Voices: On Stage and In Print, 2009
Utah State University Department of English

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This anthology of student work is a collection of winning essays from Voices: On Stage and In Print, a writing contest hosted by the Writing Program at Utah State University.

Voices celebrates the writing of students enrolled in English 2010, Intermediate Writing. Each essay in this volume was selected as the best in class by the members of that class themselves.

An excerpt of each winning essay was read during a semi-annual celebration of winning essays held in Utah State’s premier performance venue, the state-of-the-art Manon Caine Russell Kathryn Caine Wanlass Performance Hall.

Voices recognizes excellence in writing from students of all backgrounds and fields of study, and though these essays cover many different styles of writing and a wide range of topics and interests, each captures one of the many ‘voices’ of the rising generation.
Voices
On Stage and In Print
2009

Editors
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Susan Nyikos

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Editors: John Engler, Susan Nyikos
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Preface

This anthology of student essays is the culmination of *Voices: On Stage and in Print*, a program of the Writing Program at Utah State University. Some 2000 students enroll in English 2010 classes each year during the fall and spring semesters, and the essays in this anthology are among those chosen as class winners by peers during the semi-annual *Voices* contest. These winners read excerpts from their essays at a public reading held at the end of each semester in the Manon Caine Russell Kathryn Caine Wanlass Performance Hall on the USU campus. Some were awarded cash prizes; some are published in this anthology.

We who teach writing, we who know the role of writing both in academia and in the workplace, are passionate about creating opportunities for students to develop an appreciation for the power of words, of research, creation and persuasion. *Voices*, including the publication of this anthology, makes that a tangible reality.

The contest is meant to add a little fun and a little incentive to students’ writing, but there is reason and pedagogical underpinnings to the experience as well. *Voices* reinforces the following USU Citizen-Scholar objectives:

1. Being an integral part of every student’s experience. Because English 2010 is the only course required for all USU undergraduates, this contest, reading, and anthology can reach nearly every student on campus.

2. Expressing and communicating through a variety of media. Students learn how the words on paper translate into speech, and undergraduates of any discipline have the chance to publicly present their own work.

3. Helping students develop intellectually, personally, and culturally. Students personally experience a live, fine arts reading by peers in a first-rate venue.

4. Listening and viewing for comprehension. The reading creates not only a unique visual and auditory experience, it gives students the chance to hear examples of great writing, reinforcing instruction received during the semester.

5. Developing a capacity for self-assessment. All students assist in determining the best essays in their class, furthering their opportunity to engage in self-assessment.

6. Understanding the nature and methods of humanities and sciences. Competition, presentation, and publication are core methods of any profession. The contest and its awards increase the incentive to learn and to write well.
7. Communicating effectively to an audience. Not only can students visualize a real audience when writing, they can expect much cheering and applause from classmates when they take center stage.

8. Understanding diversity in value systems. To listen to a selection of student perspectives, well crafted and persuasive, allow students to gain a new appreciation for their peers’ perspectives.

The essays you find in this volume are as the students wrote them, with some light editing for mechanics. No attempt has been made to alter these essays for style or content. As such, each essay represents the viewpoint of its author and not the university, the English Department, or the editors. They were selected as winning essays by fellow students based on criteria set out by the instructors of each class.

Some are serious and others more humorous, some more research-oriented and some more narrative-based, but all of the essays contain strong elements of writing. All of the essays are likewise open for critique and discussion—they are by no means considered perfect. We hope that they will be analyzed and evaluated, perhaps as part of class or group discussions and perhaps individually to the degree that the successful aspects will be emulated and any weaker elements will be learned from.

The proceeds from the sale of this book are used to fund the *Voices* contest for this year, 2009-2010, including the use of the Performance Hall, the prize money, and the publication of the next year’s anthology. This way the contest remains self-funded each year without increasing student tuition or fees.

We want to extend our special thanks to the Writing Program Interns, Emily Flinders and Paul Malouf, who spent the whole year working with us. Their work and expertise has been invaluable.

John Engler
Susan Nyikos
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The Day I Joined a Baptist Choir
personal narrative

Kaylee Savage

Instructor: Robin Parent

It is the unexpected adventures that make life exciting for Kaylee. Finding herself as a surprised membe of a Baptist choir is one of the many fantastic experiences that have caught her wonderfully off guard. Kaylee grew up in Kaysville, Utah as the middle child in a family of five. She is an accomplished dancer and absolutely loves to play outside. Fall of 2009 will mark the beginning of her second year at USU as she continues her pursuit of a degree in graphic design. Until then, Kaylee can’t help but wonde what exciting adventures will unfold in the unpredictable future.

We stepped into a conference room cleared of all its chairs and tables. We were the first ones there. Our trip from Kaysville began early to be sure that we allotted enough time to get lost. Surprisingly, we found it just fine, a large prestigious-looking business building with “4Life” crisply displayed on the exterior. It was an odd place for a choir rehearsal. In fact, it was odd that an unheard-of nutrition company needed a choir in the first place. However, Mrs. Elkin’s email made it sound like it would be a pretty good time, so some of my Davis High buddies and I decided to volunteer. Apparently 4Life was going to have a conference in Salt Lake City and we, the 4Life choir, were going to provide the entertainment.

We paced aimlessly in the empty room. None of us were quite sure what to expect. There was no sign of a stereo, piano, or even a choir director. I was really hoping that we wouldn’t be the only ones to show up. Yes, we could all sing, but our numbers would make a pretty pitiful choir. Mrs. Elkins had said there would be others. Where were they? Just then, an animated group of people burst into the room. All of a sudden, the realization of what I was about to embark upon hurled me far from my element. My wish for more people had come true but I had never imagined it to be quite like this. The room rapidly shrunk as more and more bodies piled in. I had just discovered the missing piece to the 4Life choir puzzle. We were not going to be a part of any ordinary choir. No, my friends and I, the Davis High students who just put on Aida with an all-white cast, had just become the unsuspecting white-kid members of an all-black Baptist choir.
I chuckled to myself. I never quite envisioned myself in this position. This was definitely nothing near what I had expected. I figured that my friends and I would have been strung together with a bunch of other high school kids to sing a song about nutritional values or something that would boost the image of 4Life. Instead, I was flanked on both sides by two large black women who looked quite ready to sing gospel before the Lord. The room which was echoing with cheerful chatter quickly fell to a hush. “Thanks for coming everyone!” squeaked Mrs. Elkins. “This is going to be a real treat! I’d like to introduce someone to you. This is your choir director, B. Murphy.” A bald black man with an energetic smile stepped out in front of the crowd and gave a lively bow. He didn’t waste any time getting the practice started. “I need sopranos here, altos there, tenors over there, and do we have any basses? Good. You guys over there.”

I waited for B. to pass out sheet music. He didn’t. Instead he closed his eyes and expelled a loud, high note from his powerful lungs. I had no idea that a man could sing so powerfully at such a high pitch. “Sopranos, that’s your note,” he said. “You’ve got the melody.” Then he sang the first line of the song and instructed them to repeat it again and again. He was emitting perfect pitches, pitches you could tune an orchestra to. I had never heard of it. B. was about to teach an entire choir their parts solely by ear. He moved to the alto section, closed his eyes, gave us our note and then taught us the harmony. He did the same for the tenors and basses, expertly expelling an unbelievable range of flawlessly pitched notes. Once everyone had learned the first line, we all sang it a cappella in four-part harmony. We produced a strong well harmonized sound. “Good! Good!” Then B. taught us the second line of the song, going over it part by part and then moved on to the third line.

As the song progressed, it became more and more difficult to remember the harmony from the first few lines of the song. I felt as if I was trying to remember the directions to some unknown destination when what I really needed
was a map. We began to get off pitch and I could see that B. was not satisfied. His aim was perfection and we were dragging sorely behind.

The choir began the song again. “Hold it! Stop!” B. interrupted, “It doesn’t matter if you don’t know the notes. I don’t want to hear your pretty choir voices. This is the Lord’s choir! Sing from your center! Sing loud!” He pointed at me. “I want to hear you sing.” I froze. I felt everyone’s eyes on me. Whatever confidence I may have had vanished. I sang the line. B. shook his head disapprovingly. He stepped close to me, looked me in the face and sang the line with all the volume and gusto his lungs could muster. “That’s what I want to hear. Try again.” Oh, crap. B. wanted me to sing with more vigor and vim than I was prepared to put forth. I’m talking volume that could be heard beyond the halls of Montezuma. Shoot. Why me?

As much as I wanted to extend my hesitation, it was time to throw myself out there and hope that whatever came out of me was what B. was looking for. I filled my lungs with air and belted with all my might. “Lean on me! You can lean on me!” An instant grin illuminated B’s face. He howled with joy and ecstatically signaled me to continue as the rest of the room cheered. “Lean on me! You can lean on me!” Everyone began to clap energetically to the beat. The whole room swayed back and forth joining in harmony. “Lean on me! You can lean on me!” The rush was overwhelming. The women singing next to me sent me broad smiles and patted me on the back.

I saw the entire room swaying, clapping, singing, smiling together and enjoying the music we had created as a group. Suddenly, I no longer felt like “the white girl”. I was a contributor, a friend, a piece of the whole. All it took was a big push from B. and a little faith in myself. Together we sang on and on, pushing our lungs to the limit. “Lean on me, when you’re not strong and I’ll be your friend. I’ll help you carry on.”

**Works Cited**

Everybody’s Gotta Jump
personal narrative

Sam Abbott
Sam Abbott was raised in Orem, Utah. He is a junior majoring in Environmental Engineering. His interests include Telemark skiing, Indian food, street racing, four-square, daffodils, Brianna’s poppy seed dressing, and sweaters.

When I met poverty I wasn’t prepared. I was 19 and hadn’t left home more than a handful of times. And now, more than two years later, my mind still won’t let go of that word or of the meaning I saw behind it. It seems to press on me, pushing me, prodding me. The seven letters that spell poverty bring me the same guilt a boy who’s just peed in his pants feels. The word evokes a duty or responsibility that can’t be shirked once it’s heard. Meeting poverty is like jumping off a winter cliff into a frigid lake in Utah. The rush of the fall is exhilarating. The impact as you hit the water is shocking and painful. It’s nothing you can imagine before you are in it. Everything around you is different and threatening. You learn and experience things for the first time that are frightening and cold, and you have no other options because once you leave the cliff you can’t get back onto the dry ground. I experienced this jump. Here’s how I met poverty in Visak, a small coastal city in Southeast India.

The first time I visited the Dola family – Prasad the father, Lakshmi the mother, and their teenage children Ganesh, Ramakrishna, and Dwarka – I walked to the edge of the cliff and looked over. All five of the family members worked overtime, 7 days a week. Ganesh and his father delivered steel rebar to construction sites, Dwarka ironed clothing at a shop across town, Lakshmi cleaned and cooked for a middle class family, and Ramakrishna sold vegetables in the local market. They each walked 45 minutes or more across their dark, crowded, sweaty city to get home every night. I met Lakshmi often as she traveled home and even though she looked worn and damp, she answered my “How are you?” with a simple “Happy, very happy.” She was short and round. She was personable and outgoing. She smiled easily and often. She was totally contagious. The Dolas lived in a cold cement shack smaller than most janitorial closets. When it rained the tin roof rattled like loose change down a stainless steel staircase. Nights without rain were spent sleeping on
the dirt outside. Ramakrishna always said with an ivory grin, “It’s nicer sleeping outside… less hot and more stars.” He didn’t speak much English. He was the older of the two brothers and worked hard to earn his father’s respect. I never saw Ramakrishna with a shirt on except at church. His bare feet were flat and cracked from walking for years without shoes. He laughed at everything.

Dwarka was the youngest. She turned fourteen the fall I was in Visak. She had an optimistic attitude that didn’t match her dilapidated, dirty clothing. I played an unnamed game with her, where we would try to spot each other first as I approached her home. She won every time. After she saw me, I would run up her and shout a cheesy “Hello Family!!!” or a badly pronounced Telugu greeting, “Bangunnava!” Dwarka would always attract street dogs and give them celebrity names. She never touched them or fed them, but would tease them with her dress or a stick, or if she was lucky enough to find a ball she’d throw it for them to chase. She smiled like her mom. It was impossible, however, to ignore the brown color of her stained teeth. She chewed on a stick each day to clean her teeth—toothbrushes were not an option for the family. Whenever I left she would shout out the same thing. “Ok, Tata, Bye-bye, See-you!!!” And I’d yell it right back as loud as I could.

Ganesh was always rowdy. He got scolded often by his worrying mother and nagging sister. His favorite words were “Abbott, you’re looking ugly. Why so ugly ra?” He snuck into movie theaters to watch Bollywood films he couldn’t understand, and always commented on how pretty the actresses were. He didn’t eat very much. He had a desire to protect his family, and eating less rice meant more for his mom and sister. I never told him I knew he was hungry.

The day I first greeted Ganesh and felt how hard and calloused his hands were was the day I jumped from the cliff. I never imagined a human hand could feel like rough granite. They were hard and bent from his rebar job. I didn’t speak for several minutes. I felt my words couldn’t approach him. My life felt so thin and
vague in comparison to his. I hit the water and realized how cold and terrifying it was, and I wasn’t sure I’d ever be the same. He questioned me about my strange reaction but I said it was nothing.

Prasad, the father, was different from the rest of them. He was like tough beef jerky. Like tough, silent, beef jerky. He communicated without words. I would see him smile, but when he did it was tired and fleeting. He asked nothing of those around him. He provided what he could for his family. He hurt deeply when his family didn’t have food or when they were cold. He taught me what it means to be a father.

The Dola family didn’t allow their poverty to govern the way they lived. They didn’t know what the word even meant. They wouldn’t allow the world to tell them how to feel. They were happy. But they affected me terribly. When I began to watch them and experience this word, it was as if I burst to the surface of that frigid lake gasping for air. Life became fragile and important. I thought about the things I owned and what was important to me.

My truck is huge, and uses gasoline faster than a toilet flushes. I have an IPod that fits in my mouth and holds a million cyber songs to soothe me when I’m lonely. My sleeping bag cost 50 dollars, and I want to spend more for the one that looks fancier. I own a computer and an Xbox. My house has three floors full of empty rooms.

I struggle to sleep because these thoughts still pound my head two years later. The names and faces are now etched in my life. I heard the word, jumped, crashed into a different world, and I can never make it back onto the dry ground of ignorance. I’ve got to tread water shouting until my voice fails. I’ve got to get others to jump in. That’s the only way I can repay the Dola family.

This is how I met poverty. I didn’t expect to be so changed by it. I’ve been shocked by how powerful the word is. It’s not easy to meditate upon this one. It’s not pleasant or simple, or even totally understandable. But until I felt the hands of a man who worked so hard for a family he loved so much, I didn’t know life. Until I felt pure love from a family with nothing, I couldn’t love. Now I invite people to come see the cliff for themselves.

researched persuasive essay

Shae Torvert

Shae Torvert is a History Education Major with an English minor. She is from Brigham City, Utah. She enjoys reading, movies, volleyball, and writing. She is also a huge Aggie Basketball fan. Her biggest goals are to write a book and to see as much of the world as she can. Her favorite part about writing is the feeling she gets when she has written something really good—a feeling she has termed “writer’s high.”

“You are a bad person and everybody hates you. The world would be better place if you weren’t here.” As you struggle to read this final sentence of yet another hostile MySpace message, the tears in your eyes begin to cloud your vision. After a month of friendship, what has changed so suddenly that you are being tormented by a friend? You try in vain to wipe away the tears now dripping rapidly down your cheeks. Why shouldn’t you cry? After all, you aren’t worth anything. If only there was another way to escape this nightmare. It is everywhere.

For Megan Meier this was reality. After spending a difficult childhood fighting depression, low self-esteem, and a weight problem, she excitedly prepared for her fourteenth birthday. To make things even better, she received her first affectionate message ever from a boy named Josh Evans on her newly created MySpace account. For over a month he would send her messages claiming how lucky he was, and how beautiful her pictures were (“Megan Meier Story,” YouTube).

However, on Oct. 15, 2006, her MySpace relationship with Josh took a frightening turn. The next day, Megan came to her mother, Tina Meier, crying. Apparently, everyone was posting horrible things about her on MySpace, like “Megan is fat” or “Megan is a slut” (Meier, scr. 5). Angry that her daughter had not signed off when she was told, Tina showed only little sympathy for her daughter’s distress. Later, overcome by a horrible feeling while preparing dinner, Tina went upstairs to Megan’s room. She screamed at the top of her lungs as she found her daughter with a belt around her neck, hanging in her closet. Tina’s husband, Ron, ran into the room, pulled Megan down, and began CPR, all the while tears streamed
from Megan’s eyes. Sadly, it was too late; she was pronounced dead the next day (“Megan Meier Story,” YouTube).

The horrific situation in the first paragraph was not fiction. Following Megan’s death, this was discovered on her MySpace as the final posting by Josh, whom Megan had grown to adore. However, “Josh Evans” remained a mystery as his profile had been deleted. Approximately a month later, a neighbor informed Megan’s parents that “Josh Evans” was never a real person, and was, in fact, a creation by a woman living down the street from the Meier family. Not only was she a neighbor, she was also the mother of one of Megan’s former friends. What caused her to carry out this plan? The reasons are still debated by those familiar with the case. In the police report, this woman claimed she created “Josh Evans” as a means to obtain details regarding the failed friendship between Megan and her own daughter, as well as to gain Megan’s trust (“Megan Meier Story,” YouTube). But what began as a cruel ploy involving cyber-bullying, ended tragically.

During my first reading of Megan’s story, I began to recall traumatic bullying experiences from my life. When I was around twelve years-old, I was verbally bullied by another student in my class. Nearly everyday at school he would make fun of my clothes, hair, and my good grades. Though this is not an example of cyber-bullying, the anxieties and the self-doubt I took away from the situation has led me to be more wary of bullying today. During the period when I was bullied, the internet was still expanding throughout society. Most people I knew didn’t have internet access at home, thus it was considerably more difficult to bully a person online. Due in part to the development of the internet and other new technology, violence, like bullying, can be spread more quickly and easily.

With the creation of the Internet as a global unifier, age-old bullying has swelled beyond the schoolyard and penetrated into cyberspace. The internet in particular, is a venue for this new type of violence: cyber-bullying. It is extremely dangerous and has disastrous consequences, as illustrated in the story of Megan Meier. Thomas J. Billitteri, having written several articles concerning violence amongst youth, defines cyber-bullying as “the use of computers, cell phones, social-
networking sites and other technology to threaten or humiliate others” (“Cyberbullying,” par. 1). This is assuredly what cyber-bullying is, but what is it that causes adolescents and even adults to treat each other so horrifically online?

One cause of a person becoming a bully is the enormous pressure he or she endures nearly all of the time. If you could, would you relive your teenage years exactly as you did before? Most people would probably answer no to this question. Their reasons may vary, but chances are, all of the reasons probably lead back to pressure. Teenagers live under constant pressure, a lot of it being self-inflicted. They may feel pressure from teachers to get homework in on time, pressure from parents who desire their children to live up to standards they have set for them, and of course pressure from each other to look and act a certain way in order to be “cool” or “popular” (Billitteri, “Cyberbullying,” 4). It is specifically in this final reason bullies emerge.

But this is nothing new. It is common for adolescents to compete amongst themselves in order to be “cooler” than others their age. It is technology that makes the difference. With television and internet access, the culture of today’s world thrives on the humiliation of others. Reality television programs that exploit and humiliate their contestants have grown increasingly popular over the past years (Billitteri, “Cyberbullying,” 4). Also, next time you watch a sitcom, I suggest you listen carefully to the laugh-track in the background. The majority of the laughter will likely be found after insults and injuries of the characters. Hostility and injury among people, whether real or fictitious, has become a source of comedy and entertainment.

Online gaming is a breeding ground for hostility and injury. Many internet users are familiar with the multi-user game called “World of War Craft.” “The Official TRASH TALK Thread” for this game contains numerous vulgar and offensive posts that illustrate this example of cyber-bullying. One player with the user name Garglablamo posted this message, “Here you go jerk *%#*. Eat crow much, sucka? This yet another example that proves why no one can believe
anything you say, you have admitted first and now your foot is caught in your fat
mouth” (Forum posting Number 27). What is perhaps the most disconcerting about
this is it is entirely anonymous. No one uses their real names and will probably
never encounter one another. This was precisely the case for Megan Meier. She had
never before met Josh Evans and thus had no idea he was an adult woman rather
than a teenage boy. There is power in anonymity.

The anonymity of the internet gives the teenager who may never have been
a bully before the opportunity to do so. The stereotypical school “thug” who stole
lunch money from younger students or stuffed them into lockers is gone. Instead,
girls are more often the perpetrators of cyber-bullying. It is even possible for
younger kids to bully the older ones. Its incidence is especially growing amongst
children as young as seven or eight (Billitteri, “Cyberbullying,” 10) but peaks at
around age fifteen to sixteen (Billitteri, “Cyber-bullying,” 12). At these ages, both
children and teenagers are incredibly vulnerable; being a victim has very traumatic
effects on their psyche.

In addition to television viewing and online gaming, adolescents have
found other new ways to torment each other by use of e-mail, instant messaging
(IM), and social-networking sites like MySpace or Facebook. In another article
entitled “Discipline in Schools,” Billitteri quotes a National Association of
Attorneys General task force as saying, ““The growth in the use of technology and
social-networking sites by younger Americans has fueled a fear among
professionals that cyber-bullying will become the means most often utilized to
harass, threaten or otherwise cause distress”” (15). According to authors Keith and
Martin of “Cyber-bullying: Creating a Culture of Respect in a Cyber World,” “91%
of kids 12 to 15 years old and almost all teens (99%) ages 16 to 18 use the Internet”
(1). The popular blogging site Facebook has over 7.5 million members from
campuses and companies across the globe. “Two-thirds of the membership visits the
site daily, spending an average of 20 minutes viewing photos and profiles of peers”
(Jost and Hipolit, 14). With this amount of time teens spend online interacting with
each other, perhaps the fear of these professionals is not without reason.
It is important to be aware of the amount of time teens spend using the internet to fully comprehend the shocking amount of teenagers who have experienced cyber-bullying in some fashion. In 2004, a nationwide survey of 1,566 students in grades four to eight, approximately 57% of students said they had experienced hurtful online remarks; 35% of these students were even threatened. Furthermore, 53% of the students admit to being perpetrators of these remarks (Keith and Martin, 1-2). John Greenya in his article “Bullying” adds to these figures by stating the 53% of students who admit to being perpetrators of “rude or nasty comments” grew from a mere 14% in 2001. Thus it appears that this trend of violence is increasing dramatically over a short period of time. Technology is fueling this violent behavior, and at what cost?

Traumatic bullying experiences have a large number of direct and indirect effects on the vulnerable youth of society. Cyber-bullying is no exception. These effects are, but are not limited to, depression, problems with schoolwork, difficulty sleeping, mood swings, anger, anxiety, and spending a lot of time on the computer (Keith and Martin, 3). A case of another 13 year-old victim illustrates these effects perfectly. His name was Ryan Halligan. Though being a very happy and sensitive child growing up, in seventh grade his personality began to change. In an interview on “Frontline,” his father, John Halligan, comments on Ryan’s sudden willingness to fight, his drastic drop in self-esteem, and problems with his schoolwork (scr. 5). Later, his father found out why. Ryan had been cyber-bullied for quite a long time over instant messaging. A nasty rumor had been spread about him being gay and he just couldn’t shake it off. In the process, he lost all confidence in himself. He even told his father, “Well, what’s the sense in living? I’ll never amount to anything” (scr. 5).

Despite this attitude of ultimate failure, Ryan never dropped out of school. This isn’t the case for all victims. Billitteri discusses how the school environment as a whole is affected by cyber-bulling. Similar to traditional schoolyard bullying, off-campus cyber-bullying can often be so severe and traumatic that the victims feel
incapable of going to school, so they drop-out (“Cyberbullying,” 5). Facing the bully would just be too much.

Not only do drop-outs affect the school environment, cyber-bullying can also be attributed to acts of mass violence such as school shootings. It seems too often that society hears about yet another school tragedy like the Columbine Massacre of 1999. While investigating the reasons for the Columbine shooting, it became apparent it was largely a result of bullying. Though not directly bullied online, the two killers, Harris and Klebold, were tormented by bullies. Eric Harris initially took out his anger by posting angry, threatening messages about other students online before he began shooting his fellow students and faculty at school (Keith and Martin, 1). After being bullied for so long, the anger builds up and is released in a terrifying and incredibly violent manner. What may seem like innocent pranks and teasing, can potentially lead to devastating tragedies like Columbine.

Let us not forget the other horrific end to cases of cyber-bullying, suicide. Megan Meier took her own life in response to the degrading and humiliating remarks from who she thought was her friend. The story of Ryan Halligan, as mentioned above, also ended tragically. After a lengthy period of time suffering from a rumor he just couldn’t get rid of, Ryan committed suicide. Much like in Megan’s story, Ryan’s parents discovered the chilling evidence for his suicide hidden within his computer. With some help from Ryan’s friends, Ryan’s father was able to open a folder of previous instant messaging conversations his son had had. The final conversation went like this. “Tonight's the night I think I'm going to do it.” And the kid fired back, “It's about %#&*# time.” And my son said, “Yep, you're going to read about it in the newspaper tomorrow” (“Frontline”, scr. 9). In an article published by i-SAFE, Ryan’s father says “behind closed doors, Ryan was also able to more easily explore the option of suicide and find a website that showed him ways to do it” (qtd. in “Cyber Bullying,” 2). Ryan found both the reason, and the “how” to take his own life, by the use of the internet. Thinking he was okay because Ryan had been taught about internet safety, his death came as an unexpected shock.
His family didn’t know what was really going on because it all happened “behind closed doors.”

This popular, yet disturbing cliché has become dangerously true for youth today. Cyber-bullying does occur, and frequently no one knows about it until it is too late. Because a great deal of cyber-bullying occurs “behind closed doors,” many people think it doesn’t happen that often, or that it is no worse than regular schoolyard bullying. As I illustrated earlier in this paper, it is evident that about half of adolescents out there have experienced or are experiencing some form of cyber-bullying. It does happen, and often. I am not discounting the severity of schoolyard bullying. It is also a terrible tragedy amongst adolescents. However, when the school bell rings and those teenagers leave the schoolyard, bullying tends to end there. Cyber-bullying penetrates farther. It has the power to reach every computer and cell phone. The physical bruises and scars of traditional bullying will eventually fade, but the scars left by cyber-bullying are far deeper. They are often invisible to the naked eye, so it is only when the people around the victim look deeper, that the true problem can be seen. Though it is true that most cases of cyber-bullying do not end as tragically as those of Megan and Ryan, it isn’t fair to the victims and their families to discount the severity of what they experienced. Cyber-bullying is a significant problem, it is fueled by technology, and it needs to be prevented.

Unfortunately, due to the vast expanse the internet reaches, the federal government is unable to do much to help solve the cyber-bullying problem. What Congress is able to do is pass bills that give money to non-profit organizations like i-SAFE. With funding, i-SAFE is able to provide internet safety programs to students in all 50 states (Billitteri, “Cyberbullying,” 15). However, as the economy continues to drop and the national debt continues to rise, finding the money can be a problem for Congress and the U.S. as a whole.

State governments are also passing legislation with regards to cyber-bullying. States such as Oregon, Arkansas, and Maryland have included cyber-bullying in their anti-bullying legislation. If off-campus cyber-bullying disrupts the school environment it can be reported. Again, there is a problem. Some argue this is
a violation of First Amendment rights (Billitteri “Cyberbullying,” 19). Consequently, it is necessary for other groups of people other than government and national organizations, like i-SAFE, to take action.

MySpace itself is working with law enforcement to develop a plan to increase children’s protection online. It includes “a police hotline to report suspicious behavior, automatically making the default setting “private” for profiles of 16- and 17-year-olds, allowing parents to submit their children’s e-mail addresses to block them from establishing a MySpace profile and creating a separate section of MySpace for users younger than 18” (Billitteri “Cyberbullying,” 18).

While it would be an enormous task for government and national organizations like i-SAFE to incorporate a cyber-bullying prevention program, there are others who can make a greater difference. Out of all those who have the capacity to help prevent cyber-bullying, parents and friends will probably be the most influential. As the most important people in the lives of teenagers, parents and friends generally see them on a daily basis, and will more easily recognize changes in their personality. For parents to simply educate their children about internet safety is good, but it isn’t enough. Ryan, after all, was well-educated about internet safety. It also isn’t enough to solely monitor MySpace and Facebook pages like Megan’s parents did. They alone knew the password to Megan’s MySpace account, and yet violence still found a way into her life (Meier, ser. 4). Instead, parents need to do both these things, and more, to hopefully prevent their children from ever experiencing the horrors that victims like Ryan and Megan faced. Though it is impossible to monitor every little thing adolescents do online, it is needful for parents to periodically request to see MySpace pages, keep computers in public areas, and watch their children for changes in demeanor or activity (listed in paragraph concerning effects of cyber-bullying).

Friends can also help in the fight against cyber-bullying. For starters, do not be the perpetrators of online violence. Also, watch your friends for the same things parents should be watching their kids for. Friends have an advantage parents do not. During teen years, teens are more likely to share things with their friends
than their parents. Talk to your friends about what is going on in their life. If a friend shares something related to online violence, tell someone who can help like parents or teachers. As seen, failure to report online violence may have devastating consequences.

Lastly, there are a lot of things not only adolescents *can* do, but everyone *should* do to help prevent cyber-bullying. Don’t open messages from people you do not know. Do not give out personal information online. If you do receive threatening messages, stop reading them and stay away from future messages from the same sender. Keep the computer in a public area and not behind closed doors. If this is occurring on instant messaging, sign out. Get away from the problem. It is true the internet seems to be everywhere because computers are everywhere, but it can only be a problem if you let it. Bullying, whether online or off-line, is not something to take lightly.

Cyber-bullying is not an inevitable monster consuming one teenager at a time. Though it creates havoc amongst teenagers all over the world, there are ways to lessen its impact, and to help protect the world from the expansion of violence. I have already touched on numerous ways to assist in the prevention of cyber-bullying; now it is up to each individual to determine what he or she will do to minimize online violence. I myself spend a great deal of time on the internet doing both school work and sending messages back and forth with my friends. Everyday I probably spend at least a cumulative hour reading and sending email, or updating my Facebook page. In order to protect myself from cyber-bullying, I have begun taking more precautions than I ever have before. I have put securities on my profile, and I do not add people I do not know. I have already dealt with bullying in my life. I do not want to experience it again, only this time, in cyberspace.
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Where Have All the Dragons Gone?

personal narrative

Trevor Knudsen

Instructor: Sita Bell

Trevor Knudsen was born, raised and currently resides in Hyrum, Utah where he spends his free time riding horses and playing guitar. He grew up farming and is currently pursuing a degree in International Agribusiness, with a minor in Spanish.

What happened to me? I ask myself as I peer over my newspaper at the kids playing in the sandy playground on this beautiful summer afternoon. “Why can’t I find joy in the simple pleasures of life like these two kids?” I watch as the two young boys carelessly run to and fro, guarding their imaginary castle against a ferocious dragon that I can’t see. I am certain these two knights aren’t only seeing the dragon they are fighting, but surely they can feel the heat of the fire coming out of the dragon’s mouth, and smell the foul breath that is the result of many knights being devoured.

I used to be able to experience such things. I remember being with my friend as a child in a wooded area behind his house looking for garter snakes. Except, we weren’t really behind his house looking for pet garter snakes, we were deep in the jungles of Africa, searching for deadly anacondas that had been attacking local villages. I remember being able to feel the sultry heat of the jungle, and smell the rotting carcasses in the gigantic serpent’s lair. My imagination used to take me places. If I wanted to be a hero, I was one; if I wanted to be a villain, I became one. What a joyous time it was.

So what happened? Where did my imagination run off to? I peer back down at my paper and find a clue: “Money Woes Sweep the Nation,” it read. Of Course, I think to myself. My imagination started deteriorating when I began caring about money.” Now, money in and of itself isn’t an evil, imagination stealing scoundrel, but when I started earning money, I discovered that I could buy things that were real and didn't have to be thought up.

I think back on my first job working as a weekend paper boy, and begin realizing in small ways how my soaring imagination was slowly replaced by my lust for real world things. I remember being eleven years old and waking up at 6:30
every Saturday to deliver the morning news in an effort to receive a small piece of paper which people commonly refer to as a paycheck. It didn’t take me long to learn that instead of using my stuffed animals as pets, I could buy real live pets. Instead of surviving the dry hot desert with my trusty Swiss Army Knife, which considerably resembled a pointy stick, I could now buy a pocket knife with a real blade, a magnifying glass, and a corkscrew. To this day I have never actually used a corkscrew, but I’m sure it will come in handy eventually.

My shiny pocket knife and new pet gerbil were only the first steps of my declining imagination. I soon decided that other things could be better in reality than in my imagination. I remember beginning to grow tired of standing in front of the fictitious screaming crowds as I performed my lip synced rock concerts in my bedroom, and decided to save up for a real, bona fide six string. Shortly after saving up and making my purchase, the performance halls faded away and the crowds no longer waited anxiously in long lines to see me. I suppose they all got tired of waiting for me to learn how to play my new real guitar.

I spent immeasurable amounts of time in my basement trying to perform with the same agility as I had merely months earlier, but to no avail; the screaming crowds never returned.

As my indictment into reality continued, other parts of my incredible imaginary world seemed to get pushed away as well. My gallant black steed was replaced by a twelve speed Huffy, my rocket-powered Bat-Mobile was replaced by a small, blue, rusty Nissan pickup truck, and my intergalactic space cruiser...well, it just kind of disappeared.

As I thought through how my hopes and dreams had been crowded out by the desire to be part of reality, I realized I could no longer rescue villages from anacondas, hike to the top of Mount Everest, outrun an erupting volcano, and still make it back in time for supper. I now had piles of bills to take care of, a car payment and rent that were due, and I had to get up at 5:30 in the morning to slave
away making my meager wage. I can’t really complain about it all, I mean I brought this all on myself. But as I sit watching these two imaginations at work, I long to bring back my cost-free adventures.

As I continue observing the two noble knights, I want so very much to sit them down and tell them to hold on to their childhood as long as possible, to savor every moment of their adventures. Yet, somehow I know it won’t do any good, because I remember my dad telling me the same thing when I was about their age: “Even though you’re working, always remember to take time to be a kid”, he would say. I always shrugged off his suggestions. Undoubtedly, reality would ruthlessly grasp these two youngsters and never let them go, just as it had done to me and millions of others. I nearly shed a tear at the thought of these two young minds being strangled by the cold fist of the real world.

I eventually come to grips with the idea that my wild imagination will not likely return, and I decide that reality isn’t all that bad. If only there was a way to hold on to the imaginary world of youth while going through the drudges of real life. There was really no way to survive as a respectable citizen of this world, with all of the responsibilities that come along with that status, and still have time for a backyard expedition with the guys. I would have to let realism wash over me like the massive waves I had surfed so many times in my childhood; mere pretending is no longer sufficient.

I fold up my half-read paper and head back to work. I smile in envy at the two boys who are now celebrating the death of their fire-breathing foe. My imagination swells slightly, and I can almost see the defeated serpent lying lifeless on the red plastic slide. I allow my mind to soak in the imagery that is before me and to revel in it as much as possible. I know it won’t last long though, because I have reports to fill out, data to review, and money to be made; and money and dragons are never found in the same room at the same time.
What's Wrong With Me?

**personal narrative**

**Kimberly Anderson**  
**Instructor: Jared Odd**

Kimberly Anderson is a native to Logan, and has lived there her entire life. She graduated from Logan High in 2008, and is an English major. She loves to read and write and hopes to teach in the future, and continue writing as a hobby. She is grateful to her parents, who have been very supportive of her aspirations. Aside from English, her hobbies include swimming, video games, and walking with her dog Mack.

It begins at infancy. You are born into the world *tabula rasa*, knowing nothing. Then, from the first words you hear, you begin to learn. Your mind is shaped and formed like clay on a potter's wheel. The chatter of a playmate, the teasing of a sister, the cooing of a stranger; everything you are told influences the way you think. However, during the most impressionable parts of childhood, your parents will affect you more than anyone else. From them you will learn how to walk, and talk, and how to tie your shoes. And, if they are any decent sort of parents, they will try to make you into the best possible person. Your mom and dad will give you your morals, usually in the form of religion.

That's what my parents did. Only weeks after I came into this world, my parents started my spiritual education. They would dress me in my cutest dresses, with frills and ribbons and lace. Then we would walk the few blocks to church. I would get to color, eat goldfish crackers, and play with the other children as I learned to be nice and good. I learned that Jesus loved me. Church was an entertaining diversion every week, and I had no problems going. But as I grew older, I began to doubt. The more I listened to the lessons each week, and the more I tried to understand the Gospel, the less sure I became of my feelings towards it. Nothing seemed to click.

This scared me. I had never really doubted anything my parents had said before. Still at the age of blind trust in them, I knew that they would be so disappointed if they knew how I felt. My parents had both been raised Mormon their entire lives, as had my grandparents. All my aunts, uncles, and cousins were strong believers, as well as all my friends and classmates. *What is wrong with me?* I pushed my feelings aside and tried to ignore the ever present voices of doubt.
But of course, the feelings didn't stop. I would sit there in Sacrament Meeting, watching the congregation around me, their faces aglow with spiritual rapture, tears of joy in their eyes. There was such a feeling of love and community in that hall, and I wanted more than anything to be a part of it. I focused my attention inward to my own emotions, and tried to match them to the feelings around me. But in this sea of light, I was a snuffed out little candle, cold and dark.

Over time, I began to think up ways to get out of church each Sunday. A headache, stomachache, any number of ailments to convince my parents that I was viral, contagious, and a danger to the ward. Of course, my parents soon noticed a pattern in my illnesses, and this tactic grew less and less effective. My mom and dad would drag me, sullen and pouting, into a pew. We battled back and forth for months, both sides too afraid to admit there was any actual conflict, for fear of what that might mean. At the time, I didn't even understand my own feelings. All I knew was that church did not make me happy.

One Sunday, it became too much. I had tried to fake a stomachache halfway through sacrament meeting. My parents would have none of it, but I just couldn't bring myself to go to Young Women’s. Being surrounded by their cheerful faces made me feel even more like the odd one out. My mom walked me to my classroom, her hand firmly on my upper arm, as if she was afraid I would try to bolt. As she marched me along, I was given a lecture on the importance of church attendance, which I completely tuned out. What was wrong with me? Anyone who believes in God, and tries their best to be good will feel his love, right? I tried my hardest, and I wanted to feel him so badly. Why was I so empty? The wave of despair that washed over me made my knees buckle. I leaned against the rough white stone, and slid to the ground, sobbing right there outside the primary room. My mom stopped mid-lecture and stared at me.

“Honey, what's wrong?” She sounded scared; all of the lecture had left her voice.
“I... I...don't... know!” I choked out the words in between gasps and sobs. “I'm just...sad.” It was a gross understatement, but how could I explain it? Especially since I could barely breathe.

My mother suddenly grew very calm. “How long have you felt like this?”
“A long time,” I sniffed, “months.”
“Have you ever thought you may have depression?” She asked, “It runs really heavy in the family. Both of your grandma's had it, as well as most of your aunts.”

I stared up at her, mouth agape. Why hadn't she ever told me this before? I had never even heard of depression, let alone known it ran in the family. How was I suppose to diagnose myself at twelve years old?

My mom sat down next to me, right there in the hallway, and put an arm around me. At this point, people had started staring, but she didn't seem to care. “Would you consider taking medication?” she suggested it cautiously. I got the feeling she was trying to avoid setting me off in another fit of tears.

“Yes!” I didn't hesitate. If it would stop the pain, and fill the emptiness, then I would be more than willing to be medicated.

My mom got me the next available appointment, and my doctor put me on Lexapro.

“Now, don't worry if you don't start feeling it right away,” warned Dr. Patty, “it can take anywhere from a few days to a month to fully kick in.”

It seemed the warning was unnecessary, because within a few days, I started feeling the effects. It was as if the dark fog that had enveloped me for years slowly dissipated. I went through that first week of school feeling at peace. I hadn't felt peaceful in a long, long time.

I got up the next Sunday morning feeling anxious and wired. I put on my favorite black skirt and a green sweater. I felt pretty. It had been a long time since I had cared about my appearance. At sacrament meeting, I couldn’t stop smiling. I sat
there, twisting my hands in my lap, waiting for the good feelings to start. The meeting began with the usual routine of hymns, prayers, and speakers. And to my growing frustration, the usual feeling accompanied them. I didn’t feel the happiness I saw in others, just the usual empty void. It’s just too soon, I told myself. It’s only been a week. Next week you’ll feel it for sure.

Next week came and went, as did the week after, and the Sunday after that. At school, or with friends, I felt wonderful. The medication had helped me regain control of my life. But every week at church left me feeling sick and disappointed. I passed years living a lie every time I entered a church. It’s miserable, but it’s only one day a week, I reasoned. Isn’t that worth it to keep from breaking my parents’ hearts?

One Saturday night, I found myself alone on the bathroom floor, bawling. The idea of pretending to be happy for one more week was unbearable. I had been living in this prison of a lie for five years now, and I wanted freedom. The intensity of emotion was physically painful. I could feel it in the tightening in my stomach, and the aching in my limbs and head. In my darkest moment, I turned, as I often had, to prayer.

“Heavenly Father,” I whimpered, “please. Please help me. I feel so alone. Let me feel loved. Let me feel close to you. At least take away a little bit of the pain. My heart hurts so bad. Please make it stop.” I held my breathe as I finished my prayer, and waited for feelings of peace and love.

Nothing.

The drip-drip of the faucet. The sound of my cat’s footsteps on the stairs, and the feeling of the cold tile under my body. I had called out for help, and I had gotten none. That night was the lowest point in my life. God, who supposedly loved everyone and would be there when you needed him, had done nothing to help me.

I spent the coldest, longest, and loneliest night of my life on that bathroom floor.

The next morning, I was ready. I had learned something during the night, and I was going to have act on this newfound knowledge. When my mom came to
wake me for church, I rolled over and calmly told her I would not be going any more. Not this week, not ever.

“There is no God,” I explained to my mother. If I had stabbed her in the heart, I don’t think I could’ve hurt her more. In rejecting the church, I had was rejecting a huge portion of her life. I was ignoring the things that I had been taught from infancy. She blamed herself, as most parents in her situation do. If she had only done more scripture readings, more family home evenings . . .

I irately cut her off. “Don’t you dare think this has anything to do with you!” I snapped. “Be honest, mom, what could you have done? Did grandma and grandpa ever do family home evening when you were a kid?” She had to sheepishly admit that they did not. Growing up on a farm, they never had the time. “And all of my aunts and uncles are strong in the church.” I pointed out. “Don’t think you have that much control over my relationship with religion.” She nodded, but clearly didn’t feel any better. I could understand her view. In her mind, I was going astray. She was going to lose me in the afterlife. She began to cry, which made me begin to cry again. My mom lay down on the bed next to me, and I put my arms around her. We held each other like that for a long time. As we lay there, we talked about everything but religion. We laughed some, we cried more, and in the end, it was all okay.

“The way I see it,” my mom reasoned, “God wants you to be happy. If not going to church will make you happy, then that’s what you should do.”

Not everyone was as charitable as my mother. Many of the boys and girls I grew up with refuse to acknowledge me on the street. I have been kicked out of people’s houses, and been told, point blank, that I am going to Hell. But I am content. I no longer feel like there is something wrong with me. I no longer feel judged every moment of every day. My life is filled with good friends and loving family, and I am happier than I have ever been.

I consider myself a born-again atheist, but don’t let that term fool you. I still believe that you should love your neighbor, turn the other cheek, and give to the poor. The words “atheist” and “Christian” are not definitions. They are merely
broad labels, to give you a general theme of how a person will think. Personal philosophies and belief are much more complex than that. A person’s beliefs are a spiraling galaxy, infinitely complex, and infinitely beautiful. They orbit and free-wheel through the universe contained in each of us, influencing our being. In the end, what religion you practice does not influence how happy you are. Living the truth is what makes you happy.
Renewing Hope through the Destruction of Stigmas

*researched persuasive essay*

**Esther Calvert**

*Esther Calvert is a junior majoring in Sociology. She was born in England but has lived in Utah for most of her life. She enjoys reading and writing, and she hopes to write an autobiography someday. Her educational goal is to continue on to graduate school and to use her experience and her skills to bring about change to the ineffective policies in our current criminal justice system.*

Up until June of 2008, I was among the millions of Americans whose past mistakes impacted my life in ways I did not consider when I was younger. I was raised by the department of Youth Corrections from the age of 13 until I was 18 when the adult correctional system took over the organization of my life. I was convicted of a felony at age twenty. When I came back into society in 2003, my experiences of the fifteen years I was incarcerated defined who I was. I had no hope, no job skills, an inadequate education, and a criminal record where all of my mistakes I had made since I was a child were recorded. The stigma others have of “criminals,” my negative perception of who I was as a result of my actions, and the time I spent incarcerated directly affected my opportunity to be employed. I applied for several jobs, yet I was denied each time. Eventually I stopped trying to find work and I began to volunteer at Bridgerland Literacy to teach a man how to better his English comprehension skills; I also cleaned cat kennels for a non-profit animal rescue. Regardless of my volunteer work, I was turned down for employment by PetSmart, North Logan Library, and Convergys; though Convergys was one company that admittedly hires people convicted of misdemeanors, but not felonies.

During my first year living life “outside” of institutions I had no social skills, and I did not know how to communicate with people whom I labeled as “normal;” even though I had no idea what “normal” meant, I believed I was not amongst them. In my perception, having friends, maintaining a job and having life experiences opposite to mine were what constituted “normal” to me; becoming “normal,” at the time, seemed equivalent to climbing Mount Everest.

My capacity to feel empathy began to return when I started to foster sick and abandoned kittens in my home for a non-profit animal rescue. I adopted a
beautiful kitten whom I named Buddy. He helped me to change my life in many ways. My devotion to giving him a better life than what he started out with helped me to believe I had something to offer. For the first year of being “outside” I did not want to be in the community because I lacked the self-confidence to succeed; I believed I would return to institutions as I had done before. Yet, I realized that I could deal with living my life inside of a cage, but I did not want Buddy to have to live that way, which was what would have happened if I would have been incarcerated again.

In January of 2005, I began attending Utah State University. During my first semester I was unaccustomed to school, and since my education was based on the Youth in Custody program I did not have experience with exams or homework assignments because neither was a priority and was excluded from the curriculum. I read as many books as I could while I was incarcerated which was the overall foundation of my education; reading served as a release that helped me to cope with my experiences, and it enhanced my desire to learn. The sixth grade was the last grade I completed in the public school system. Because I lacked a formal education, I questioned whether I could succeed in my college courses. I had been out of school for almost 20 years so I only took two classes my first semester; I received As in both. Up until that time I had not experienced a more joyful moment. I applied for a job as a housekeeper at the University Inn was hired. I worked at the Inn for one and a half years before I transferred to the Taggart Student Center where I was employed for another year and a half. Because of the kindness of employers who took the risk of hiring me, and my positive interactions with professors on campus, I began to believe in myself; I was given another chance at the age of 31 when my criminal record was expunged.

Unfortunately, my story is not unusual. There are currently 2.2 million people who are incarcerated within America’s prisons, (Katel 2) many of whom will be released someday and will be in the same situation I was where employment opportunities were next to non-existent. One of the main problems associated with having a felony conviction is recidivism. The definition of “recidivism” is
“relapsing into a previous type of undesirable behavior, especially crime” (Encarta Dictionary) serving repeated terms of incarceration and probation/parole violations are other examples of “recidivism” because many people are sent back to prison for violating their parole. Some of the violations that people return to prison for include: curfew violations, lack of employment, testing positive for alcohol or other drugs, associating with other probation/parolees, or additional conditions defined by their parole officers.

People who are released from prison or another long-term institution are not receiving adequate assistance from society in order to help them with a successful transition. Prison “transforms” an individual into a survival machine because that is precisely the sort of environment prison is: one in which from one day to the next prisoners do not know if they will survive. Many prisoners serve years inside of this environment and they are forced to adapt to looking over their shoulder, and being suspicious of others because prisoners never know if or when they will be betrayed by someone they trusted. In prison trusting another human being is potentially life threatening. The psychological damage prison has on inmates, known as prison re-indoctrination, and the lack of opportunities available for ex-prisoners returning to the community significantly reduce their chances of acquiring skills that are socially acceptable, skills that are crucial for ex-prisoners to internalize so they can continue to live in society.

Negative attitudes and perceptions that prisoners are “unworthy” of opportunities contribute to recidivism, and are rampant in American society. Some common perceptions of prisoners are that they are “lazy,” “lack intelligence,” and “complain” about their living conditions, or that they want to be “coddled,” by mainstream society. An article printed in the Economist reports attitudes many Americans have and who believe in “popular” forms of humiliation: “The reintroduction of chain-gangs, or dressing inmates in pink uniforms and giving them
mind-numbing work” are embraced by Americans “because of their punitive effect” (par 16). Nothing beneficial occurs in communities or in prisoners’ lives by degrading others; this will only further promote people to demand retribution thus contributing to the cycle of prisoners being released and re-incarcerated.

These attitudes are not exempt from Cache Valley Utah where the crime rates are significantly lower than in many parts of the United States; some Logan residents display similar disrespect towards prisoners. An inmate at the Cache County Jail wrote a letter to the editor that was printed in the “Herald Journal.” In response to “Inmate Dunbar’s” article; Daryl Forinash, a Logan City resident, addressed the 54 year old inmate comparing him to a “recalcitrant child” who has been sent to “time out” (par 7). He continues by adding, “And like the child, when you have spent some time considering your actions, you will be allowed to once again socialize with the rest of us” (par 7). My belief is that the words Daryl Forinash chose to use were intended to shame Mr. Dunbar publicly, and to imply to “the rest of us” that inmates are second class citizens, and treating them as such is acceptable. Regardless of what a person has been convicted of they do not deserve to be treated disrespectfully. Every one of us has made our fair share of mistakes; inmates are just more aware of this fact because of their surroundings. Yet, instead of remembering that we have each made our own mistakes many people seem to have “forgotten” this fact.

In recent years prominent scholars and researchers have outspokenly criticized the recidivism rates, yet what has been different in their recent criticism is the fact that it has been directed towards the structure of the criminal justice system. In the past, people usually have blamed ex-prisoners for their lack of employment or their return to prison without taking into account the nature of our justice system or the policies which are in place that prevent people from being productive. One of the most detrimental of the current policies, which was addressed in the article by criminologists Jessica S. Henry and James B. Jacobs, is de facto discrimination from hiring ex-prisoners who are seeking employment.
As many people are aware, on almost every job application there is a question which asks whether the prospective employee has ever been convicted of a crime, more so a felony.

Felons are required to disclose this information and many employers conduct background checks on their employees where a felony conviction is bound to be discovered. As a felon, I was required to disclose this information regardless of the time elapsed since my convictions. Each time I filled out an application and turned it in for consideration I knew I would not be asked to return for an interview based on my past convictions. None of the employers knew who I was except for what they read on a piece of paper and I was not given an opportunity to personally meet them to discuss the ten years that had passed since I was convicted; their decision was already made.

As Henry and Jacobs have pointed out, the question on job applications that ask applicants’ about their prior criminal convictions is *de facto* discrimination. They say this type of discrimination has created “a permanent underclass of ex-offenders who are excluded from the legitimate economy and are funneled into a cycle of additional criminality and imprisonment” (Henry & Jacobs 756). Because of the rejection of an application based upon an applicant’s answer to this question, there is not much hope of an ex-prisoner receiving employment even in menial labor jobs, and the result is, in fact, discrimination based upon life experiences and previous situations.

Bruce Western, a Professor of Sociology at Harvard, reinforces this fact by stating that “the key to the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into society is their ability to secure legitimate employment,” and when this opportunity is unavailable for people who have served their time in an institution, banishment from the job market will only increase recidivism. According to an article printed in the Economist, America’s population is growing in the numbers of ex-prisoners returning to society. We are witnessing in this “army of ex-cons…the final, perhaps unforeseen, stage of the country’s ‘love affair’” (par 6) with incarcerating individuals. The current “permanent underclass of ex-offenders” will only continue
to rise when more prisoners are released into society. There is significant evidence proving that when ex-offenders have stability in their lives the chance that they will remain in the community is dramatically increased.

Criminologists Robert Sampson and John Laub have described the significant “turning points” in an offender’s life which can prevent recidivism. These community supports involve “school, family and employment, that alter life trajectories and redirect paths” (Western 479) to those which are more beneficial for the whole of society. When an ex-offender has already experienced years of “prison re-indoctrination” there is little chance they will succeed in their communities without societal supports. Western concludes his article by discussing where society’s “real investments” can be made, ones “that build skills and improve health and well-being more directly” in people’s lives who are among the most “socially marginal in American society.” Each member in our society whether “free” or imprisoned has the potential to contribute to our communities in a positive way when given an opportunity to do so. Solutions that can help bring us as a human race together will in turn help us to value ourselves more and place a higher value upon life in general.

Recent improvements for helping ex-prisoners receive meaningful employment are being implemented in several major cities in America. According to Henry and Jacobs’ article, an ex-offender group in San Francisco, “All of Us or None,” has advocated for a bill to “end discrimination against ex-offenders applying for city and county jobs” under the campaign entitled “Ban the Box.” The “box” they are referring to is the question on a job application that asks whether the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime. Under new laws which have resulted from the “Ban the Box” campaign, employers disclose which jobs will require a background check, yet in order for them to ask for an applicant’s criminal record the potential employee will have to be a “finalist” in the hiring process, which means a completed interview, and the decision to hire them has been made. When the department for which an ex-offender will be working discloses the potential employees’ name to Human Resources they conduct a background check, and “if a
disqualifying conviction is revealed, the applicant has an opportunity to meet with the Human Resources Department to discuss any mitigating circumstances” (Henry & Jacobs 757). Banning the box will be most effective in benefiting ex-offenders who have shown improvement in adapting to life outside of prison, and this policy “filters” out those who have not made necessary changes that are needed in order to remain in the community.

In Boston City 5,000 private contractors have also adopted the policy which greatly “enhances the employment prospects of thousands of ex-offender job seekers” (Henry & Jacobs 758). There are several steps that have been implemented to ensure equality between ex-offenders and non-offenders. In cities that have adopted “Ban the Box,” the question of whether an individual has been convicted of a crime is no longer on job applications. Ex-offenders who are “job ready” have the opportunity to be evaluated and considered solely on qualifications that are relevant to employment while excluding criminal convictions that have resulted in past discrimination. And “under new guidelines, even when a criminal record might be relevant to a particular job; before making a final hiring decision, city agencies must take into account the time elapsed since a conviction occurred… and evidence of rehabilitation” (Henry & Jacobs 758). It is my belief that this new proposal ought to be accepted as a common practice in the United States.

During the last five years I have progressed more than I had at any time in my life. There are many people who have helped me to achieve the goals I once believed were unreachable. My previous employers wrote a letter to the judge on my behalf so I could get my record expunged, and one of my professors in the Sociology department also wrote the judge a letter. They were not obligated to do this for me, yet I will always remember their kindness.

I am still amazed by the grades I have received throughout the three and one half years I have attended Utah State University. Whereas I once doubted my intelligence; I have surpassed the expectations I once had of myself: I am majoring in Sociology and I have a G.P.A. of 3.9; I am an Undergraduate Teaching Fellow in
the Sociology Department, and I plan to attend graduate school in the next few years.

The place where these solutions need to start is within members of our communities. If people continue to harbor negative beliefs about “criminals” this will do nothing to help the problem of discrimination, this negativity will only exacerbate it more, and thus promote further marginalization. Value and respecting others is what will increase a more cohesive society, and will have more positive results than the overall current mindset of “disposable” individuals. Helping others to realize that their contributions are valuable through reintegration instead of through shaming and humiliation will be more beneficial to everyone in the long-term.

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I sat there staring at every happy couple that walked past. I hated them. I didn’t know anything about them or their lives, but I hated them. It wasn’t fair that they should be happy and normal, the kind of normal where the man loves the woman and the woman loves the man. I thought about the annoyance I had towards both my mom and dad; I was irritated that my mom would allow this to happen for so long and that my dad could cheat on his wife of thirty-five years. Not only was he unfaithful to my mom he cheated on her with another man.

It felt as if my family had been destroyed overnight. My thoughts raced faster than I could keep up, thinking of the past, the present, and what the future might be like. (A memory that struck out and kept replaying over and over again is a night many years before that my family had just watched the movie, Mrs. Doubtfire.) Concerned by the divorce in the movie, my parents told us they love each other more than anyone could and they would never consider getting a divorce. This seemed so long ago as if it wasn’t reality but a dream. As I tried to wrap my thoughts around my new life beads of sweat began to form. My body temperature dropped and the pit in my stomach grew making me nauseas. The numb feeling was starting to return.

Just hours ago I thought my family was “normal” and believed “that families must conform to one model to be happy and raise children well.” (Tolstoy, 1946) My day was just like any other day. I had gotten through classes for the day and I received a text from my dad asking if I wanted to go to lunch with him. I started my trek across campus towards my father’s office. The crisp air cut through all my layers of clothing. I wasn’t ready for winter yet but it didn’t matter I could feel the change in the air and it was coming if I welcomed it or not. As I walked into my dad’s office something was different. He didn’t stand up to greet me like he
normally would, he sat at his desk. He was tense and avoided eye contact.
Something was wrong. The tension in the air had a thick feeling, like the room had
suddenly filled with smoke. I had trouble breathing and had suddenly become
lightheaded. I had to sit down. At that moment I knew that we weren’t going to have
lunch at all. My dad was about to confirm any Suspicions I had about my parents
relationship. I wasn’t sure if I wanted the truth or if I was able to handle the truth.

The clock on the wall ticked louder and every second felt like an eternity.
The tension only grew. My dad stared at the floor still avoiding eye contact. I sat
with a blank stare; my leg was shaking and
my lip was sore from chewing on it.

“Cathrine I need to tell you
something you should know.” his voice was
shaky and cracked as he forced the sentence
out. I sat quietly waiting for him to go on. The silence was thicker this time. I
looked at him. His eyes were red and beginning to water, he wasn’t able to continue.
My mind raced of all the things that he could possibly need to talk to me about. One
thought kept creeping into my mind as I fought to dismiss it.

“You are cheating on mom aren’t you?” My thoughts had won. This
question had been tucked away in my mind. I tried to ignore it, but at times when
things didn’t feel right it seemed like the only logical reasoning. He wasn’t able to
hold back the tears any longer and my whole body went completely numb. I wasn’t
able to think, feel, or say anything else.

“Kind of.” Was the only response he could give me. The answer made me
furious. There was no reason for the unclear reason. It was a simple yes or no
question. I sat quiet as he struggled through an explanation. I sat with my arms
crossed, my leg shaking frantically, and my lip was now bleeding. I hadn’t realized
how hard I had been biting it. Feeling began to creep back into my body; it felt like
there were millions of sharp pins traveling through my veins. I heard what my dad
was saying but had a hard time taking it all in. What he was explaining was
impossible. It wasn’t possible for him to be homosexual. He is married; he has eight
kids and seven grandchildren that mean the world to him. He was talking of leaving to live with this man he claimed he loved. My body was in shock it wasn’t able to handle all the information. As hard as I was trying to keep it all out, it was still seeping through the cracks. I wasn’t able to stop the truth and I would now have to accept it.

“Cathrine, I know this is a lot of information and it hurts you, but I have been hurting for a lot of years holding this secret. For the first time I feel like I am truly happy.” His words stung. What did he mean by “truly happy?” His wife, children, grandchildren, and me—his little girl: the people that had brought him so much happiness in his life were just brushed aside. For the first time in my life I felt like my dad was acting childish and I was the one looking at him as though I was a disappointed parent.

How could he be so selfish and forget all of us? Didn’t we matter to him anymore? Didn’t he realize how he was affecting the family? Through all these thoughts I realized my dad was sitting nervously waiting for my response.

“I love you dad.” The words had surprised me but the more I thought about them the more I realized they were true. He was my dad and nothing could change that. He was the man that had taught me that it is necessary to accept and love those that are different from me. It had just become clear to me that he was human and can’t be perfect; I couldn’t love him any less because of it. My legs trembled under me as I put weight on them. The effort to dry my tears was pointless; my tears wouldn’t stop. My dad gave me a hug, trying to comfort and assure me that everything was going to be alright. I left his office with my head down hoping my tears wouldn’t draw attention. The sun was bright and seemed so out of place. I sat in my car with the engine running, lost as where to go next. Home was usually the safe place I could go. It was the one place that always brought me comfort and peace. (Walsh 2003) For the first time that idea seemed like a lie and was the last place I wanted to go. I’m not sure how I ended up at Cache Valley mall but that’s where I sat and hated complete strangers for having the life I had just lost.
Victory
personal narrative

Jasem Al-Nouri

Jasem Al-Nouri was born in Kuwait city in 1974. He is married and has two boys and two girls. He is on scholarship from his company to complete his Environmental Engineering degree. He wrote the “Victory” essay to express his feeling about a time interval that affected his life. The Iraqi invasion had a significant role in Kuwaiti life after 1991. He found English 2010 was a good opportunity to write about the invasion which occurred August 1990 - February 1991.

At first, it was like a dream; suddenly I heard a big explosion with high speed winds. I jumped from my bed to the ground like a monkey, and my mother pushed back and hit the wall. I heard her skull hit the wall. She fell down, and cried from the pain. I helped her stand up. I asked her “What is going on?” She shouted, “Ask your father.” I looked out the window, and the street was empty with nothing abnormal outside. I went to my father, I found him busy searching the radio channels. I told him “Did you hear the explosion? My mother hit her head on the wall because of the explosion.” While he was searching the radio channels, he was hammering and saying many things I couldn't understand him, and maybe he didn't notice me. I raised my voice, and I asked him again. Suddenly, he looked at me like he had looked at me for the first time. He stared at me for a while then he said, “Go to sleep nothing happened there.” While I was leaving his room, I heard the radio saying, “Please help us, we are surrounded by the army, and they started shooting us.”

“Which channel is this?” I asked my father. He looked at me, and his eyes were red, and the tears trapped within them, and slowly his tears dropped one by one. It was the first time for me to see my father’s tears. Before, I thought my father was emotionless and solid like the rock.

After many repeated calls for help on Kuwait main channel, the radio became silent. My father tried to find any other channel to know what was going on. He found the BBC channel announcing that the Iraq army had attacked Kuwait city. Our house is fifteen kilometers away from Kuwait city. The BBC announced that the Prince of Kuwait ordered his army to retreat and stop fighting the Iraq army, because there were more than one hundred thousand soldiers and three thousand
tanks. So, it would be like suicide for the Kuwait army. The Iraq army was almost twenty percent of Kuwait population. Although the Kuwait army stopped the fire, the Iraq army was firing at any uniform-police, army, even mall security guards.

After I heard this news, I quickly went to the roof through the stairs. Then I climbed to the highest point on the roof, and took a fast look around my house. It was still dark. I did not notice any strange movement. Then, I looked through the horizon toward the Conference and Guest Palace, which was five kilometers away from my home. But it was calm there. Meanwhile, I saw my father leave the house very fast, start his car and drive away. While I was sitting on the roof waiting for anything, I heard sounds and I saw flashes coming from far away from the north direction, which was the Iraq side.

My father came back home after a short time. I jumped from the roof with agility. I saw him with a gun in his hand. He told me to follow him, and he wanted to talk to me. I followed him, and I waited for him to speak. He took a deep breath and said “You have become old enough to learn how to use this gun.”

I said, “Why all of this? I know the army will not attack the civilians.”

He said, “I am a governor, and I am sure they will come to take me, but I will not go without a fight.” Then, he started to teach me how to use the gun. Also, he showed me where he kept the gun and the ammo. Furthermore, he promised to bring another one. “The sun rise up, and I will look for any new news,” he said. While I was going out he said, “All the government members are out of Kuwait including the Prince.” It was the first good news for me since the black day started.

Three hours passed and nothing new happened. I went out to see if any of my friends had woken up. It was almost 8 am, and the street was empty because it was Thursday, the beginning of the weekend. Suddenly, I saw one of my friends running toward me, and big noises were coming from his direction. I looked at the sky, and I saw large numbers of helicopters with low altitude. They were like a big
herd of locusts passing the sky toward the west. My friend tried to talk to me but I
couldn't hear him because of the noises I couldn't hear myself.

I caught his hand, and I took him to the roof of my house. We saw a scene
we had never seen before. It was like Armageddon. I couldn't count how many
helicopters were in the sky. They were many, and they were hitting each other and
falling down like poisoned flies. Also, I saw the ground rocket launcher hitting. I
thought the Palace guards were trying to defend the Palace. I counted how many
helicopters fell down, and they were sixteen helicopters. After, the helicopters
retreated back, and they couldn't defeat the guards. My friend whose brother is one
of the well trained guards told me, “I am not worried about my brother and his
friends they will find their way to escape, but they want the Iraqis to have as many
losses and casualties as they can.”

The first day passed, and we didn’t see any soldiers. The next afternoon,
my friend came to my house and told me that there was an Iraqi tank caught by the
Kuwaitis resistance, and they parked it near the junction between my town, which is
Bayan, and Mushrif, which is in the south side. I said, “It is near; it is almost two
and a half kilometer away.” I told him, “Let's go to see this tank, and I will bring
with me spray paint and Kuwait flags.” He agreed with me and he promised to bring
more. Then, we went with our gears to the tank location. We saw the tank parked
above the sidewalk, and the driver’s body was laid near to the tank, he was dead.
We came close slowly to the tank. I jumped over the tank, and I attached the flags’
sticks in the tank holes. My friend tried to jump over the tank, but he couldn't
because he was fat. At this moment I felt the victory, and handled the biggest flag
that I had, and I waved it like a victorious commander. During the rapture of the
victory, I heard somebody shouting to us, “Watch out the Iraqi soldiers are coming.”
I looked around, and I didn't see anything, and I asked my friend if he could see
them. He said, “I think it was false warning, don't worry keep working.” After five
minutes another warning came, but this time it was true. A big green GMC van was
coming toward us at high speed and one soldier was hanging on the right door.
When I saw the van, I jumped from the tank toward the houses, and my friend ran
toward the street. I was near to the van and the soldier jumped from the van and chased me. First, he shouted to stop then he shot two bullets onto the air. I was faster and lighter, and then he started to fire in my direction. I saw the bullets hit the ground in front of me. I told myself it is a nightmare and I will wake up soon. I closed my eyes, and I sped up and ran faster. I opened my eyes, and told myself I will not let this green insect take me down. I started to zigzag my path, and I kept running and jumping over fences on my way, and I climbed walls, passing back yards and front yards. The fire stopped, and I looked back and the soldier wasn’t chasing me. Although the soldier wasn’t chasing me, I kept running to my home. At last I was at my house.

I smacked the door, and entered my home. In the middle of the living room I stopped. But my heart didn’t stop, and I felt like I was standing on the air. My legs could not carry me anymore. Suddenly, I collapsed and fell down, and I saw the world rotating and it wasn’t the world it was me. My eyes were open, and I saw my sister panicking and she was screaming. Everybody in the house was surrounding me trying to wake me up. Then, I became unconscious for a while. I woke up after sometime, and I felt pain in all of my body. The pain was horrible it was like I just finished a wrestling match.

After a while, my mother came to my room to ask if I needed anything. I saw the fear on her face, and felt guilty for making her panic. I asked myself why I did this to my parents and why I put them in this bad situation. But, she wiped away this feeling by telling me that, “I know you love your country, however there is a better way to express your feelings.” Then, she told me that my friend had been caught, and his uncle was trying to find where they took him. I sat with myself to think wisely what I was going to do, and while I was thinking I looked from the window and I saw in the front yard the old pickup was parked and neglected. I said to myself I can use this pickup for anything useful. Also, my brother in law is a good mechanic. I went to my father to ask him what we can do with this pickup. He told me that we can fix it and use it to collect the trash and clean our street because the Iraqis stole all the garbage trucks from Kuwait.
So, I and my brother in law worked on the pickup for two weeks. It was hard to repair it because we couldn’t find the spare parts that we needed to repair the pickup. Although it was a hard job to succeed in fixing it, it was the first benefit from this crisis to learn how to fix cars and how to drive a car with a manual gear box. All the time, my father was watching us and he was giving us some advice.

Suddenly, my friend showed up and he came to visit me. I was very excited and I couldn't believe he was still alive. I hugged him very strong, and he asked, “Please release me, you crushed my bones.” He told me how the Iraqis tried to torture him but they couldn’t kill him because there was a good Iraqi officer in that place protecting him from the other soldiers. Also, he said that he was released by that good officer. Moreover, he showed me his body and it was horrible, it was like zebra skin. He said “They were slashing me by a big knife like the one we use for slicing the meat.” I told him “Never mind, what we did with the tank was a bad idea, and we are still too young to involve ourselves in politics and military actions. So, I have a good idea and we can volunteer in civil activities as my father suggested to me.” He agreed with me and joined us for collecting trash and dropped it in the desert. Many of our friends joined us in this job. Also, there were two of our neighbors donated their pickups to help us, and it was the second benefit that we gained from this crisis, which was to work in groups and nobody can live without the others.

Finally, after seven months the Coalition Forces under United States of America commander freed Kuwait from Iraq army, and they defeated Iraq and kicked them out of Kuwait. It was a bad experience but it changed my life. I learned from it lots of things. Before this invasion I was a careless person, and I was thinking how to spend my day in playing and making fun. However, the crises taught me how spend my day in useful things. Also, it taught me how to think wisely for the next step in my life. These memories with their sufferance and difficulties were useful and unforgettable.
Dechen, Jean, Steph, and I are having a girls' night in the basement of the two story house Dech’s host family lives in. Dech went upstairs a while ago to “get another brownie.” We haven't heard any noise above us; everyone else is sleeping. What could she be doing up there for so long? I quietly climb the steps leading up from the basement to check on her, but as far as she is concerned I am “getting another one too.” As I reach the top of the stairs, I glance into the lighted computer room before turning into the kitchen. Dech hears me and as I walk by I see her hastily minimizing an internet browser. After a few more steps I reach the counter and take a brownie out of the pan. Acting as though I didn't see her, I rush back downstairs to frantically explain to Jean and Steph what I had just seen.

As a member of the *Helianthus* genus, helio meaning “sun” and anthus meaning “flower” in Latin, sunflowers have long represented loyalty and adoration\(^1\)\(^2\). This is because their faces follow the sun in its journey across the sky, day after day. Sunflowers originated in Central and South America and were used throughout the Andes by the Incans as symbols of the sun god. Francisco Pizarro discovered these strange flowers when he landed in Peru, and in 1510, Spaniards introduced the sunflower to Europe giving it more familiar names derived from the Latin *flos solis*\(^3\)\(^4\).

Dech is upstairs, again. Steph, Jean, and I are starting to subconsciously have all the pieces fall into place. But we don’t want to admit it, not yet. We creep up the stairs and check the first floor, looking in the kitchen, computer room, and most importantly the bathroom—but Dech isn’t there. Jean sits down in front of the computer and begins to check the history. We need to see what Dech had been trying to hide. However, our need to know if our dreaded suspicion is actuality urges Jean to forgo her original task and conduct a web search. One by one our hearts sink as our eyes soak in the words on the screen. It all fits. From the swollen
cheeks and scab on her knuckles to the over-exercising and bathroom trips\textsuperscript{5}. It all fits . . .

When the night has come, and the land is dark,
And the moon is the only light we'll see,
No, I won’t be afraid . . .
Just as long as you stand, stand by me\textsuperscript{6}.

Although Dech seemed closer with Jean and Steph, she had given me all of the hints—the crucial clues that I did not understand at the time. I received the first clue when the Nordic season began about four months ago, in November. Dech and I sat together in World Studies. It became a daily routine for her to turn to me during class and ask if it looked like she’d lost weight in her face. As the weeks passed she began to eat less and less while working herself as hard as possible at practice. Jean, Steph, Dech, and I had the same lunch block. It didn’t take long for us to notice Dech’s mysterious disappearances into the bathroom for 10-15 minutes after eating. She didn't do this daily, only after “larger” lunches. Her once naturally rounded Bhutanese face became a shell housing the hurt girl deep inside, and we didn’t realize anything was wrong. But one day last week a red flag went up when Dech confided in me that the previous night she’d thrown up blood.

A new fascination with sunflowers erupted during the Impressionist art movement of the mid-1800s\textsuperscript{7}. It became an “icon of uncommon beauty,” an image with which we continue to associate with them today\textsuperscript{8}. In 2003 a film titled \textit{The Order} orchestrated a conversation in which Mara, played by Shannyn Sossamon, explains her fascination with sunflowers to Alex, played by Heath Ledger.

Alex asks, “Why? Why do you love sunflowers?” To which Mara replies, “Because I always thought that when God was making beautiful things, He messed up with sunflowers. . . . They look like crooked teeth around a mouth that’s too big.
... Just when He was about to start over, He realized that's what made them beautiful. They were a brilliant mistake.9

While Jean continued her search of the computer’s recent history, Steph and I slowly climb the wooden stairs to the second floor. We listen against the door of the suite Dech shares with two of her host sisters, not wanting to wake the other girls. We hear faint music coming from a CD-player the girls keep in the bathroom located in the back corner of the room. Ever so quietly, we open the door and tiptoe through the room toward the source of the music. Again, we press our ears to the door. This time the sounds we hear confirm our fears—sounds of her gagging, her stomach convulsing, and her vomit disturbing the water in the toilet.

If the sky that we look upon, should tumble and fall,
And the mountains should crumble to the sea,
I won’t cry, no I won't shed a tear,
Just as long as you stand, stand by me
Whenever you're in trouble won't you stand by me10.

We try to talk Dech into going to a clinic to determine the extent of the physical damage she has inflicted upon herself. She refuses. In an attempt to wrap our minds around the situation we do research. We educate ourselves. We learn that bulimia is not caused by a distorted body image, like anorexia, nor does it include abstaining from food but that it is a binge-purge system. A system which is used as a psychological method of feeling in control of one's life11. To our horror we learn that the bloody vomit was caused by stomach acid eroding the lining of her esophagus, which, coupled with deprivation of nutrients, could ultimately result in death. As our enlightenment climaxes, Dech finally breaks and tells us the secrets that gave life to her pain—the secrets that make her feel powerless in her own life. None of us know what to do. Dech has told us that she doesn’t want her family to find out, but we know that we have to tell someone. Steph goes home, and I take Dech and Jean to my house. All Dech can do now is cry, especially when we decide that she has to go home and tell her family. Against her wishes, her family has already been informed. And against her wishes, I drive Dech home.
Devotion, constancy, loyalty, allegiance, and fidelity. These words imply a sense of duty or of devoted attachment to something or someone\textsuperscript{12}. Just as the sunflower shows devotion to the sun by religiously following it through the sky, friends show equal loyalty to each other. This loyalty, in certain situations, causes true friends to make life changing decisions. Decisions that hurt and feel like betrayal but are born of love and concern.

The four of us rode in silence on the way to the airport, trying to hold back tears. It was a short and numb five days that had passed since the painful truth exposed itself. Dech was to meet her mother in Seattle then fly to Bangkok, Thailand for treatment before continuing home to Bhutan. Jean, Steph, and I broke down in fits of tears and guilt at school that afternoon and weeks to follow. We felt like we had let her down. We, her closest friends, didn’t realize what she was going through for several months. But we, her friends, helped her to see that we are like sunflowers. We are loyal to one another and all beautiful because of our imperfections.

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My Opinion: Opinion is Not News
personal narrative

Connor Child
Connor Child, a native of North Logan, Utah and graduate of Sky View High School, is a sophomore
majoring in finance and economics. As a student of the media, his writing is heavily influenced by
politics, sports, and the pop culture. He decided to write this essay after years of studying peoples' reactions to the media's portrayal of current events.

A few weeks ago, I was walking out of the grocery store when I noticed an older gentleman offering free copies of various editions of the daily newspaper. I breezed right by him and pretended I couldn't hear him when he offered me a free copy. I also work in sales, so my conscience started gnawing away at me with each step I took. I eventually found the sympathy in my heart to turn around and at least see what he was offering. When I asked for a copy of The Salt Lake Tribune, he informed me that I could receive the Tribune daily for the next three months for the small price of $26. By this time, the initial sympathy in my heart had snowballed into full-blown empathy. “Where do I sign?”

Although this experience is synonymous with “impulse buying,” I had my reasons for paying the subscription fee. I had become fed up with the lack of respect I was receiving from the national television networks who seemed incapable of delivering actual news without attempting to insert their personal opinions about the subject. With opinion based shows such as The O’Reilly Factor and Countdown With Keith Olbermann dominating the airwaves these days, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a news outlet for balanced reporting of actual news. Surely, I thought, a newspaper of the Tribune’s status would have journalistic standards to confine opinion pieces to the opinion section.

This has not been the case. On several occasions I have noticed opinion pieces sneaking their way into the news sections. While I value everyone’s opinions and believe opinions have their place in newspapers, I firmly believe that that place is the opinion section. This past Sunday, on the front page of the Utah news section, a column was ran by Rebecca Walsh titled “LDS Stand on Proposition 8 Oozes Irony.” The title itself is the smoking gun that this is an opinion piece. I was not at
all upset that the author’s opinion may have differed in some ways from mine. I was upset that it was the author’s opinion and thousands of Utahns were reading it in the news section. And I find it insulting when a news outlet attempts to disguise opinion as news. They’re basically telling me that their opinion is the correct opinion and I don't have the intelligence to form my own opinion based on the reported news.

Deborah Howell, ombudsman for *The Washington Post*, recently admitted that her newspaper was biased towards Democrat Barack Obama during this past election. If there were an award for “Least Surprising Revelation of 2008,” this may well be the standard by which all subsequent winners would be measured against. While the *Post* may be the only major newspaper thus far to admit to such a disgrace, anyone with the ability to breathe oxygen could tell you other newspapers fell victim to this fallacy as well. When our nation's capital’s biggest newspaper admits that its journalists did not behave like true professionals, it’s time to reevaluate things.

The uninformed voter relies heavily on the media’s coverage of the candidates in order to obtain a general understanding of who the candidates are and what they stand for. They then have the right to cast an educated vote for who they feel would do the better job in office. This is at the heart of democracy and it is a shame when the voter is not granted the opportunity to learn about each candidate in a balanced way because of a major publication's admitted bias towards a particular candidate.

I was in 8th grade during the 2000 presidential election between Governor George W. Bush and incumbent Vice President Al Gore. I can vividly remember sitting in Mrs. Wright’s history class as the classroom got in a heated debate about who the next president should be. The vast majority of the class was in favor of Governor Bush, and Mrs. Wright took this as a teaching opportunity that I have remembered ever since. She simply took the stance as a Gore supporter and asked
the most vocal supporters why they supported Governor Bush. The only things the Bush supporters could say was, “Gore is a tree-hugger…Gore is in favor of abortion.” Mrs. Wright eloquently defended Vice President Gore’s stance on each of those issues, and I watched in embarrassment as my classmates made the same uninformed statements like they were a broken record.

The reason this experience stands out in my mind so much is it made me realize how dangerous it can be to just rely on someone else’s opinion as news. I’m certain each of those 8th graders had great parents with well-informed opinions and I don't believe any of them were brainwashing their children into supporting Governor Bush. What concerned me is how little thought my classmates put into their arguments. How can constructive debate take place if one party’s opinion is reduced only to snippets of other people’s opinions? With opinion pieces continuing to sneak their way into the news sections, it will be increasingly difficult to inform ourselves with the actual facts, which should be the foundation of our opinions.

Rush Limbaugh and Al Franken are both incredibly smart individuals with valuable opinions, but they are both about as balanced as a seesaw with a hippopotamus on one end and a lemur on the other. Both of them have large platforms to which they are able to express their points of view and I am in full favor of people seeking their opinions. The danger, however, is when their opinion simply becomes our opinion and we allow them to do the thinking for us. For example, at the conclusion of the 2008 Democratic National Convention, as Senator Barack Obama gave his concluding remarks, I asked a friend what he thought of the speech. This was his response: “I can't wait to see what Rush says about it tomorrow.” In other words, he didn't like it, but he wasn't sure why he didn't like it so he needed Rush Limbaugh to figure it out for him.

This is why I am so disgusted that more and more newspapers are allowing opinion pieces to appear in news sections. It is our duty to form our own perspectives based on actual facts that a news outlet should be obligated to report. Because all humans are different, some will value certain facts over others, thus creating different opinions. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.
I am not saying that we should do away with all opinion pieces in the news. Columnists and TV and radio hosts have all dedicated careers into the art of expressing opinion and they spend much more time studying issues than the average citizen. However, one needs to be careful when listening to their take. If we haven't done our homework or gained somewhat of an understanding of the issue at hand, it becomes far too easy to simply echo the opinion of the media personality. And it will become progressively more difficult to do our homework if newspapers continue to run opinion pieces as news.

Michael S. Malone is a renowned columnist for ABC.com. In a recent column, he describes an experience he had three summers ago that “shattered [his] faith” in true journalism. He was staying at a hotel that only carried CNN International and this was at the time the war in Lebanon was taking place. Mr. Malone writes that he watched as reporter after reporter “reported the carnage of the Israeli attacks on Beirut, with almost no corresponding coverage of the Hezbollah missiles raining down on northern Israel...I sat there for hours watching, assuming that eventually CNNi would get around to telling the rest of the story...but it never happened.”

Whoever was in charge of CNNi’s coverage of the war in Lebanon was obviously opposed to Israel for whatever reason, and as such only one side of the story was reported. Those who weren't as informed as Mr. Malone who may have relied on CNNi’s coverage will now be much more likely to also be opposed to Israel, even though they don't know any thing about the other side.

Journalism is one of the greatest institutions in our society. In theory, it puts forth effort to get the truth and present it to the public and we have the right to know. It plays a central role in democracy as it reports information about political candidates and issues to which we are allowed to vote on. In order for journalism to really help the cause of democracy, all sides need to be treated in a fair and balanced way. I beg journalists to please report news and make it as clear as possible when writing opinion. Please don’t make it harder than it already is to find actual news that we can consider all sides before taking an educated stance.
My Dear Respite

*personal narrative*

**Callie Cahoon Sandberg**  
Instructor: Michael Ward  
Callie Cahoon Sandberg is a sophomore from Brigham City, Utah. She currently is undeclared but is considering an Education major. Callie enjoys country swing dancing, singing along with the radio, eating ice cream, and playing volleyball. Callie is married to an awesome red head and loves spending time with him. Callie wants to find a major and career that she will absolutely love, be able to enjoy her work, and hopes to make a difference in the lives of her family, friends and others through her work and life.

Green beans simmered hotly on the stove while the accompanying spaghetti and sauce cooked nearby. The aroma of spaghetti sauce and hot, fresh French bread had a Pavlovian effect on me as I eagerly anticipated dinner. The high, shrill squeak of the garage door swinging open announced the arrival of my dad home from work. His keys jangled as he hung them up, and as he walked inside, his pockets rattled with the metally clink of spare change.

“I'm home!” he announced loudly as he made his way into the kitchen. I glanced over my shoulder as I heard my dog Trek assumes his watchful position outside of the back door. I turned back and watched cautiously and hopefully as my dad made his way across the kitchen. He hugged and kissed my mom happily; sometimes that just didn’t happen. Maybe tonight would be a good night. Maybe they wouldn’t fight.

My dad looked over in my direction. I quickly greeted him and returned to the important conversation I was having on MSN Messenger. I passively listened to the quiet conversation taking place in the kitchen, fearing the tension that always hung over the house when my parents talked. Usually it was only a matter of time.

Suddenly it happened. The warm, fragrant, kitchen air was tainted by the sound of sharp, defensive words. My stomach sank. The hope of a good night I had felt just moments earlier rapidly dissipated. I wondered what they could possibly be arguing about this time, and what could have brought this on. Shrinking into the computer chair as best I could, I tried to be invisible. Invisible and deaf. My ears would not cooperate despite my desperate efforts. The angry words reached my ears and reverberated in my head. The argument grew more and more heated. I glanced
up just in time to witness my dad spit a clump of half-chewed green beans into the sink. He was so angry, and judging by the tone of my mom's voice, so was she.

It was time to escape now. I stole a furtive glance around the dining room, determining the best possible escape route. Trek was still watching us all through the back door window. I slipped quietly across the dining room to join him outside.

I quickly exited through the back door, quietly pulling it closed behind me. I stepped out into the warm, fall sunshine; its warm rays danced across my face, but the sunlight was only reflected by the tears starting to spill onto my cheeks. I hoped that my parents hadn’t noticed my escape, and that they wouldn't come out to find me. I couldn't let them see these tears. Memories of smashed water bed frames, arguments, and the recent green bean incident flashed through my mind. I sank down on the top step and reluctantly gave in to silent tears.

The sound of padded footsteps coming towards me caught my attention. I looked up to see Trek coming closer. As he drew near, my first response was to push him away. I felt that the last thing I needed at that moment was dog hair all over me, but as he wiggled his head under my arm to cuddle, I couldn't help but give in. I hugged him close and cried into his fur.

As my tears slowed, I scratched Trek’s head, tracing the division between black and white fur, and watched his tongue flop happily out of his mouth. His face seemed to be stuck in a large, goofy grin. Laughing once to myself, I hugged him tightly once more. Even though I had just been carpeted in dog hair, I was grateful for his affection.

I needed to get my mind off what was happening inside. Racking my brain for something better to occupy my thoughts, I remembered the day we got Trek. Memories of that day began to flash through my mind. I had been so excited because my mom had finally agreed to let us get a puppy. I smiled as I recalled more and more about that day.
It was a cold December morning. As we turned up a frozen gravel driveway, we saw a man walking out to greet us. We followed him behind his house towards a crusty, run-down barn. He pulled open the heavy door. In a flash of black and white, a small border collie scampered out. His ears were pressed flat back on his head as he ran around, nervously casting glances at the man who owned him. His stubby tail, however, pranced back and forth in short, excited wags, betraying his love for attention. As his owner told my mom, my sister, and me about the puppy, the small dog shied away from the sound of his voice. As we eyed the dark barn that this little dog lived in and witnessed the dog’s fear of the man, we suspected that the dog had been abused. We decided then that this puppy had to be ours.

Although Trek was very cute, sweet, and lovable, we weren’t quite prepared for what a character he actually was. I’m sure everyone has heard the term “man's best friend” referring to their amazingly loyal, obedient, prize of a pet, but as far as I was concerned, that cliché did not apply to my dog. Trek had grown into a full fledged border collie and maintained all of his puppy-like energy. He had a passion for running the length of our back fence thousands of times a day, trampling our raspberry bushes, and chewing up anything and everything we left in the back yard. Plastic bowls, water noodles, and dog food bags were only a few of the items that Trek felt obligated to rid the world of. He ripped them to shreds. Thanks to him and his “chew toys” we had a patchwork of color underneath our lawn that closely resembled a famous abstract painting.

I spent countless hours attempting to pick up the things he had shredded, and even tried to save the raspberries, to no avail. They were doomed to death by Trek. However irksome his habits, I loved that dog. The sweet personality that made us fall in love with him as a puppy was still present when he was grown. The way he interacted with us was almost human at times. Trek seemed able to think and understand at a deeper level than he should have. He would often stand at the back door to watch our family in our comings and goings. He could be seen through the door during birthday parties, family dinners, and other events, participating enthusiastically in the only way he could: by watching. I know he witnessed many
things about our family that outsiders usually wouldn't see. He saw the spontaneous water fights and our traditional Sunday French toast lunches. He shared in our laughter, our celebrations, and our lives. I wish I could say that everything that he witnessed was pleasant. That however, is not the case. Trek also watched and listened through the glass as angry scenes unfolded inside. Today’s argument definitely was not the first one he had witnessed, and wouldn’t be the last.

My thoughts grew more reflective as I realized that Trek might actually understand what was going on inside the house. I think he knew that I needed someone, and that I felt alone. Somehow he must have an understanding of the devastating pain and heartache I was experiencing from this unintentional emotional abuse. He had faced some of the same hardships during his previous life living in that musty old barn. He did know.

It seems ironic that the one who I could always turn to when my parents were arguing was my dog. This dog that had been abused as a puppy knew exactly what I needed. Trek helped in a way that was unexpected and perhaps unconventional, but it meant the world to me. He was able to lend me physical and emotional comfort, and an understanding, unbiased sense of friendship that I didn't know where else to find. I realize now that Trek, who had all the right in the world to be hurt and bitter, offered me the sweetest, most sincere love and understanding of life, love, and trust. I saw my dog a little differently that day out on the back porch. Suddenly I realized that he was much more than just a pet to me. Trek may not have been man’s best friend per se, but perhaps he was mine.
iPods, Facebook, and Text Messaging: Oh My!
researched persuasive essay

Bailey McMurdie  Instructor: Emily Sorenson
Bailey McMurdie is a junior at Utah State University, majoring in English with a Creative Writing emphasis. She was born in Seattle, Washington and was raised in Glastonbury, Connecticut. She has been inspired by author Tim O'Brien, comedian Stephen Colbert, and poet, Robert Frost. She is currently single and on the prowl.

While working in a small fast food restaurant over the summer in Bear Lake, Utah, I got to work with a lot of high school students who were a couple years away from graduating. My boss was around seventy-three years old, owning the restaurant from a very young age, and liked getting workers who were young. One day during the summer I was working when my boss walked up to me and asked me if I could read a note a worker had left for her indicating what day she needed off. When I started to read the note, it was in plain English, until she write “IDK what times I need on that day, but I will get back to you.” My boss had no idea what IDK stood for and had way of finding out until she asked someone of the same age group.

Being in the twenty-first century, technology is becoming more advanced faster than ever. We have come from being connected through operators on the telephone to text messaging and video chatting over the Internet. It seems as if this plethora of new communication is ruining the old ways of communicating with other people. All of the new ways to communicate have become so impersonal; there is no actual contact with other human beings when you speak with them. But that isn’t the only way bonds of communication are being broken; the language that is being used through text messaging and instant messaging is becoming so irrelevant that if you are not of a certain generation, you will not be able to understand, just like my boss during my summer job. It is even affecting children’s capacity to learn how to read and effects how students write essays. Even language used in certain online video games is becoming so far fetched for even normal teenagers to understand.
Before the ever-prominent text messaging became popular, it was instant messaging through services like AIM (AOL Instant Messenger) and MSN Messenger. Personally, when I was in junior high, instant messaging was the only form of communication I had with my school friends other than in school; the phone was not cool. Plus, I hated talking on the phone. I took typing classes in 6th grade to help my efficiency on a keyboard, but those skills were quickly thrown out the window. Instant messaging meant typing things as quickly as possible, to make sure your friends got your message in time of their response. This means using acronyms and shortenings for certain and recognizable words or phrases. Even certain words were made up. Though you can trace the origin of these strange words, who made these words up is usually lost in the translation. If they were traced back to their creators, you’d probably find a used-to-be thirteen year old stuck to a chair in front of a computer. For example in instant messaging, an acronym was created to represent the words “rolling on the floor laughing”, becoming “ROFL”. After a certain amount of time, this acronym was used as a word through voice, but then took a strange turn and changed over to “ROFLcopter.” When a group of people were asked if they had ever heard of the word “ROFLcopter”, the majority of people said no, but the people who said yes were those that were involved in online gaming such as “War of Warcraft.”

This language that is used through these messenger services became very specific to the age group and was seemingly harmless; no one thought that this made up online language could affect children’s actual communication with other people. Soon enough, children started becoming more careless with their educations and these online acronyms started to show up on homework assignments and essays. It even, in my own personal experience, has come to people speaking out the acronyms like they are actually words to their friends. “Words” like “LOL” (Laugh out loud) are sounded out to create actual sounding words and could be used in conversation. But there is a counter effect to creating these new words: sounding out
the words actually changes the spelling of the acronym, making it something other than an acronym. Such acronyms like LOL changes to LAWL because of the way it is spoken through voice.

While helping a friend who worked as a DJ pack up his things after a high school dance, I waited outside the high school for him to come help me lift his speakers into the car. While I was waiting for him to come, I overheard a conversation between five high school students, approximately around the age of fifteen or sixteen, as they waited for their parents to come and get them after the dance. A boy was pushing one of the girls around, and this conversation followed. I quickly recorded the conversation to come out something like this:

Girl 1: O M G guys! (Each letter pronounced like a word)

Girl 2: O M G guys, she just said O M G!

How can this not ruin the ways we communicate with each other? It completely changes the communication between generations and even isolates the people who have not learned these new words. Sure, certain people have created a balance where they only use that language around certain people, making it selective, but there are those few unfortunate who don’t understand the gap. Just by speaking these acronyms you are destroying the art of all human languages, not just English.

Text messaging is another suspect to the demise of language. Punctuation has been defaced through pretty much all text messaging. An article named “iPods and English-language Learners: A Great Combination” talks about how these new technologies have helped people learn English. It also mentions how these new portable electronics like iPods and cell phones are helping kids read more. It specifically reads that, “such changes are in some ways quite heartening; today’s online technologies have young people reading and writing far more than they were 20 years ago or even a decade ago.” While kids may be reading more than ever, what is the quality of the text they are reading?

The majority of text messaging used is riddled with acronyms and lack of punctuation. Logical explanations to not use punctuation could be because it takes
to long to type it all out, but has become so common that punctuation is hardly even used anymore throughout the younger generation. Text messaging has isolated young people from their educations by distracting them from their classes and causing lost learning. When observing an English class while attending Utah State University, looking around the room every ten minutes, on average there were two people looking at their phone rather than paying attention to the class. How much information is not retained in classrooms because a student was looking at their phone and checking their text messages rather than listening to the lesson?

The generational gap in language has become so apparent that even pop-culture has taken advantage of advertising to speak to younger crowds. An AT&T Wireless commercial is recognized and quoted regularly by the younger generation due to its social significance. In the commercial it is a Mother berating her children for going over their text messaging limit, the whole while the children respond back to their mother in test message language. But not until the Grandmother is shown texting and responds to the Mother’s question of who she could be texting, the Grandmother replies, “IDK, my BFF Rose?” The reason this commercial is so well recognized is because the younger generation who watch it thinks that it is hilarious that the Grandmother in the commercial can understand text-messaging language. AT&T is targeting a younger audience who obviously understand this language and can relate with it, probably bringing their sales up with younger adults.

Teachers have had to learn how to deal with receiving papers from students use such language that is used in text messaging or instant messaging. The reaction can be taken one of two ways: the teacher accepts the writing as a form of personal expression or will reject the writing as unintelligible. In Evelyn Ch’ien’s article, she says “I sometimes ask my students if they find certain vernaculars difficult to read, and this generation appears more adept at it than older ones.” Even though it may seem to be easier for some students to understand other languages because of the use of different communication, but what about all of the students who are unfortunate enough to use these languages in English classes? Are they supposed to
be graded by the specific generations use of language or do they need to learn how to use both forms of communication?

Since the introduction of text messaging and instant messaging, technological upgrades have brought us websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. Facebook and MySpace that were created as ways to connect people and students with the click of a button. High school students that graduate and leave for college are given the opportunity to keep in touch with each other. An interview with a sophomore college student from Loyola Maryland, Mariel Pereda says, “I’m not the best at keeping up with my friends. When we all left for college, we went to all different areas, even one of my best friends went out to Utah.” When asked if it has helped her stay I touch with her friends from high school she replied, “Oh yeah, it has. I don’t ever really have the time to talk to them on the phone because I am off doing so many things, but every once and a while I will check their Facebook page and will be able to look at some pictures they have been taking a leave a little note on their wall that I have been thinking about them.”

While these websites have created an important way to connect with friends when there is not much time in your schedule, it has enabled the use of bad grammar and poor communication. Students like Mariel Pereda use Facebook to communicate with friend who are far away from home, but Brooke Hall talks about how it has made communicating with people way too easy. She says “It has kind of become pointless to call anyone these days. You have all of these ways to communicate with people that it just seems there isn’t a need to even meet people in person anymore. People even try to develop relationships over these things; it’s getting kind of ridiculous.” While these forms of communication could help the more shy people of the population, it only inhibits personal interaction. More and more relationships today are developed through writing than actual human contact. Abbie Park talked about how she does not have enough time to talk to people in person, so she just texts messages, though she admits, you can only get to know a person so well through text messaging. When asked if any of her “flirting” through text messaging has brought her any luck with the opposite sex, she replied, “to be
honest? No, not really.” It also has created unsociable people, causing young people to be unable to speak to others in person.

Overall, why should we even give concern to this topic? That can be answered with another question: How much perversion can the English language take before it becomes a whole new language? Technology has progressed and advanced so quickly that it is only natural that people today demand for the most recent forms of cell phones and laptop computers, why would they not demand for the quickest ways of communication? While it can be a blessing to be able to communicate so quickly with friends and family, it can also be a curse by causing an adverse effect on the use of the English language.

There is no doubt that parts of the English language have been perverted because of the younger generations that are living amongst this technology. This shift in vocalization has created an age gap that is so large, older people have to use dictionaries to find out what some of the words mean, which is sad that some dictionaries even include these words. Teachers have to deal with students every day, telling them to put their phones away or grading papers with acronym use with regular English. How far is too far? If we let this type of language slide, then what else is going to happen down the road when a younger generation comes along to pervert the perversions of today? We need to stop this language now by reinforcing the use of proper grammar and punctuation in English classes. We can cripple the use of this language if it is mandatory for students to write all of their papers in proper English. We need to come up with ways to stop the progression of text-messaging languages because it is creating less intelligent and capable people who need to communicate in the world. Sure, some diversity in language and perversions of words have gone throughout history, but sooner or later you can only dumb down OMG and BFF so much.
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The heat is unbearable, and the humidity disgusts me. A thick wave of mugginess slaps me in the face as I step off the plane. I don’t like the climate, but I’m fifteen. I can handle anything.

My initial impression isn’t entirely complimentary. The foul-smelling streets of Bangkok are buzzing with traffic. As the smoggy, gray air stifles and chokes the inhabitants below it, the tightly cramped cars sit as if in paralysis. Motorcycles and bikes whiz between the stopped cars and cruise down the dashed lines, as jealous automobile drivers glare and scowl after them. What can best be described as colorful, three-wheeled golf carts called “tuk-tuks” act as the taxis. They look like something found on a theme park ride, and after getting out, passengers feel as if they’ve been on one.

Awnings and tables line the sidewalks, with natives selling the same teal silk purses with gold elephants that I’d see throughout our sojourn here. Alongside these tables are impoverished, Thailand versions of America’s taco stands. Though instead of taco fixings, I see large containers of fried grasshoppers, cockroaches, and little frogs frozen mid-leap. The sickly tan color of fried batter slightly alters their forms.

Miscellaneous vendors collect around the driveways of the hotels, hoping to attract the eye and, if Karma would have it, the Baht of a naïve tourist. I refuse to throw away my money like these tourists and expect to hold tight the Baht I now carry. After glancing at the 5-star’s shiny glass façade, I step out of the taxi and ignore the locals. Upon walking into the hotel, the blessed air conditioning, ultra-modern furniture, and fresh lotus flowers greet me. As I unwrap my pillow mint, I look out the window to view the streets of Bangkok from above.

A strange and ancient-looking little graveyard resides just kitty-corner the lavish hotel. The surrounding buildings have taken over whatever else was once part
of this small, dark gray patch of a cemetery. Stray dogs curl up in the holes they’ve
dug themselves to keep cool. It’s interesting to see luxury and poverty reside so
closely, yet one will have nothing to do with the other. Quite untouched by the
observation, I flop down on the soft bed.

The next morning I try to enjoy a breakfast of fresh fruit, smoked salmon,
and the best orange juice I’ve ever tasted. Recalling the fried frogs being sold just
outside, I make a face and push my plate away.

Today my parents, grandmother, and I are to
accompany my great aunt on a jaunt to a
jewelry store. Many jewelers, my great aunt
among them, travel to Thailand to acquire
gems for a reduced price. Upon leaving, I pull
ahead of the group in some eye-rolling attempt at adolescent independence. Of
course I can walk Thailand’s streets alone. I’m fifteen. I can handle anything.

Dodging a scrawny stray dog, I come upon the first real beggar I’ve ever
seen. An old, gaunt and worn woman’s face looks into mine, as her aching body sits
cross-legged on the concrete. Leaning against a telephone booth, a little plastic sand
bucket sits in front of her. Wide-eyed, I continue on, and try to shake off the
uncomfortable shock of the encounter.

A block or two further, there’s a man, or at least a semblance of one, sitting
on a wide platform of stairs to my left. Never having seen a starved person before,
the image etches itself in my mind. Wearing nothing but a simple diaper of sorts, his
body shows every rib and more. Before me is a skeleton with a tanned skin
stretched across it, appearing to have been vacuum-sealed around each bone. His
stomach disappears up into his rib cage. The hipbones look ready to burst through
the barrier of paper-thin skin. Knobby joints connect frighteningly thin limbs that in
all likelihood can’t lift themselves. He sits cross-legged, showing flexibility, but this
is not to be envied; a severe lack of muscle makes him sit so flat. Each leg’s
willowy, rawboned appearance makes my own ache, and I think of being on the
solid ground all day with near nothing separating bone and concrete.
The sunken cheeks of his frail face look much like his stomach, vanishing underneath the cheekbones. These only emphasize the dead-looking eyes hidden behind thick rolls of eyelids, and a tight, wrinkled mouth that has forgotten how to chew. What reads on his face is pure, listless resignation. He must have crossed the path of a demon, who, in drawing out what sustenance was in the man, chanced upon his spirit and sucked it out also. He is a dry, shrunken husk of what he must have been.

At the sight of him, the air within me makes its escape in one quick exhalation. Unable to easily draw more, I take short, small inhales through my nose as I try to focus on how tight my chest feels. I’m sure my eyes look big and my mouth tight as I trudge forward, attempting to hide the horrible image deep in my consciousness. My eyes start to swim, but the impending need to see where I’m stepping causes me to push all the horrid emotions into a little box to deal with later.

Determined to not let my parents see me upset, I never refer to the incident and let my face betray nothing. I’m fifteen. I can handle anything.

Walking onward, I try to enjoy the sights and sounds of a street in Bangkok. The familiar 7-Eleven’s and McDonald’s bring home to mind. Would a Thai Big Mac taste the same as the one I had after school last week? Does the kid sitting behind me in pre-calc miss passing notes? I ponder these and similar questions as I maneuver in the direct center of the sidewalk, equal distance from the strangeness that seems to accumulate on my left and right. To avoid a fast-paced bike, I move to the right, hastily stepping over a destitute woman as if she’s a bump in the concrete.

The street seems to get darker as we travel, and we pass by a group of impoverished men to the left side of the walk. Many are leaning against the buildings, one or two are sleeping in the fetal position. Quite apart from the group sits an armless man with his legs crossed. His arms end just a few inches out from the shoulder. Hanging from his left arm stub is a bright red little sand bucket, much like the old woman’s. This time, the bucket’s color being the only thing able to reach out to people, asking for just a little. Just a little.
Seeing this man sends my heart to my throat, and it feels as if I’ve swallowed a rock. I desperately desire to put something in the little red bucket, probably just as desperately as he would desire me to do so. I get scared, and again turn my gaze to the sidewalk at my feet. I resolve that on our way back, all of my money will go in that bucket. My consciousness suddenly feels very heavy.

Looking further down the way, the roads are skinnier and less busy. No dashing “tuk-tuks” here. I hear my dad’s voice behind me and turn to see my family crossing the street. The sky is a kind of hazy gold, a hue often seen just prior to sunset.

I absently wander through the jewelry store, mumbling in agreement as my mom oohs and aahs over something. My mind is distracted. I pray that the man hasn’t moved in the time we’ve spent here. Trying on some necklaces, my grandmother purchases one of them while my back is turned; a Christmas present I will receive in a couple of months.

After my great aunt finishes bartering and bickering, we begin to leave. I start to get antsy and anticipate seeing the vagrant man again, seeing the little red bucket as it somehow clings to what remains of his left arm.

The Baht in my pocket is of little importance to me now. I know it will feel good as the money leaves my hand. I know it will feel good to help someone.

I keep my eyes peeled for that raised red bucket, ready for it to flag me down. Going in the direction we came, I now walk behind everyone. I want to keep this between the poor man and myself. The light is diminishing quickly, and the blue-gray atmosphere of a sun gone down pervades the buildings and sidewalks.

At first sight of the bucket and small man, I reach my hand into my pocket to grasp the folded bills. That now familiar loss of breath comes over me. Trying to appear casual, I review in my mind how to place the money in the bucket without making it fall off its precarious perch.

Coming closer, my grip on the Baht gets tighter. My heart is beating wildly in my throat, and constricts every calming breath I try to force down. My vision
blurs as I take a step toward him, and he looks at me for the first time. His sad gaze affects me deeply.

    Bordering catharsis, I step in front of him and the ambience seems to brighten. Against my will, my feet keep taking me forward. A voice in my head screams for them to stop, but they continue to disobey. Moment lost, I shamefully glance back at him before the street gloom returns.

    Lowering my head, I look to the ground as tears come into my eyes. My once constricted breath comes in quietly pressurized gasps, and I walk onward. I just couldn’t handle it.

    I’m fifteen. I can’t handle anything.
Say No to Mathematics
researched satire

Rebecca Squire
Rebecca Squire is a native of West Valley City, Utah where she met her best friend, whom she is lucky enough to be married to. She is a Mathematics/Statistics Education major, although she would be okay if Math were outlawed.

Imagine if the President of the United States of America, along with Congress decided to finally listen to our high school students. All across this nation, students experience the woes of math requirements. From geometry to algebra, trigonometry to calculus, students everywhere dread the math classes that will surely drive their GPAs and self esteems down. One student who goes by the tag “theonechickagelle” on the oasisjournal.com website, an online journal service, writes, “I hate math. I have been hating it since 3rd grade. I simply do not understand it and do not see its relevance” (I Hate Math). Her sentiments are similar to many students nationwide. Math is a barrier between the student and his aspirations. So consider for a moment: what if, as a going away present, the current Congress and President were to decide that it is time to pass legislation outlawing mathematics from the lives of Americans, beginning with the education system and working toward every aspect touched by math? This Anti-Mathematics Bill could count as a Christmas/Jewish/Kwanzaa/Non-Holiday-Related Gift to every student across the United States. The education system would be directly affected, followed by the destruction of mathematics from any area. The complaints of students would not be the only reason for such a drastic move, researchers nation-wide would see the benefits and determine that what the American population needs is a life with less stress and more simplicity, something that will invariably come with the denunciation of mathematics.

Mathematics is defined as: “the science of numbers and their operations, interrelations, combinations, generalizations, and abstractions and of space configurations and their structure, measurement, transformations, and generalizations” (Mathematics). Using this definition, the possible Anti-Mathematics Bill would outlaw anything and everything that falls under this
umbrella. The proposed bill would have to include what the framework of the
education system in the United States would look like and the bill would also
discuss areas in our society that would be affected inadvertently and how we should
handle them. Two of these areas could be: Architecture and National Monuments,
and the Animal Kingdom dwelling within the borders of the United States. So take a
deep breath and plunge with me into some of the depths of this possible government
gift.

It is very clear that through the Anti-Mathematics Bill, all math classes will
be outlawed from beginning to end. This includes elementary, middle school, high
school, and the university level. From basic addition to complex analysis,
mathematics will vanish from curriculum.

As experts from the U.S. Department of
Education work on how to do away with
math, they have discovered that outlawing
mathematics makes it necessary for more
modifications to be made to the education system as a whole, not just in the math
class setting. The education system is built upon a grading system in which teachers
assign students grades to reflect their performance on tests, homework assignments,
and other categories as determined by each individual teacher. Unfortunately, all
teachers must use some sort of grading scale that is rooted in a number system. So,
with the Anti-Mathematics bill, teachers no longer are able to grade their students
with a percentage that equals a letter grade. In fact, the letter grade received by each
student cannot be any sort of measurement of that particular student’s performance.
Measurement, as defined by the above mentioned definition, is a form of math.
Consequently, grades will be done away with completely as they will be illegal
according to the new legislation.

Along with the subjects already
removed from the curriculum,
Music Programs nation-wide
would cease. Music is directly
tied to mathematics and is simply
a glorified form of math.

As further investigation is conducted on the education system, many
subjects not inherently connected to mathematics will be taken out of the curriculum
or modified. Science is one of the subjects that will have to be modified. With the
chemistry branch, measurements are often made on substances as chemicals are
mixed in beakers. This is a clear violation of the Anti-Mathematics Law. Physics is another branch of science that is filled with formulas based in mathematical properties. Physics will be done away with. Biology studies patterns and relationships that come from life around us, also a violation of the Anti-Mathematics Law. Consequently, Science will become a subject where students can explore their feelings about sunsets, animals, and plants without applying any sort of relationship between themselves and the world around them.

Art is a subject that will be completely done away with. As stated in a paper from professors at the University of Colorado, “Mathematics can indeed be defined as the general science of pattern and structure. Because art also involves patterns and structures, art and math relate to each other in many natural ways (Craft and Farsi).” By this statement alone it is clear that there is a distinct connection between the visual arts and mathematics. Geometry is clearly a part of an artistic eye as the artist attempts to create something pleasing by following the law of thirds or something disproportionate or lacking perspective to make the viewer wonder the artist’s motives. No matter what the artist strives to achieve, he is using mathematics in some form to his advantage and to make a point. For example, look at the Pieta by Michelangelo. There is a clear knowledge of proportions used in that statue. Michelangelo must have made the Madonna larger than the Christ for a reason. So with the disproportions, the beauty is retained and a message is conveyed.

Along with the subjects already removed from the curriculum, Music Programs nation-wide would cease. Music is directly tied to mathematics and is simply a glorified form of math. Thus rented violins, tubas, and cellos will be returned to the local instrument shop and dissonances will never be resolved. Where is the proof of this claim? Gottfried Leibniz, a world-famous mathematician, declared, “Music is the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting (Sauty).” Music in its very essence is counting. It is numbers. It is relationships. It is making sound using math. And thus under our new legislation, the nation will say goodbye to music.
After looking at all the elements of the education system and determining how the curriculum will have to change, the experts on the Anti-Mathematics Project will have to look at other aspects in which the nation will have to change as we turn our backs on mathematics. One of the key areas is in architecture, especially with the national monuments. One of the well known monuments of this great land is Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Anyone who has visited this site can attest to the magnificence of the monument dedicated to some of the great leaders of this nation. However, under the Anti-Mathematics Law, Mount Rushmore will be bulldozed as it is a clear representation of mathematics applied. With the use of proportions and similarities, men’s faces were enlarged and carved into the side of a mountain. Any Geometry teacher would gladly use this as an example of applied math. And thus, the nation may want to pay its respects to a monument that future generations may never know. Other soon-to-be demolished sites will include the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco Bay, the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue, and The Arch in St. Louis, Missouri. These are just a few of the sites that are an outright display of mathematics. All structures, including houses across this nation, will be demolished, as an open declaration of our abhorrence of mathematics. The government should advise the citizens to burn all camping tents as they are clear mathematical structures and to not even consider living in a cardboard box because all boxes will be broken down along with all geometric figures.

And, finally, another area the legislation will touch upon is that of the animal kingdom within the borders of the United States. Elvis, the Welsch Corgi, who is owned by Tim Pennings, the associate professor of mathematics at Hope College in Michigan will no longer be able to play catch with his owner, who will also unfortunately be out of a job. In 2001, Pennings noticed that Elvis consistently took the quickest route to reach the ball when they would play catch. After conducting some experiments, Pennings discovered that Elvis was doing calculus to reach the ball. If this new legislation passes, Pennings will have to find the ball for Elvis as his Welsch Corgi will no longer be able to find the ball, let alone the
quickest route to it. Another affected species: the lobster. Lobsters will be sold in mass quantities and forced to live in aquariums or become extinct as they do mathematical calculations in order to return home in their natural habitats. Using the earth’s magnetic field, lobsters are able to figure out how far they have traveled along the sea floor as well as in what direction they need to go to get home. With mathematics outlawed, the lobsters will need to be reigned in and eaten for their noncompliance to this new legislation. And a final example, with more that will be outlined in the legislation, is that of the honeybee. Be sure to enjoy your last taste of sweet honey before the government has be put a stop to the geometric fiends responsible for making the delectable goo. With hexagonal homes and patterned dances to survive, honeybees have proven to be among the worst perpetrators in nature (Devlin).

Despite the evidence as to why outlawing math would be the best piece of legislation to touch the United States Congress, lobbyists associated with the State Boards of Education would seek to stop this Bill. Their reasoning could only be self-serving. Of course the lobbyists fighting against the Anti-Mathematics Bill would want to retain the education system as it stands today. Without it, these lobbyists would be jobless because there would essentially be no education system but a national babysitting business. Another driving force behind the opposition is their desire for luxury. They want homes that will stand erect for longer than six months. Clearly this is selfish, as they care little about the frustrations of high school student nationwide. The lobbyists also want to have pets that will play catch and bring them newspapers, proving their laziness. And finally, the lobbyists are arrogant in thinking that they want to retain the prestige of owning art and listening to music. Those who would oppose the Anti-Mathematics Bill clearly want their own comforts met first, caring little about helping the whole country live a life more simple and peaceful.

This “imagine if” moment shows how the world might look if our government were to pass an Anti-Mathematics Bill. I daresay, few would protest the abolition of mathematics as it would make America’s future a little bit brighter. The
youth would be allowed to focus on something more than passing their math classes and making the grade. Teachers everywhere would rejoice with nothing to grade. And adults would be delighted to not have a mortgage on the homes they do not have. Every citizen of the United States of America would count their blessings that they live in the land of the free: the land free from mathematics.

Works Cited


The Real World
personal narrative

Brittany S. Roring

Instructor: Binod Paudyal

Brittany Roring is a junior at Utah State and majoring in elementary education. She loves to teach, but also loves to write. Putting her ideas down on paper is one of the best feelings. She is very excited to see a piece of hers published and hopes you enjoy it.

The arms clasped around my slim waist felt almost a part of me. I allowed the protective embrace to tighten, bringing me closer. The room held a thick, yet oddly sweet aroma that almost tickled my nose. I had experienced the rough smell of cigarettes many times before back in Arizona, but this was not the same. I knew exactly what the wisps curling around me contained. Something much worse than a bit of rat poison mixed with nicotine. This was marijuana. This was the substance that I had watched destroy many friends and family members. And yet, a deep curiosity welled up within me. He sensed the sudden turn in my emotion, and his protective arms tightened around me once more. It was largely ironic. The only person who was truly trying to protect me from this world of drugs, alcohol, and crazed partying was the person who had presented it to me in the first place. He was smart enough to understand that the “party” world was destroying him, picking him apart piece by piece, and yet, he was not strong enough to remove himself from it.

My mind, being quickly blinded by curiosity, began to wonder what “being high” felt like and I slowly tilted my head upward to look at him. He glanced down and my curiosity quickly turned to concern and I blinked in confusion. He could not keep his deep blue eyes fixed with mine for more than a couple seconds and they nervously shifted back to a scene of laughter and smoke. His short glance had contained a smile, but there was something behind that smile. I didn’t, and couldn’t fully understand what he was going through. For him, it was an addiction. It was a physical need that flashed through his mind every second of every day. And for the moment, he had to resist every thought and temptation in order to protect me. The aroma in the air mocked him, enticing him to forget about the fragile girl wrapped in his arms and join in on
the party. And yet he stayed, viewing from a distance as his friends enjoyed each
drinking game and each hit from their home rolled joints. I knew he wanted to join
in, but watching him destroy himself like that would certainly destroy me, and he
knew that.

My mind had always portrayed drug users as mindless, selfish jerks,
concerned only about their addiction. I always had felt that people who made those
decisions deserved their fate. But now I was witnessing the person behind the
addiction. These people were trapped in a downward spiral, secretly begging for
someone’s help, but too proud or “cool” to ask for it. Some are angry with
themselves for a time, but eventually they accept their situation and allow
themselves to be consumed by it. This is where the angry selfishness sits in. They
are angry at the world for not stopping their foolishness. But how could I help him?
How could I make him stop? It was a decision he had to make for himself, not for
his girlfriend. A small piece of me knew this, but another spark of hope believed
that maybe I could make him stop.

The laughter quickly reminded me of where I was standing. I was at a
college party, a party that I had always promised to treat like the bubonic plague.
This was a party to avoid at all cost. My parent’s words seemed to echo, bouncing
around in my mind like a child’s rubber ball. I pictured crimson warning lights,
blinking in my head. I knew I should say something. I knew that I should leave, and
yet the cold tile held my bare feet like peanut butter to bread. I didn’t want to leave
his safe hold. I trusted him. There was always something behind his eyes, something
for me to figure out. That was the real reason why I was here. He was different; he
had sparked my curiosity. It was like his mind was on a whole different frequency
than the rest of the world, and it was exhilarating trying to keep up.

The sour stench of alcohol stung my nose as a brimming full cup splattered
its contents across the floor. I suddenly understood what my parents had meant. In
order to avoid temptation, I needed to avoid the situation, and, of course, I had
placed myself directly in the middle of it. Not only was I there, but now I had a
reason to stay. Now I could not make myself leave. I had super glued my heart to
him, and no matter how much my logic pulled, my heart was content to stay put, and my feet followed suite.

A blonde haired girl, who had been horrifically losing in a game of “flip cup,” frantically shoved past us on her way to ‘converse’ with the toilet. As the stomach churning sound of bile hitting water reached my ears, my logic began to tug harder. Was it worth it? Was he worth it? In fact, was anyone or anything worth throwing away my perfectly good brain cells and my ability to walk in a straight line? I knew that if I stayed, no matter how hard he tried to protect me, and no matter how strong I thought I was, I would find a way to give in to my new temptation. The only way out of this mess was to completely remove myself from it. And yet, could I do that? Could I remove myself from him? My heart began to beat faster than a hummingbird’s wings. I had made up my mind. I had to leave. I broke from his embrace and turned to face him.

“I can’t stay here.” My face was clouded with emotion as I said these words. I began to walk toward the crooked door and my heart sunk to my stomach. He did not follow. He could not follow. He was stuck in that world. Addiction won out over affection. It will win every time. I turned at the doorway and locked my eyes with his, pleading for him to follow. Shame and regret filled his gaze but he did not move. His clouded eyes shifted back to watch, and now to join his friends. My heavy feet continued to carry me through the doorway and to my frosted car. I didn’t want to be a part of that world. I turned the key and the old engine rattled to life. I pulled away from his apartment and away from his life. I glanced back only once, and then, scraping frost from my window, I drove on.
The Aggie Faithful
personal narrative

Chad Fuller
Instructor: Kurt Magsamen
Chad Fuller is majoring in exercise science and planning to attend medical school after Utah State. He works at the Cache Valley Specialty Hospital as an operating room orderly with Dr. Bressel on research regarding the biomechanics of bicycle seats. He plans on traveling to Salvador, Brazil this summer to help work with HIV/AIDS infected children. He is from Tampa, Florida and enjoys cooking, traveling, snowboarding, and has a passion for sports. He loves supporting Aggie athletics and can be found cheering on the Aggies at most athletic events.

“GO, GO, GO! RUN, RUN, RUN!” are the last words I hear as I sprint towards the steps. A newbie follows me and runs right past the usher ignoring the need to swipe his student ID. We are neck and neck. We approach the steps, and I allow my momentum to ram him into the wall as we turn to dash as fast as we can down the stairs. I reach the steps first. Crucial. “Don't fall,” I repeatedly mutter to myself. To go down as fast as possible, I zero in on every third step. I must focus on every individual step to make sure I do not trip up as I race to the finish. The hand rail ends, and I look up to my destination, almost a fatal mistake. I catch the end of a step and begin to stagger down the last remaining steps. I can no longer fight to maintain my balance and land on both knees. Ignoring the new rip in my pants, I quickly grab the seat next to me and fling myself into the first couple of seats. I toss my jacket over the next two seats. Mission accomplished.

My roommate introduced me to the excitement of the front row of Aggie basketball games over three years ago. Some people are addicted to cigarettes, others pornography; me, the front row. I am literally a foot away from the action. The opponent hears every taunt and scream. The ecstasy knowing you are in the opponent’s head surpasses any physical pleasure. It is the monster locked up deep inside me that is accountable for my uncouth behavior. I enter the Spectrum and the cage door opens. There is no holding back the beast. I transform into a person whom I cannot recognize. I want to stop it; nonetheless my soul craves it. I love the feeling when it emerges. It gives me freedom and a belief of unaccountability. I vow to myself every year I will quit going after the front row. However, my promises prove to be as empty as a politician’s campaign platform. Till this day I have yet to
experience a home game no further than from row number one. I love the feeling when I can release the beast.

Like any addict, I do anything to satisfy the habit. Instead of whoring myself to other people, I whore myself to the Spectrum. The Spectrum requires payment, but I do not pay in cash. Game after game, I spend at least five hours waiting for the chance to claim my spot down low. Grades surely suffer as I must skip class, and even an occasional quiz to make payment. No mercy is shown to anyone who must feed this obsession.

Today we play against the #9 nationally ranked Nevada Wolfpack. Luckily it is Saturday because payment will be expensive today. My alarm beeps at 8, and I arrive at the spectrum by 8:30 AM. I enter the waiting room and scan the situation. Crap, two have already beaten me to my spot in line. Wait, one is my roommate, and the other is another regular. Those seats are as good as mine!

I lie down on the hard, dirty floor and attempt to sleep to pass the time. The sun begins to shine directly into my eyes. I rub my eyes and awake from my nap. Is it noon yet I wonder. I look at my phone. Only 45 minutes have passed while I slept. I pull my backpack out and attempt to study for a test I have on Monday. I only need ten minutes to realize I am not in the mood to study and quickly set my school work aside.

More important subjects occupy my brain. Will the Aggies be able to control Nevada’s frontcourt? What is the best way to make fun of Coach Fox? How many points will Jaycee Carroll score? Instead I bust out my laptop and search for a DVD to put in. Ah, Gladiator. The perfect movie set the tone for the rest of the day. I finish the movie and look at my phone again. A little past eleven. My back begins to ache and stiffen up from sitting on the floor. So I take a walk outside. I begin to shiver from the cold so I return back to my spot. Again I look at my phone and still it is not noon. I cannot take it anymore. I call my friend up and beg him to bring me a pepperoni pizza. By the time he arrives, noon finally hits. Only six more hours to go.

*We treat them like hobos begging for money on the streets; avoid eye contact and act as if they do not exist.*
By three o’clock we stop opening the doors to let people in. Soon a throng of students outside the locked doors starts begging us to let them enter. Due to our own comfort we refuse. Every five minutes a new student pounds on the door holding on to the hope one of us will break down. We treat them like hobos begging for money on the streets; avoid eye contact and act as if they do not exist. Little sympathy is shown for the students waiting outside in the sub-freezing temperature. We pay too of a high a price to consider the average fan. If you want a spot inside, you have to pay the price. Many fans believe we are an elitist group unwilling to give anybody a chance to sit on the front row. I compare it to a job. Do we all start off as the boss of a big corporation? No. You work up the corporate ladder. We are not going to allow one of us to miss out on our front row seat because an average fan wants the best seat for just this game. Come early and come often and earn the seat. It may not be the Obama way, but it is the fair way. We sacrifice too many hours to give seats away. All fellow front rowers share a sense of unity. We look out for each other. We will get our seats.

It is now 5:00 PM. Only one hour left. I put on my headphones and start listening to some pumped up music. It's now 5:30. I check again, only 5:35. Fifteen minutes later I check again, 5:40. Everybody in the room begins to stand up in anticipation. Three more hours pass by, and it is now 5:55. I start jumping up and down to get the butterflies to leave my stomach. It doesn't work. “What if I am too slow? What if somehow something happened, and I didn't get my seats? I can't have 2nd row seats,” I begin speculating in a panic. Then some idiot in the back opens the locked door. A herd of students begin to push their way in. I have to hold back the mob. I strategically position my student ID card by the card swiper, with my picture facing me. It ensures a quick exchange between the usher and me that will save precious seconds.

5:59. The minute before six feels like we wait a whole other day and I wonder if time has stood still and if the clock is ever going to change to 6:00 while I wait in my runner’s position. My friend stands right behind me. His job is simple, to make himself as wide as possible to slow everybody behind us down. Eyeing down
the clock; my eyes begin to water because I refuse to blink. I must make sure I start running right at six.

My thoughts spontaneously begin to stray. “Why do I do this? What brings me back game after game?” Then the beast begins to growl deep inside me, knocking on its cage door. I welcome the transformation it will bring. I lose focus and turn my head to gaze towards the swarm of students behind me. I realize that the beast lives in all of us. I am not alone. The fans are unmerciful to the opponent and at times downright mean. The basketball games are a chance for all of us to release all that we hide inside and it helps propel our team to victory. Suddenly I snap back into reality with the frantic scream of “GO, GO, GO! RUN, RUN, RUN!”
Beyond the Superhero: Comics Fuse Word and Art
researched persuasive essay

Malissa Candland        Instructor: Susan B. Andersen
Malissa Candland was born on September 29, 1988 in Salt Lake City, Utah and grew up in the town of
Alpine. She is an honors student dual majoring in political science and anthropology. She plans on
pursuing a masters in Public Administration in International Development. She loves to read graphic
novels, go to concerts, run, dance, bake with her twin, write poetry and research papers, and being with
her husband.

Comic books and graphic novels showcase evil villains, superheroes with
god complexes, gritty fighting, street crime, and abnormal powers. Or at least that is
the perception. In reality, the comic medium is much more than a simple,
entertaining narrative of a hero overcoming evil. It is a serious art form just as rich
and complicated as any serious prose novel and as such it is ready to escape its
common stereotype after years of getting no respect. The typical imagery associated
with the comic medium bears no resemblance to reality. It appears to be a land of
refuge for the social misfits, the awkward teen, and the immature adult—a boy’s
land. Despite this, comic books and graphic novels are not relegated to telling the
trials and triumphs of superheroes but to the stories of regular people,
revolutionaries, a person’s childhood, war, and friendship. The entire comic
medium is no longer the medium of choice for awkward adolescents, instead it is a
serious literary contribution that deserves to be treated the same way as traditional
art and prose that promote literacy and influences society.

The term graphic novel refers to a novel whose narrative is related through
a combination of text and art, often in comic-strip form. Although this definition is
vague it encompasses what a graphic novel is—the grownup relative of the comic
book and a story portrayed through word and art. It is precisely because of its close
association to the comic book that it gets treated with little respect. Some people
consider graphic novels to be just adventure stories but even the superhero tale
“serves as an allegory to modern life and provides an escape for readers” (Bucher
and Manning 68). The traditional age group for comic books is in the upper teens,
yet graphic novels transcend this into the mid-20s and beyond (DeCandido 52).
Critics of comic books point out that the typical audience is young and male, citing
surveys that 90 percent of comic fans are male and ages 6-11, 11-17, and 17 and over (Brown 14), yet these surveys are at least a decade and a half old, calling into question the accuracy of such claims. This is not to say that the appeal to adolescents is gone, rather that the appeal has broadened in a large degree to women and to an adult audience (Weiner 55). As DeCandido and Weiner point out in various articles, the demographic for graphic novels is widely changing, challenging the conventional view that they only appeal to young men. The comic book has outgrown its traditional audience and transformed into a forum for discussion of important issues.

Even though the audience is growing, it remains in the public consciousness that comic books and graphic novels are reserved for male nerds. As a fan of graphic novels, this offends me. Although I openly admit that I am a nerd who likes comic books and graphic novels, I don’t appreciate it when people call me a nerd because of my penchant for the comic medium. In addition, it infuriates my feminist tendencies when people give me surprised looks and negative comments just because I am a girl when I mention that I enjoy a good comic book or graphic novel. It even annoys me when a guy is pleasantly surprised and intrigued that I like them and comments on how he never meets girls who are fans of comic books. I do not see why it should be any different and I find it offensive that something I do is perceived as only being normal for a male. This is upsetting as well as detrimental to women by making them feel as if they must conform to an arbitrary standard of suitable reading material. Also, as long as this attitude persists it can negatively affect the reach of the important literary and art medium of comics because it can limit the audience.

One of the main reasons I love reading comic books and graphic novels is because of the fusion of art and word. The medium goes beyond the traditional literary form through the integration of art work. A vivid picture is created by mixing word and image on an elaborate canvas that allows for innovation for the author and illustrator as well as breeding imagination in the reader. As comic books evolved from short strips to the radio waves, then to ten cent copies at the drug store
into a serious art its potential started to be realized. Lawrence Abbott wrote that “comic art does possess the potential for the most serious and sophisticated literary and artistic expression, and we can only hope that future artists will bring the art form to full fruition” (Tabachnick 154). As Stephen E. Tabachnick explores in his article, “Of Maus and Memory: the structure of Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel of the Holocaust,” Art Spiegelman was an artist who brought the art form to completion. Spiegelman took advantage of the unique qualities of the medium, its ability to gender a rich sense of time and space and a deep involvement of the senses than any other novelistic medium can offer (Tabachnick 154). Yet the genre of the graphic novel is not fully recognized as a serious artistic practice in the United States. However, comics have been canonized in European countries like Belgium and France, where its contribution to the art world is recognized (Chute 1021). Comics are a meticulous and intricate form of art that layers the narrative tracks of the visual and verbal realm.

In fact, the entire history of art began with cartoon-like forms in the form of cave paintings and Egyptian illustrations (Manning 66). From this point, the images evolved to represent ideas and sounds or they became more realistic images. As photography and other art techniques allowed images to be represented realistically, the trend shifted toward abstraction in the 20th century. Cartooning is an abstraction of images and “by stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way realistic art can’t...simplifying characters and images toward a purpose can be an effective tool for storytelling in any medium. Cartooning isn’t just a way of drawing; it’s a way of seeing” (McCloud 30-31). Thus, it is an ideal medium for conveying ideas directly to the reader by allowing them to truly see the essence of the object and its message.
Like other great art, comic books comment and question society and convey specific ideas to the viewer. Robert Crumb, Chris Ware, and others used the graphic novel as a vehicle for political activism, as a memoir, and to tell the stories of flawed and relatable heroes (Schjeldahl 162). As a result of their work, “graphic novels are a young person’s art, demanding and rewarding mental flexibility and nervous stamina” (Schjeldahl 162). They are not simply accounts of a hero’s antics used to defeat the costumed villain or simple tales of good and evil. They are complex, requiring mental acuity. Comic books and graphic novels are far from passive entertainment. They require the immersion of the reader into the story itself.

This is accomplished through the use of symbolism, metaphors, drawings and other literary devices that are effectively used to comment and reflect on humanity, society and life. In this aspect, graphic novels contribute just as much to society as poetry or prose novels. Graphic novels like Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth by Chris Ware can give insight into the human condition. Jimmy Corrigan has a limitless capacity for mental suffering that is fleshed out using techniques like stream of consciousness, graphic art, and multiple viewpoints (Schjeldahl 162). Another artist, Robert Crumb, delves into satire, questioning our political system and social mores (Weiner 56). As this shows, the comic medium can be very powerful in questioning society and government.

Despite its strengths, the medium of comics is still in search of cultural legitimization. Thierry Groensteen believes that it is still searching for cultural and literary acceptance because the medium is an example of crossbreeding, its storytelling ambitions are seen as sub-par, it is connected to caricature, and it seems to propose a return to childhood (Chute 1020-1021). It is still seen as “nothing more than holding out our hands to the kids we used to be” (Chute 1021). Yet others like Paul Levitz, the president and publisher of DC Comics, would argue that the medium is much more than this, it is a vehicle for sophisticated storytelling (Daveitzkoff 3). Although comics are a storytelling medium, they should not be entirely treated as literary fiction with emphasis on plot, character development, and theme because there is another important function served by comics that must not
be ignored, that of illustration. Pictures in comics “do not merely depict characters and events in a story: the pictures also add meaning-significance-to a story” (Harvey 3). Another precaution must also be made, that of taking the narrative aspect of illustration too far and comparing comics to films. Comics are neither film nor literary fiction, they are a world of their own yet they can influence society just as much as both mediums.

The creations of comic writers and illustrators have transcended the page into society, and not just in the form of a pop culture phenomenon. One early creation, Superman, defeated the Ku Klux Klan in the 1940s. After World War II, the Klan experienced a resurgence in numbers, becoming incredibly powerful. A young reporter names Stetson Kennedy decided to infiltrate the group in order to expose its secrets. After learning everything from code words to rituals, Kennedy took the information to the police. However, the Klan had become so powerful the police were afraid to take on the KKK. In order to make use of his information, Kennedy went to the writers of the Superman radio serial. With the Nazis defeated, the writers needed a new villain for Superman and the KKK was a perfect fit. In a seven-episode arc, titled “Clan of the Fiery Cross” Superman went up against the men in white hoods. By revealing rituals and codes, the Klan was stripped of its mysteriousness, sending its recruitment down to zero. By 1948 people were showing up at Klan rallies just to mock them (Goodrum np).

While most comic books have not taken down an organization extremely detrimental to society, every one has something to offer. The Canadian artist Chester Brown lists three lessons on liberty that can be gained from comic books. They teach acting outside of the law, taking on government, and censoring material is harmful (“Anti-government Superheroes” 14). One graphic novel, *V for Vendetta*, teaches all three of these lessons effectively. The author, Alan Moore, shares his views on government and control by telling, with great illustrations by David Lloyd, how one man defeats an authoritarian regime in England. When I read this graphic novel the depth of argument and issues addressed struck me. Like the novel *1984*, only with more imagery and vividness, *V for Vendetta* showed how government
hiding under guises like the voice of fate of Big Brother makes citizens ignorant, living a life in relative bondage. This caused me to reconsider how our government operates, how various forms of censorship creates ignorance, how others control my life, and how government can instill fear and finally, evaluating if I am truly free or not.

The fact that graphic novels are enjoyed by many young adults is not a bad thing. It is because of the qualities of the genre that young adults do enjoy them; they are so different from the books that educators have encouraged them to read. Graphic novels have a huge visual impact that appeals to those who have grown up with television and video games. This may account for its growing popularity. From just 2001 the sales of graphic novels in the U.S. increased from $75 million to $120 million in 2003 (Bucher and Manning 67). This growing popularity can be used in the educational realm to promote literacy.

Graphic novels can develop language and literacy skills. One thing that graphic novels have that no other literary medium possesses to the same degree is the combination of illustration with text and this provides valuable contextual clues to the meaning of the written narrative (Crawford 26). This view goes directly against the negative belief that comic books are not adequate reading material for the young, hindering literacy development. Research shows that comic books and graphic novels are linguistically appropriate reading material, bearing no negative impact on school achievement or language acquisition (Crawford 26). Graphic novels “offer diverse alternatives to traditional texts as well as other mass media” for the promotion of literacy (Schwarz 263). Far from discouraging the reading of text, some studies have shown that reading graphic novels may require more complex cognitive skills than the reading of text alone (Schwarz 262). From social studies to English class, graphic novels can teach literary terms and techniques as well as social history in a new way.

The best way to encourage reading is by introducing material that appeals to the audience, which is why incorporating graphic novels in the classroom would encourage literary. Some attribute the appeal of graphic novels to the “dynamic,
eccentric, and very often sexy illustrations in combination with fast-paced science fiction, adventure, fantasy and martial arts stories” (Bucher and Manning 68). Even if this is the only reason young people are drawn to the medium, this can be used to the advantage of educators by using the graphic novel to teach literary terms and techniques such as dialogue, to serve as a link to classic literature, and as a basis for writing assignments (Bucher and Manning 68). Also, introducing them into the classroom would not cow tow to the boys because several comics appeal specifically to girls like Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Origins. It would be beneficial to expose girls to something they probably grew up believing was not meant for them, helping to shatter gender stereotypes.

The comic medium has grown to become a full-fledged art form with a peculiar and important place in the literary world. Its combination of word and art enables it to reach the reader on a personal level. As a result, the medium is gaining in popularity and the traditional view of comics as fodder for the socially awkward male is increasingly challenged. It has expanded from the world of pure good and evil and delved into the complicated realm of human inadequacy, change, life, politics, and social mores. Comic books and graphic novels are art and literature that provokes both thought and action.

Works Cited


