

# Essay

## 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### Grandpa's Lap

*by Nicole Hedmark*

I always felt so safe there. He held me on his lap as I played with the snaps that kept his shirt pocket shut. The cloth was plaid, made of cotton, and worn thin with years of work and washing. He kept Werther's candies in that pocket, and I dug my little hand as deep as it could reach to find one. When I found my treasure, I looked up and grinned as I pulled it out, the gold wrapper crunching in my clenched fist. His eyes shone at me as he unwrapped the candy, and I popped it into my mouth. The solid caramel melted on my tongue as I inhaled the scent of cologne and cigars that reminds me still of my grandpa.

Grandma was in the kitchen with my mom and aunts, getting ready for dinner. I could hear the clatter of pots and pans and over that, the sound of her voice singing as she worked. The old familiar hymns floated through the doorway and crept into my ears like a lullaby. The farmhouse was filled with the aroma of a home-cooked meal. I leaned against Grandpa's chest and sighed, completely content to sit and listen and allow my mind to wander into dreams of the upcoming evening.

Soon the hunters would return from the deep woods of northern Wisconsin. The voices began faintly, and the sound would grow louder as they neared. I would climb from my perch on Grandpa's knees and cross the hardwood floor to peer through the windows as they hauled their game towards the house. There was a log nailed between two trees, high above the ground. They would tie thick ropes around the deer and hang them from the pole. Then they would begin to sharpen their knives in preparation for butchering. I'd watch this process from the warmth of the house, anxious to see who the victor was of the running competition to get the biggest buck.

When they were finished tending to their bounty, thirty men would stomp into the farmhouse with a blast of chilly air, shaking off the cold as they removed their coveralls and wet winter clothes. Lumps of snow would accumulate near the doorway and someone would always pick one up to drop down the neck of Grandma's dress. She would scream in surprise and then laugh as she swatted the culprit away. The rest of the snow and ice would melt in pools on the linoleum that covered the floor of the entry way.

The men who were the most successful that day would be the brunt of jokes.

"What'd ya do? Hit it with your truck?"

"It's a good thing you brought so much ammo! There's no way that was your first shot."

There was always another one or two who were taunted for one reason

or another. Usually someone would fall asleep in their deer stand or miss an easy shot. Jokes flew through the room, but they were always given and received good-naturedly. I would sit on a nearby couch listening to them, proud that my dad was never teased for hunting mistakes.

Long wooden tables were set up end to end in the dining room to accommodate such a large dinner party. Bench seats lined them and at each place would sit a small plate with a huge portion of Grandma's pie. The men would take their places and Uncle Joe would sneak a bite of the pie as they waited for supper to be served. In a matter of minutes, the women would march single file out of the kitchen, armed with steaming bowls of Swedish Meatballs, mashed potatoes, and vegetables, all of which were home-grown and home-cooked. Once the food was on the table we would all hold hands and bow our heads while Grandma said a prayer of thanks for good food, good family and friends, and good hunting. Then bowls would be passed from one end of the tables to the other, and the room would grow silent as everybody focused on the feast before them.

When the plates were empty and bellies full, the women would march back into the kitchen to clean up and might recruit help from the older kids. I was still too young for these chores, so I would stay with the men, waiting for them to take out their socks and begin playing poker.

One by one, the hunters would mount the stairs to the bedrooms on the second floor, and would soon

descend with heavy woolen socks that jingled with every bouncing step. They each kept a trove of coins at the bottom of these socks, hidden by day in their rooms and emerging only when the poker decks were taken out in the evening. They would pour their drinks, light their cigarettes, and shuffle the cards while I climbed onto their laps. If I found my dad in a good mood, he would give me the maraschino cherry that was always waiting at the bottom of his brandy.

As they dealt the cards and began their game, I would sit and listen to the hunting stories they told. The tales always grew in direct proportion to the noise level as the men became more boisterous. Laughter would resonate through the house, and I would go from one man to the next, checking the cuffs of their thermal undershirts for hidden cards. Once in a while they would slip one up their sleeve just to humor me, and I would proudly proclaim to the gamblers, "HE'S CHEATING!"

The room would grow smokier, the hour later, and my eyes heavier. When sleep would begin to overtake me, I would curl up in my mom's arms and she would rock me back and forth, brushing her hand across my red curls in rhythm with her swaying. As sleep would consume me, the volume of the room always seemed to slowly fade, and my last thought was always a wish to stay up later to enjoy the cheerful atmosphere.

I tore my mind from its reverie to discover myself still on Grandpa's lap. The beat of his heart pounded

against mine and I smiled, full of serenity. This was family. This was peace. This was home. I was safe within those strong arms, and for the first time in my young life I was able to appreciate all these simple gifts that I had been given.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

### **Ambition**

*by Michele Lutz*

I must admit, I enjoy being the center of attention. Who doesn't like to be acknowledged for an accomplishment they've worked hard for? To stand before your peers, accept an award, and receive thunderous applause for your diligent work. I can recall an event where I deserved the recognition, but did not receive it.

It was my senior year of high school, and I was preparing to participate in the Regional Oral Interpretation Competition against several local high schools. In past years, I had competed in various categories such as Prose and Duet; however, this year I had selected a Reader's Theater piece. I had been awarded pins and medals in other contests, and I knew I possessed the talent and skill to qualify for the State competition. Only the three top teams would be able to advance to State from the Regional meet. My group consisted of myself,

and five other capable individuals, and I had complete faith in their talents.

Being part of a team meant spending several hours a day in a stuffy drama room, rehearsing intricate details of our script countless times. The speech coach had no inhibitions about chastising us for minor flaws; however her demand for perfection gave us a great sense of pride when we met her high standards at each practice. In the days preceding the meet, our team enjoyed honorable mentions in the local newspaper and good luck wishes from the student body during the morning announcements that rang out over the loud speakers. We considered ourselves a formidable force, and we bubbled with school spirit. Our group contained many Speech and Drama veterans who possessed the skills we needed to advance.

Capturing a coveted spot at the State meet, and qualifying to perform at the highest level in Speech, encompassed my sole motivation that week. Our cross-town rivals, in particular, would always put on a riveting show and steal the judge's full attention; however, we intended to make laughing stocks of all the other competitors this time.

After many weeks of preparation, the day of the contest crept upon us with eager anticipation and dread. The entire Oral Interpretation team loaded into a rented van for a forty-minute drive to the designated location. My group had to endure a three-hour wait before our designated performance time, which created what seemed like an endless void in the day. I followed each jittery tick of the second hand of a

large black and white clock in the waiting area in an effort to accelerate the gap in time. This only served to increase my anxiety, and command time to creep along at a snail's pace. The desire to win shot a rush of adrenaline through my veins. An equal and acute fear of failure provoked several sporadic rehearsals in an attempt to perfect every last detail of our program.

At last, everyone was called into the unfamiliar school gym for the Reader's Theater showdown. Parents, teachers, fellow competitors, and stern-looking judges congregated in the cold and spacious room. All eyes focused their attention to the front of the room, where six wooden stools stood silent, and ready for action. The groups went forward one at a time, and when they called out my school's name, our group members were prepared to deliver the presentation of a lifetime.

As we cautiously walked toward the row of seats, our shoes echoed loudly to the front of the room and back again. We each found our spots, took a shallow breath, and began our routine. The audience suddenly came alive as we spoke each line. They listened intently, and hung on each word, and pronunciation we offered. They smiled, they laughed, and they sat transfixed. The judges watched, and scribbled, and occasionally furrowed their brows as we skillfully laid our work at their feet. We had successfully entertained everyone, including our coach, who beamed with pride in the rear of the room. She initiated the applause at the conclusion of our piece. It rose up, swelled in our ears, and

slowly faded away as we stepped off the stage.

As we sat down among the audience, the energy radiated from each team member in a soft glow of accomplishment and relief. We were confident that we had secured a place in the State competition and congratulated each other in breathless whispers and silent high fives.

Suddenly, one of the judges stood to his feet, announced that the scores would need to be compiled, and the panel would return in ten minutes with the results. The judges hastily grabbed their papers and pens, and fled from the room for a secret deliberation. Once again, I sought comfort from a clock. It hung above an exit sign with a cage across the face to protect it from over-zealous adolescents armed with misguided basketballs. I wanted to pace the floor, or whistle a tune, or dash out and listen at the door of the judge's lair.

At the end of the allotted time, the judges filed back through the heavy double doors, and briskly took their seats. Anxiety and tension permeated the cement block walls, and hung like a fog above our heads. It took only a few moments for the judges to announce the teams that would be advancing to the State meet. As they read each name, I waited with full expectation to hear our school mentioned, but I did not. The qualifying teams marched forward, accepted their medals, and received a roar of cheers and applause for their hard work. Their coaches came forward, embraced each student, and outstretched their arms to elicit further adulation and respect from the

audience, which they gladly offered. Whistles and whoops burst from the joyful spectators and a standing ovation rounded out the energized award ceremony.

I sat dumbfounded. I deliberately closed my eyes to wait for the wretched dream to end, but the echo of clapping hands snapped me back to reality. Envy and bitterness boiled in my throat. All my tedious work had gone to waste. My limelight had turned a few shades of green, as I scowled upon the elite of Oral Interpretation. My team tried to reassure me the best they could, but this only served to fuel my anger against the other students. I knew I deserved better, but the judge's decision was final. There would be no praise for me today, or in the future. My high school Speech days had come to an end with this surprising defeat.

I moved sluggishly down the narrow hallway, a few steps behind my team, with my head bowed in defeat, and a crumpled program in my hand. We had almost reached the front door, when the coordinator of the meet approached us and said there had been a mistake in the scoring. She nonchalantly informed us that we had received more points than the judges had tabulated, because some numbers had not been transferred to the final tally sheet. She asked us to stay put while she found the losing team to take back their medals, and she disappeared out the door. Within moments she reappeared with a handful of copper circles, promptly passed them around the group, and walked away.

We stood frozen for a few seconds, marveling at the sudden turn

of events. My selfish ambition had backfired. The adoration I had longed for, worked for, dreamed of, still remained elusive. I greedily clenched my medal, but there was no crowd to share the accomplishment with me. No one knew that a mistake had occurred. Everyone had already exited the building, and abandoned the campus. No one had bothered to draw them back for another prestigious ceremony. Everyone was on their way home, and unaware of our linguistic success. There was no applause. No words of admiration. No public recognition of any kind. There erupted a deafening silence, and my desire to be acknowledged for my verbal expertise would go unrealized. Several moments passed, and I realized I stood alone now, with the ice-cold trinket warming in my hand. I decided it was up to me to articulate the only words I had wanted to hear that day. I slowly parted my lips and forced my inconsequential voice to mumble a sarcastic, "Congratulations," in an effort to permit some satisfaction to enter my troubled psyche. I had received exactly what I had come for that day, self-respect and a material reward; but the journey had not been the one that I had expected.

## The Making of a Police Officer

*by Leonard Kjelland*

He sits on his couch, waiting for the call. His nervousness is apparent as he barely speaks and opens his phone nearly every five minutes to be sure he has not missed it. False alarm after false alarm before the call he is waiting for finally comes. He takes a deep breath before he answers in a shaky voice, "Hello, this is Mark". It takes less than ten seconds before the expression on his face and the tone of his voice changes from hopeful to dejected. Nothing is said after he hangs up the phone. Just a shake of his head tells the whole story. Twenty-three year-old Mark Ranum had just failed his interview with the Fargo Police Department. The tall, lanky Valley City native had fallen just short in his determined quest to become a police officer that began over two years ago with the murder of his brother's girlfriend.

It was fall 2006, and Ranum was in the process of taking classes at North Dakota State University for hotel hospitality and management. Hotel management was something Ranum wanted to do with his life since he was in grade school, but that all changed after Mindy Morgenstern, Ranum's brother's long-time girlfriend, was murdered in her apartment in Valley City, ND, by Moe Gibbs. Gibbs's murder trials consumed Ranum for over a year. "We paid attention to every detail, attended every court hearing and collected every news article," Ranum

says referring to himself and his family. He says that he and his family "lived in Minot" during Gibbs's first trial, and "drove back and forth from Valley City to Bismarck" during the second.

On July 12, 2007, Gibbs's first trial came to an end when the jury remained deadlocked after four days of deliberation. Ranum recalls being, "extremely shocked," that Gibbs was not convicted. He felt that there was more than enough evidence to send Gibbs to jail. Ranum says he was confident of a conviction in the second trial because he felt that "there was no way two juries could be dumb enough to ignore all the testimony and evidence against Gibbs." Ranum was right. On November 16, 2007, a Bismarck jury convicted Gibbs of murder. "When the guilty verdict was read, it felt like a huge weight had been lifted off of me, and it was a great day," recalls Ranum.

The trial had a huge effect on Ranum's view on life. He no longer aspired to become a part of the hotel industry. Instead, he wanted to do something that he felt was more meaningful. He decided he wanted to become a police officer. "I decided to try to become a police officer because I want to help people," Ranum says, "whether that means keeping people safe, protecting people from themselves, or helping solve a crime to bring comfort to the victims."

"I had never seen Mark so motivated to do something in his entire life," recalls Brad Elliott, Ranum's long-time childhood friend. "All of a sudden one day," Elliott continues, "Mark just decided to completely turn around his

life and his goals in order to become a cop, and he hasn't looked back."

After months of preparing, Ranum finally took the first step to becoming a North Dakota police officer when he entered the Fargo Police Department screening program. Ranum describes the process as a "grueling process." "The Fargo Police Department requires passing a physical test, written test, oral interview, background check, lie detector test, and mental evaluation," explains Ranum.

Ranum, a former high school basketball player, easily passed the physical test. The written test was a different story, however. Nick Wagner, Ranum's college roommate, recalls the long nights of studying and preparation Ranum underwent. "There were nights I would wake up at two or three in the morning and find Mark up at his computer going over codes, terminology, and scenarios," Wagner remembers. "He was very dedicated."

Ranum's preparation paid off. He narrowly passed the written exam's 70% threshold with a 75%. Only 16 other applicants passed both the physical and written tests. "There was very little time for celebration," Wagner says. "The very next day he was back at it, preparing for the interview."

Ranum knew the oral interview would be the toughest of the steps he needed to complete. "They have strict standards, and only the best candidates get through," says Ranum. The odds were stacked against him, but that did not stop Ranum from pushing forward towards the interview. The night before, he vigorously went over all of the possible questions that might be

presented to him. The next morning Ranum dressed in his formal brown suit, devoured a big breakfast of eggs, bacon, and toast, and departed for the police station.

"There were five interviewers sitting in front of me," Ranum explains, "and each one would take turns firing questions at me." The interview lasted nearly an hour, and Ranum came out feeling "very confident but nervous." He spent much of the next day sitting on his couch and watching television waiting for the call. False alarm phone calls from his family and friends wondering about how the interview went plagued Ranum. Each time his phone rang, he thought, "This has to be them this time." For most of the day, however, it was not. Finally, just before 4 o'clock, he received the call telling him he came up short. He scored a 70%, but the Fargo Police Department requires a score of 75% to pass.

Ranum remembers the feeling he had upon hearing the news. "It was frustrating. It brought me back to step one again." There is a mandatory six month waiting period Ranum must undergo before he can begin the process over again. He will then need to retake both the physical exam and the written exam before he can retake the oral exam. Ranum does plan to continue towards his becoming a police officer, however. "Failing the test has motivated me to work harder this time so there is no reason not to fail the interview when I try again," Ranum says.

If he is going to pass next time, it will take just as much dedication, commitment, and hard work that it took him the first time, but that is not going

to hold him back. An energetic Ranum ponders the future and what lies ahead for him. “I can’t wait to get back at it,” he says. “I won’t stop until I achieve my goal so I can prevent tragedies like the one that happened to Mindy.”

## Parenting?

*by April R. Faucett*

When I was about ten years old, we lived in a three-story apartment building. Cramped into a two bedroom apartment were my mother, father, older brother and baby sister. Although I enjoyed living there, as I had developed a close friendship with a girl the same age as me, there were many things about living there I didn’t like. Perhaps it was mostly the memories.

My newfound friend Becky lived just up a little hill in another apartment building. Our summer days consisted of walking several miles back and forth to the swimming pool and stopping at the Dairy Queen on the way home to buy one measly cup of candy crunch, if I wasn’t stuck babysitting my baby sister. Summer nights were spent mostly at home arguing with my brother about who got to watch what on TV.

Since I felt like my opinion didn’t matter, I tried to get out of the house as much as possible, whether it was spending the day at Becky’s or staying the weekend at Grandma and Grandpa’s. I also wanted to get out of the house to avoid the tension of my parents’ fighting. Like clockwork, my body would

tell me when there was a fight coming; I shivered and had the urge to urinate constantly until they came home from wherever they were.

I couldn’t get to sleep one night because of my racing heart, shivering body, and contracting bladder. My brother was asleep though and never seemed to have the troubles that I did. He had seen all the fights I had, if not more, yet it didn’t seem to affect him the way it affected me. Maybe he was used to it.

I heard my dad’s truck coming from up the block and my heart started to pound. Since it was so late at night, I knew they would both be drunk—which always predicated the fights. I heard them arguing before they even got into the apartment building. I always worried the neighbors would call the police one of these times, but they never did. The yelling continued until they opened the door, and then I heard my dad explode in rage and something banged into the wall—I assumed my mother. This fight happened for what seemed like an eternity, with my dad’s voice ringing out in my head, “Your days are numbered Dawn! Your days are numbered!”

Since we were all used to this happening, the next day conversations were nill. When I woke up and finally met my dad in the kitchen, all he had to say as he showed me the gob of hair in the sink was, “Look what your mother made me do.”

## Waging War on Old Habits

by Kyle Hess

Never have I been consumed by something so addictive in my life. A certain game I had been playing for the past five years seemed to be burning up my time and preventing me from discovering other joys in life. *Age of Empires*, a game of building and conquering empires, caught my attention my freshman year of high school after observing my friend Chad play it. I asked to borrow it for a while, and ended up buying the game a few weeks later. Since then, I found myself addicted to *Age of Empires*. My mind was consumed in strategizing and plotting the next battle. My time spent with friends, completing homework, engaging in physical activity, and my time with God was cut short for my daily fight. I enjoy the game and feel relaxed while playing it, but I think it sapped too many other parts of my life. After completing a media report for COMM 112 this semester, I realized that I spend so much time playing *Age of Empires* that my relationships with friends, my schoolwork, my physical health, and especially my time with God has decreased in quality, and I need to set limits for myself.

One effect could be that I never took initiative to better my relationships with friends. When my high school friends invited me to a party or to play basketball for one night, I participated, but when the evening was activity-free, I would relax to a game. This affected the quality of my relationship with my

friends. My true knowledge of their character was shallow. Playing the game so often also weakened my social skills. I find it difficult to talk to friends. The possibility that my friendships would have been stronger if I had not played the game so much is a probable effect. Amends are impossible to make up now because these people are in school elsewhere, and I do not even know where a few of them are today. All that can be done now is plan for the future. Opportunities still exist for future friendships if my behavior changes.

Along with time with friends, my gaming took away from my schoolwork. Procrastination was never a big problem for me in high school. I usually did my homework right away when I arrived at home from school. My brothers usually played on the computer right when they arrived home from school. Finishing my homework earlier meant that the computer would be open by the time I was done. I usually played one game each day, and each game can last a little over an hour. This consumes a great amount of time throughout the week, and takes away from thoroughly going over my homework. I never studied for a test in high school because I thought I could do well enough without spending extra time outside of class. If I had not played so much, I could have studied and learned more in high school.

Concentration at school was never difficult, but at home, my mind often strayed from tasks. The atmosphere at home made work hard to focus on. This game not only occupied my time, but also my thoughts. My mind wandered often and

plotted strategies for games to come. The quality of my homework earned good enough grades to make my parents content, but the learning never concerned me. My focus was to get through school with little effort, and try to enjoy myself. I have changed quite a bit since then, but still take pleasure in playing the game in my dorm room on weekends. My time needs to be better managed in order to work harder in school.

Along with my mental health, my physical health may have suffered from my inactivity. I weigh 150 pounds, which is less than average for a person my height, probably because I am not outside and building muscle. This last semester was probably the least active I have been during the winter. From sixth grade through my senior year I have been playing basketball during the winter months. These last few months I remained in my dorm for most of the time accomplishing homework and playing games. Lack of participation in activities this season is not healthy for my body. I should not sit for such a long period of time. Limiting my time on the computer would greatly improve my body.

My senses have become weaker along with my physical strength. My eyesight may be weaker due to staring at the computer screen. I have owned glasses for ten years, and without them, I cannot see clearly more than two feet in front of my face. Immediately after playing a game that lasted more than an hour, my sight seems to be more blurry than usual. My poor vision may partially be an effect of too much gaming.

Not only my sight, but also my reflexes may gradually have decreased in quality and speed. I tried playing basketball two weeks ago with a few others from V-CAB, and I reacted much slower than I once did a year earlier. Spending time on the computer hampers my physical activity and causes my reactions to become slower, an ample reason for why I should change my habits.

Though friends, school, and health should be of importance at this period in my life, God should be the highest priority in my life. Playing *Age of Empires* has affected this area most. When a game stands between time spent with God and me, a problem arises. I have no excuse to place any object before Him because he blesses me so much, and to spend more time with my computer would be a letdown to Him. I have been reading His words and talking to Him too sparsely to possess a healthy relationship. When I play games, I cannot spend time with God at the same time. Additionally, the little time I spend with God lacks sincerity, which is unacceptable.

Too much playing *Age of Empires* also hinders me in accomplishing my life's goal, to bring others to God. I can only do this when I gather with other people, learn more about the world, and stay healthy. Friends, schooling, and health are important pieces to the much bigger picture. If these areas suffer, I also struggle to follow God's will. I have to make a decision because I cannot follow God and be controlled by a game at the same time. The quality of one must go down if the other is to rise. Improving my time with God will aid

the other areas of my life. When God stands first in my life, everything else falls into place. I need to control my addiction to *Age of Empires*.

The effects caused by being consumed with this game reflect the need to change my habits. I need stick to a plan to control myself in my spare time, especially at home or the dorm. New habits have to be formed that will wean me away from this game. My strategy limits myself to no more than two games per week. Hopefully I can later knock that down to once a week. After they are spent, I will find other ways to occupy my time. This extra time will be used to increase the quality of friendships, schoolwork, physical activity, and devotion to God. Arranging activities with current friends will strengthen those relationships. I will try to spend at least a half hour reading and studying each day to better my mind. I have also begun a training program in my Fitness and Wellness class, which I will continue after the class ends. Spending less time on the computer playing games will help me to focus more on godly things, such as reading my Bible, praying, and applying the knowledge gained to my life. More quality time with God and less time on the computer will improve all other areas in my life. Focusing on the benefits of not playing the game as often can only increase my motivation to carry out my plan. I believe this goal to be attainable and beneficial for my life.

## Clutch Time

*by Travis Kauffman*

“Strike three!” yelled the umpire.

Standing in the on-deck circle I watched as my best friend Ben Pollock went down on four pitches, leaving the tying runs stranded on second and third. I could hear the thundering of a freight train in the night as half of the crowd decked out in their blue and red Southland Rebel apparel jumped out of their seats, yelling their approval. I looked to the scoreboard that read HAYFIELD - 0 SOUTHLAND - 2 and knew that with two outs in the bottom of the seventh, Southland was closer than ever to the state tournament berth both of us had been fighting for the entire 2009 season. In the on-deck circle, I picked up the bat and thought back to everything that had led to this moment.

Just two weeks before, we ended our regular season with the best record in school history and set our sights on the state tournament. One team stood in our way, Southland—the team the papers had labeled as “The Dream Team”—and that pissed us off. Led by two-time all state selection pitcher Brian Voigt, who had only given up one earned run all year, and who seemed God-like on the mound, we knew we’d have our hands full.

We finally got our showdown with Southland in the sub-section tournament and took our most embarrassing defeat of the year, losing 8-2. Voigt made us all look like fools at the plate while registering 14 strikeouts. Redemption was on our minds from that game on,

and we won our way through the sub-section tournament beating every team by at least five runs. Taking second place at the tournament was enough to advance to the section tournament, only one step away from the Minnesota State Tournament and our goal. Rolling through the section tournament, we knocked out both defending tournament champion Wabasha-Kellogg and perennial power Chatfield, the latter by the ten-run rule. We gained much needed momentum and were poised to take on Southland for the section title.

Now, as I approached the batter's box, I felt the weight of our entire season on my shoulders. Glancing back, I saw the entire crowd of close to five hundred standing and yelling on their feet in anticipation for the potential game ending at-bat. Southland's coach, Scott Reterath, called time and slowly walked out to the pitcher's mound. Reterath was a tall guy with a fat beer gut and an arrogant smirk on his face, and I knew exactly what he was doing. He was trying to ice me to let the situation sink in. Saying I was unsuccessful against Voigt in the past would be a giant understatement. I was 0-5 with four strikeouts against the hurler, and Reterath knew it.

I looked from Reterath to my coach and saw him gesturing me over. Craig Selk was a short stocky man with a goatee and a rugged face. He reminded me of a UFC fighter and was probably as tough as one. Though he looked tough, he was one of the nicest people a person would ever meet, and his love for the game of baseball cemented a solid friendship between us.

As I walked towards him, every step I took felt weighted down. It seemed like a cinder block had been tied to each foot. "Okay Trav, this is a huge spot for you and its clutch time. I know exactly what you're thinking. This is the big spot in your career, and you want nothing more than to deliver for your teammates." I couldn't speak so I just nodded. "All I want from you is to go up to that plate and to have fun playing baseball like I know you love doing."

I felt a wave of instant relief. The weights on my feet became feathers, and the scared-child look on my face became that of a little boy on Christmas morning. With a huge grin, I said, "Let's have some fun."

Stepping into the box, all turned silent and I focused on nothing but the task at hand. While I dug my back foot into the damp sand to get my feet comfortable in the box, I gripped the bat tight with my bottom hand and loosely put my top hand over the handle. Like I had thousands of times before, I swung the bat rhythmically, two times back and forth, never taking my eyes off the pitcher. Voigt stared back—a towering figure on the mound standing at 6'4" and built like a linebacker. His red hair stuck out from under his red and blue cap, and his eyes seeming to penetrate right into me. I could tell he was thinking the same thing I was: "I'm not backing down."

Ready, I watched as he looked in to the catcher, nodded immediately, rocked back, and let loose a fastball at my chin. I ducked out of the way to prevent my face from resembling road

kill. I knew it was an intimidation pitch, but I wasn't having any of that, and I liked the idea of him being behind in the count.

I stepped out of the box to regain my composure. After a deep breath, I dug my front foot back in ready for another pitch. I looked at him as I did my same rhythmic swings, and he nodded at the first sign again. He reared back and threw another hard fastball. I held back, but it caught the outside corner. "Strike 1!" the umpire yelled.

Ready to go this time, I settled in for his famous slider, the pitch he had used to sit down at least half of our 12 strikeout victims that night. He shook off the catcher this time, and with that little jerk of his head he had me confused. By the time he threw the fastball for strike two, I reacted late and swung and missed right over the top of it.

With two strikes on me the next pitch had me on pins and needles, and I could sense the crowd going crazy on the delivery, but I couldn't hear them. It was just me and Brian. I watched a slider drift away outside the zone, and heard the umpire holler, "Ball!" He had tried to set me up to chase a bad pitch.

I stepped out of the box and looked over at my coach. His smile told me, "Give it your best swing." I dug back into the box, took my routine two rhythmic swings, and locked eyes with Brian for a second. He then looked to his catcher and nodded his approval. I saw the spin right out of his hand. The slider was coming, and I knew it would break for a strike on the inside part of

the plate. I swung like I had swung at thousands and thousands of pitches before. Everything felt perfect until I felt the barrel of the bat come through with nothing connecting with it. I had struck out.

When my hearing finally came back, the noise was deafening. A sea of red and blue rushed in front of my eyes onto the field and piled on their star pitcher to celebrate the win. I turned around, the bat feeling like a club in my hand as I walked back to the dugout with my head slumped down and tears filling my eyes. The game was over, the season was over, my high school career was over.

Coach Selk took us out to right field as the celebrations continued and told us of how proud he was of all of us. Once his speech ended, we went to pack up our things and get on the bus. He stopped and pulled me off to the side. With the look of a proud parent, he said, "Coaching you for four years has been a blast, and I can't tell you how much it meant to me that you played balls to the wall every pitch and every at-bat, and for that I'm giving you team MVP this year."

With tears in my eyes I looked to him and said, "You are my favorite coach and thanks for all you've done for me. Someday when I coach, I hope my players look up to me like we all did to you."

I was the last one out of the dugout, and before I left I looked out across the diamond and I took it all in. As upset as I was, I couldn't help but walk off that field with a smile on my face.

# Fatherhood

*by Joseph Bateman*

One night while driving to hoop, I noticed a young lady waiting at the bus stop. She had a stroller next to her and a little boy holding her hand. She looked angry and fatigued. Seeing her at the bus stop, with two kids in my neighborhood meant one thing. She was a single mom who was having a tough time raising her kids. This sight isn't uncommon in the world, but it is one of the problems that my friends and I can solve. My friends and I are on the way to becoming future parents and when that time comes we as young men need to be there for our kids.

I have been around people that grew up with no father. My father didn't have one. He has always filled my ear with words of encouragement and has always been there for me. Some days I wonder where all these words of wisdom came from when he didn't have a father to hear them from. He would always tell me how hard it was for him growing up. He told me about all the odd jobs he took to help his family get by. How he had to watch out for his little sisters and even his mom. He didn't have a father figure so the streets raised him and he was always caught up in some trouble. He grew up too fast, and missed out on a lot of his childhood because he had no father.

My brother has a son and he wasn't there for the first year and a half of his life. His baby's mother was always asking him for help. I ended up babysitting him three nights out of the

week for a year. I would always call my brother and let him know the steps he was missing in his son's life. He missed him start crawling, walking, talking, and even missed his first haircut. After his first birthday, my dad called my brother and told him to get home and take care of his responsibility. My father knew what was going to come out of this situation and he didn't want his grandson to go through the same things he went through as a kid. It's time for young men to step up and take responsibility for their kids. When it's our turn to be parents we have to be ready.

We might think we aren't prepared to be parents. We might think we aren't ready because we aren't mature enough. No parent is mentally ready to raise their first child. But by being there for our child every day, we will grow up along with the child and understand what it takes to be a good parent. We might think we aren't ready financially to raise a kid. We don't have jobs now but the one thing we are all doing is going to college. College is going to put us in the best position to succeed in the world. We have to work hard toward our degrees so when we graduate we can assure ourselves of a good job and a bright future for our kids. Also by having a college degree, our kids can have something to look up to us for. We can encourage them to further their education when that time comes.

My cousin has a two year old son. He loves his son to the fullest and makes every effort to be there for him. He just recently stopped going to see his son every day. The main reason for

this is because of the baby's mother. She constantly argues with him and tells him he isn't doing enough. She even tells him that she is going to put him on child support if he doesn't start giving her more money. "Baby Mama Drama" as we call it is a major reason most young men don't spend time with their kids. But we can't let the mother stop us from being around our child. No matter how much she irritates us, we have to get along with her for our child's sake. She is going to throw her fits, and want us to play a major role in the baby's life. We should try to be there as much as possible and give her time to relax. Watching a child 24/7 is tough and the easier we make it on her, the easier it will be to bring the child up in a family atmosphere.

We might think that having a child is putting too much responsibility into our young lives. We might not have as much time to party, to chill, or do a lot of things we love doing together. But that's all part of becoming a man. Men take care of their responsibilities and when we have a child that is our biggest responsibility of all. My father once told me when my brother was first born he didn't have a lot to give him. But he worked hard and didn't leave my mom looking for help from the system. We shouldn't have to depend on the government to take care of our kids. We shouldn't leave our responsibilities to another man either. The world is full of dead-beat dads. We have to be able to handle everything fatherhood throws at us, and if we need help, we can go back to our fathers for words of advice.

I want us all to have great lives. We might not get rich and famous, but

we can all leave our legacy in this world. We can handle our responsibilities from day one. We can give our child's mother encouragement through the pregnancy. We can be there for the delivery and maybe be the first face our child sees. Then we can make an impact by being there for the kid every day. We can be there through his stages of growing up and be there to teach him things our fathers taught us. By doing our fatherly duties, our child in return, whether boy or girl, will know what a father figure is suppose to be. They will pass it on to their kids, and keep it going for generations and generations to come.

## That's *My* Plate

*by Josh Lawrence*

I asked the ump for time as I got up from my crouch behind home plate and made my way to the mound. With the enemy's clean-up hitter due up, I sensed that the overall momentum had switched, and importance of this visit with my pitcher, Ryan, grew more important with each step.

Our Lidgerwood Legion team hadn't beaten West Fargo since the 2005 sectional tournament, so after our convincing seven to three victory in game one, West Fargo had definitely come back to make game two interesting. It was the top of the seventh, tied at six, and a speedy Nate Peterson was on second with two outs. I removed my mask, and wiped the

sweat off my forehead as I approached Ryan. “Hey man, you’re pitchin’ great, how ya feelin?”

Although frustrated by the double he had just given up, he stayed cool and kept his chin up. “I’m doin’ fine. I’ll get us outa this jam,” he said confidently.

“Alright, that’s what I like to hear. This is their four batter here. We’re gunna pitch him low and away. If we walk him, we walk him, that’s okay.” He nodded. I patted him on the shoulder and made my way back to the plate.

Walking back, I took a moment to think about the ups and downs of our season. We were currently four and three, and coming off a two game losing streak. I felt that if we could get this guy out, I would be able to make something happen at the plate leading off the bottom of the inning. While I approached my feet placements behind the plate, I turned to the field, took a deep breath and got back into my crouch. Suddenly, over the loud speakers I heard the announcer’s high pitched voice: “Now batting for your West Fargo Aces, the third baseman, Zach Neer!”

The home crowd screamed with excitement. While the batter made the long walk to the batter’s box, I observed his composure and facial expressions. He appeared calm and collected, like a pro who had faced this situation many times before. He placed the barrel of his Easton Stealth on the corner of the plate, and got situated in the box. I lowered my sweat lined mask onto my face. I felt the ump bend down, and ever so lightly touch my back, ready to resume play. Through the window of the

mask, I watched Ryan collect himself on the mound. He placed his right foot on the rubber from the stretch position, and looked in for my signs.

With my fist down by my groin, and the show of the index finger, I gave the signal for fastball, and set up outside. Ryan, with a nod of approval, came to a set and stared down the runner. He swiveled his head back to the plate, took a slide-step, and committed towards home.

As soon as the ball was released from his hand, my heart started pounding—the pitch that was supposed to be low and away just happened to be heading right over the heart of the plate.

The world seemed to stop; I hoped for the best, but prepared for the worst. I could sense the batter lead with his hips, get his hands through for a strong swing and make good contact. The “ping” of the bat lined the ball over Ryan’s head, and into center field. I instantly stood up, removed my mask, and started yelling, “Four! - Four! - Four! All the way Wieb!” I threw the mask off to my right side, knowing I was in for a game-changing play at the plate. The ball one hopped our centerfielder, who doubled as our varsity quarterback, and my adrenaline kicked in. Brock Wieber fielded it cleanly and came up throwing just as the runner rounded third.

Everything seemed to happen under a strobe light. I kept my eyes on the perfectly thrown ball, but my peripheral vision sensed the runner closing in. I knew I would emerge as either a hero or a zero. I situated my feet, got ready to block the plate, and

reached up to catch the ball. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the runner laying out. I dug my left cleat in down by the bottom of the plate, and placed my knee on the front top corner. As quickly as possible, I swept my gloved hand down, and placed the tag. I had the entire plate blocked, and then felt his hands and helmet slide directly into my knee. I knew there was no possible way he was safe. I looked up at the ump, and showed him the ball. In complete silence, everyone awaited his verdict.

With a single motion, he pointed at the runner and dramatically punched the air. "He's out!"

The home crowd immediately disagreed with the call, yelling at the poor guy, and screaming profanities. I looked into my glove and worshiped the sight of the stitched ball sitting in the pocket. It was one of the greatest feelings I have ever felt. I jumped up and ran to the dugout, pumping my fist in the air. My teammates greeted me with high fives, and fist bumps. I waited for Brock to come in from the outfield and met him with a high five. "Great throw man, it wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for you."

After I took my seat in the dugout and began removing my gear, Coach Nash came over and confronted me. "Lawrence, that's how you block the damn plate!" He grinned.

I shook his hand, and although pumped, I knew I had to keep my composure and focus on my upcoming at bat. "That was so great Mr. Nash, but we aren't quite done yet. We gotta get one here."

"Be the leader you are, and make something happen," he said with a smile, as he headed towards the third base coaching box.

Just a couple minutes later, on the other side of the plate, I worked my at bat to a full count, and lined a triple off the center field wall. Tyler Meyer, our big first baseman and cleanup hitter would score me on a blooper into right field. We beat them 7 - 6 to complete the magical night.

Looking back now at that important game-deciding play, I realize if we believe in each other, good things do happen. I knew we might never sweep West Fargo again, but that play put us on a momentum swing that led to a four-game winning streak. We would go on to finish the season with a nine and seven record, and enter the sectional tournament as the fourth seed before losing our first two tournament games. But if you ask any one of us what moment of what game we remember most, it's a no brainer.

## ***Moink the Great***

*by Joseph Bateman*

This summer was the last time I saw her. It was mid-August; I was on my way to my first year of college. She was sitting in her chair watching CNN, her daily channel. I watched her stare at the television as if she was the only person in the room. When she finally looked at me, she smiled and her dimples came out, and I smiled also.

This was my grandma, my favorite person in the world. Before I left, she grabbed me, hugged me and whispered in my ear, "Joe, I knew you would make it, even though I had to almost beat you every day, you're a good kid. I love you." If I still cried, at that moment and time I would have shed some tears.

My grandma is a great woman; she has given my siblings, cousins and I tons of advice about the real world. She inspires the whole family with everything she goes through and went through. In her 86 years, she has been through a lot. She has gone through the racial times when blacks had a real tough time in America, but throughout everything she said her faith helped her keep respect for everyone no matter their color. She always told us to respect our elders and to never forget about our family. She has 15 kids; she never forced them to move out, and if one of them struggled, her door was open to them until they were back on their feet. She taught me a lot and helped mold me into the person I am now. She never once broke down in front of us even though she was a woman. She was very strong. This is why she is my hero.

She doesn't move around too much these days. Back when she was feeling better and her arthritis wasn't bothering her as much, she would be up at five every morning, cooking breakfast for my uncles and aunts to come eat before they went off to work. This would be her time every day to see the children that were still living. Every Sunday after church, everyone could count on a big home cooked meal to be prepared. She did this

because her mom, who was the biggest influence on her life, always cooked breakfast, dinner and a big Sunday dinner. She loved cooking and she passed down all her secrets last summer. She didn't want to take them to the grave with her. This is what she told me verbatim: "My momma passed the secrets down to me and my sister's, so I figure I better do the same before the good lord calls my name."

She was the third child born to Sarah and John Henry Smith. Her education didn't go past the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but she urged us to go to school every day. She always told us, "If yall young one's don't get yall education, yall aint going to be nothing in this here world now a days." We always listened to the woman we loved and called Moink. She didn't have a lot of book smarts or school smarts, but she was very "street suave," meaning she knew things that they didn't teach in school. She knew the real world.

Moink stressed education to the fullest. There wasn't a day that went by that she wasn't urging us to read some or telling us, "Get your damn eyes out that dummy-box." She didn't have the chance to get a full education so she wasn't going to let us waste our time on any nonsense. She woke us up every morning on time for the bus and made sure we had our homework done before our parents came to pick us up. "Ain't no dummies going to be eating up my food and lying in my bed," She would say. Education was the key out the "HOOD". Education was needed to be successful in the "white man's world."

I called Moink two weeks ago and asked her some questions—

questions about her family, questions about her life and how it was living in the times when slavery was over but racism was still heavy. She told me about her childhood. She was the third child out of five and she says her parents were the hardest on her. Every day after school she was to head to the field to do work. She wasn't a slave, but this is how her family earned money. Her parents wanted her to go to school, but she had a duty to her family and she wanted to help out, so she dropped out at the beginning of her 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. She worked every day all day. Sometimes she did house work for a white family, some days she headed to the farm with her dad to tend to the animals and collect eggs. These were hard days, but they only made her tougher. She pushed her kids so hard to get an education because she knew how tough it was to work in the white man's world without an education. Still, all seven of her sons never went past the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The day after they dropped out, she made them go do masonry work with her husband Tim. As she told me, "Rule number one in my house was you either went to the school house or you went to the block pile."

Moink lived in a time when racism was a big problem. She was born July 5, 1921. She remembered one night when she saw a black man about to be killed: "They came to the building that we lived in and they took him out in the middle of the night and they started yelling at him calling him Coon and Nigger. His family rushed out and demanded to know what was going on. The white men told them he looked at

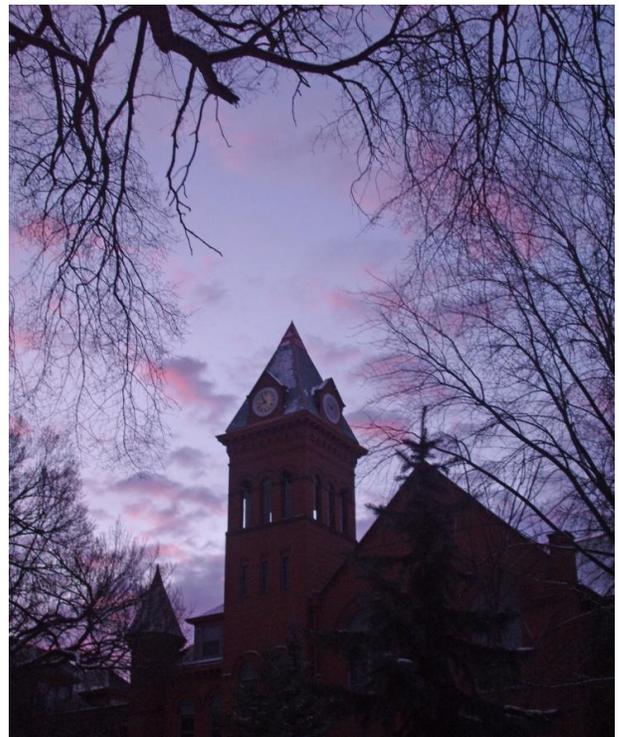
a white lady the wrong way. I was only about nine or ten, but I knew what was happening and everyone else knew not to say anything. But they got Ben that night and we never saw Ben again." She got silent after this story and then told me, "It was the most terrifying experience in my life. It changed my perspective on people. From that day on I never looked a white person in the eyes until I was about 60 years old."

When I heard this story I wondered, how could she ever respect anyone ever again? I received my answer quickly and what she said had a lot of meaning to it: "God says treat everyone like you would like to be treated. Back in my day, it was nothing that a black man could do right. I didn't understand it, but everyone knew it and had to respect it. Church back in my day was a big thing where all the black people got together and just relieved themselves of all the things that were going on in their lives. Through church, I learned to respect people no matter what they did to you because one of these days they are going to get tired of you being so respectful and just stop what they are doing to you. Also, remember this, whatever you do to people good and bad will come back to you. So treat everyone like you would like them to treat you. Don't do something bad then expect something good in return. I love everyone the same and treat everyone the same because I know that this here earth is just a stop for me. I'm trying to get to heaven and respecting people will get you there."

When Papa died, my grandma didn't cry a lot or stay to herself, I

always wondered how she stayed so strong. She went back to her faith. “I never question anything the good lord does, it was just his time to go, and he suffered a lot on this here world and I’m happy that he doesn’t have to go through that pain anymore.” Her strength is one of the biggest reasons I admire my grandma.

Throughout everything—losing her sister, her brothers, her twins at birth, her husband, two sons and a nephew—she still stays strong and is still making it through. She still does her daily Bible reading, but not as much cooking and more sitting and eating. She still gives me great advice when I call. She is still Moink the Great to me.



***Time for School***  
Mary Kennedy  
*Photography*

## Nature of Evil in Goethe's *Faust*

by Ryan McCulloch

Like a certain demonic serpent, evil in *Faust* is a slippery subject. While it would be a tempting to place this burden upon the snake himself, appearing as Mephistopheles, Goethe will not excuse us so easily. Mephistopheles is indeed at least partially responsible for many of the despicable deeds committed throughout the play, but he acts under the authority of God as a tempter only. Is Faust then ultimately responsible for his many wicked actions and thus the true source of evil in his own life? But then, what of the remorse he shows in the dungeon at the play's end? Are these the action of an evil man? It is through the evil committed by Faust, with the help of Mephistopheles, that he is able to understand the error of his ways and begin his journey towards redemption. In his play *Faust*, Goethe uses the interactions of his main characters with the devil Mephistopheles to examine the nature of evil and its possible use as a tool for good. Harry Steinhauer, in his paper, *Faust's Pact with the Devil*, expands upon this when he says, "Goethe has used the wager between God and Mephistopheles and the pact between Faust and the Devil to symbolize the issues which are at stake in Faust's career on earth."

In the beginning of the play Mephistopheles is shown conversing with The Lord about the fate of Faust's soul. Through a somewhat dubious wager, The Lord indicates that Mephistopheles can have possession of Faust's soul if he is able to truly corrupt him. This wager is made somewhat dubious through the fact that The Lord, an assumedly omnipotent being, puts his faith in Faust's overall goodness when he says, "Though he now serves me but confusedly,/I shall soon lead him where the vapor clears" (2163). The Lord admits here that Faust is currently in a state of turmoil when he says, "now serves me but confusedly" but The Lord also reveals that through his actions Faust will change his ways in the future. He indicates this with the "I shall soon lead him to where the vapor clears" line. While it might initially seem that The Lord is doing harm unto Faust by unleashing Mephistopheles onto him, his words indicate just the opposite. It is obvious that The Lord expects Mephistopheles' interference to lead to Faust's salvation. According to Steinhauer's analysis, this wager holds extreme importance for another reason. In his wager, Mephistopheles trusts in man's desires and to be thus ensnared easily by his own ambition as shown when he says, "From heaven he demands the fairest start,/and from the earth all joys that he thinks best;/And all that's near and all that's far/Cannot soothe the upheaval in his breast" (2163). The Lord, on the other hand, seems to make no wager, never truly accepting the terms, seemingly knowing the outcome. He simply allows Mephistopheles to go forth as indicated by his line, "Enough - I grant that you may try to clasp him,"

(2164). And so, according to Steinhauer, no stakes are truly set for The Lord believes that Faust will overcome his ambition and start on a path to redemption.

The pact between Faust and Mephistopheles provides similar insight. Upon first meeting with Faust, Mephistopheles introduces himself to be one who, “Would do evil evermore, and yet creates the good” (2186). An introduction that strongly aligns with the ultimate outcome of their relationship set down by The Lord. As their conversation progresses, Mephistopheles reveals the nature of their relationship when he says, “I shall be your servant, or your slave” (2193). By stating that Faust will be the master, Mephistopheles clearly places the responsibility for any actions he may be a part of on Faust. The deal struck between the two progresses in much the same manner as the one in heaven. Only this time it is Mephistopheles who is passive and his opponent, Faust, who is the aggressor. This can be seen in the back and forth conversation between the two of them in which Faust gives lengthy passionate speeches and Mephistopheles repeatedly gives only a simple “I accept it” (2194), or “Consider it, for we shall not forget it” (2194). This again puts Faust into the leader position and reaffirms his responsibility for what follows. Steinhauer’s criticism confirms this but shifts focus onto the terms of the pact. He points out that Faust’s damnation hinges upon never speaking the phrase, “Abide, you are so fair” (2194). With these words Faust claims that that the day he wishes a moment to “Abide” is the day he has lost his soul. In other words, the instant that he is happy with his life just the way it is, he is damned. Thus pushes Faust towards constant activity which Steinhauer believes to be what The Lord intended.

Faust soon finds his way ever closer to damnation when he meets with and, though the help of Mephistopheles, eventually seduces Margret. Through his relationship with her Faust begins to see his own failings. He remarks on this while speaking with Mephistopheles when he says:

Her – her peace I had to undermine.  
You, hell , desired this sacrifice upon your shrine.  
Help, Devil, shorten this time of dread.  
What must be done, come let it be.  
Let her fate come shatter on my head,  
And let her perish now with me. (2233)

Here Faust starts to blame Mephistopheles for his current miserable state but ultimately takes up fully the mantle of responsibility. While Mephistopheles does indeed prod and poke Faust’s course with false encouragement like “Go in and comfort her, you dunce” (2233) it is Faust who, in the end, pulls Margret into despair. Soon her mother is killed by Faust’s poison and her brother by Faust’s sword. On top of this Margret is quickly pregnant with Faust’s child. Meanwhile Faust, unaware of Margret’s torment and eventual incarceration, escapes to a celebration of Walpurgis Night.

Upon learning of Margret’s imprisonment Faust is extremely distraught. He is quick to blame his devilish companion for her suffering and says to Mephistopheles, “Traucherous, and despicable Spirit” (2258) seemingly accusing him of tricking Faust into his current predicament. Not to be outdone Mephistopheles snaps back with the

reality of the situation when he says, “Who was it that plunged her into ruin, I or you” (2258). Upon reaching the dungeon Faust meets with the now insane Margret. Soon Faust is forced to bear the full weight of what he has done. Margret relates her true suffering to Faust when she says, “I’ve put my mother away,/I’ve drowned my child, don’t you see/Was it not given to you and to me” (2261). It is now that Faust is able to understand the misery he has wrought. He shows the true depth of his remorse when he says, “That I had never been born” (2263). It is here that the first step of Faust’s redemption begins, where he regrets his past actions and wishes that he was never there to commit them. It is here that he sees the wickedness that his past deeds and desires have brought about and knows that he was ultimately responsible. Unfortunately his journey is not yet complete and after he witnesses Margret’s salvation he escapes with Mephistopheles.

The nature of evil, for Faust, is desire. Through his desire for knowledge, and experience, he brings out the destruction of one he loves. It is through his remorse at the evil his deeds have wrought that Faust begins his path to redemption. Through the aid of Mephistopheles, Faust is able to achieve all of the things he wishes for but in doing so Mephistopheles, and in a greater sense, The Lord, show him the effect that his deeds have on the world around him. In the play, Faust, Goethe uses this theme to show how evil may be used as a tool for good.

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***Nature’s Wrath***  
Neenah Donnelly  
*Photography*