

*Spring 2011*

# River Voices



*Photo by Mary Jo Westenberg*

# River Voices

Spring/Summer 2011

*A Publication of*  
**Muskegon Community College**  
**221 S. Quarterline Road**  
**Muskegon, MI 49442**  
**(231) 777-0695**

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

Please submit poetry, short stories, creative non-fiction, plays, essays,  
black and white photographs and art  
to rooms 154 or 158 for our 2012 issue.

Submissions requested by email to [rivervoices@muskegoncc.edu](mailto:rivervoices@muskegoncc.edu)

Save your work in Word.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I Reminiscences

Childhood Memoirs	<i>Tyler Burt</i>	6
Baptism		
Pop Fly		
Sneaky Tip Toes		
Razor		
Measuring Day		
Perfect 300	<i>Nicholas Marcinkowski</i>	11
My Mother Nature Brought Me Up	<i>Holly Carlson</i>	12
Grandma	<i>Shelby Shavalier</i>	13
Sweatshirt	<i>Adam Campbell</i>	14
Broken Branches	<i>Lucas VanLinden</i>	17

## II Discovering/Creating Ourselves in Work and Life

Red River	<i>Nikki Foster</i>	20
My Journey	<i>Rhonda Carlson</i>	21
Consign to Oblivion	<i>Ken Porter</i>	24
The Gift of Life	<i>Pam Williamson</i>	25
Big House/Big Heart 5k-10k Run	<i>Bob Bates</i>	28
A Pink Elephant on Christmas Day	<i>Joško Vukušić</i>	31

## III The Dark Side

The Scam of a Life Time	<i>Shelby Shavalier</i>	34
See Her Dance	<i>Nikki Foster</i>	38
Hot Flashes	<i>Tyler Carlson</i>	39
Joker	<i>Nikki Foster</i>	44

## IV Love Lost and Here to Stay

Copycat Kidnap	<i>Meg McCarthy</i>	46
Love Poem	<i>Samantha Drakos</i>	47
How Deep Engraved into the Snow	<i>Tyler Burt</i>	48
Ghost Flowers	<i>Nikki Foster</i>	49
just for tonight	<i>Nikki Foster</i>	50
Phoenix	<i>Tyler Carlson</i>	51



# I

## REMINISCENCES



*Photo by Emily Koebel*

# Childhood Memoirs

## The Baptism

“I don’t wanna go to church! I wanna stay here! WHY?” I yelled.

“Well you’re going to church to be there for your brother’s baptism,” my mom said, but I was tired ‘cuz my mom woke me up very early, and I did not want to wear a suit or go to church. My baby brother Eric was all wrapped up in blankets sleeping while we headed to church, and then there was my sister Allison, sitting in the car seat all nice and neat and tidy.

Church is boring. I’m missing Donald Duck’s Quack Attack and for what? This day where Eric is brought up to the attention? I want attention! We sat in the front row, and as I waited to go up with my parents to Eric’s baptism, my aunt sitting next to me nudges my shoulders. Hey, do this to your head. She puts her hands together like a fist and gently bumps herself in the forehead several times. Well, she is a lot older than me, so it can’t be too bad to do and maybe I can finally get the attention I’m after.

So while sitting in the pew, I start gently pounding myself in the head, and my mom gives one snotty glare at me, and I quickly stop. What’s wrong? My aunt told me to do it. Why is it so bad?

Soon we get up in front of church, and I’m completely bored out of my mind. This old guy with a long robe on comes over and drips water on my brother’s head. I look at where the rest of my family is sitting down in the pew, and there is my grandpa proudly videotaping the entire thing. This is cool! I can do what my Aunt told me to do and it will be on camera, and I’ll finally get the attention I want! So I begin pounding my forehead and making weird faces. My aunt is dying of laughter in the pew and this only makes me want to do something else. I begin tugging on my mom’s dress and finally her hand grips my hand in the way a cobra lashes out to protect her young. Oh, no! This is the end of my life! I think. I feel my eyes tear, and I know when we get home I will have to go to my room with my dad and there will come the spankin’.

*Tyler Burt*

## Pop-Fly in the Outfield

“Pop-fly in the Outfield!” my dad cries as he swings the baseball bat and launches a ball into the air.

“Wow! How does dad make it go so high?” I ask Allison. Our backyard is so big that my dad never could get it all the way from our house to the pine trees, but he comes very close.

“Do you want to try, Tyler? Here, I’ll pitch it to you,” my dad says, as I run up to bat. This is so cool. The bat I’m holding has let my dad smack the ball hard and far. I focus in on the ball, and my dad throws it. I swing as hard as I can. I miss! I actually miss the ball. There is no way I’m missing next time; I’ll be sure to look right at the ball the whole time and not close my eyes for anything. I try again, and the ball goes over my dad and a little ways from our swing set. But not quite as far as my dad’s ball.

My dad laughs and grins at me and says, “Here let me show you how to hold the bat.” As he runs toward me, he grabs my hands. “You hold it like this, see? Yeah, you got it! Now pull your legs apart and try again.”

“Well,” I think, “the way I am standing feels weird, but if it will let me hit the ball, good, then why not?” My dad again throws the ball, and I hit even further than my dad’s distance. “Woah! Look at it fly!” I yell. The ball just misses the pine trees. I can do things just like my dad now. I think. I feel so awesome this day; I figure that like the ball flies through the air, so can I with my dreams as long as my dad is right there helping me along.

*Tyler Burt*

## **Sneaky Tip Toes... HERE I GO!**

I'm in my bed next to Eric listening to mom and dad talk and the blaring sound of the TV. My stomach makes a squirmy sound, and I get out of bed and nudge Eric in his bed. "Psssst. Lets go in the bathroom and slam the cupboard door and get back into bed before Dad can catch us."

Eric looks at me with his tired eyes and sighs. "Ok."

I peer out our bedroom door for any sign Dad may be coming down the hallway to check on us. I put my finger to my mouth and look at Eric. "Shhhh. Sneaky tip toes, don't be slow, and here I go." Each step I take I take like a mouse not wanting to wake up the cat toward the bathroom cupboards. There is just enough light in the hallway that touches my back to show I am out of bed. I can still hear my parents talking quiet and their show is still on the TV. I can do this; I am so close to the bathroom door. I reach out with my hand. "Creeeeek" goes the door.

"Well here goes nothing," I whisper. I open the woody cupboard door wider and wider and wider and....Then, with all my might, slam it with a loud echo throughout the bathroom like never before. I quickly run to my bedroom and oh, boy oh boy. I can hear my dad rise from his spot on the living room couch and suddenly the sound of stomping along the carpet can be heard. He quickly opens our door and glares at Eric and then at me. Me especially, for the longest time. I do not look at him, but I just can sense he is watching me to make sure I'm sleeping. Finally after what seems like forever, my dad's footsteps fade, and he is back on the couch in the living room with Mom. I get out of bed and look at Eric. Well, that was close. I can't believe dad almost caught us. Eric looks at me from his bed and nods his head with fright in his face. "Well," I say with a voice of excitement, "are you ready to do it again?"

*Tyler Burt*

## Razor

I'm looking at myself in the mirror. I get right up on the counter top. I press my face up against the glass and there they are. What's they? Hair today, that's they. I see little peachy white hairs on my chin and cheeks. I'm a 5th grader and I already have tiny hairs. Now that's cool. Now lets see... where's that cream? Oh here it is. I get out some of my Spider-Man shavin' cream and I spread it all over my face. I'm an old old man I say with a shaky voice looking at myself in the mirror. I laugh so hard at the cream covering most of my face. I get out the small plastic shaver I got also on my birthday. Soon here comes my dad. Hey Tyler what are you doing? He laughs a little and then says, you go like this when you're shaving. He guides my hands along my face and smoothly wipes off the white cream which makes its way to the sink. "You think you're getting old Tyler?" My dad asks.

I tell him, "well not as old as you are," and he smiles at me and takes me down from the counter. My dad takes out his razor from the drawer and flicks it on. Bzzzzzz. Man I love hearing that hum. I remember grandma's little tiny razor she uses on the back of my head to make bristles. The gentle touch. The zingy sound. I can think of the small pieces of the razor going round and round. Bzzzz. Soon the sound stops and I look at my dad and he's done shavin'. My turn! My Turn! and I jump up and down. No Tyler, this is mine, but don't worry you'll reach that age when you can use your own. No, I want to use the razor now! I want to be older! I stomp out of the bathroom. Sometimes I wish I could be grown up like my dad. My dad has all those black spots from shavin' all over his face. I wish I had those black spots... but I guess if I must... I can wait till I'm as old as dust.

*Tyler Burt*

## Measuring Day

I run out into the yard calling out to Allison and Eric and telling them that it is time to be measured out at the barn. My dad gets out his ol' black marker and comes out with us to the barn. "I'm gonna be in 4th grade next year so I hope I am tall," I tell Allison who seems to be getting taller than me lately. As my dad opens the barn door, I can smell the woody smell of the walls and gasoline from the snowmobile and lawn mower. I don't know why, but I just love the smell of gas. Gas reminds me of go karts at AJs fun center and snowmobile rides in the wintertime. "Eric you're up first," my dad says.

Eric straightens up and makes himself as tall as possible by nearly being on his tip toes, as my dad marks his height on the wall. Allison is up and dad marks how tall she is; she grew a lot from the looks of it, and there is no way I grew that much this year to beat her. She's my little sister. Little. Why am I not growing at all? "Alright Tyler, you're up," my dad says. I lean up against the wall of the barn and straighten my back to the point of aching and hope that I'm taller than Allison, but as the black marker makes its way across the hair on my head, I have a feeling I'm not as tall as my little sister. Sure we are only a couple years apart, but still I'm the oldest, so I'm the tallest.

Luckily I know I'm stronger than her. I look at the mark my dad makes on the barn for my height. Yep. Allison has beat me by three inches. "I'm taller than you oooo. I'm taller than you oooo." She teases me the whole way back to the house. "I'm taller than you oooo. I'm taller than you oooo."

"It doesn't matter" I tell her. "I'm still stronger than you oooo." I hate being beat in anything and especially by a girl. I run inside to mom and tell what happened at the barn and how Allison's taller and why can't I get taller? She assures me I need to know that everyone is different. There are some great people who are not the tallest men in the world. "And you know?" she goes on, "being small can allow you to reach objects in places other people cannot reach." I smile a little and think about a dog stuck in a well where taller people can't reach him, but I can be the hero that saves him cuz I am small enough.

*Tyler Burt*

## Perfect 300

My grandfather, bowler of perfect games.  
His eyes followed the ball,  
back into his head. As he went rolling  
to the floor,  
my memories of Spider went, too.  
His name creates the dusk of day.  
Oils to ashes now bring him down  
he can't but reach for the line  
one last time.

His eyes focused on the Pins,  
its beauty is beyond great.  
Wondering mind 'til it sees,  
wishing is all he does.  
His Heart pushes the ball left then right.  
It strikes the figure; it strikes  
his heart.  
I bowl with his  
ball now.  
We all do.

*Nicholas Marcinkowski*

## **My Mother Nature Brought Me up**

My mother nature brought me up  
during childhood's lonely vigil,  
in a place caught  
between  
two city-light sunsets,  
I found no peace in people.

I ran to her  
when reprimanded  
by a hard-handed stepfather.  
Cried to her  
when mama  
was working, always working.  
I searched for siblings  
in trees,  
found friends  
in flowers.

When home suffocated me  
she brought fresh air,  
let me breathe.  
She never spoke,  
just listened,  
and when I wept  
the sky opened up  
and mother wept with me.

*Holly Carlson*

## Grandma

I made a seven layer salad,  
you said to mom on the phone.  
I'll be over at three.  
But, three never came,  
and neither did you.

I went tanning,  
took a nap,  
Then, I had to work.  
I should have mowed your lawn,  
like I said I would.

You were a fighter,  
Grandma, it still feels like  
you're here with us.  
Every day it doesn't seem like  
you're gone.

But you are,  
and everything still smells  
like you.  
The pillows, the blankets,  
the chair that sat in your living room.

Who knew, Grandma,  
while I was tanning  
or taking my nap.  
You were a rag doll,  
a human rag doll.

An empty can being kicked  
down the hurtful  
road of goodbye.  
A punching bag of  
unheard cries.

It's all over now, Grandma.  
The pain is all gone.  
We smile now, Grandma,  
Because you live on.

In the pillows, the blankets, and  
the chair that sat in your living room.

*Shelby Shavvalier*

## Sweatshirt

The essay “Shame” by Dick Gregory is a story about the author as a boy and how he was embarrassed in front of his class. Gregory loved a girl named Helene Tucker, and all of his school achievements were for her. Gregory was very poor, and because of that, his teacher placed him in the back of the classroom. He couldn’t read or write, but what the teacher didn’t realize was how hard it is to concentrate when you’re starving. Then one day the teacher was asking the class how much they were going to contribute to the community chest. Gregory wanted to top Helene’s dad, so he saved up money determined to buy himself a daddy. The teacher skipped him, so he stood up and said he was going to give fifteen dollars. He kept saying his daddy was going to give 15 dollars, but the teacher told him to be quiet because the whole point was to collect money for his kind. After one more attempt to say his daddy was going to give fifteen dollars, she told him in front of the class she knows he didn’t have a daddy. Helene turned to look at him with crying eyes, and when Gregory saw, he left class and didn’t come back very often. He lived the rest of his childhood in shame every time he took charity. (278-282).

Gregory was placed in the back seat where the supposed misfits and stupid kids sat. This would seem like an indicator that the person who placed you there probably didn’t like you. According to Gregory, though, that is not how he viewed it because he said, “And I always thought the teacher kind of liked me. She always picked me to wash the blackboard on Friday, after school. That was a big thrill, it made me feel important” (281). This means the teacher thought he was stupid, a troublemaker, and “asked” him to wash the tools she used, after school. Gregory must have been so neglected, and used to cruelty in class that even the slightest

attention brightened his day. It was after school, so the students weren't even there to see it. So, I imagine that when kids were bragging about what their parents bought them, or how many points they scored in their youth sport league, all he had was how he helped cleaned the blackboard. The cruelty of the teacher was unforgivable; she shamed him and destroyed his chance with the girl he loved.

In my fourth grade class, there was a boy named "Joey Brown" in it. He was a walking mess all the time. He had shaggy black hair and was way too skinny to be healthy. He always wore the same moldy brown and black sweatshirt to class. No one knew why he always wore it, and we were too young to figure he was just too poor to afford another one, even though that wasn't the reason anyway. One day, Josh Salem asked the teacher why Joey always wore that sweatshirt. Mrs. Monroe was in the middle of teaching, and was obviously taken back by the question. Every student except Joey started cracking up, and continued until the teacher threatened us with no recess. When she began to talk, Joey stood up and said "When I was a baby she used to wrap me in this sweatshirt when it was cold. My mom would take me everywhere she went." Then it went dead- silent, because we all knew Joey's mom had died when he was little. He ran off crying, and later that day the police found him trying to run home. I didn't see him for while; no one did, but it was something nobody could possibly forget.

#### Work Cited

Gregory, Dick. "Shame." *Models for Writers*. 10th ed. Ed. Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz. Boston:Bedford/St Martin's, 2010. 278-282.



*Photo by Kimberly Page*

## Broken Branches

I used to find myself  
resenting you;  
your roots, your leaves,  
and your strong branches.

In the winter, when you died,  
I rejoiced in my cold revenge.  
And in the spring,  
I wept at your return.

I thought:  
He climbed your strong branches,  
my brother.  
He trusted your sturdy arms.

So when he fell from you,  
there was no one to help him.  
No one but a small child,  
with arms outstretched beneath  
your strong limbs, snapping so easily.  
Arms, hoping to catch a brother.  
Arms, reaching toward the sky  
in a pathetic Hallelujah.

As he fell past me and onto the ground,  
my arms remained reaching  
still waiting for him to fall.  
I turned away from you to see, and I saw  
everything.  
I saw the blood  
seeping  
feeding the hungry earth.  
I heard the scream.  
He was silent.  
It must have been me.  
Or was it you, screaming?

I never knew what you did  
not for a year.  
When my resentment faded,  
I was ready to think.

So, thank you, Tree,  
for what you did.  
You broke  
your branches for him.  
You broke  
his fall.  
You saved his life  
when I could do nothing but stand  
with arms reaching toward the sky.

*Lucas VanLinden*



# II

## DISCOVERING/CREATING OURSELVES IN WORK & LIFE



*Photo by Emily Koebel*

## Red River

I need to get this out... I grab that blank, boring canvas sitting in the corner. Setting it on the easel, I stare at it. I grab the tube of cadmium red acrylic paint. I snatch my fan brush up, run it through the red on my pallet. Raising my arm up and bringing it down, slash it with red. The paint runs down the canvas like a river snaking through it. I soak the brush thoroughly with blue, then I finish the undertones in the red river, filling the gaps the fan brush left, in the blue with a fine tip brush. I smear the borders in with glass bead gel, then paint in it with blue, grey, and white. I can hear the water rushing, see the foam building. I've created this world. I reach for the gold. Mix it with water, then add highlights to the river. It just starts to flow, becoming its own. I go back for the fan brush, water down some silver paint, throw some blue in it and streak it through the blue water. The red with gold and the blue with silver start dancing in the sun light coming in my studio window. The warm and cold colors spin and tangle each other up, fighting one another like two cats in a burning sack. I suck in a deep breath, hold it until my world spins. Exhale. It's all out, out in water of fire and ice.

*Nikki Foster*

## My Journey

The groundwork for my journey began when I was twelve years old. My appendix ruptured, and I was rushed for emergency surgery at McLaren Hospital in Flint, Michigan. The R.N. who was assigned to me was a perky, young nurse with short blonde hair that flipped up around her cap. I still remember her name, Miss Kathryn Mc Gunn.

Her fiancé was in Vietnam and she hadn't heard from him in over a week. I still wonder to this day if he came home and married her, or if he was brought back in a box. One of her other patients was a boy who still walked humped over after nearly a week. She pointed him out and asked me if I could walk straight and show him that girls were better. Wanting to please her, I took my IV pole and walked past the boy, showing him that girls were by far the best. She then asked him if he was going to let a girl show him up, especially since I just had surgery. By the end of the next day, we were nearly running around the floor, straight and tall, trying to show each other who was best. Her creative intervention helped both of us heal faster.

Miss McGunn inspired me to be a nurse. I wanted and still want to be just like her: warm, compassionate, and inventive, while sharing a little of myself. I bought a book on nurses right after that and still have it.

Another part of my journey is writing. In junior high, a creative writing teacher told me I had no talent for writing, but I felt inside that I did. She didn't like a piece I wrote on colored leaves. With a D- on my paper, I decided that she was right and forgot writing.

A high school paper done with little effort brought my teacher, Miss Carolyn Moore to me. She questioned me about what I wanted to do when I graduated. When finding out about the junior high teacher, she turned red. She told me that if God put something in me so strong that I knew at a young age what I wanted to do, then I should never let anyone or anything, including a teacher, stop me.



A counselor at Women in Transitions sent me with a list of things to do and by the end of the day I was registered at Muskegon Community College for nursing. Barney Herron was my Algebra teacher. I had no confidence or belief in myself at forty-nine. The first day I walked through collegiate hall, which was packed full of kids the age of my oldest; I froze, wondering what in the world I was doing. When I failed the first algebra test, I was ready to quit. Mr. Herron asked me to stay after class, and I was near tears. I was anticipating that he would tear me to pieces for my

failure like most men in my past had done. He stated that he saw me finishing problems almost before he got them on the board, that I had correct homework, and that he had seen me teaching others how to do the math. He then asked me what happened when he gave me the test.

I told him that when I turned the test over, everything turned so blurry I couldn't read it and then the page went blank. With a smile, he explained that I had severe test stress and proceeded to ask me questions about how I studied at home and then devised a plan for me to do my next test. I would use imagery, sit on my feet, kick off my shoes, sit in the corner on the floor, whatever it took, I was not to turn my test over until I could see myself sitting on my bed doing my homework listening to the radio. From that point on, I never had lower than an A. Without the help he gave me that first semester, I would never have made it to and through the nursing program. The principles he taught me, I still use today for nursing exams and NCLEX exams.

Janice Alexander is another person who kept me in school. I met many challenges during this program. She helped with the financial portion of the program, supplementing my grants to help with books and uniforms. But not only that, she put herself out there, sharing herself and caring for me and my family. One time when I felt like quitting while living at the mission, she told me that she would not allow it. She told me that she believed in me and that I had to finish what I was sent to do. She held me accountable. Her warm, compassionate personality and genuine caring for me kept me in school.

The writing interest was supplemented and nurtured by two awesome professors, Mary Tyler and Ronnie Jewell. I was waiting to get back into a med-surg class when a creative writing class had one opening. Before I got there, it was filled. But I begged Ms. Tyler to let me in, that it was my only chance to do this and I wanted it more than anything. She let me in, providing I worked hard and wrote what she asked. Ms. Tyler challenged me and taught me to write pieces I would not have chosen to write. Mr. Jewell also encouraged my creativity. I read texts I wouldn't normally choose, and he let me write with my imagination running on high.

The nursing program has got to be the best there is. It's hard to name just one instructor or adjunct here. Each and every one of them taught me something different. Each had a different style, some straightforward like Sue and Pam B; some took me under their wings like Barb and Pat. Others were fun loving like Wanda, Dennis, Pam G. and Sandy, some by the book like Mary, still others encouraging me to find my own style. I adopted a little from all of them, including others like Kathy, Ilene, the Chrises and Shae and many others. They all cared for me and my

progress, encouraging, and teaching along the way. When retaking a class, I was never made to feel like a failure but was encouraged and made to believe that I could succeed. With Pam Brown working for our program to keep it the best possible, Jodie handling all the student problems, the records, waiting lists, and top notch instructors, I have grown and developed as a person as well as a professional.



When I came here in 2003, I was a divorced, forty-nine year old who had brought her family out of abuse. I had no belief in myself and hardly knew who I was. I only knew that I was called to nursing, writing, and that I would be working with the abused. In this program, I've been nurtured, pruned, and had my rough edges smoothed.

During my years of education, I have had to live at the mission twice, had four grandbabies born, each with issues that required special care in the beginning, especially the twins. We almost lost the smaller one. I drove from Holland, to Grand Rapids, to Muskegon and back again at the end of a class or clinical day for two weeks. I have had to carpool, had three vehicles given to me to get through school, been allowed to live in an apartment without paying rent through finals at the end of the L.P.N. level and med-surg R.N. level, moved at least five times, and had to repeat two nursing classes. As I leave Muskegon Community College, I am a confident, educated nurse who will be certified as a S.A.N.E. nurse. Where I go from there, God alone knows.

Whatever it is that comes up to stop you, find a way around or through it. If you have the desire and truly want to be a nurse, there are people here who will help, encourage, and challenge you. A greatest joy in my career is when a patient I took care of squeezes my hand and thanks me for my care, or I see patients standing up for themselves for the first time, or a patient I advocated for, receives something needed for a discharge home.

As we step out into the world as graduates, we should thank each person who had a part of our journey in whatever capacity he or she helped. We should become the mentor, set the example for others, and encourage others in their progress. In whatever field we go into, we should strive to be that nurse, writer, teacher whom others look up to. I think that the best honor that any school or any person could wish for is to see a legacy passed on. When we graduate, it is not just our accomplishment, but it is the accomplishment of each person who had a part along the way.

*Rhonda Carlson*

## Consign To Oblivion

The worn, steel, metallic titans clashed in the ashes of the burnt city. Shell casings crashed through buildings and cracked concrete below. The clashing of metal scraped the crests on their bodies, logos of corporations that had once been countries. Clockwork cogs and pistons cried and blades and mortars clashed on shields of iron.

The two remaining monsters charged each other through smoldering wood and girders below. The heat of battle blew their gaskets, the cogs and pistons slowing to a soundless stop.

The torsos opened, and out crept soft creatures of flesh, hair, hands, and eyes; eyes that looked to one another with astonishment at a similar pair. Eyes that said more than any ammunition or clanging metal. The soft beings climbed down their titan's legs and sat, eyes locked, five feet from each other. After a silence, one of them lifted his hand, reaching out to touch the other.

“I forgot,” he said.

“We forgot,” said the other.

*Ken Porter*

## The Gift of Life

McDonald's essay, "A View from the Bridge" is a poignant reminder of how precious life is. He describes his encounter with a young lad, fishing on a bridge, during his morning jog. The boy was rather scruffy looking, wearing a pair of wrap-around sunglasses. The young lad calls McDonald for help in finding his dropped shrimp bait. Wanting to ignore the boy, but unable to, the annoyed McDonald stops to help him. A dialogue between McDonald and the boy ensued, and it was during the time when the boy caught a fish that it became apparent that the young lad was blind. McDonald, realizing this, changed his attitude from annoyance to kindheartedness. He described the fish to the boy by telling him that the fish's length was about the size of his arm, its scales were rough like armor, and how the sun made the scales shine like glitter when he jumped out of the water. Releasing the fish back into the lake, the boy thanked McDonald for helping him see the fish, to which McDonald replied, ". . . No, my friend, thank you for letting me see that fish" (122).

McDonald's essay reminded me of a time when I was unable to see how precious life really is. This was true until I helped with a camp called "Special Days Camp," a camp devoted to children with leukemia and cancer. My mother told me it would be a good experience to be a counselor at Special Days Camp. At seventeen years of age, I wasn't so sure of it, but I agreed to look into it further. When I went to the orientation meeting, I was hooked. The guy counselors were so cute! And besides, there was free pizza, horse-back riding, hot air balloon rides, and a weekend off between sessions. Upon my arrival at camp, I learned that I was assigned to be a counselor for the teen girls, along with another counselor, Rebecca. The night before the children arrived, we became familiar with the campground, the daily routines, cautionary procedures, and learned a few new camp songs around the campfire that night. We became familiar with each other's names and personalities, bonding to each other as if we had been friends for years. Rebecca and I were a bit nervous being counselors to teenagers but figured we could handle it.

The day the children arrived was rather confusing, as most of us were still learning the layout of the campground. Because of this, we led a few campers to the wrong cabin, or took a longer route than necessary to the correct cabin. Overall, it was fun seeing all of the new faces, but especially our teens' excitement to get away from the watchful eyes of "Mom and Dad." We had a total of six teen girls; some were shy and some rather assertive in their ways. The girls ranged in ages from thirteen to fifteen with various stages of

cancer. Only one of our campers was “cancer-free,” having been in remission and off treatment for the last three years. The others were noticeably battling cancer with bald heads, edema from the medication, and pallor. However visible their cancer was, their attitude and energy permeated the cabin showing us they were truly teenagers, eager to meet “the boys” in the other cabins. Rebecca and I introduced ourselves and set a few ground rules for their safety. We got to know one another and had a few laughs with each other. I could tell it was going to be a great week.

Our first day together was spent attending various sessions which the girls had signed up for. We rotated through archery, swimming, horseback riding, the ropes course, nature center, and crafts, stopping for lunch at the mess hall and a short rest afterwards. During this time, I was able to observe the other campers, noticeably battling various forms of cancer. I was seeing the cancer in the kids, not the kids with cancer. I was visually struck by the effects of cancer, the unfairness of cancer, the uncertainty of cancer. What I was not seeing, was that these kids battling cancer were simply ordinary children with the same questions, worries, and concerns, along with the insatiable appetite to experience life as other healthy children. Just as McDonald’s eyes were opened by a young, blind boy, my eyes were opened by the children at Special Days Camp. I began to see them not as kids with cancer, but as children wanting to experience camp life. I saw the children laugh, cry, and tease one another. I saw them make mistakes, learn from them, and grow from them. My eyes began to see the children, not the cancer that so viciously attacked their bodies. And as my eyes began to open, so did my attitude and outlook on life. I began to see that life is truly a gift waiting to be opened. These special, precious, and dear children helped me to see the choices you have before you when you open your gift of life. You can experience opening your gift ever so carefully, taking all sorts of precautionary measures—or you can rip your gift open and experience all that you can out of it. True, life is short sometimes, but how you choose to experience living your life is what counts. So, please, come join me; dig in and enjoy life!

*Pamela Williamson*

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*Photo by Kimberly Page*

## Big House/Big Heart 5k-10kRun

I am running on the Eye Bank of Michigan team and in memory of my son Zachariah. This event is taking place at the University of Michigan's football stadium. The start is just outside the stadium, and the finish is on the fifty yard line. The course goes throughout the campus. The funds from this event support heart research and the Motts Children's Hospital. I have a lot of memories here and called the campus home for several weeks in 2003. Zachariah had open heart surgery at three months of age in the Motts Children's Hospital.

Leaving from home at four a.m. to make the three hour drive to Ann Arbor allows for some thinking time. My emotions again seem to be overwhelming due to the whole reason I am here. I notice the huge football stadium and all the renovation work that has been done since my last visit here. I am observing the age groups of people here, still in disbelief at how many people are walking to the start line. While warming up for the race, I can't help but notice all the volunteers and police workers along the first half mile of the course. This is very impressive to me, how so many people can come together on a cold Sunday morning and volunteer their time for a great cause.

Jogging to the start line, I hear the small talk of the people around me, the sounds of the announcer thanking sponsors, giving directions of sign up and start times. I hear the announcer introducing the guest speakers and the speeches to be given. I listen very closely to the introduction of a man who is pushing a running jogger without his son in it, because he passed away a few months ago. This gets to my heart. I am very emotional here. I hear the national anthem playing and the tears are coming down my face. I am remembering Zach and that I am running in his memory. I can hear him making noises in my mind. During the national anthem, I say a prayer before the race and I am praying that Zach be with me throughout this race.

The final moment to go to the start line has come. I take my place in the front row on the line. I take one last look at the "Live Strong" wristbands I am wearing. The left wrist is Zach's band, and on the right

wrist is my personal band. The bottom side reads “Zachariah.” Placing my right hand on the picture of Zach on my chest, I take a deep breath and look to the sky for one last thought of Zach. The announcer calls the runners to the start line, and then the ten second countdown begins. The gun goes off, and I run the first quarter mile as if I am being chased by a vicious dog. I am running with the first place runner for the first mile and then the second. My mile times are so good for me that I am excited, but something is going wrong with me physically in the third mile. I feel as though the excitement and emotions have caused me to have some trouble breathing, like an anxiety attack. I say to myself, “Zach I need you now, I need strength.” Now we are at mile four, and I am in third place. I am getting my strength back and running fast again. I am passed by several runners during this mile and feel discouraged but continue to push on. I am coming to the fifth mile; I am now fighting to stay in the top ten. I tell myself that I will not finish outside of the top ten. I am running in the final mile with the same strength I had in the first. I’m glad to feel so strong. I pass one of the runners who passed me earlier. I enter the sports complex area and know my geographical position very well at this point. I have just a short distance now before I enter the Big House.

I am running the final fifty yards of the race; it seems like an eternity to the finish. Just feet before the finish, I touch the picture of Zach on my chest, kiss my hand and point to the sky. I say, “This one’s for you buddy.” I run through the finish line and find a chair to sit in to cry. I let the emotions go free. I finish in ninth place, and I am the highest placer on the Eye Bank of Michigan Team. I also am first place in my age group and am very happy with the honor I have given Zach. The University of Michigan is a place where we spent many days and hours together, so this is the perfect place to honor and remember him. I really have a hard time leaving the stadium; I stay a little bit longer to bask in the whole moment, knowing I will never forget this day.

*Bob Bates*



*Photo by Kimberly Page*

## A Pink Elephant on Christmas Day

For those of us who were growing up in a Christian family under the veil of communism, Christmas was a very important, but secret, holiday. My brother and I would skip classes on Christmas Day; somehow we would always get “sick” that day and not be able to go to school. Secretly, with our parents and all our extended family, we would go to the midnight mass in my grandma’s village. We didn’t have Christmas presents because under communism the custom was to give presents to each other for the New Year. The Christmas tree was actually a New Year’s tree, and somehow there would always be a strong red communist color on or around the Christmas tree-- I mean “New Year’s tree.” On Christmas Day, we would have fun with family and friends. In the morning we spent time with family, enjoying a big fat lunch together full of roasted pork, sarme (stuffed cabbage rolls), potatoes, soup of course (because “there’s no good meal without a soup” according to my mom), fresh homemade bread, cookies, cakes and more cookies. In the afternoon we would usually spend time with friends, enjoying the beautiful sunny weather, going for a walk on the beach or spending a serious amount of time at coffee shops while wearing our best clothes and looking sharp.

Christmas like that existed till the early nineties. Then it wasn’t the same anymore. One day my uncle, on his trip from Germany to Croatia, never reached his final destination. He went missing. My dad told me that my uncle had left his apartment in Germany and called his family to tell them he was taking a flight that day to come back to be with them. He put his key in the lock and left his apartment, but that’s where his trace disappears. My family never heard what happened to him; there was just silence on the other side of the wire. Silence. Empty silence.

Police, detectives, and people in black suits with black ties were looking for him, trying to figure out the twilight zone that we were in, but there was not an exit to our labyrinth. This was the first time Christmas was different. The Berlin Wall had come down; my brother and I didn’t need to be sick anymore on Christmas Day. The roads to midnight mass

were open, but for my family it was a different Christmas. We tried to pretend that everything was okay. My family continued to put up the Christmas tree, and we even put some presents under the tree, but the jingle bells didn't have the same jingle anymore. We knew that someone was missing.

In my grandma's house, the smell of stale confusion was covering the smell of fresh baked cookies, and instead of her joyful look, her face was a little bit different this year. She often stared at the wrinkles on her hard working hands, mumbling some quiet prayers that were never answered. Sometime around Christmas, we, as a family, learned a new family game. We learned how to dance around the "big pink elephant" and pretend that we didn't see it. Everyone, somehow, by some secret sign, moved perfectly around the elephant, trying not to wake it up from its deep sleep. Everyone was dancing, including me, not realizing how this was creating a big dent in our lives.

A year after that, and the year after that, and all the other years that have followed, Christmas became a big charade with the same reminders of the equation without an answer. It became a perfect dance to avoid the pain and sorrow that came from missing a very important person in our family.

So, why don't I like Christmas? It brings, on the surface, questions that are haunting me and my whole family even today. Where is my uncle? Will closure ever come? Will we ever find out what happened to him? It is too painful around holidays; it is easy to just skip them and work those days. But now that I have my own family and am married to someone who is a big fan of Christmas, it makes me reevaluate what I want my family to remember about Christmas. Over the last few years, I have been creating a new beginning with Christmas, and I am on the journey with Charlie Brown in search of its true meaning.

*Joško Vukušić*

# III

## THE DARK SIDE



*Photo by Emily Koebel*

## The Scam of a Life Time

“So what do we do now?”

“We wait,” Jonah said.

“Well how long is that going to take?” The fog was getting thicker to the point where you couldn’t see the full moon anymore.

“I don’t know Kelly! All I know is we were supposed to come here at 10 p.m., drop the money off, and then wait!”

“We really should have Stew leave. He shouldn’t be involved.”

“What a great idea Kelly! Have Stew leave, and then we won’t have a car!”

The window was getting foggy from the heavy breathing in the car. I wiped the window with the sleeve from my shirt to get a clear view of the road. “I keep going through people in my head, thinking of who it could be. One person seems to be sticking out...”

Jonah looked at me. Dead stare, nothing else. “You think this is my wife?”

Tears were filling my eyes now. This is so screwed up. “I did not say that, Jonah! It’s just a huge possibility.”

“I don’t think she would plan this out.”

“Now you’re sticking up for her? Jonah, if you want to be with her then be with her.”

Jonah grabbed my hand. “I’m not sticking up for her, Kelly. I’m sorry if it seems that way. I’m under a lot of stress...”

“Jonah, stop. There is no reason to explain. I can only imagine what’s going through your head right now. This campaign means everything to you. I’m so sorry we’re in this mess.”

“You’re sorry?” He paused and took a deep breath. “Kelly, this is not your fault. I’m the one who said “yes” to the date. I’m the one who called you. I got us in this mess, and I’m going to get us out.”

I wanted to believe him, but whoever had the picture of us together wasn’t going to give in very easily. This campaign will determine the rest of his life. “Okay, if it’s not your wife... maybe it’s Mayor Lockwood?”

“No, he’s a good friend.”

“Yes, but he is also your competitor, babe.”

“I know, but still there’s no way.”

“Okay, whatever you say, Jonah.” It’s now 10:45 and the fact that we’re in the middle of nowhere isn’t helping my nerves. The road is pitch dark. The only time it actually lit up is when a car drove by every 20 minutes. “Jonah, I want you to know that whatever happens tonight, I don’t regret any of our time together.”

“I know Sweetheart, I feel the same exact way.” Jonah took my hand and squeezed it. “I love you, Kelly.”

“I love you, too, Jonah. I do, I really do.” We held hands in silence for awhile. Not talking at all, only thinking. About the campaign, our future, even the next fifteen minutes. My mind wouldn’t stop telling me this could all end tonight. The last amazing four months could have been for nothing. But I refused to let myself think that any longer. “Jonah, its 11:15, I think it’s time to go.”

“You know? I think you’re right. Whoever is doing this, isn’t wasting my time anymore.”

I couldn’t help but smile. He was picking me, and that felt

amazing. As we were about to pull out onto the road, a car came around the corner and was about two inches from hitting the limo. “What the hell! Who is that?”

“That’s the person with the picture.” Jonah’s hair was standing on end. His nerves were getting to him. “Let’s just wait in the car and see what happens.”

The car in front of us flashed the bright lights. “Jonah, I think they want us to get out. You have the money my father sent you, right?”

Jonah looked over at me, looked down by his feet, and then looked back at me. “Yes, the 2 million is in my brief case.” Jonah grabbed his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat off his face. “Let’s get out now.”

As we were making our way out of the car, so was the person across from us. I grabbed Jonah’s hand and squeezed it, he squeezed back. The bright lights from both cars were causing me to close my eyes. I let Jonah lead; I couldn’t see at all. “Jonah, what’s happening?” He didn’t reply. After we moved to the side of the cars, I opened my eyes. There stood a big tall guy I didn’t recognize. “Jonah, who is that?” Still no reply.

“Mr. Jonah Winslow, we finally meet.” The big tall guy finally spoke. “I believe you have my client’s money.”

Jonah and I exchanged glances. “Your client? Who is that?” Jonah straightened his stance.

“My client will make himself known in time, Jonah. Now the money.” The big tall guy reached out his hand toward the brief case. I still held on to Jonah’s hand.

“Give me the picture first, or no money.” The wind was picking up now. Jonah would have to talk louder.

“You know? For a future State Senator, you’re not very smart. Give me that money, or I will make sure you never come close to your place as Senator.”

Jonah tossed the brief case at the man's feet. He was crushed. He gave up the fight. "We'll get the picture back, Jonah." But as I said that simple sentence, the man got back into the black Mercedes. Jonah fell to his knees as I followed him. "I'm so sorry, Honey, so sorry" As I was cradling Jonah in my arms, I heard him laugh. "Jonah?" I said.

"You stupid bitch!" I looked up to find a female coming out of the car. "Get your hands off my husband."

"Hey, Baby." Jonah rose to his feet, grabbed his wife's face, and kissed her. "What took you so long?"

"Oh, you know me. I had to find the perfect outfit." She stood over me, looked down, and then she spit. "You're so gullible, Kelly."

"I don't understand. What is going on?" My voice was shaking, along with every one of my limbs. "Jonah, please. Tell me this is a lie. You love me."

"Actually Kelly, I never loved you." There was that laugh again. "You make me sick, to be honest. I had to force myself to be with you."

"But we made love and talked about marriage." I was still sitting in dirt. I looked like a fool, but there wasn't much I could do.

"Yea, don't remind me. I might just gag." He turned to his wife and whispered something in her ear. "Thanks for the money, Kelly. It's really going to come in handy. But now you have to go."

I stood up now, being as tough as I could. "What are you going to do, Jonah, kill me?"

"No." He simply answered. "But..."

His wife lifted her arm in the air. "I am."

*Shelby Shavalier*

## See Her Dance

See my Strings,  
Watch me Dance  
oh it's such a Wonderful Dance,  
a Wonderful Existence  
on these Strings. The only thing  
that Connects me  
to You.

You hold me up High, Dangle  
me Down to Your Feet, then pull  
me back up again. these Strings  
that I love because they are the only  
Connection to You.

I Fly in this number, High above your Head  
without ever touching Your Heart.  
You Control me with Your Hand; without it,  
I am Dead.  
this Dance has been the same since the start

I Spin round and round, Waiting  
for the next Command  
coming down from those tiny Strands,  
this brief Contact.

I Crave it.  
an Addiction.  
the love I feel is Real,  
Pounding through my Heart  
with every Tug and Pull.  
I Smile with fear for the day  
You get Tired and Cut these simple  
Strands that Bind me  
to You.

the only thing keeping us Separate  
but Connected  
are these Simple  
Strings

I am a Puppet to my Master

*Nikki Foster*

## Hot Flashes

Man with a match. Thinking. How easy is it to strike it against the small cardboard package it comes with? He sets the gasoline down on the floor. It reeks of pleasure. He looks around and wonders if anyone is upstairs sleeping. He grins. Not for long.

Fireman playing cards at the fire station. He thinks about how the bell rang not too long ago. He thanks the taxpayers for being able to afford two teams of firemen. He can't help looking up at the bell, though. It isn't unusual for two fires in a night. Especially recently. He knows something is up and hopes the cops figure out what's going on.

Chief Inspector in a car. Travelling fast and hard. Going so fast he forgot to turn on the lights. He flips the switch. Sirens ring off, travelling far and loud. Can't help but to be worried. It's the 9th one this week. I need to catch this asshole. That's all he can ever think about anymore. Even neglects the stack of easy work that keeps piling up on his desk in favor of this case. He looks out the window for a quick second and sees the smoke rising in the distance. Almost there.

Old woman in a rocking chair. She filters her hands through her curly gray hair. The light flickers. It's been doing that all day. She sighs and gets out of her chair to fix it. She wishes her son were here. He knows how to fix just about anything. It was his job. After all, he was a handyman. Poor Dave. He graduated from college with a Bachelor's in Computer Science and couldn't even find a decent job, at least not one that he could keep. He blamed the economy. She can't help but think it was something more.

Teenager walking late at night with his girlfriend. Or maybe his girlfriend. He doesn't know what they are. All he knows is he likes her, she kisses him, and as long as she keeps doing that, he doesn't see any problems. Maybe he'll ask her if they want to go to the next level tonight. Be a couple or something. Then maybe something more will happen. More than making out. Feels his body responding to the thought.

“Are you listening to me?” she says.

He thinks, “No,” but responds, “Yeah, every word, Babe,” and then continues to think about his previous thought as she rambles on. He looks at the houses as

they pass. Notices a dark shadow in one. Next house.

Man strikes a match and watches it burn to the tips of his fingers. Feels good. Everything about it. The warmth. Even the burns on the edges of his fingers. Again. Again. His heart pounds. He lets the matches fall onto the floor, watching as the remnants shrivel in a cloud of gray. He walks around the house, looking at everything that could ever burn. The couch and drapes in the living room, the hand towels and plastic shower curtain in the bathroom, the wood doors in the hallway, the fruit and wooden bowls in the kitchen. Ah, yes, kitchen. He checks the stove. Gas. All the more satisfaction.

The fireman wins his game of solitaire. He's pleased with himself. It has been awhile since he has won at anything. He takes a glance at his watch. 11:43. Something seems wrong. It normally doesn't take this long for the other fire to start. Then again, why is he complaining? This is a good thing. Maybe they finally caught the bastard.

Why can't I catch this Bastard? thinks the inspector, pulling across the street from the fire. Over twenty years of experience, a solid rate of tracking down the criminals at ninety five percent, and this is the one he can't find. Don't even know what he looks like. The Fire Bandit. Good god, it's gotten to the point where the media has even named the perp. He feels the shame ascend from his stomach into his chest. Takes a look at the fire. It smoldered from the roof. Worse than what was described to him over the phone. Accelerant use is apparent.

Man in the fire. Lying on his stomach. A beam overhead crashes and the cherry desk that was in his bedroom above now finds a place in the dining room. He cowers closer to the wall. There's no way to escape. The sirens outside shrill as he begins to hope water starts pouring in soon. Can't take the sulphuric smell. It's making his head get woozy. No. Not yet. Don't pass out yet. I need to tell them what he looks like.

The old woman sits back in her rocking chair. Her son's on her mind. She just wishes he could catch a break for once. A degree from a major university and all he had to show from it was a \$50,000 debt and a new mattress in the basement. She thinks about this morning, their conversation over eggs and coffee. "When are you going to get a job?"

"I don't know, Mother."

“You need to.”

“You don’t think I’m trying? I’ve been looking everywhere!”

“Where?” And then he walked out the door. He was mad, she knew, but what could she do? All she wants is the best for him, and sometimes being pushy has its effects.

Man decides he’s stalled enough. He grabs the can of gasoline and pours it over everything in sight. Wonders if he has enough for this house. Shouldn’t have used so much on the last. Ends up in the hallway. There’s a mirror. Stares at his reflection. Sees himself. It melds. It’s not just himself anymore. Gray curls form on his bald head. His face morphs, sags. He tries to smile but there’s nothing happy about the thin, dark red lines his lips have become. His fists clench and he shouts but doesn’t know what. He lobs gas onto the mirror. Watches it streak down. Strikes the match, throws it at the mirror. Watches the face melt.

Teenager grabs the girl’s hand. She slides his fingers between hers and rubs her shoulder against his. He pushes her back to get her off. “My shoulder hurts,” he lies. He can’t stop thinking about her. He takes a glance behind, watches her ass as she walks. She asks him what he’s looking at back there. Lies again. A squirrel. Or something like that. She asks what he wants to do. “We can go back to my place if you want. My parents are gone for the night.” This is it. If she says “yes,” then he knows she likes him like he likes her. She smiles, bites her bottom lip like she’s thinking about it. “Come on, Babe. We can watch some TV,” he cajoles.

“I don’t know, Brad, it doesn’t sound like a good idea,” she responds, her eyes slowly shifting over his head. They widen. “Brad, look, over there. A fire! Let’s go check it out!”

He curses his luck. If I can wait sixteen years, I can wait another half hour.

The bell rings – a fire. He knew it. It was like a reflex: the fireman hops out of the chair and puts on his gear. It takes him a few seconds tops. He’s had practice. Everyone else is ready, too. They hop into the truck, and it bolts out the door.

The man in the fire realizes there is little hope. He thinks about the guy who set his house on fire. He was bald. No older than thirty. Fit. Wearing dark clothes. And that grin as he splashed liquid onto him. It smelled strong like octane. He had barely enough time to jump as the match struck the floor, igniting everything.

He was spared from the fire spreading onto him. Just one touch from the flames and he knew he was done. "Why?" He remembers yelling through the roaring of the fire. "Because," he heard as the response. "Because it's fun." A spark of fire flies dangerously close to his sleeve.

Dave makes his way out of the house. Proud of his work. It's a masterpiece. Feels calm. Relaxed. But his finger starts to throb from the burn earlier. Hears the sirens a few streets over. Time to go and examine his handiwork.

The old woman turns on the television. It's the late night news. Breaking story, new development, two fires underway this evening, and the mass arsonist known as the Fire Bandit is believed to be the offender. She turns it off. It's too depressing, and it reminds her of her son, Will. He died in a fire a few years back. She wishes he were here. She misses him. He was going somewhere in life. There was the troublesome childhood, but he cleaned himself up. He had two degrees and was working towards a doctorate. Successful career, schooling, was married. He was everything Dave is not. Not a bad thing she reminds herself every now and then. But couldn't he be a little bit more like Will? She looks at the clock. It is getting late. Time for bed.

Inspector watches as they douse the house. It can't be saved. Hopefully no one was inside. It'll be a miracle if someone survived that. There is just too much damn smoke. His phone rings. He answers it. Another one? One street over? He's getting more and more dangerous the longer he isn't found. Just then two teenagers from the crowd of spectators point a street over and exclaim, "Another fire!"

The fireman makes it to the new fire. He sees the lights just one street over. It looks pretty contained now. But this one is just getting bad. Good thing they got here when they did. He attaches the hose and lets it go. The water drenches the house. He glances over a bald man walking through the backyard of the house who's fire he is trying to extinguish. Odd.

Man watches his creation dwindle and finally die out. The firemen make their way inside, looking for anything. There won't be anything. It's perfect. They come out and call the paramedics. They enter and come back out a few minutes later. With a gurney. He scowls. How the hell did he survive? He looks down at his victim. Unconscious. "What a shame," he says, and a teenage girl he has never seen before agrees and calls it a tragedy. The ambulance drives off.

The Inspector makes his way around the spectators. "Have you seen anyone

recently outside? Anyone suspicious?” he asks as many people as he can. A teenage boy says he thought he saw someone earlier in a house, but he can’t be too sure what house it was, and besides, it could have been the owner, so maybe it wasn’t suspicious. Lets them go. They don’t need to be brought back to the station. Too circumstantial, and it wouldn’t ever lead to anything. He curses his luck. Seems like the Fire Bandit got away again.

The teenagers walk home, passing by the other fire that is dying down. They look at the firefighters working, decide they are tired. She’s coming home with him she says. All she talks about is the fire all the way to his house. Brad doesn’t care. All he thinks about is what’s going to happen in ten minutes when they get inside his room.

The old woman turns off the lights and starts to make her way up the stairs when the door opens. She turns. “You scared me, Dave.” He smells of smoke.

“Hey Ma,” he responds.

“Where were you?” she asks.

“I was out.”

“Were you safe?”

“I’m home, aren’t I?”

“Are you okay from this morning? You rushed out without saying anything.”

“Yeah, I feel a lot better now.” He hangs up his coat without a single glance at her.

“Good. I’m going to bed now. I’ll see you in the morning, Dave.”

“Night, Ma.” He goes to his room, she to hers.

She lies in her bed on her side, unable to sleep, staring at the phone. It has gone on long enough. He’ll never be like Will. Should she call?

*Tyler Carlson*

## Joker

he got inside your head  
like pieces of sand  
infecting every inch  
and every space within

he seeped through your frontal lobe,  
overtaking your personality,  
you took him into you,  
evoking his spirit

his madness transmitted  
through your synapses, molding  
your gray-matter into shades  
of purple and green

that smile, frozen on your face--  
the scars became your own  
under that smeared makeup--  
was now a mask you wore to bed  
and even there, he tormented you

in your dreams it was worse;  
that laugh haunted you,  
pulled you from peaceful dreams,  
plunged you into the darkness

of your nightmares  
jumping out of it

soaked in sweat  
stumbling to the bathroom  
to splash water on your face  
the burning sting of the black  
running in your eyes  
that's when you see it in the mirror  
the reflection you cast  
is not the face of William Thatcher  
nor the fair Patrick Verona  
but the twisted face of  
The Joker staring back at you

that morning they found you  
flat on your bed  
pills in hand

your final escape from him

*Nikki Foster*

# IV

## LOVE LOST & HERE TO STAY



Kimberly Page March 2011

*Photo by Kimberly Page*

Emily Koebel

## Copycat Kidnap

I may not be  
a poet but if  
it counts, I am  
a dreamer so  
I am entitled to  
kidnapping you and  
crossing state lines or  
stealing to Mexico among  
the other criminals. But  
I think I'll dream us  
into a convertible  
top down winding around  
corners like we are trying  
to escape the moon  
light or on the backs of  
horses galloping through  
the desert with your red  
hair unable to catch  
up with our race to the sun  
set. Maybe I will dream up  
a field of forget me  
nots I can lay  
you down in to  
spout clichés and  
maybe then I'll dream us  
into the sheets of my  
bed where I can  
finally release you  
and you won't  
leave

*Meg McCarthy*

## Love Poem

In a place where we lived  
to perpetuate each night, I'd breathe in  
every moment and hold it in for hours.  
I'd lie next to your head and measure  
each feature of your face. I'd memorize  
your eyes, as green as shallow  
ends of the foamy sea.  
Your tongue was always as sweet as sugar  
dripping with distain, and cool  
like the chill of autumn. Lovely was that bent  
member, like an inverted archway to heaven,  
and I'd die in that lap a thousand times before  
I'd recognize the arms that you slept in;  
that were strange to me.  
Yet you'd return, and I'd welcome you,  
to take refuge in an entanglement  
of our sheets, because we were perfect there.  
Timeless. And on some endless road in Iowa,  
one late Monday evening, your race  
against time ended with a head-on collision;  
the day you left all other arms for mine.  
How lucky was I to almost have you.  
Now the bantering of the clock is endless  
as the hands stand still. Your pillow is cold  
and the fabric released the remnants  
of your fragrance. I rest my head alone.

A stone lies above your head;  
as black and cold as the coal  
that'll become your perfect  
bones – those crooked teeth, your strong  
chin, that prominent chest – long after  
your name is forgotten. The only memory  
left through the echoes of the ages  
will be the apathetic lettering engraved  
on that stone. And while I rest  
in the empty arms of your shirt,  
you're cradled in an eternal sleep  
in the dusty arms of the earth.

*Samantha Drakos*

## How Deep Engraved into the Snow

Your feet which once roamed these woods  
I follow the prints down toward the church  
where we said our vows, "till death do we part"  
But this is not the case  
for in my heart you live  
In my mind you run  
Your footprints are my guide to bring forth  
a new day

Around our house filled with light and glow  
your footprints are everywhere in the snow  
My love for you is all around  
For in the sky you may be  
and to the earthly places I may go  
but the space between us cannot matter  
For as I walk to the high school where we met  
a pair of footprints is near me so I can't forget

I brought you breakfast to our bedroom  
Kissed those cheeks as pale as roses  
We both knew this time would come  
and even though you believed  
you were too sick to be beautiful  
Beauty, True Beauty  
is what you'll always be

I get by just fine by looking out the  
living room window  
where your footprints always find their way  
Home.

*Tyler Burt*

## Ghost Flowers

Send me ghost flowers  
to put upon my grave  
till time fades  
and only pleasure remains

We'll watch others wilt  
watch them die  
but ours will never decay

Forever transparent  
Forever bloomed  
ghost flowers mailed  
in times of gloom

they plant the seed of happiness  
way down in our core  
spreading love through the veins  
Toxic to the pain  
the poison started flowing out  
oozing from the wounds  
the wounds that never seemed to heal

ghost flowers came  
to put upon my grave  
till time fades away  
and only you and I remain  
Untamed.

*Nikki Foster*

## just for tonight

your fingers twist  
in my spiraled burgundy hair  
you press to my back  
the venetian red satin sheets  
all tousled with the blankets  
on the cherry red wood floor

the sunlight breaks  
through the blinds  
biting at the darkness  
ending that lucid night  
our only night  
our little secret, kept  
between these two Venetian red  
satin sheets

you pull me closer then spin  
me to face you  
with morning caught  
in your hair  
a smile with closed eyes is my first  
sight of the day

your emerald eyes flutter open  
to meet my own crystal  
cerulean eyes, you're beautiful  
in the morning  
you say forcing my cheeks  
to rise and redden like a rosebud  
which opens into a deep scarlet  
my crimson lips part  
a slight bashful smile escapes them

we lie there and stare  
into each other  
the night clings  
to the crevasses  
of these tangled, matted red sheets  
i don't want the day to come, can't it stay  
night, let the nightingale  
sing again

but the second it leaves your lips  
i know that can never be  
once the sun  
peaks over the horizon  
the rays lunging toward us  
and we rise setting our feet  
on the cold damp floor  
our night is done  
it must stay  
between those two sheets

i move to the edge  
of the bed but you drag me back,  
back into your arms whispering  
stay a little longer  
don't end the magic  
just yet

but it's too late  
the sun has chased away  
all the darkness, finding its way  
into every inch, every crevasse  
of these once red satin sheets  
the night and all its illusions are dead.  
i pull free  
plant my feet  
to the floor  
  
it's gone already

*Nikki Foster*

## Phoenix

My heart is a phoenix. You've burned  
a hole through my pulsing muscle.  
It crisps to blackened cells,  
dead flesh like prey's carcass in the ash.

Do you remember  
you walked out on me last night,  
the red wine stained  
on the white tablecloth,  
dripping slowly onto the floor?

My core swallowed in flames,  
I clenched my chest, feeling the final  
fiery beat.  
Did you feel the fire too?

I stay up at night  
devoid of a pulse, death, my love.

In the morning,  
I hear the knock, knock, knocking  
at my door.  
You stand there, and we both shed  
our red feathers and I hear the bird  
crow with resurrection.  
My heart is your phoenix.

*Tyler Carlson*



# Muskegon Community College



*Photo by Kimberly Page*