Featuring the work of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Please submit poetry, short stories, plays, essays, black and white photographs, and art to rooms 154 or 158 for our Fall 2013 issue.

Submissions requested by email address at RiverVoices@muskegoncc.edu. Save your work in Word. No anonymous submissions accepted. Submission constitutes permission to print.

The River Voices staff assumes the right and responsibility to edit work. For questions or comments, including participation queries, Contact Ms. Suzanne Bellrichard, Room 158, ext. 695.

Staff Members
John Cole
Emily Koebel
Jason MacDonald

Advisor
Suzanne Bellrichard

Front Cover Art
Kimberly Page

Back Cover Art
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47th Annual MCC Student Art and Design Exhibition, Ceramic

Special Thanks to
Gretchen Cline, Amy James, Pauline Keith, Tim Norris, Nancy Slater and Mary Tyler
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I. POETRY
- Trenches  *Jennifer Lance* .................................................................6  
- 1st Place in MCC’s Writing Contest  
- Saturday Morning  *Michael Shields* .........................................................7  
- 2nd Place in MCC’s Writing Contest  
- Cyan  *Kristin Krause* ........................................................................8  
- 3rd Place in MCC’s Writing Contest  
- Decoys  *Lynn Rhode* ........................................................................9  
- The Social Experiment  *Dan Wieten* .....................................................10  
- Memory of a Time Long Since Passed  *Andrew Kroll* ......................11  
- Under-toe  *Dana Sahagan* ................................................................12  
- Photography by  *Emily Burrell*  
- Mo Anam Cara  *Chris VanGeison* ..........................................................14  
- Falling Scar  *Zachary Mathiot* .............................................................15  
- Art by  *Teri Hofman*  
- Landscape 3rd Place Annual MCC Student Art and Design Exhibition  
- Aqueous  *Alan Saari* ...........................................................................16  
- Michelangelo’s “Narcissus”  *Caitlin Baughman* ..................................17  
- Blue  *James Lillie* ..................................................................................18  
- Honorable Mention in MCC’s Writing Contest  

## II. FICTION
- Night Lights  *Bonny K. Lownds* .........................................................20  
- 1st Place MCC’s Writing Contest; 3rd Place All State Land Writing Contest  
- Breakdown  *Ken Porter* ....................................................................22  
- 1st Place Land Sponsored MCC Writing Contest  

## III. ESSAYS
- Once a Runner  *Devon Joslin* ..............................................................27  
- 2nd Place MCC’s and 3rd Place All State Land Writing Contests  
- Meanings of “the” Word  *Jamar La’Don Knox* ....................................34  
- Fate Can Wait  *Kyle Thomas* ..............................................................36  
- Why Get a College Education?  *Jason MacDonald* .........................41
POETRY

Trenches  Jennifer Lance .................................................................6
1st Place in MCC’s Writing Contest
Saturday Morning  Michael Shields ..............................................7
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Mo Anam Cara  Chris VanGeison ...............................................14
Falling Scar  Zachary Mathiot .......................................................15
Art by Teri Hofman
Landscape
3rd Place Annual MCC Student Art and Design Exhibition
Aqueous  Alan Saari .................................................................16
Michelangelo’s “Narcissus”  Caitlin Baughman ............................17
Blue  James Lillie ......................................................................18
Honorable Mention in MCC’s Writing Contest
Trenches
Jennifer Lance

The men saw the guns,
“Huns.”
Ruben said and smoked his cigarette,
With long steady ease,
As if it were his last,
And he didn’t care,
Johnny sat in front with chipped teeth,
His hat was like a tin plate half on his head,
And I knew he was thinking, as I was, about,
Shells flying wild like caged birds, dirt rupturing up through and in,
To take us down until we cried for Mother,
And felt no shame for doing so.
Our graves we dug were cold and miserable,
I couldn’t get my cigarette lit,
So the Huns came and Johnny stood right up in the trench to watch them come;
They had strong guns and infinite fields to cross but they came,
Iron youth.
Boys mostly, I thought, sitting there loading my gun with one hand;
Frank was shaking and spitting mud and someone had to sit on him,
“Hold on, hold on, hold on,”
Johnny yelled and jumped back down and a hiss whine bang,
Light, and the war was on again.
Saturday Morning

Michael Shields

Yellow grease
streams into buckets,
caked in leaves and
grease goo.

Then put outside on
a yellow cart covered in
dirt and sick sticky stuff.

Green chemicals
Squirt, slither and slice through
the hard crusty gunk left
in the fryer basins.

Blue ripped cloths wipe
away the melting muck and
sleek steel shines.

Cool crisp oil
flows,
filling the deep
basins.

The cart,
dragged
across dirt and rock to
the black bin.

Clammy buckets are emptied,
cool sticky air creeps
out of the black bin.

The floor gets mopped.
The pilots light.
The oil heats.

Order in.
Cyan

Kristin Krause

the color of the mobile and the walls the baby boy is lying in his crib
the color of the fresh blood pumping in his veins
he is sucking his plump inch-long fingers

the cool crisp night the star in the sky
his girlfriend Brittany lying on his bumpy bed as he hears the crack
of the rainstorm and the electric blue bolt that flashes across the sky

the blue Caraco that he is sippin on
the panties that Chyanne is slowly sliding off
as he takes off his Nike basketball shoes
the feeling of being able to spread his toes

The color of the sky before the sunset
The moment he is lying on his death bed Waiting to join Cyan
Decoys

Lynn Rhode

Mother sleeps a lot these days,
she sleeps so she doesn’t have to
think
about what to eat and when,
what to make or not.

She rests so she doesn’t have to
think
about what she just said or
what I just said,
what she just
remembered
or forgot.

She sleeps to ease her mind from
Worry,
where her things are and who
hid them,
why she can’t
remember,
why her mind’s
blank.

She can’t
remember
what day it is or month.
spring or fall, summer or winter.
It’s all the same to her,
She
forgets
what I said and what she said in
response.

She wonders where
the decoys
on the lake
go
when it rains,
where they sleep,
what they eat.

She thinks they are moving,
but they’re not.
“They’re decoys,” I tell her.
“That’s right,” she says,
but she
forgets.

She doesn’t listen.
It’s easy to
forget
if you don’t listen.
You don’t have to
remember
if you don’t hear
what you just said,
what I just said,
what you just said in
response.

“You don’t have to
worry.”
I tell her.
about the things that have
disappeared
from your mind, from your house,
from your mind, from your lips,
from your ears and eyes.
“You don’t have to
worry.”

She can’t
remember
and sleeps a lot to
forget
what she used to
remember
and now can’t
remember,
what I just said,
what she just said.
She can’t hear when she
sleeps,
and she wonders
where the decoys go
when it rains.
The Social Experiment

Dan Wieten

Eight boys in a cabin for a week;
popular, awkward, apathetic.
Showering together at eleven?
A cruel joke of a pissing contest.
Paralyzed by fear, I ask why
because here, it’s not part of my grade.

On a hike in the woods, someone says,
“I heard Nate likes Jenny.”
As I admire the chlorophyll,
I pretend I like Jenny too.
It’s three o’ clock, the pedal boats are at five.
I have two hours to find a partner.

My friends join me in the mess hall;
We couldn’t get a cabin together.
Discussing the closing show:
David on drums, me on guitar
Brock sings lead because his hair is blonde,
We’ll be air banding to Motley Crue.

If I take one thing, it’ll be the love of home
I’ve set myself apart for years to come
As Nate and Jenny hold hands on the bus
I leave more confused
Holding my cardboard cutout guitar,
I wonder if I’ll ever be normal.
Memory of a time long since passed

Andrew Kroll

I look upon the picture, sitting in my room
On the outside I feel happy,
Butterflies dance in my stomach
On the Inside I feel sad
My heart painfully aches
Knowing the truth
The people in it stand together unmoving,
  Like a frozen memory unaffected by time
The weather in the picture remains the same
His smile is natural
He feels happy about things
Hers on the other hand is not
She might feel differently
Her eyes are squinted due to the sunlight;
  His are covered by sunglasses.
It would seem that these two were a couple,
But they are merely camp friends
Having met that week
The background behind them shows a calm summer day.
Many people are around,
  But in the picture it’s just them.
The two of them laugh and enjoy this moment together,
Even though this one would be their last.
The boy is me and the girl is a friend,
I let her go after that day
We had a chance together
But I was a fool once again
  Like usual I didn’t keep in contact
Now she has probably forgotten me
Our time having become a mere memory
UNDER-Toe

Dana Sahagun

A brightly colored bathing suit clung to her small frame, as warm bright light caressed her pale skin.

The outstretched river gave a tempting glow, as impatient voices echo the warning of danger. Only to be reflected by her youth and carelessness,

She twirls like a ballerina practicing for Swan Lake, oblivious to the lurking dangers below the surface. Stepping closer and closer to threatening waters, that swirl madly with an unforgiving grip.

Without warning strong waters grab hold and pull. Encompassing her body below the surface, creating air deprived lungs while limbs thrash for an escape.

Fear completely takes hold as water muffles her pleas. Unfocused images dance in her vision, as water burns her nose.

Until hands grasp her arms, suddenly hanging over a broad shoulder. Her father’s hands give security and punishment that sting her wet skin.

Finally penetrating her little ears, are the voices that were once deflected.
Mo Anam Cara

Chris VanGeison

Forged in sacred flames,
it\'s silver glistens in the light.
The hope it brings,
a blessing for our days,
of the good to come,
of the wonders to embrace.

A small loop,
with a perfect fit.
The meaning shines,
bright as the full moon,
and is forever ours to know.

Engraved is a royal heart,
wearing only pinstripes.
The secret it holds within,
but three little words.

Be mine
Mo Anam Cara.
Falling Scar

Zachary Mathiot

I shakily make my way up the tree
Leaves and stumps become specs
My breath is fast and heavy as
I make it to the top

I’m there, but completely petrified
How high am I now?
Sweat pours down my face like a waterfall
My stomach churns as I look around

The only way down
a rope barely a thread.
Long and blue, tied between two branches
An unreliable escape from this high up horror
The safety of ground seems miles away

I take a deep breath
birds chirping around me
crunching leaves and sticks
As I hit the ground with a loud thud

At first glance I look fine
But upon a second look
I feel something warm
My chin a dripping, leaky faucet
Crimson streaks running down my chest

I run as fast as I can
Back home, back to safety
The Mickey Mouse face splattered
My new shirt forever tainted

The hospital room is cold and unfamiliar
And I get the same feeling
The feeling I had at the top
Complete uncertainty and fear

Needles and thread start closing the wound
I sit there in agony and pain

The needles go in an out
Rushing through me like a river

Height’s now my biggest fear
The scar a reminder for life.

Art by Teri Hofman Landscape
Aqueous

Alan Saari

When did I become a writer, when did the flowing of thought and consciousness meld into a genre or creativity? Reflections of events to relate, but what is the worth, what is the intent? Someone's first love or a tragedy, the opportunities, endless ripples as they may seem. The well of knowledge, to bestow and drink from, flows through all in different wakes.
Michelangelo’s Narcissus

Caitlin Baughman

Those glassy eyes will not
gaze back or offer any relief to your wanting.
You have fallen, hard, to your own devices and
there you will stay until the end of your days.
An Echo in the woods pleads for your attention,
but no one can draw you away.
White starburst flowers bloom, flourish, and then wither.
Grass is swallowed by the ravenous cold
and the sun shows no mercy for snow.
Time does not abate and neither do your desires.
You are overcome, stricken, and
reaching will only bear ripples, never your wish.
Coveting eyes and a face wrought with serenity;
you are your weakness.
This mirror will mean your end,
ever quenching the thirst of your self-love.
Drink it in, drink it in,
drown in it.
Blue
James Lillie

Drip
Drop

Lonely
Sleepy

From atop
To the Crop

just as the sky
so Deep and wide

an Obscuring mist
it is downward hiss

With the glow of the moon
Play me some blues jay?

lots of splatter
Pitter patter

A tear sinking through the void
how enviable to be blue when tears fall in two

mix with dirt, feed the seed, opportunity for warmth is all you need.
At the bottom, a pool does grow. meet friends you did not know and ripple to parts unknown.
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Night Lights

Bonny Lownds

When she finally came home, opening the door quietly and slipping inside the darkened single-wide, she only just remembered to relight the fire in the tiny woodstove. Then she exhaustedly felt her way in the dark to her room and fell into bed, sleeping in smoky clothes with soot coating her fingers like an ancient secret.

The next morning when her father made his painful journey to the kitchen, she was already at the table. He turned up his nose at the bowl of Cheerios she offered, almost pouting. “Do you want me to fry you an egg instead?” she asked, searching his haggard and disappointed face for answers.

“No, that’s okay,” he answered, removing the cap from one of his numerous pill bottles. “I’m afraid nothing’s going to sound good to me today anyway.” He flipped on the small television and sat down at the table to watch a news anchor in flaming pink lipstick inform them they were scheduled for more snow. “Did you remember to light a fire last night?” he inquired.

“Why? Are you cold?”

“Yes. I lit a fire last night.”

“Is it still going then?”

“I suppose so.”

“Good girl,” he admonished and returned his gaze vacantly to the television screen.

Flames now filled the 8” by 12” frame as the news anchor began to discuss a story about recent arson activity. The girl moved to change the channel; but her father stopped her, his hand
leaping to close over hers. His eyes filled with the glorious chaos of the blaze as he sat with now rapt attention, forgetting to release her hand. She observed him out of the corner of her eye as he ravenously stared. When it was over, he let her go and stood to turn off the TV. “You would think those people would learn to do something better with all their money than build mansions that burn to the ground,” he mused with hollow satisfaction as he shuffled out of the kitchen. “Don’t forget to light a fire tonight,” he intoned over his shoulder before continuing away.

Hours later she stepped out into the dark, letting the night embrace her as she walked. Absentmindedly she stretched one leg, then the other; she had a long way to go before she came to the part of town with Escalades in the driveways. She let the backpack, slung casually over one shoulder, thump into her with every quickening step, enjoying the sloshing sound of the can of gasoline. She held the box of matches tight in one hand and let a smile flicker over her face. Later, after she’d watched her handiwork for a while, she would go home. She would remember to light a fire.
Breakdown
Ken Porter

The slate gray sky bled sunlight through the autumn leaves of an old oak tree as Fred Wood and John Mayfall sat underneath, on opposite sides, wearing in their tuxedos. Beside the road, Fred’s Volvo smoldered under its hood in the strange October heat, making a deep whine like an angst-ridden teenager.

“She’s probably having a panic attack,” John said, “her mom always gets her all riled up about stuff like this. Anyway, the tow truck said it’d be here as soon as it could. Did you hear me? Fred?”

“I can’t believe this,” Fred said.

“It’s not your fault,” John said, “it just happened.”

“I know it’s not my damn fault! Of all the damn times you had to—“

“I said I was sorry, what else am I supposed to say?”

“Sorry doesn’t mean anything. Not a God damn thing.”

A warm breeze swept through the tall, browning grass, breaking an eternal silence. Fred jumped to his feed and stormed over to the Volvo. She was battered, weathered, and still smoking. He had been with her for so long, loved her more with every passing year. The more miles she got, the more life breathed into her. He had first seen her when he was in college, in a parking lot outside the dorms. At that moment, he knew he had to have her.

“I can’t believe you touched her,” Fred burnt his fingers as he popped the hood. “Damn it! Do you fuck up everything on purpose? Or is it some kind of game for you?”

John sat under the tree, fidgeting and playing with his bowtie. Fred surveyed the Volvo’s damage. The engine block was split by a crack, which penetrated deep within her. She was broken. One set of strange hands and she’d completely come apart, unclean and untrustworthy. He’d ignored the warning signs. Now it was his wedding day, and something had to be done.

“I should’ve told you about it sooner,” John hopped to his feet, “I told you because I can’t live with it anymore.”

“I can’t live with it either,” Fred said.

“What do you mean?”

“Never mind.”

“What are you talking about?”
“I don’t know,” Fred ran his hand through his damp hair.

“Yeah you do.”

“I don’t!” Fred slammed the hood down. “I don’t know what I’m gonna do!”

“Just don’t call it off, please … I was drunk, that’s all it was.”

“I didn’t say I was gonna call it off.”

“You were thinking it.”

“Oh big lesson in thinking from Captain Good Decisions over here!”

“At least I admitted I screwed up!”

Fred threw his arms in the air. “So now it’s my fault?”

“Shit,” John said, “it’s not your fault. You know it’s not.”

“You want it to be,” Fred said, “you want it to be all on me so you don’t have to feel guilty.”

The car made a clanking, sputtering noise. Fred kicked it.

“Shut up!” he kicked it again. “Just shut the hell up!”

John tore off his jacket, whipping it to the pavement.

“Hit me,” he said.

“For Christ’s sake,” Fred said.

“It’ll make you feel better, just do it, I won’t fight back.”

“Why did you touch her? Why did you have to ruin all of this? Now we’re stuck here.”

“I’ll hold my arms behind my back, won’t be able to block even if I want to.”

“She used to be so perfect … you had to break her.”

“Are you going to fucking hit me or what?”

Fred threw his foot into John’s chest, sending him into a tree and to the ground. John climbed to his feet, a footprint stained his shirt.

“What the hell?” John asked.

“I don’t feel any better,” Fred said.

“I thought you were going to punch me!”
Fred shook his head. “We should call the church, tell them ... something.”

“You said you didn’t want to call them.”

“I don’t want to talk to them. I don’t want to talk to anybody anymore. Where the hell is that truck?” Fred stood in the middle of the road. To the left, a storm was gathering, lightning cracking in the distance. The ceremony and reception were inside, where people would be dry and happy, but the rain would still be falling down. It’d still be there, lingering above him. To the right, far beyond the trees and buildings, he could see the bell tower of the university where he met her.

“He’s late,” Fred said. “What the hell am I going to do?”

“He told us he was going to be,” John said. “Look, just let me talk to Mary Ann, I’ll work it out.”

“You’d like that,” Fred clenched his fist, “I’m sure you’d love to be alone with her, just the two of you, plenty of booze at the reception hall to make another mistake.”

John opened his mouth to speak, but his words were masked by the honking horn of the tow truck. He dusted off his jacket, pulling it back on. Fred straightened his tie. The tow truck skidded to a halt in front of the car, backing up to angle the rig, it was set up with one long bar and a smaller bar three quarters of the way up, like an automotive crucifix. The driver stepped down from the cab onto the pavement, surveying the damage. He wore a black set of overalls with a white collar, and carried a clipboard with a book of auto parts for Volvo cars.

“Sorry it took so long, guys,” the driver said, “had a family thing I had to take care of.”

“Don’t we all,” Fred said.

“Getting hitched?” he asked.

“Looks that way.”

“Let’s see what I can do about it.” The driver lifted the loose hood, examining the crack in the engine block.

“This is worse than you told me,” he said, “couldn’t tell from the outside how bad it is, but then again, you never can tell until it smacks you in the face.”

Fred and John exchanged glances.

“Funny how that happens,” Fred said.

“How do you figure?” Fred asked.

“Can you fix it?” John asked.

“Well, you can fix just about anything,” the driver said, flipping through the book, “the question is whether you want to fix it.”
“The engine’s done, that’s a fact,” the driver said, “but it can be swapped out. Is this old girl worth doing a complete overhaul? Knowing she’s in such a bad shape, is it too much for you?”

Fred stood in front of the car and looked left, he looked right, and down at the hood.

“What do you think?” Fred asked the driver.

“Well, I’m a man of tradition myself,” the driver said, “like to pick something and stick with it. But for you, I could see getting out before it’s too late. Sticking with something like that is going to hurt you down the road.”

Fred pushed the hood down.

“Do you do trade-ins?” Fred asked.

“Sure do,” the driver said, “I can take you back to the lot and pick out a beauty after the wedding.”

“Let’s go,” Fred said.

“Finally,” John said, “let’s get to the church already; they’ve got to be going bat shit insane.”

“To the lot,” Fred said, “let’s go to the lot. See some of these other cars you’re talking about.”

“Fred,” John tugged on his arm, “you’re getting married.”

Fred pulled away.

“You got anything a bit newer?” Fred asked, “maybe something in a cobalt blue?”

“Course I do,” the driver hooked the car to the truck, “always another car on the lot, right?”

Fred climbed into the truck, crossing his arms as he turned away from the darkening storm. The driver patted John on the back on his way to the truck.

“Plenty of room to ride up there with us,” the driver said.

“Go ahead,” John said, “I’m walking, I’ve got to go the other way.”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s my fault, I shouldn’t have waited.”

“Not everyone’s that great with cars.”

“Right,” John let his head hang low, “the car.”
III

ESSAYS

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Once a Runner
By Devon Joslin

The end. I wish there was more to this story, but there is not. I had this crazy notion that I could learn something new by writing this paper. I had thought I could maybe figure out where I went wrong. I had hoped that keeping a running journal every day would help me on my arduous journey. I had hoped a lot of things. However, my journey has come to a close. This is the end. It is often said that the man who works the most diligently improves the most. So, let's try something; let's pretend this story did not end yet. Let's go back to the beginning. Let us pretend it is still the spring of 2010, where my journey began.

Spring 2010

"What I want is to be number one!" I exclaimed to the news reporter at the GMAA City Track and Field Championships in the spring of my junior year. It was time to run the 800m. After losing the 1600m run I knew I couldn’t just sit back and relax for this race. The starter lines us up, then fires the gun, the battle has begun. According to the pre-race announcements I was supposed to win, but Coach Smith had told me not to become over confident and take the lead early, and it would have been wise to listen to him (he is arguably the best distance runner that Reeths Puffer ever produced, and in 1992 he qualified for the Olympic Trials in the marathon). The first 300 meters pass by quickly. I am still in the lead. Out of the corner of my eye I can see a person in blue coming on me fast. I have never heard of this competitor so I let him pass me at the 400 meter mark figuring he would burn out and I would win with ease. He didn’t slow down. I didn’t want to settle for silver, so I chased the gold:
One hundred eighty meters left: I retake the lead and try to pull away.

One hundred fifty meters left: the pain is unbearable; the runner in blue challenges me for the lead.

One hundred twenty meters left: The boy in blue passes me with authority and pulls away, and I can hear two more behind me.

Eighty meters left: I bow my head and violently swing my arms hoping for a burst of strength.

Twenty meters left: two more competitors line up next to me and try to pass.

Ten meters left: I can’t hold on, the two runners pass me. I cross the finish line. No gold, no silver, no bronze, I have finished with nothing. I decline to be interviewed after the race and go to be alone.

I guess I can’t always be a champion.

Something was gone. The edge that had once made me a lion on the track was now gone.

After the two mediocre performances that day I had considered walking out on the sport for good. My spark was gone.

Winter 2010

I’m 17, a senior at Reeths Puffer high school, and I am on my way to decide my future.

Coach Smith, now the head cross country coach at Muskegon Community College, receives a knock on his office door. I am standing in the doorway as he finishes his phone call.

He then flags me in.
Keep your cool. Don't seem overanxious. Play hard to get.

"Have a seat Devon."

"Why did you want to see me Coach?"

“Did you talk to the Cornerstone Coach yet?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He offered seventy five percent tuition, and room and board."

Smith grins menacingly, "That is a pretty good offer."

"Yeah, I guess it is, isn’t it?"

"You know, I can remember the day you came out for the cross country team. Coach Peters almost didn't let you on, remember?"

"Yeah, I remember you telling him I was decent at track and he should give me a chance. I like to think I was an awesome freshman distance runner!"

We both laugh for a moment.

Smith turns and looks out his office window and lets out a sigh. "Yeah, you sure have come a long way since then."

"Yes. Yes I have."

"I think you still have a lot of unused potential."

"What do you mean 'unused?' in case you haven't noticed; I ran for team USA last summer, I am the fastest cross country athlete of the last decade at Reeths Puffer, I think I am running pretty damn well!"
"So much for 'keep your cool.'"

"Calm down, I meant that in a good way."

"Sorry Coach."

"I called you in here because I think I can help you find your racing legs, you are a great 'runner' but I can make you a better 'competitor,' not to take anything away from what you have done..."

"I don't understand what you mean, should I be insulted or flattered?"

"For a chunk of change can I call you a Jayhawk?"

"Look man, you haven't said a word to me all year; now you just throw an offer like that and expect me to say yes? Two weeks ago you wouldn't even come watch me race. I don't understand you man!"

"Well, I don't understand you at times either."

"...Alright..."

"I'll have your letter ready for signing this afternoon, if you want it anyways..."

"Okay."

I leave his office grinning.

*Got 'em.*

Four years ago I found freedom. I found an activity that let me express myself. Running is a simple act: you just put one foot in front of the other...very fast. It is simple enough that I can focus all of my energy on it. Focus enough to train through a brutal Michigan winter.
A miracle happened! I survived the Michigan winter training and I got hurt. It's okay! I needed the time to reflect on things. I had made running the most important thing in my life. It had eventually gotten to the point where I would wake up and ask myself "how is my running going?" if the answer was not good, my day would suck. Getting hurt was a blessing. It tested me in more areas then just running; it tested my will, my mind, and my faith.

I had reduced my training routine from 65 miles per week to 10. The regional track meet was around the corner. I had two mediocre performances so far in my senior season of track: a fourth place finish in the 1600 at the GMAA city meet, and a third place finish in the 800 at the OK Black Conference meet. I was not ready. I'm sure Elijah was not ready when he outran a chariot 70 miles to Jezrel in the Old Testament, but the hand of God touched him and he took off. Regionals was my chariot.

...And I won...

*It feels good to be back on top again.*
October 29 2011

I covered the muddy Lansing 8k course in 27 minutes and 36 seconds.

It was good enough to earn a plane ticket to New Mexico for the NJCAA Cross Country Nationals.

November 12 2011

My running journal reads:

Nov. 12 2011

Morning: Today is nationals for cross country. New Mexico sucks, the weather is dry and the air is thin.

The course has some whoops on it every Kilometer. I'm not too worried though, it has been a fun build up getting here. I am just going to trust God with it. The guys and I saw tumbleweed on our desert adventure before breakfast. I wonder if that is a sign of some sort? I guess I am going to find out.

November 13 2011

My journal reads:

Nov. 13 2011

Morning: The race[nationals] went terrible yesterday. Went for a short recovery run this morning. Now it is time to focus on the road ahead. This is what I was born to do.
God works in mysterious ways. Why would anyone want to hear a sad story with no happy ending? Sometimes the most interesting part of a story isn't when a man falls. It is what happens once he rises once more. Upon my return to Michigan, I received an email from my high school cross country coach, Randy Peters. He told me that an eighth grader who is considering high school cross country had asked him "what it was like to coach Devon Joslin". Coach asked the young man "Why do you want to know?" The young man replied, "So I know what it will sound like when you talk about me someday."

That is what makes this story worth telling.
Meaning of “the” Word

The concept that I grasped out of the essay “The Meanings of a Word” was that a certain word used in different tones or words can mean two completely different things. In her essay, Naylor discusses various meaning of the word “nigger.” One day while sitting in school she was called a “nigger” by a little white kid. Confused, because she never heard that word in that type of tone nor context, she went home and asked her mom what the true meaning of the word was. Like me, she grew up around the word all her life but was familiar with hearing it in other situations. For example, the way her family uses it is when a man distinguishes himself by his effort and he is approved of. A man or woman can use it in a way of claiming their significant other or husband. The way the kid used it in Naylor’s school was in a hateful way, and she understood it was wrong. (108-111)

While reading this essay, something stuck out to me and it was when she went home and asked her mother “Mommy, what does ‘nigger’ mean?” (109). If you think about it, that’s the hardest question for any African American to answer. I honestly wouldn’t know what to tell my child if he asked me that question. I mean, I can say to him that it’s a name that white men gave to African American slaves back in the 1800’s when we weren’t exactly considered human. We were classified as hard working machines brought to America from Africa. It probably still wouldn’t make sense to him because African Americans are still walking around presently calling it to each other every day. I wish the story had gone on further to tell how the mother responded because
I’m still looking for an answer to that question. I really liked how she used the question-asking scenario as the thesis and the closure of the essay. A lot of African Americans absolutely hate the fact that we call each other the word “nigger” and they have the right to, but really they have the concept all wrong. We don’t use the word to degrade each other, we use it for bad and then we use it for good but never in the way it was used against Naylor. Just as in her essay, we used our word in a different tone; we even spell it different (nigga). Every day this is an experience to me; I’ve been dealing with referring to my friends and family as one, to others for calling me one in that negative and knowingly wrong tone. I just deal with it and hopefully one day we’ll get an answer to our question ‘What does nigger mean’

Work Cited

Fate Can Wait

Kyle Thomas

Today was a day I was afforded the luxury of imagining what life could possibly be like—if I was a normal, eligible-bachelor. I am an eligible-bachelor, that’s not the problem, but I’m nowhere near the vicinity of ‘normal.’ I used to think about it all the time—when I was engulfed by desire with a sweet, lovely belle. We were in high school; she was the valedictorian while I was the passionate-trouble-maker.

_Funny how time changes so much, yet so much stays the same._

Nowadays I don’t have the benefit of dreaming. I have realities to think of, tasks to get done to make myself better—to have something to offer. I know who I am, although sometimes I’d like to forget it. Today was the first day in a long time I was able to forget about my troubles—my stresses—and it was all because of her smile.

As a 21-year-old college student, you’d think I’d have more days like this. But this isn’t university, and I’m no All-American kid.

I walked up to the bookstore, wandering around bewildered-like, not knowing at all what I was looking for. I looked at my class slip, but that didn’t give me my answers.

“So, this must be your first semester,” she said, over-my-shoulder with an amused look on her face as if she’s seen my type before. And by my type I mean “dazed” and “confused.”

“Yeah, how can ya’ tell?” I said, slowed in my chance for a clever response.

“Oh, you know? Staring blankly at a piece of paper, standing still, not making any sudden movements—you’re either a mime or you’re _really_ thinking hard. You just looked lost, that’s all.” She said this with the sweetest-tone, with no contriving sense about her.
“Do you know where the art supplies are?” I said, figuring I should start somewhere.

“Yeah, take my hand.” She glided, walking slowly in front, as if not wanting to rush our time together.

Or maybe that’s just the way I read the situation. She was gliding. Her hips swayed from side-to-side, her caboose moved to the tune of salsa. This was not a perverted encounter, this was more than sexual—it was more spiritual in fact, she could’ve become my religion. She was art, after all. And she hadn’t even smiled yet, not like she did when I fell.

“What art supplies are you looking for? I mean, what class are you in?” she asked.

“I don’t....,” I said clumsily, not having an answer. “None, I like to draw.” I didn’t have an art class.

“Then what do you need, give me your list,” she demanded, knowing that I wouldn’t say no to her anyways.

A fuse was ignited before me, a light reigniting my soul like a candle in a jack-o’-lantern. She could sense her grasp on my chest—a heart beating out of its cage.

“You really don’t have an art class?”


Art lit her up, as her eyes sparkled like baby-blue-diamonds. If you’ve ever been in love, you absolutely know the moment that you fall. You can see the changing of the tide—the changeover from guarded-emotional-brick-wall to the release of fears, of eternal-trust, lust and desire—and the features of each person change along with them.

When two people fall in love, there is absolutely no doubt about it.

“What do you draw?” she asked, seemingly intrigued.
“Beauty,” I say softly, in a lustful whisper. “Enchanted—you could even say I’m a fool—for the world’s beauty.”

She’s milking my words, desiring every-bit-of-it to be true. It was true. A fool for beauty I’ll always be, and she was beautiful.

“I bet girls ask you to draw them all the time?” she said, pretending to be jealous. She just wanted a portrait.

“No, never. I’m not too open on how deep of a person I am,” I said, smirking and laughing in one. “You’re now the only one who knows me.”

“I’d love to draw you. Just your outline would be a masterpiece. It’d be the greatest piece I’d ever create upon canvas. My fingers would dance to the tune of your skin.” With those words I left my mark. She needed to be wanted. And I wanted her.

“Yeah! Let’s do that,” she said, ecstatic, as if feeling the same burning inside as I.

We both look around, remembering she’s at work. We start moving along with the books, but the train is slowly-chugging as our moment is nearing ‘The End.’

“I’m glad I looked confused,” I said, referring to the beginning of our encounter, but this statement only made her look confused.

I smile. “I’m glad you came up to me, to help me. I wasn’t expecting my life to change today, but now it’ll never be the same. I would’ve come a long time ago.”

“You wouldn’t have found me a long time ago,” she said. Her tone seemed she was trying to tell me something, of some sort of pain deep inside. I only knew her for an instant, but it was as if we could read each other, like a boy and his beloved-childhood-pet. We could feel inside of each other. Our own separate-life-pains developed insight to the other’s heart, mind and spirit.

“It would have been too early. It had to be this place, this time. It had to be ‘now’,” she emphasized. “Do you believe in fate?” she asked.
“I do. Why?”

“I’ve been having a lot of dreams lately. You’ve been in them. Not really...in them, but...you’ve actually been them.” She didn’t make any sense.

“What do you mean?” I asked. I hadn’t had any dreams. Was our connection real—even supernatural?

“My dreams have told me I would find you. That you would come into my life, like a poetic Don Juan to save me from my loneliness.”

Now, I couldn’t tell if she was serious, only a minute ago I was looking at this girl’s beauty and believing it to be angel’s singing, and now she’s talking about a dream of me coming into her life—like a ‘Virgin Mary’ speaking to her from heaven. I didn’t quite believe her seriousness, but I was a little bewildered as to her intentions. Was this to scare me off? Or was this to make me believe in our destiny?

“I truly believe this was meant to be. Your kindness, your eyes are the eyes of a lost soul, a hurt and wounded person who’s been in the dark. I’ve been in the dark too. I think we can work our way out, together,” she said. Her words were becoming more prophetic, as if directly coming to her from the light. But what light?

I thought fast—as I tended to do when I was nervous, in an uncomfortably-ironic position. I thought we were meant to be, and now she’s scaring the “heaven” out of me.

“I completely believe the same thing. Let’s climb back to the light together,” I said, not knowing if I was mocking her, or going along with her out of fear.

“Babe, can I call you babe?” I asked. “We should meet in a bit, we need to grow our newfound seed—our new life together must be nurtured,” I said, almost laughing through clenched teeth. I could tell she believed me, that we were in sync—as we were only moments before.

“Hold on, one second,” I said, pulling something out of my pocket. It was my cell phone.
“Oh, damn. Give me one second, can you hold onto the books for a minute, I’ll be right back. It’s my ma’,” I told her, covering the speaker with my hand as if blocking my mom from hearing me talk. Between you and me, my phone never rang. It wasn’t even on. When a girl begins to scare you, especially one you thought you fell in love with only seconds before, you begin to think of ways to extract yourself from that situation. I had one choice. The fake “I have to take this” phone-exit strategy—it was all I had props for.

The lesson of this story—before I tell you what happened at the end—is that no matter how quickly you think you fall in love with someone, you don’t even know that person. That girl or guy could be Prince/Princess Charming the first time you meet them, then within a span of a day/hour/minute, they can become a monstrous-scary speaking version of themselves, and this is without it being Halloween.

So, to cap off my “Perfect-ly Brutal” encounter, I had her hold onto the books as I took the phone call in the hall. The phone was placed directly on my ear, my lips were speaking words that made no sense in correlation with another, and my focus was concentrated on taking the easy way out—just as soon as an opening would arise.

THIS IS IT! As she turned her back to set the heavily-burdened books down, conceivably to help someone else as she awaited the return of her “fate-mated-soulful-poet,” I turned and started to ‘Usain Bolt-it.’ As I got about fifteen-feet down the hall, I tripped over my own feet and slid face-first like on a slip ‘n’ slide. As my phone flew from out of my hand and smashed into a considerable-amount of pieces on the floor, I picked myself back up and brushed off.

As I looked around to see if my pride remained in-tact, and make sure the coast was clear from “Heaven,” I looked down at the tiny pieces of shrapnel left of my cellular device. “Small price for a great escape—time to fade to black.” I walk—an abrupt end on one hand is a fresh-start on the other. Fate can wait for another day.
Why Get a College Education?

Jason MacDonald

Andrew Braaksma describes his disenchantment with blue-collar employment in the essay “Lessons from the Assembly Line.” Spending his summers in various loud and potentially dangerous factories, Braaksma misses the comfort his quiet, more relaxed life as a student offers. While his friends stay on campus and choose less demanding summer jobs, Braaksma decides to be a factory worker close to home so he can save money. He also prefers the overtime pay he receives; unfortunately, his paychecks do not always seem to equally represent the long, grueling hours he has endured. Braaksma experiences much anxiety when he learns that within six months, his unit will be moved to Mexico to cut costs. He writes, “As frustrating as the work can be, the most stressful thing about blue-collar life is knowing your job could disappear overnight” (485). This disheartening revelation prompts Braaksma to speculate what his future might have been if he had not attended college. When he returns to his sunny campus in the fall, he no longer takes for granted his privileged life, yet there is a lingering sense of guilt. Since his fellow coworkers lack the opportunities he was lucky enough to possess, they must continue their work in the factory long after he returns to college in the fall. It is not only their unfortunate circumstances that give Braaksma a new appreciation for higher education but, more importantly, it is the perpetuity of their suffering. (484-486)

Upon reading Andrew Braaksma’s essay, I felt compelled to think about his experience in comparison with my own. Unlike Braaksma, I never believed I would go to college. This was not for lack of intelligence or financial need; it was rather, a denial of the importance of an education. I felt fully capable in my ability to find employment without any sort of degree, and so I left my hometown shortly after high school with nothing but a backpack. I believed that travelling around the country would be a more worthwhile use of my time.
For the next ten years, I was employed in several unskilled fields of labor such as fast food, telemarketing, farming, customer service, logging, painting, cart-wrangling, and even assembly of Kraft lunchables. All of these jobs, were mind-numbing and had their respective grievances too numerous to list, and they all shared one common trait. Since no high form of education was required to obtain a position, job security was practically non-existent. This is especially apparent in our present day economy.

Most recently, I have held several positions within the food service industry. About three years ago, I was hired as a dishwasher for a locally owned, farm-to-table restaurant. As soon as I had a fundamental understanding of their process, I was taught how to make simple dressings and salads. When those were successful, I continued to learn more and more recipes. I started making crackers, pasta, cookies, brownies, carrot cake, and banana bread. Anything they asked of me, I would learn. Then I accepted the challenge of yeast breads and, after a few short months, mastered it, becoming their head baker. Rewarded with my own key to the restaurant, the luxury of deciding my own schedule and a pay raise, I believed I had become an educated and, therefore, valuable member of the kitchen. Of course, as they always do, personal obligations arose, and I was forced to abandon my beloved job for three weeks. This, I was told, was not a major issue, so the proper arrangements were made, and I left. Upon my return, I was shocked to see I had been replaced by a previous employee, one who had walked out during the busy summer months and failed to contact my employers until my untimely absence. Falling down the ladder, I was once again nothing more than a glorified dishwasher with a basic starting wage and no raise in sight.

This is a large reason why I chose to enroll in community college this year: in hope that one day I will earn a degree which will open doors to more significant occupations. There will come a time when I will no longer be able to meet the physical demands of an uneducated laborer, and I have realized that
I must prepare myself. Currently, the ratio of unskilled laborers to available job positions is not favorable for the individual. Also, in obtaining a degree, I hope to join a profession I actually enjoy and respect.

In conclusion, like Andrew Braaksma, I have developed a new understanding and admiration for college education through my experiences as an unskilled laborer. With the threat of imminent job loss lurking around every corner, it is apparent that one must gain as much knowledge, and as many skills, as possible to increase his or her value as a member of the workforce. I feel that I have now found a new purpose and direction for my life and enjoy a great sense of satisfaction from this. I am grateful for my past experiences; they have set me on this fast track to become a specialized engineer.

Work Cited

“Totem” by Lesa VanSingel

Muskegon Community College

$2.00