. He is not playing a position. He, and all of his teammates, along with all of the players on the other team, are just trailing the ball. At the end of the game my uncle swoops onto the field and swings his little soccer star around. My family and I rush in and hug and congratulate him. A unanimous decision to go for ice cream is the perfect way to reward my cousin for his "victory," regardless of the *unmentionable* double-point loss.

Children are given attention and prizes no matter how they play. In 2001 Dan Kindlon, a psychology professor at Harvard, surveyed 654 teens and 1,078 parents. Most families had annual incomes over \$50,000; many had incomes over \$200,000. Kindlon observes: "Frequently, parents shower their kids with gifts and attention...They bend over backward so everything is perfect for their children. They hate when they're upset. All this attention makes children feel they are the center of the universe." Such attention is the one thing those children -- now teenagers -- strive for, but as we age, applause becomes harder and harder to get.

Teens in the twenty-first century *need* someone to take us to ice cream. Without such universal and immediate admiration and gratification, teens have devised ways never to be alone. A virtual world that is almost larger than the physical one brims with emails and IM's; cell phones buzz constantly. We have a subconscious need to be connected. In 2008 71% of teens in America owned a cell phone. According to an August 2009 study by senior research specialist Amanda Lenhart with Pew-Internet Researchers Association, Americans sent and received an average of

obese eight-year-old has the brain of a healthy sixteen-year-old. Rather, such children have the brain *degeneration* of someone twice their age. The anvil is crashing right onto our heads.

These statistics do not bode well for the acumen of our populace. Sixty-six percent of overweight Americans equals two-thirds of the population with severe brain degeneration. More than half of all Americans are less capable of remembering, less capable of functioning properly, and more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease as a result of a few extra pounds. Only one-third of Americans think effectively, simply because their physical attributes fall in the "normal" range. When the number of normal-weight people who merely choose not to think is added to this equation, America is left with a dwindling minority of citizens possessing any desire or capacity for dextrous thinking.

Substandard education is not creating a deficit of capable American innovators: American intelligence is trickling away into a pool of trans-fatty acids and MSG. American ingenuity and intellectual competitiveness is spinning its slow path into a vortex of lard. By feeding their children fast food, parents are undermining their children's potential. This is a sad irony. As much as parents advocate good education as an integral part of their children's success, their own desire for an easy life at mealtime negates any progress educational reforms might create. Likewise, schools who sell out to Pepsi for signs, or to Pizza Hut for convenient cafeteria choices, are taking the short road to ultimate failure. The minimal economic gain produced by such strategies undermines American intelligence.

Education is held hostage to food that makes students stupid, but the fast food industry is here to stay, if only because it weighs in at \$120 billion dollars. Pizza Hut in schools and soda dispensers in every nook and cranny may raise extra revenue for education, but such mass-appeal culinary strategies are completely counter-productive for schools. The dichotomy of a thin rich and poor fat population can be overcome: embracing new ideas in our consumer culture is the solution. Health-food vending machines installed in my school have good economic and educational value. Healthy students propose appealing solutions that can ultimately safeguard the intellectual potential of posterity.

Sunday

by Danny Kaiser

Rain pings against the tin roof, an overturned pot
set under a leaky sky. Maddening noise drives out
thoughts of all else; my mind wanders away.
Thoughts as scattered as raindrops
flit through the air
and promptly disappear.
Eyes droop. Another assignment

357 text messages per month in 2008, as well as making and receiving 204 monthly phone calls. In the 180 days preceding the writing of this article, 1,032,720 thirteen to seventeen-year-olds had Facebook pages, according to insidefacebook.com. This is proof that we are important, that we are winners.

On a single weekend evening, my friend and I watch movies, surf the internet, try on clothes, and finally play *Wii*. She suddenly jumps up, exclaiming: "It's 8:30!!"

"Yah, so," I reply.

"It's EIGHT THIRTY," she all but spells out for me, "and I haven't gotten a single text all night!" She proceeds to whip out her phone, fixing that dilemma with several sent messages of her own. Her personal "empire" has forgotten its ruler.

Teens merge into large bunches based on "obsessions" -- each a variation of a giant hug on a soccer field. That only sucks more of our individualism away. As the ever-popular chick books say: "the only thing harder than getting in is staying in." If someone isn't interesting enough to capture the fifteen-second attention span, she sinks to the petrifying bottom. Our voices combined with others make them sound louder, but then is that voice really ours anymore? Millions of eyes compete for one spotlight. Doting parents have created monsters out of innocent children.

Our generation feels the need to be celebrated. This craving to be fabulous results in an empty, attention-sucking, insecure mass of teenage consumers with gigantic electronic connections. Teens dread disappearing into the oblivion. Our cliques - - emos, preps, nerds, and losers -- seem to be the only way we can survive. But am I really all prep? All emo? All nerd? Individualism is unnecessary in the large jigsaw puzzle of teenage existence: take one piece out and there is no loss. One small detail simply disappears, over one lowly scoop of ice cream.

goes unfinished.

Supremacy

by Bennet Roper

The age-old debate over which is cooler -- pirates or ninjas -- has changed the life of one McCall native. Gerrit Egnew has had experience with both sides of the debate, though to him, pirates win hands down. It all started around the age of three. Gerrit was celebrating the Halloween festivities with a plastic samurai sword and a black cape: the classic ninja look. "Ninjas were cool," he states, rolling his eyes, "but I'm not the violent type." The ninja tradition lasted for several years, five to be exact. Then the nunchucks were laid aside, replaced with a new passion: sailing.

Thus began the reign of the pirates. Sailing is a passion of Gerrit's. It is something he does with family and friends, and is "challenging". He enjoys "having to 'do' things...it feels real," he says, referring to the adrenaline rush that occurs when almost capsizing a boat. Gerrit has devoted summers to learning about sailing. He has participated in races and ocean adventures, but he believes that there is much more to learn, that "there are unlimited amounts of information...you have to pick it up as you go." The ninja costume is now collecting dust, while pirating adventures lay seductively in this *non-violent* teen's future.

Tranquil

by Bennet Roper

A golden coin
in grey-purple twilight: the moon hangs
warm, like a glove caressing my body.
Heat leaks from parched ground
and radiates towards distant sky.
Hair, loose and soft around my tan face
recalls last fading rays of sun.
Tall grass brushes against
tanned legs.
Silence,
complete as if a switch were flipped, forms
another endless summer evening.

Chill

Desolation

by Bennet Roper

Sand trickles softly
through icy fingers as I stand at the brink
of your grave. The hiss of loam
striking the oak coffin shatters my glass
heart.
Sand from an old hourglass glances off solid
oak:
quiet sounds whisper...crushing that too-
small organ.
I sink to my knees; you are not here
to pull me up again. I am falling. You will
never catch me.

...and repeat.

by Bennet Roper

As I huddle on the edge of the rock,
miniscule ridges tear the bottoms of my feet.
The river pounds past this boulder as it juts
out over the torrent. I clutch my life jacket,
looking again at the roiling water stirred by
large rocks at the bottom, forming a large
wave train rushing around the corner. *Why
am I doing this?*

The morning sun creeps up the canyon,
highlighting my hair and glistening on
puddles of water deposited from other
jumpers. *Stop being a coward.* I can hear
Gerrit and Wes climb up the rocks behind
me, and expect their quips as soon as they
spy my crouched form, clinging to the rock.

"Have you jumped yet?"

"It's cold," I reply.

"That isn't a qualifying factor," Gerrit
sarcastically comments.

Wes just nods his head. "It's easy. I'll go
right before you." I think he mumbles

by Bennet Roper

Damp cold air bites fresh faces;
frost like white ivy makes grass brittle, raising
goose bumps on exposed legs. Morning sun sleeps,
tucked behind dark mountains
hiding the new day. Heavy backpacks make shoulders ache,
noses and lungs burn: each breath inhales stabbing splinters of ice.
Waiting for the bus really sucks.
caught in light breezes;
Winter's sleep soon to come.

Safari

by Bennet Roper

As I push heavy glass doors aside, oppressive, musty heat assaults my body. Before I even notice the chaotic array of posters, my posture morphs into that of a primal animal. The second set of doors is impossible to push open, but when I finally finish wrestling, the heat doubles, washing over me like a smelly tidal wave. I slip in as quietly as I can, to no avail. Like nervous antelope, EVERYONE in the room glances up.

My eyes automatically dart around the room, taking in everything as quickly as I can. My head down, I shuffle to one of the tables, my binder and bag making soft thumps as I set them down. They might as well be gun shots: everyone twitches slightly. Alerted, I sit in the chair; it is impossibly deep and soft, not in the least bit helpful for research. I pull out a random array of schoolbooks, to make it look like I am going to study. I sit back. Everyone is silent, as if daring me to do something, expecting me to.

I stand, mentally telling myself I won't see anyone from my class; no one goes to the *library*. I drift over to the magazine stand and timidly reach out for the latest issue of *People* magazine, all the while glancing surreptitiously around. At this point everyone has seen what I am doing, so I half fall into the overstuffed armchair, allowing myself to fade into the rustling background. I have officially become one of them. As if some mood in the room has changed, I become part of the pack. A native, at home in the caressing brush. I can now observe my surroundings.

The buzz reaches me first: outdated computers sing like flies in the sun. Men, unemployed by the looks of the stubble on their chins, slump in chairs, glazed eyes staring at endless web pages, searching for jobs. The woman with grey hair feigns a passionate interest in the book she glares at. Tapping her foot with an irregular tempo, she analyzes a man who looks like a bum reading a newspaper. Two young children scamper through tall shelves, holding fists to their mouths in an attempt to stop giggling. They earn a stern look from the librarian over the top of her

"again" under his breath. Wes pushes past me, runs, and jumps off the edge, splashing then shooting to the surface, buoyed by his lifejacket. Gerrit slides past me, glances back, then launches himself off with a war cry.

I grit my teeth and glance at Erin, Dad, and Ana, watching and waiting with a camera. I want to turn back, maybe put some shoes on. *That's just an excuse*. Gerrit will be back soon, and Wes will be disgruntled. I release my death grip on the straps of my vest. *This is no big deal. I've jumped off way bigger stuff without even a thought. What is freaking me out?* I can hear the catcalls from Ren, who is watching. I bend my knees just enough to propel feet-first into the rapid.

Not far enough!! My feet hit right on the eddy line, a whirling vortex of currents. *Bad!* I am quickly sucked under. Three seconds later, still being tossed around in blackness, I feel the first faint twinges of panic. My arms shoot out and claw at swirling water, my feet kick frantically. My head starts to pound along with my thundering heart, as if deliberately trying to sabotage the little air I have. I open my eyes, surrounded by a mirage of bubbles. Other than that, it's completely dark. Panic.

Old air burns in my throat; my lungs scream for more. *Oh my god. I'm going to die. Die!* My breath rushes out of my lips and is replaced with water burning my nose and rejected by my lungs. I want to cough but there is nothing to expel the water with. Ten seconds feel like a lifetime. I am still clawing toward the surface: it feels useless. Light, blocked by millions of bubbles, beckons tantalizingly. Black spots cloud my vision. Is it lack of air, or just the grit swirling up from the bottom of the river? I have no idea how much time has passed.

I can barely feel the subtle loss of pressure as I slowly rise to the surface. I can no longer force my hands to beat at the water. Panic is so intense, my heart has ripped its way free of my chest and I can no longer feel it. This is the worst way to die: terror, terrible effort; just swept under, gone

ridiculous horn-rimmed glasses.

The chair I have chosen is horribly over-stuffed. If one were to take a series of still photographs, the end product would reveal: slouch, legs crossed, one leg over the arm, two legs over the arm, both feet on the floor, all in the space of five minutes. Comfort is a lost cause. After I have finished thrumming through the air-brushed pages of interesting/glamorous people, I cannot take the chair any longer.

Head down, I shuffle towards shady stacks. I pass through the kids' section; it is like a temple of some forgotten human god. Flowering murals interrupt bleak paint. Characters from the much-abused volumes dance in a mystic scene. The kids' section is out of place, like an oasis in this desert of a room. Creativity charges the atmosphere: a microcosm hidden in a dusty back corner. All life is pulled into one vortex of juvenile energy.

The magic of books is hunted here. Children in bright camouflage brush through caressing shelves like big game hunters. They complain loudly when it is "time to go home." The trend is reversed in adults, who feel like prey, watched and analyzed, prepared to bolt at any moment.

The innocence of childhood is lost on them. What was once a mysterious place of subtle happiness is now swallowed in acrid shadow. Forced out of the oasis, adults linger in the adult section, looking for answers, receding into silence. In the public library the louder the children, the more stoic the adults, who forget what drew them there in the first place. They cower in florescent corners, fearing and hoping for a glimpse of those lush, lost realms.

A Normal Morning

by Gerrit Egnew

"Wake up! Wake up!"

I'm going to be late.

Frenetic bellows from downstairs -- my morning
air-raid siren -- stimulate sluggish nerves.

Springing out of slumber like an irate bear,
hassled,

roused from torpidity,
dashing for the door.

Trollishly tripping,
tumbling down

tricky stairs, I manage to survive
the cliff; grab my breakfast; fly
out the door.

"Oh blast!"

I forgot my clothes.

forever; no one knows this feeling.

Suddenly the top of my head breaks the surface. I hardly notice. My eyes reach the blinding sun, but I can barely see it. My nose and mouth rise, frantically sucking in life-giving air, and gagging on more water, which streams from my nose. Finally I am able to suck in a mouthful of oxygen. There are waves all around me, and my hair lies plastered to my face. It doesn't matter; I have air moving through my lungs. My vision clears and I am able to see the shore. Erin and Dad are staring at me with glassy eyes, frozen in place, answering my own wide-eyed expression. I use a shaking arm to push my aching muscles towards welcoming rocks. Thirty feet away from where I hit the water, I slip into the eddy and let its current pull me lazily next to a flat rock. I am barely able to hold on. Erin has recovered her voice, and is bleating questions at me. All I can do is nod my head.

Eventually I am able to move again. My body is sore, but other than that I am unscathed. I brush my hair out of my face, and drag myself to higher ground. I ignore Erin's questions and statements with nods. "How long was she under?" I hear Dad ask. "At least thirty seconds," comes the reply, though the ordeal had felt like a lifetime. I climb out onto warm rocks where my friends are waiting. I force a smile onto my face and answer Ren's short inquires. She shrugs and jumps into the water. Wes comes up behind me. "What happened?"

"Not much," I say, as I take a running leap and fly out into the middle of the river.

Sweltering

by Bennet Roper

Shifting position on hard ground:
searching for a better angle on pointy rocks.
Barely shielded by a thin blanket --
hardly what anyone could call comfort.
Blistering sun cuts into my eyes like a scythe,
dry grass ripples as if possessed by rogue wind.
Muddy water coursing past gurgles and groans
across black rocks resting deep in the ditch.
Sweat trickles across a hot brow, down a scorched neck:
my throat is parched. Trying to relax
is completely hopeless.