Bad News
Our nose knows news!
by Justin Stangler

Cast
Kyle Hintzel – Homophobic weather man.
Suzanne Dunwoody – Fluffy, chirpy, perky, newswoman. She’s a fresh young face, just out of school and still green.
Jeff Norwood – Sportscaster who happens to be a chronic gambler. He’s not especially intelligent. He is wearing a bad tie.
Hank McConnell – Veteran news anchor who’s having problems with his wife.
Jason Van Allen – Investigative Reporter. He is arrogant, self righteous, and generally an unlikable guy.
The Producer (Alicia Reinhart) She is mature, in her upper 30’s and dresses professionally.
Co-Producer (Carrie Lang) Younger, probably in her late 20’s and also dresses professionally.

Setting: Hinkleyvilletown, Nowhere U.S.A. in a low budget news studio.

The Rundown: Channel 57 news is in trouble. The prior geriatric crew has been replaced due to low ratings and a new crew is feverishly assembled. Channel 57 news is an obscure news program that occupies the midnight time slot. The challenge for the producers is to find the chemistry needed to halt the replacement of the show by a cheesy late night infomercial.
(The setting is a news room with a desk and two chairs. The room should be furnished with cheap, cheesy décor. On the left or right should be a weather map of the United States.)

Co-Producer: It’s touch and go.

Producer: It’s more than that. It’s life and death. That’s the reason I had to fire our geriatric news crew. The 60 and up demographic doesn’t watch the news at midnight. Hell, who does?
Co Producer: Well, I did as you instructed. I found some fresh faced replacements.
Producer: Right. I just had a meeting with the big guys. If our ratings don’t improve, we will be replaced by the Duracell Electric Training Underwear for Toddlers infomercial. So, who do we have? What does our news dream team look like?
Co Producer: (Digs into her folder) I got Hank McConnell to sign on.
Producer: I know that name. Wasn’t he a runner up to replace Ted Koppel?
Co Producer: He was. He had an emotional breakdown on camera though. Apparently, at the time, he was having trouble with his wife. But, he’s assured me that everything is fine now. He’s a veteran news man and can bring experience if not legitimacy to Channel 57.
Producer: Fine with me. Who else?
Co Producer: Suzanne Dunwoody. She is a recent graduate from Indiana University. She actually found me and begged for a job. I rejected her because of her lack of news casting experience. The next day, I came to work at 7 a.m. to find her in my office with coffee and fresh baked doughnuts and a power point slide detailing why I should hire her. This was some feat, considering she had to pick three sets of locks to get in.
Producer: She’s got moxie, I like that. Channel 57 needs guts. What poor soul is next?
Co Producer: Jeff Norwood. He’s going to be our sportscaster.
Producer: What’s the catch? Does he have a speech impediment, is half his face missing?
Co Producer: No. He’s actually quite handsome. He had some unfortunate dealings with Channel 12. They gave him the ultimatum of getting fired or resigning. He chose to resign.
Producer: Well, what happened?
Co Producer: He’s a chronic gambler. He was caught trying to sell Channel 12
property, mostly desks, fax machines, telephones, in order to pay off his debt.

**Producer:** I want you to watch him like a hawk. If I find so much as a paper clip missing, I will chew some butt!

**Co Producer:** Agreed. Next is our weather man, Kyle Hintzel. His former stomping ground was Channel 6 where he earned himself quite a reputation. He was fired after making some negative allusions about homosexuals.

**Producer:** Ok, so our current tally is a spark plug, a gambler, an emotional wreck, and a bigot. Who is the other refugee?

**Co Producer:** Jason Van Allen. He’s an investigative reporter who worked for a local newspaper in Blue Butte, Wyoming. He broke the local . . . (Looks at file) “Dairy Queen Skimping Scandal”.

**Producer:** The what?

**Co Producer:** “Dairy Queen Skimping Scandal” as Van Allen coins it. It turns out he uncovered that the local Blue Butte Dairy Queen was using “12%” less toppings on their ice cream blizzards than the franchise standard allows.

**Producer:** Sweet lord, that man is a moron!

**Co Producer:** (Looking at file) Van Allen received a letter from a local person who expressed a negative opinion about his news columns. He then wrote an inflammatory article about this townsperson, accusing him of involvement in the “sub-Saharan African slave trade.” Van Allen was promptly fired. I suppose he’s a product of too much time in the hands of the misguided.

**Producer:** Bring them in. It’s time we become acquainted with each other.

(Producer goes and fetches the cast and they all enter together.)

**Kyle:** (To Jeff) Would you stop staring at my buttocks!

**Jeff:** I was just looking at my watch, fella.

**Kyle:** Just keep your eyes on the road, Mary Ann.

**Producer:** Everyone, if you could please get comfortable. We have one hour before we go on the air. First off, I would like to thank you all for agreeing to work for us on such short notice. My name is Alicia Reinhart; I am the show’s producer. This is my co producer, Carrie Lang.

**Co Producer:** Hello.

*(They all mumble “hello” unenthusiastically except for Suzanne)*

**Suzanne:** Hello there! I just want you to know I am honored to be working with you all. I brought some homemade strudel for everyone. Just dive right in! *(Offers one to Producer)*

**Producer:** Thank you, Suzanne, but I am diabetic. Although I can not share in the sugar orgy, I appreciate it. Behind me *(Pointing to two audience members)* is our camera men. This is Brian *(Goes over to random audience member)* on camera one and over here is Chad *(To another random audience member)* on camera two. Let’s come back down to earth. I will be as honest with you as I can. We hired you all because Channel 57 is going down the tubes. The reality is, this is either going to work, or it isn’t and we haven’t much leeway. By next month, it is very likely we could be replaced by an infomercial. The best way to save our skins is to work as a team. On that note, let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves. *(To Kyle)* You can start first.

**Kyle:** I’m Kyle Hintzel. I’m a meteorologist and I’ll be doing the weather.

**Hank:** I’m Hank Mc Connell and I’ll be doing the news.

**Suzanne:** *(Very Perky)* I’m Suzanne Dunwoody. I graduated from Indiana University with a degree in broadcasting. I enjoy Jackie Collins novels, watching the Oprah show religiously, and in my spare time, I make clothes for needy children. Oh, (Giggles) I’ll also be doing the news with Hank.

**Jeff:** *(Jeff moves and faces Suzanne trying to use his B.S. charm on her)* I’m Jeff Norwood. I do sports. I also happen to have a large Jackie Collins collection, and in my spare time I read books to deaf children. It’s a pleasure to meet you *(Kisses Suzanne’s hand)*
Suzanne: (Giggles)

Producer: Jeff, you should introduce yourself to EVERYONE, not just Suzanne.

Jeff: (Stuck staring into Suzanne’s eyes) I meant it for everyone.

Jason: My name is Jason Van Allen. I graduated the top of my class at the U of W. I’m an investigative journalist/writer by trade, poet by passion. You might remember my work. I was the one who broke the Chips Ahoy story. A thousand chips delicious my butt, more like 878 chips delicious!

Producer: Uh . . . right. Thank you, Jason.

Ok, everyone, we have a half hour before we go on. Go over your material, get what you need. At 11:50 on the dot, I want everyone in position. But, before we go, I want everyone to practice saying the Channel 57 mantra. You will say it at the beginning of every show. Listen carefully, “Welcome to Channel 57, where we find the news for you. Our nose knows news.”

All: (Should be said out of sync) Welcome to Channel 57, where we find the news for you. Our nose knows news.

Producer: Ok, see you in 20 minutes.

(Producer, Co Producer, Hank, and Kyle walk off to get ready. Suzanne, Jason, and Jeff stick around.)

Suzanne: (To Jason) You really write poetry?

Jason: Why yes, I do. I believe it is therapy for the soul.

Suzanne: I don’t think I would be very good at writing poetry.

Jason: Sure you would. I could tell right away you were a person with depth and intelligence. Would you mind if I read you a poem I wrote?

Suzanne: Oh, that would be great. I love listening to poetry.

(Jeff, seeing Jason is making progress with Suzanne, steps up to listen)

Jason: (Pulls out a piece of paper from his coat pocket) I wrote this while I watched a crew of immigrants do landscape work on my lawn this morning. (Clears throat) “The scornful bushes eclipse my view; the nostalgia of the dainty leaves itches my Iris. The pretentious sun, whore-slaps my brow like a grizzly in heat. Gushes of eye juice stream down my cheek as if to say, ‘hello’, to my lips. The dew slathered aliens mercilessly uproot my scornful bushes as a child in Honk Kong cries.”

Jeff: What the heck? Dew slathered aliens? Was E.T. doing your landscaping?

Jason: A man who wears a tie looking like that is hardly a judge of anything, let alone poetry.

Suzanne: I thought it was very . . . heartfelt.

(Shes stands in the middle, trying to smile as the two men go at it.)

Jeff: I know horse dung when I smell it.

Jason: You wouldn’t know poetry if it crawled to your doorstep, died and lingered for three days as the stank of creativity raped your nostrils . . . even then, you still WOULDN’T KNOW!

Jeff: (Realizes he’s outmatched in a battle of wits) Yeah . . . well . . . I saw you parking outside, you can’t parallel park worth a crap!

Jason: Very nice retort. Did you think of that one before or after you learned to walk erect?

Co-Producer: Hey, enough! Get to your places and start getting ready.

Jason: Ciao Jeffery.

(Jeff storms out mad and Jason exits. Suzanne moves off to fix her make-up. Kyle and Hank enter looking over various papers)

Kyle: Hey, what’s the deal with that Jeff?

Hank: How do you mean?

Kyle: He was tail-gaiting me all the way to the station. He was all over my rear. Then when we walk in here, I catch the little fruit loop staring at my . . . (Moves closer to Hank to confide in him) my buttocks.

Hank: He probably was just checking his watch.

Kyle: Yeah, with those wandering eyes of his!

Hank: I’m pretty sure he’s straight. He’s a sports caster, his tie is very tasteless and you saw the way he was all over Suzanne.

Kyle: Smoke and mirrors my friend. Those kinds of people are all over.
Hank: Look, I have to go over some notes, but I’m fairly certain you have nothing to fear.

Kyle: If this were the Land of Oz, maybe. But this is the 21st century. I grew up with the Lone Ranger; his generation grew up with Burt and Ernie, two grown men that happen to live in the same apartment together.

Hank: Grown men? They’re puppets!

Kyle: Homo puppets with an agenda. Don’t be so naïve. It’s metaphorical! It all means the same things.

Hank: Sir, I just met you, but you really need to calm down and collect yourself. We are professionals here. If you have a problem with Jeff, talk to the producers or Jeff himself. But please, do not dump your phobias upon me. I have plenty to worry about.

Kyle: Fine. I got some stuff to look over too. I’m just going to go over to the map and check out the isobars and . . .

Hank: That’s fine, thank you.

Kyle: Wait a minute . . . are you . . .

Hank: (Very annoyed) No! I have a wife. Now please!

(Enter Jason Van Allen and Co-Producer)

Co-Producer: Mr. Van Allen, what do you have for your news segment?

Jason: Don’t you worry, it’s covered.

Co-Producer: Well, I have to know what you’re going to present so I can approve it.

Jason: Trust me, it’s hot.

Co-Producer: Hot?

Jason: Yes, it’s hot. If it were any hotter I’d have to call Mr. Giorgio Armani to personally flame retard this suit.

Co-Producer: Still, it’s standard procedure for me to “ok” the material for the show.

Jason: (Laughter) I appreciate your well intentioned yet naïve concern, but working with Jason Van Allen is like riding a roller coaster; you just sit back and let gravity do the rest. If need be, throw your hands up and scream. (Walks away like the quintessential arrogant upstart he is as Co-producer just stands in shock)

(Enter Jeff talking on cell phone)

Jeff: Yeah, I have the money, I’m working now. That’s two K for the Red Sox, Raiders and Blazers. That’s six thousand. Thank you, I owe you. When I win I’ll buy you a keg. (Angry) Look, don’t bust my cahones on this, I have the money! Alright, bye.

Co-Producer: Mr. Norwood, you should get ready.

Jeff: Alright, I was just talking to my grandmother . . . she’s a sports nut ya know!

Co-Producer: When your news segment comes on, I will prompt you with cards for the scores.

Jeff: Ok, sounds great.

(Enter Producer)

Producer: Everyone, get where you’re supposed to be. I want Suzanne and Hank front and center.

(Suzanne and Hank sit at the desk)

Suzanne: (Low hum) Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm. Hoooooooolaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa la la la la me la la hoo la la.

Hank: Miss, what are you doing?

Suzanne: I’m warming my voice up. I just had a cup of sweet tea and honey and I need to finish the process. Hee naw, hee naw, hee naw, oooo waaaaaaa, oooo, waaaaa. Why don’t you try it?

Hank: I usually don’t . . .

Suzanne: It really works. Say it with me. Hee naw, hee naw, lee lee lee.

Hank: Hee naw hee haw lee lee lee

Producer: Ok, get ready you two.

(Hank is visibly embarrassed)

Co-Producer: You are on in 5, 4, 3, (Does two and one with her hand)

Hank: Hello, welcome to Channel 57 News, where we find the news for you. Our news nose knows . . .er . . . our nose news knows the news?

(Gives a look of confusion to the producers)

Producer: (Loud whisper) Keep going.

Hank: In Iran, thousands of people took to the streets in violent protest. Hours later, the crowd realized they had nothing to protest, so they burned an American flag and dispersed calling it a day.
(After this point, Suzanne should be inappropriately perky)

**Suzanne:** (Perky) In Peru, a plane en route to Argentina apparently malfunctioned and crashed into the Andes Mountains. No body is believed to have survived!

**Hank:** Terrorist mastermind, Abu Bin Sledin, has released another tape this week vowing more attacks, denouncing U.S. action in Iraq and U.S. involvement in Pepsi Blue. The CIA is currently analyzing the tapes for authenticity.

**Suzanne:** (Perky) Hurricane Roy hit Puerto Rico early this morning leaving the whole island without electricity. Eighty-three people have died so far and thousands are homeless in the wake of the massive storm.

**Hank:** In national news, Lichtensteinian born weight lifter turned movie star, Hans Shankleburger, has announced his gubernatorial candidacy for the state of Idaho. Shankleburger has come out publicly saying he is against “child abuse, rape and bad things” and is for “children, jobs, and puppies”. Recent polls show Shankleburger ahead of current governor Red McGinty by ten points.

**Suzanne:** (Perky) In Johnsonwood, Kansas, a lightning bolt ignited a fireworks warehouse. Twelve of the warehouse employees suffered 2nd to 3rd degree burns before they escaped the blaze. One bystander described the scene as “a devastating inferno of patriotism”.

**Hank:** We’ll be right back.

**Producer:** And commercial break! Suzanne, can I speak to you please?

**Suzanne:** Absolutely! *(She hops over to the Producer)*

**Producer:** You’re doing a fine job. I appreciate the energy but . . .

**Suzanne:** Oh my god, do I look fat on camera?!? I heard the camera adds 15lbs so I went on a laxative/Pedialyte diet, but if you think I need to lose more . . .

**Producer:** No, no. It’s not that at all. You look fabulous on camera and I like your enthusiasm, but . . . what you’re saying doesn’t fit how you’re saying it. Do you understand?

**Suzanne:** Are you saying I should be less . . .

**Producer:** Perky! Yes, that’s what I’m saying. Thank you, you’re wonderful, I know you can do it. *(Thumbs up)*

**Hank:** (To Producer) I’m sorry about messing up our mantra.

**Producer:** It’s ok. You’re doing a fine job, Hank. Keep it up. We are on in ten seconds, get back in place. *(Both of them sit back at the desk.)*

**Co-Producer:** Good luck everyone. You’re on in 5-4-3 *(Silent countdown to one)*

**Hank:** In Hollywood news, pop singer-actress Lily Cortez has apparently called off the wedding with dashing young actor Trey Backflash. Close friends of the singer say she was furious over Trey’s shenanigans at a Las Vegas strip club. In response, the Pope has called a national day of prayer for the couple. Local and civic leaders around the nation are distributing posters and banners supporting the union of the couple. Scientists are currently calculating the effect the couple’s break-up has on the rotation of the earth on its axis. Action star Jean Claude Van Dam has vowed to keep making movies unless the situation is resolved. Chilling. We’ll keep you updated.

**Suzanne:** *(Overly sullen and morose)* Legendary actor, Rod Brownstone, celebrates his 88th birthday today. You know Rod best as Smokey the Bear from his 70’s educational films Holy Smokes and Grin and Bear It. We wish Rod a happy 88th from everyone at Channel 57. Happy birthday.

**Hank:** A new study out today by Berkley states that the divorce rate in the United States has increased to 57%, higher than any previous year. *(Pause)* And why not? You keep wondering why she orders pizza so often, sometimes three times a day. One day, you come home early from work to find she’s been piddling the pizza boy! *(Starts to sob)* We shared 20 years together. I know I wasn’t always there for you and might have deserved it, but what about Sniffy and Dakota? How could you do it in front of our
dogs! Right in front of them!?!? How could you??!??!

**Suzanne:** We’ll be right back!

**Co-Producer:** Hank, what’s the matter with you?

**Producer:** I thought you said everything was alright with your wife?

**Hank:** It’s not. I’ve been sleeping in my car for a week. She took everything: the house, the glass menageries, the . . . (Sobs) . . . DOGS!

**Producer:** He can’t go on like this!

**Co-Producer:** Hank, can you pull yourself together and go back on?

**Hank:** Just give me some tissues . . . and some whiskey.

**Producer:** No!

**Hank:** Just a little. I’ll sip, I promise.

**Producer:** No whiskey, there is no whiskey. There will be no whiskey. Go to the lounge, grab yourself some apple cider and a Little Debby.

**Hank:** Hug?

**Producer:** Excuse me?

**Hank:** Please, I really need one. I spent last night singing “So Happy Together” to my Garfield suction-cup window doll.

**Producer:** Carrie, I’ll let you field this one.

**(Co-Producer hugs Hank awkwardly)**

**Hank:** Thank you. I’ll now take comfort in the lounge and drown my sorrows in a cup of cider . . . (Getting emotional again) extra cinnamon sticks.

**(Hank exits)**

**Co-Producer:** What are we going to do?

**Producer:** We’ll cut short the news segment and do sports. Get Norwood in here.

**(Co-Producer exits to get Jeff)**

**Suzanne:** What’s wrong with Mr. McConnell?

**Producer:** He’s just a little emotional right now. He’s having time out in the lounge.

**(Jeff and Co-Producer enter)**

**Jeff:** I’m ready for show time.

**Producer:** (To Suzanne) We are cutting short the news segment and going straight to sports.

**Suzanne:** Poo.

**Producer:** Go to the lounge and try and cheer up Hank.

**Suzanne:** (Perky again) Ok!

**Producer:** Get up there, Jeff. You’re on in ten secs.

**(Co-Producer grabs the score cards and stands back to prompt Jeff. Jeff is given the signal)**

**Co-Producer:** 5-4-3- (Silent countdown to one)

**Jeff:** Hi, I’m Jeff Norwood here to bring you the world of sports. An upset in high school football tonight. The Mud Grouse defeated the Sloppy Hens 52 to 7 tonight. Star Quarterback Chaz Lockwood of the Mud Grouse excitedly touted the performance as “Good. We played good. I feel good. We just need to keep playin’ good and stuff. It can’t get any gooder than this.” Amen, Chaz.

Good luck to Chaz and the Mud Grouse against the Dusty Ducks next week. In college basketball, the Deacons defeated the Demons 87 to 68. Officials had to call an exorcist when Mike Liliput, head coach of the Demons, attempted to assault a referee with his removed toupee. A truly hairy raising event! (Awkward silence as no one laughs at his joke) Ahem . . . now to the pros. In baseball tonight, the Boston Red Sox defeated the Mets . . . 3 to 2! Aright! That’s what I’m talking about!!! Hooohaaa!

**Producer:** What is he doing??

**Co-Producer:** (Frustrated) I don’t know. At least he’s not having an emotional breakdown.

**Jeff:** In the NFL tonight, an upset was in the air. The Titans . . . (Sorrow) . . . defeated the Raiders 21 to 14 tonight. Dammit! Dammit! Dammit! You know, this is just like the Raiders. I’m sick and tired of this, the coach is an incompetent retard and the quarterback might as well get a seeing-eye dog, he doesn’t know what the hell is going on out there! That’s two grand down the toilet . . . (Realizes he has revealed too much) . . . um . . . that is if you’re a betting person . . . a person that bets . . . which I am not. Betting is wrong and over in Portland tonight, the NBA season kicked off with the
Blazers/Kings match-up. The Kings . . . *(Increasingly filled with anger)* take down the Blazers 109 to 105 . . . with Divac scoring . . . God does not like me! Tony, if you’re watching, I’ll have the money, just give me a little more time! I have this job now and all I need is a little time . . .

**Producer:** (Angry) Cut to commercial!!!

**Jeff:** I can explain.

**Producer:** You buffoon. You told me you quit gambling!

**Jeff:** I did. Will you please let me explain?! **Producer:** It better something like you placed the bet at gun point and you were going to build a shelter for cute little orphans with the money . . . and I’m talking about very super cute puppy dog-faced orphans! Otherwise, so help me I will . . .

**Jeff:** Listen! I . . . have you ever had a sure thing fall right into your lap and at the last minute . . .

**Producer:** Vanish out of my sight! *(To co-producer)* This is a disaster! I’ve hired a band of misfits and degenerates!

**Co-Producer:** We could cut to an infomercial.

*(Enter Jason)*

**Jason:** Ladies, I’ve been watching the whole thing. Put my spot on next, and I’ll take this steaming monkey nugget into my hand and squeeze it into a diamond.

**Jeff:** You can’t let him on . . . he . . . he . . .

**Jason:** Has a better tie, education, and vocabulary. We know. Go back to the lounge, Jeffrey—I think I saw a *Highlights* magazine that’s right up your alley.

**Jeff:** Hey, Mr. Van Dork . . . I have a poem for you. What do you get when my fist hits your mouth at 40 M.P.H.?

**Producer:** Enough! He’s going on next. Go to the lounge and cool off, Jeff. *(To Co-Producer)* I need you to get Suzanne.

**Co-Producer:** Right. *(Exits to summon Suzanne)*

**Jason:** You’re making a wise decision.

**Producer:** That remains to be seen.

*(Jason goes and puts up the “What up with that” graphic on the wall. It should be just a piece of tag board with the words “What up with That” written on it. Suzanne and Co-Producer Enter)*

**Suzanne:** I’m ready.

**Producer:** How is Hank?

**Suzanne:** He became emotional again when he said Little Debby reminded him of his wife. But he’s nursing a cup of apple cider and looking through my Cuddly Wuddly Kitten Calendar.

**Producer:** Great. Get in places you two. *(They both move to the desk)*

**Co-Producer:** You are on in 5-4-3- *(Silent countdown to one)*

**Suzanne:** Welcome back. Here tonight we have our own investigative reporter for Channel 57, Jason Van Allen.

**Jason:** Thank you, Suzanne. *(Pause)* What up with that? Nuclear holocaust, Chernobyl, genetic mutation, acid rain, terrorists, Pol Pot, Ebola virus . . . with all the horrors the world faces, a public library should be a sanctuary against the ills of society. Not so, folks. I recently visited a local library here in Hinkleyville and was stunned at what I found. Library fines: we’ve all paid them, but where does the money go? One would assume they go to restore the facilities or to purchase new books and the like. But when I ventured into Hinkleyville United Centennial Memorial Library, what I found froze my soul. I went to this library undercover as a random literary roustabout.

**Suzanne:** *(Synthetic interest)* Oh my, what did you find?

**Jason:** What I found is not for the faint of heart. If small children are watching, I suggest they find a parent . . . but then continue to watch! With my surveillance camera, I caught the library employees emptying the fine money, which amounted to $4.32. I followed them down to a soda machine where I spotted them purchasing two diet cokes . . . *(Jason pauses for shock value)* and one sprite!

**Suzanne:** *(Confused)* That is so . . . not . . . good?

**Jason:** It’s an outrage, Suzanne! Even after spending most of the $4, they went back for
more, in one instance, purchasing a Rollo chocolate confection treat!

Suzanne: ???

Producer: Give me a gun; I’m going to shoot him!

Jason: (Grabs a piece of paper out of his file which are pictures of the two old ladies) So, Miss Gertrude Anderson, age 74, and Miss Agnes Evers, age 65, of Hinkleyvilletown United Centennial Memorial Library, we are watching you! The citizens of this town know your little secret and we are not going to stand for this! Our fines will not be used to fund your excess. Look out, Agnes and Gertrude, librarians extortionaire! We as a community raise our collective voices and say “What up with that??!”

Suzanne: We’ll be right back . . . I think.

Producer: (To Jason) Listen here you little worm, I did not clear that story!

Co-Producer: He wouldn’t clear it with me, he refused. I’m responsible for this too . . . I should have . . .

Producer: I’ll speak to you later, Carrie. (To Jason) But you!

Jason: Listen, it’s not my fault you don’t know anything about investigative journalism. The public has the story; they’ll eat it up like pigeons, and I the generous bread crumb giving vagabond.

Producer: The story? You mean the story where you demonized two elderly librarians!

Jason: Hey, don’t be fooled by ageism. I was there. They had a cunning look in their eyes.

Producer: Cunning look?!?! It was probably their cataracts!

Jason: Whatever. I’m going to grab an Aquafina. I’m sorry you can’t see my brilliance. I suppose it’s asking too much for you to take off your blindfold and stare at the sun for the first time. (To Himself) This happened to Galileo too. (He exits off as arrogant as ever)

Producer: That arrogant little . . .

Co-Producer: ASS!

Producer: Thank you. You’re forgiven.

Co-Producer: We have the weather left.

Producer: I like the weather. Nothing can go wrong with the weather. It’s just plain and simple. Cut and dry. Sunny, cloudy, cloudy, sunny. Good ol’ reliable weather. Get me the weather, Carrie.

Co-Producer: I’ll go get Mr. Hintzel right away.

Suzanne: How are we doing?

Producer: Hindenburg or Titanic? Take your pick, Suzanne.

Suzanne: I knew I shouldn’t have made strudel. I probably jinxed us.

Producer: Honey, out of all that’s happened tonight, you’ve been the least of the screw-ups.

Suzanne: Really?

Producer: Yes.

Suzanne: Thanks, Miss Reinhardt.

(Enter Co-Producer and Kyle)

Producer: You’re on Mr. Hintzel.

Kyle: (Goes over to map) I’m ready when you are.

Co-Producer: 5-4-3- (Silent countdown to one)

Suzanne: Welcome back. Our own Kyle Hintzel is here with the weather. Do you have any good news for us, Kyle?

Kyle: I wish I could give you that good news, but it doesn’t’ look good for the weekend forecast. Doppler radar has picked up a weather system coming in from Canada. This appears to be a low pressure system which will bring large, sporadic amounts of precipitation. Our current stable high pressure system is going to be penetrated by this front coming from behind . . . from Canada . . . it’s going to be penetrated from . . . behind! Dear god! I could see this coming all along. We all know how these low pressure systems from Canada work. They sneak up behind the high pressure system, drop a little precipitation to distract it. That’s when it moves in fast to penetrate the front!

Producer: (Loud Whisper) Stop him.

Interrupt him, Suzanne!

Suzanne: Thank you, Kyle, for that . . . interesting forecast. On the lighter side of the news, we will go to Langdon, Indiana, where an 80 year old grandmother of four has cut a deal with Thugster Records to produce her
first rap album. We take you live to G-Ranny . . .

(Kyle runs up to the desk)

**Kyle:** No, keep the cameras rolling! I will not allow these homosexual storms to pollute my Doppler. It’s a slippery slope, people. The next thing you know, we’ll have color coordinated sunsets, liberal dew points, or even flamboyant multi-colored snow that falls like fairy dust! Who’s ever heard of colored snow?? It’s anarchy! How will you explain to your kids? Think of them!

**Producer:** Stop him!

(Kyle is chased off by Co-Producer who is shooing him with the cue cards).

**Suzanne:** (After the commotion has ceased) Thank you for watching. This has been Channel 57 News, where our news is our nose. I’m Suzanne Dunwoody. Goodnight.

(Ending music. Suzanne remains frozen smiling for a good 10 seconds)

**Co-Producer:** You can stop smiling, Suzanne. The camera is off.

**Suzanne:** Oh, right.

**Producer:** (To Co-Producer) The world is cruel. I’m going to my office. I think the execs will probably want my resignation.

**Co-Producer:** What do you want me to do?

**Producer:** Find a newspaper and look for a job. Everyone will probably need one.

(The entire cast enters, except for Kyle)

**Hank:** I’m sorry, Suzanne, I let you down. You have my sincerest apologies.

**Suzanne:** It’s ok, Hank. This has been quite a learning experience.

**Hank:** Thanks for the calendar. I don’t even like cats, but I feel better now.

**Jeff:** (To Suzanne) You did great.

**Jason:** Great? She was transcendent, a Venus of late night news.

**Suzanne:** Thanks, you guys. I wasn’t that good.

**Hank:** (To Co-Producer) Where’s Miss Reinhart?

**Co-Producer:** She’s talking to the big guys about the show. It doesn’t look good.

**Hank:** This could be the shortest job I’ve ever had.

**Jeff:** They can’t cancel us now! Don’t they realize my limbs are at stake here!

**Jason:** You certainly didn’t help the situation. Did you gamble that brain of yours away too? Oh wait, they don’t take nickel bets!

**Jeff:** Yeah . . . well . . . investigate this

(Flicks him off but Suzanne steps in the middle so she is blocking Jeff’s hand)

**Suzanne:** Stop it!

**Jeff:** Tell it to fancy pants over there!

**Jason:** These pants cost more than your education!

(Producer enters stoically with papers in her hand. It looks like bad news)

**Jeff:** (Again defeated in the battle of wits) . . .

**Hank:** Your mother!

**Suzanne:** Shut up everyone! Let Miss Reinhart speak.

**Co-Producer:** What did they say?

**Hank:** Are we jobless?

**Jeff:** Limbless?

**Producer:** Channel 57 News is no more.

(Everyone lets out a cry of despair)

**Producer:** Channel 57 News is no more. They loved it.

**Co-Producer:** Loved what? Firing us?

**Producer:** Where is Kyle Hintzel?

**Co-Producer:** Being escorted out by security. Why?

**Producer:** Get him back here.

**Co-Producer:** I’m on it. I just hope I’m not too late.

(Producer exits quickly)

**Producer:** They loved the show. I have the faxes. They kept getting phone calls from people thinking we were doing a sketch comedy show.

**Hank:** Comedy?

**Producer:** Yes, comedy. The ratings kept climbing throughout the show. I’m as stunned as you all are.

(Producer and Kyle enter)

**Kyle:** What’s going on here? I get canned for defending heterosexuals everywhere??
Produce: No, Mr. Hintzel. We got a phone call from G.L.A.D. They loved you. They called it “A wonderful satire of homophobic America. Hintzel exposes the irrational fear in a hilariously clever caricature”.

Kyle: Caricature? Loved me??!!

Producer: One man called and said Mr. Van Allen’s piece was “foolishly hilarious”.

Jason: What? This is . . . he is a . . . (For the first time, he’s got nothing to say)

Producer: They got dozens of calls just like these.

Hank: What does this mean?

Producer: They want to scrap Channel 57 News, and turn us into a comedy show. They want to keep you all on with a few additions to the cast.

Suzanne: A midnight comedy show?

Producer: Yes. Your contracts will have to be renegotiated of course, but they want you all.

Jason: That is absurd. Count me out. I will not have my work the subject of mockery.

Jeff: I’m in.

Hank: We’re not comedians!

Co-Producer: What’s funnier than a group of people that don’t know their funny. I mean, an investigative news story on library fines! It’s hilarious!

Jason: You smug little girl. Your fines are being squandered for Rollos and hard candy and all you can do is sit there and laugh!

Co-Producer: That’s what I’m talking about, Jason. You’re hilarious!

Hank: Well, as long as there’s a pay check and Prozac in it for me, I’m in.

(Enraged, Jason disconnects himself from the group and gets his things together to leave)

Suzanne: Gosh, when I graduated I never thought I’d be doing a comedy show. It sounds fun. I’m in.

Kyle: I’m not a caricature! I’m a meteorologist!

Producer: They don’t have to know that! All you have to do is be honest. You can still do weather. Just be yourself.

Kyle: (Thinks it over) Fine. I’m in . . . for now.

Producer: Ok, everyone. Go home and get some sleep. We will have a meeting here tomorrow at noon to discuss details.

Co-Producer: See you tomorrow everyone. It’s been a pleasure working with you all.

(Producer and Co-Producer exit)

Kyle: Hold up, they gotta be . . .

Hank: NO! They’re both married. Carrie has two children.

Kyle: How do you know?

Hank: Instead of pointing fingers, I engage in casual conversation and get to know these people.

(Hank and Kyle walk toward the door)

Kyle: I never thought of it that way. Do you have any kids?

Hank: Why yes, Sniffy and Dakota, St. Bernard and Schnauzer respectively. (Opens Wallet) This picture was taken last Christmas. We dressed Sniffy up as Santa and Dakota was suppose to be Rudolph. (Amused by the picture) See him in his cute little hat! Oh, and I’m throwing a birthday party for Dakota next week, his 7th. I’m inviting all his friends and their masters. Even though I haven’t discussed it with Dakota yet, you’re invited as well.

Kyle: Uh . . . sounds great.

(Hank and Kyle exit)

Jason: Suzanne, on Saturday I’m going to a symposium on colon polyps. Apparently these people saved their removed polyps that are shaped like movie stars. I hear the Jay Leno polyp is quite impressive. I would be privileged and honored if you would join me.

Suzanne: Well . . . I . . .

Jason: And afterwards, I will wine and dine you at Le Fromage. The New Yorker called their Sea Cucumber a truculent little dish with a naughty surprise in the center.

Suzanne: No.

Jason: Ha ha ha. No really, what time should I pick you up?

Suzanne: I said no. You are a rude, condescending little man who treats people like dirt. My answer is no, Jason.

Jason: Fine. I see beauty and class do not go hand in hand. Pretty faces are a dime a dozen, all I have to do is call one number on
this cell phone. Have a great time
discovering the mystery of fire with the
Neanderthal.

**Jeff:** Hey Jason. You are a vexatious
ignoramus! *(Takes a pocket dictionary from
his coat and holds it so Jason can see)*
You’re not the only one who knows how to
read, butthead.

**Jason:** Go to rot! *(Angry, he exits in a huff)*
**Jeff:** Check and mate. *(Nervous and boyish)*
Hey Suzanne . . .

**Suzanne:** Yes?

**Jeff:** Would you like to go have some coffee
with me or maybe some pizza or both if
you’re weird like that?

**Suzanne:** Maybe.

**Jeff:** Is it the “get lost loser” maybe or is it
the “maybe” maybe?

**Suzanne:** You’ll have to do two things for
me. Jason was right about the tie, it has to go.
The second thing *(outstretches her hand) . . .
please walk me out to my car.*

**Jeff:** *(Tears off tie)* Done . . . *(Holds out arm
for Suzanne to grab) and done.

**Suzanne:** What was the last Jackie Collins
novel you read?

**Jeff:** Jackie who?
*(Jeff throws the tie on the floor. The lights
fade to half)*

**Jason:** Jason Van Allen: intrepid poet and
rogue lover. *(Takes out a piece of paper) I
wrote this while spending an evening with
my lady fair.

“Do not bite the hand that sees you, and do
not laugh at the nose that bleeds for you,
wench. Sexy pixels and an avatar to die for,
why do you sizzle my sauce? I know you
will addict my senses like a PCP junky going
back for more but I am enslaved to your
electrons. You slaughter my eyes with your
incendiary phosphorus grenades of sweet,
sweet, love. I draw closer to your flame like a
tornado to a trailer park. Guide my twisted
tongue to the honey and hold back your
Africanized killer bees of repudiation. Email
me soon, diva of all that is cyber. My fire
retards as a dog in Malaysia is eaten a la
carte.” *(Jason steps back as the lights go down)*
Granny
by Max Klingenstein

My dad and I turned off Highway 31, fifteen miles north of New Salem, North Dakota, onto a gravel road leading to my Grandma’s farm. One mile later, we entered her yard which was sprinkled with shriveled leaves. To the right, I noticed the curious, old, red shed leaning haphazardly to one side, threatening to fall down in the next wind storm. Somehow it still remained standing. When I glanced at the house, I noticed my Grandma’s head peeping just above the window of the front door.

“Hi, Granny,” I said as I walked in.

“Hello, Max,” she replied cheerfully, putting an emphasis on the word “Max.” I bent down awkwardly to give her a hug and a kiss since she only stands 4’11”. Although Granny appears fragile and old, she is still sharp, hardworking, and full of the love she feels for her family.

As we sat at the kitchen table to talk about the changing weather, I looked at her old but beautiful face. It included a distinctive pink nose and narrow blue eyes. Her thin gray hair was matted so she had wrapped a handkerchief around her head. When I started talking about school, her huge smile revealed a lower tooth that had fallen out sometime during the past summer. My eyes followed to the thin, soft, skin that hung loosely from her face. When I reached to pick up a carrot stick out of a bowl of water she had set between us, I noticed her bony, gnarled hands resting limply on the table. From these fragile hands, dark blue veins popped out dangerously and climbed up her bony arms, which also showed some bruises where she must have bumped into something.

Granny’s old fragile body doesn’t appear to affect her mind. As I sat at the table, I started to daydream about when relatives had gathered at Granny’s to play Schmier. To her delight, she slyly managed to outsmart her opponents all night long. She can also tell stories from her childhood as if they were yesterday. I remember listening dumbfounded when she started talking about the Dust Bowl and the Depression. She nodded slowly as she talked. Her eyes grew wide and serious, and she almost whispered as if she was afraid that talking loudly would awaken those years and they would come back.

Those hard times are probably one reason my Grandma works so hard. That night, even as I slept, I was aware of Granny stirring at five o’clock in the morning. It was as if I saw her put the coffee pot on the stove and start making breakfast. She then let the dogs outside and fed them their breakfast. I gradually heard voices at the kitchen table and the clanging of forks on plates as the hours passed. By the time I woke up, around nine o’clock, Granny was already up and busy for four hours. As I ate my breakfast of fried sausage and toast, I marveled at her work ethic. She made meals for people almost her whole life, and then washed the dishes afterwards. I even remember eating lunch once while she was already cooking supper. Every morning for years, she woke up before dawn and milked cows. She spent hours doing the chores that a typical farm wife must do to raise a family. Now that things are more difficult for her, it seems to me she works harder than ever.

Through her actions, Granny exhibits all the love a person could show. I remember when she came to my Confirmation two years ago and endured the long drive because she wouldn’t miss it for the world. Having Granny there made that day even more special for me. Granny considers other people before she thinks of herself. She treats all her children and grandchildren with a protective motherly instinct and worries about and tries to take care of them. I haven’t once seen her angry at anyone.

Every Christmas and birthday, she kindly
sends a card in the mail with a present. I am always welcome to come out to her farm whenever I want.

I remember hunting during these fall and winter weekends at Grandma’s farm. After a long day of hunting and cleaning pheasants, there was nothing better than coming in out of the cold to a warm house. For a few minutes, until my hands warmed up, I knew what it was like to have arthritis. I pictured Granny’s hands and what she had lived with for years. Entering the kitchen, the aroma of a hot meal of turkey, pheasant or ham engulfed us. Even though I didn’t see the meal being prepared, I knew it took a lot of time and energy. Perhaps what made the meal so good was the love Granny put into it.

As my dad and I departed from the farm on Sunday afternoon and gave Granny a kiss goodbye, the last thing she said to us was, “Come again.” Leaving the farmyard, I noticed the old, red shed again and wished that it would remain standing for a long time.

Home Sweet Home
Photography
by Austin S. Lang
Every year, my family and I plant a garden, a ritual my father, mother, and I all appreciate in our own way. The patch is located between Fargo and Valley City at our family farm, which lies about 15 minutes beyond any town with more than 250 people. The farm consists of two white shops; an average size white barn with a loft full of straw and hay; many little, white, rickety buildings, none of which store anything of importance; one red poll-barn, which my horse and one cow call home; and the massive, white farm house my father grew up in. The plot of dirt for our garden falls in between an undersized tree claim to the west, two small white shacks on the east, my horse’s run to the south, and a miniature fruit orchard, which includes pear, apple, and plum trees, on the north. The center of the garden consists of a large patch of raspberries, but we also plant many other vegetables.

In the spring of the year, tilling the garden ranks as one of our top priorities. By turning the dirt as soon as possible when the ground dries out and no longer forms balls when squeezed, we hope to help dry out the ground. Rotating the dirt helps to remove the hard clumps which make it difficult for seed sprouts to reach the surface. After planning to fit as much seed as possible into the garden, we are ready to sow seeds. My mom, dad, and I plant however many vegetables we can cram into the patch. The required fruits and vegetables include peas, green beans, carrots, potatoes, parsnips, tomatoes, zucchini, onions, Swiss chard, pumpkins, butternut squash, ornamental gourds, corn, cucumbers, cantaloupe, and watermelon. The spacing of the seeds depends on type, and the seeds must be placed about half an inch down in the dirt before smoothing the dirt over them. I enjoy planting the parsnips, my personal favorite, and space them so they are about two inches apart. Anticipation to dig underneath the parsnip tops in the fall encourages me to work hard in the garden throughout the entire year. If I want to find anything beneath the ground in the fall, a few very important conditions must be regulated throughout the year.

First, the seeds must be kept wet until they germinate and reach the surface if they are going to live. The moisture prevents the dirt from packing and inhibiting the sprouts from breaking through the surface. Once the shoots are up, my parents always apply Miracle Grow, a store bought fertilizer, to strengthen both the weak and the strong plants and provide them with additional defense mechanisms to fight various diseases with. Weeds generally appear at the same time as the fruits and vegetables, and since they drown out the new growth by using up the available space, water, and nutrition, my parents and I clean the garden together throughout the year. The needed space essentially provides each plant with room to grow and flourish. Thinning out the extras, a process my mother insists is necessary, insures the remaining ones receive enough room to grow. My parents thin out the rows if an above average number of seeds germinate. We mound dirt up around potatoes, corn, and tomatoes to help support the stalks because their weight can cause them to fall over and break off. Some of the varieties vine out and take up the additional space. With the right care, our garden seems to flourish.

This spring our garden’s fate was not good. It grew beautifully until the weather took a drastic turn one evening in early June. The sky turned a shade of dark purple, and the clouds started to roll. With no time to cover the growing plants, my parents and I helplessly stood peering out the front door towards the garden as hail started to fall. At first, small hail began falling, but in time it grew larger. As I watched the storm run its course, I wished it would have arrived about three weeks earlier, before the plants
surfaced. The storm finally came to an end, and we walked around the garden to evaluate the damage. The hail took its toll on the garden, and even though some of the vegetables didn’t make it, others survived. My heart fell as I reached my row of parsnips, which was no longer standing. The delicate, young tops had been broken off. I knew I would not find anything beneath them this fall. The other fruits and vegetables lived and thrived partially because the hail had naturally spaced the rows.

Just as nature played a role in the success of our garden, it can play a role in the success of the goals I set. Goals consume a lot of my time, and I always try to space them out reasonably so I can give each of them the care they need. The two main goals I believe will truly be satisfying to achieve include forming lasting relationships and obtain a beneficial education. As precedents of my future goals, these goals will provide me with the fundamentals of additional goals I hope to set.

I believe every relationship forms the foundation for another and is an experience uniquely its own. My most important goal is to form strong and long-term relationships with people, but in order to succeed many conditions must be perfect. Both individuals must contribute because all relationships involve at least two people. Just as lumps of dirt can prevent the seeds from sprouting, new relationships often keep their distance due to the walls encumbering some people. To remove these walls, I surround myself with people, and in a sense keep myself wet with people. Forming relationships takes a lot of hard work, but the result is worth it.

Interacting with associates seems to act as a strengthener. Merely knowing I have them to turn to provides me with a sense of security and high hopes for what the future might hold. Although I think positive bonds between individuals are one of the most desirable things to possess, I also believe in a right time and a wrong time for these bonds to develop due to their fragility. One mishap, such as a misunderstanding, can form into a hail storm and terminate certain components of any relationship. Learning from these mistakes provides the only benefit of this misfortune.

My second goal, which is to obtain a valuable education, closely relates to raising a garden. The learning environment needs essentials, which include teachers, goals, challenges, reading material, and an open mind. If too much of any one thing is present, I lose focus of the other elements. Certain goals and obligations should be thinned out so the remaining, more important components can receive the needed amount of attention. Books and homework strengthen my mind by contributing additional information to the knowledge I already retain and the things I want to learn more about.

Finally, while striving to succeed in my goals, I have realized no matter how much planning, effort, time, determination, and enthusiasm I put into obtaining certain goals, I may fail to reach my objective. I need to accept I can not always make things perfect and achieve the things I strive for. As I get older, I find satisfaction in solely working to achieve my goals.
Drama

Cast:
Mrs. Cooper: A Theatre teacher
Katie
Brittany
Cole
Matt
Randy
Julia

Setting: Theatre 320 w/ some classroom implements: Chalkboard, chairs. The students have their computer bags and have notebooks in which they are taking notes. It is to look as though there is a class going on in 320 as usual. It is Acting One, and the teacher, Mr. Cooper is handing back papers to the students.

Randy: (To Cole) Dude, what’d you get on your paper?
Cole: Got an eight out of ten. How about you?
Randy: Oh, something kinda like that.
Katie: (squeals) Another ten! Woo-hoo (or something like that)
Randy: (muttered) Oh, for crying out loud.
Cole: Hey, I’d be happy to help you on the next breakdown, if you want.
Randy: Nah, too busy with all the ladies.
Brittany: Sure.
Randy: Well, what are you doing tonight, hot stuff?
Brittany: Oh, puh-lease.
Mrs. Cooper: Well, while we’re waiting for Julia and Rachel to perform their scene, let’s talk about the GOTE acronym. Cole? What does the “G” stand for?
Cole: Ummm, objective?
Mrs. Cooper: Yes, thank you, Katie. Now let’s see if Cole will get a chance to offer a correct answer. Cole? What’s another word for “goal”?
Cole: Ummm, objective?
Mrs. Cooper: Very good! Okay, Brittany, how about another word for “Goal”?
Brittany: Okay, let’s see, how about purpose?
Mrs. Cooper: Good, how about the word “intention”?
Katie: I was just about to say that.
Cole: Whatever.
Mrs. Cooper: Moving on to the “O” in GOTE, Matt? How about it?
Matt: (pause) The “O” stands for object?
Mrs. Cooper: Not quite. Let’s try again. What can help a character or become an obstacle for a character reaching his or her goal?
Matt: A plot?
Randy: No, it’s a . . . they need a script?
Mrs. Cooper: The character needs the “other”. As in the “O” in GOTE. Yes, a plot is a good thing to have, true enough, but as a character in the play we want the other character or characters to help us achieve our goal, or we may have to overcome an obstacle another character causes in trying to achieve our goal.
Cole: (whispered to Randy) Geez, where did Julia and Rachel go to get their props? The moon?
Mrs. Cooper: (overhearing) I’m sure they’ll be right down. Focus, please. Let’s go over the “T”. Katie?
Katie: The “T” stands for tactics.
Mrs. Cooper: Yes. Why?
Katie: Well, it’s referring to what tactics we’re going to use in order to achieve the goal. I mean, how to reach for the goal in the scene.
Mrs. Cooper: Good. What kind of tactics can we use, Brittany?
Brittany: Inducing and/or threatening tactics.
Mrs. Cooper: Okay, that’s good, now how do you induce someone into doing what you want them to do, Cole?
Cole: Ummm, well, I could kick ‘em.
Mrs. Cooper: Rather than inducing that would be threatening tactic, wouldn’t it?
Cole: Yup.
Mrs. Cooper: Good example of a threatening tactic. Brittany? Can you think of another threatening tactic?
Brittany: Sure. How about stab them in the back or something?
Mrs. Cooper: That would be a life-threatening tactic, certainly. How could you be menacing without damaging vital organs? Randy?
Randy: Ummm, I could like, say, “Hey, dude, do what I tell you or I’ll make you do community theatre!” (the other students laugh, but then--)
(At this point, offstage, upstairs in the prop room, is heard a very loud scream, followed by loud footsteps as Julia runs CAREFULLY!!! downstairs and into 320. She looks completely panicked.)
Julia: (very panicked) Mrs. Cooper!!! Rachel’s gone!
Mrs. Cooper: What?
Julia: She disappeared!!!
Mrs. Cooper: Julia, come on now, good joke.
Julia: No, I’m not kidding (pulls on his sleeve) She’s not up there! (looking around) Did she come down here?
Brittany: No.
Matt: Nope.
Julia: We were trying to find props and she just disappeared!
Mrs. Cooper: (placatingly) Okay, I’ll bite. All of you stay here, please. I’ll be right back. If this turns out to be a joke, there are going to be pop quizzes for a week.
Julia: It’s not! I’m serious. I swear, she’s gone!
(Mrs. Cooper gives her a look, shakes his head and goes upstairs. The audience should hear the footsteps)
Julia: But she’s not up there!
Cole: Wow, that was some good acting!
Katie: Yeah, had me convinced.
Randy: Totally. Whoa.
Matt: And the Oscar goes to--
Julia: I’m not acting! She’s really gone!
Cole: Sure, Jules . . .
Brittany: Yeah, that sure was creepy, when you just burst into the room like that, with that really panicky . . . (trails off) Hey, are you telling the truth?
Julia: YES! I am telling the truth! We were just looking for a tea set, and then I heard this kind of, I don’t know, whispery kind of sound. Like two people were whispering to each other but it was all around the room. Then I heard a gasp. I looked around and I called out for Rachel and she didn’t answer. She wasn’t there! Something inside me told me to get out of there . . . so I did. I’ll swear an oath, I’ll tell the cops, but I am not going back up there.
Randy: (In the style of Keanu Reeves) Whoa.
Matt: Well, where do you think she went? There’s nowhere to go to up there. Unless she went into the loft.
Katie: Yeah, maybe she went into the loft.
Julia: But I would have heard that! You know how those boards creak! And she’s afraid of heights! There’s no way she would’ve gone up there.
Katie: It’ll be okay, I’m sure Mrs. Cooper will find her.
Julia: (sits down) I hope so, but . . .
Brittany: But what?
Julia: Well, you remember the movie The Sixth Sense?
Cole: Yeah?
Katie: Oh, please. That movie so freaked me out.
Randy: Dude, I hear you. Slept with the lights on for a week.
Matt: What, do you see dead people? (The group snickers at Julia)
Julia: No, you idiots! You remember that whenever a dead person would appear the temperature would drop way down? Well, it’s a flippin’ fridge up there!!! I remember that as soon as we got up there, it started getting colder. But we ignored it and started
looking, and a few minutes later I heard the whispers and the gasp.

**Matt:** What about the gasp? Was it Rachel?

**Julia:** It sounded like her. It sounded like she was about to cry out but someone or something stopped her.

**Katie:** Listen, Julia? I think you let your imagination get a little carried away. People do not just disappear.

**Randy:** Besides, it’s North Dakota. Everything’s freezing.

**Cole:** Dude? It’s almost May right now.

**Brittany:** Yeah, she probably came downstairs to use the bathroom or something, Julia.

**Julia:** Think about it. Those stairs are as old as the hills. You can’t even breathe on them without everyone hearing. Someone would have heard her come down those stairs!

**Cole:** Actually, I heard of a girl once that disappeared.

**Katie:** Come on, Cole, don’t encourage this!

**Cole:** No, seriously! I think it was while they were building the student center back in the, uh, 60’s?

**Matt:** Something like that.

**Cole:** Yeah, well, anyway, a girl disappeared on campus. The police said she just ran away with some hippies or something.

**Katie:** Well, maybe she did.

**Cole:** That’s what I thought. But here’s what the police didn’t tell anyone. Everything she owned was still in her room. Not one piece of clothing was taken, not a shirt, not a pair of jeans, nothing. Everything in the world that meant anything to her was in that room and she didn’t take a thing.

**Brittany:** How do you know all this?

**Cole:** My grandpa was a deputy way back then. He likes to tell stories. But this one . . . this one really bothered him.

**Matt:** Why?

**Cole:** I think because she was only eighteen. She seemed happy. Came from a good home, had good friends… But you know what else?

**Katie:** (flat) What? You have another ghost story for us?

**Brittany:** Well, it is really creepy up there.

**Randy:** Dude, I second that. It is totally creepy.

**Cole:** You know why it’s really creepy? Because that’s the last place she was seen! But there’s more. Her class ring turned up a few years later in the drawer where they keep all the stage jewelry.

(Silence)

**Katie:** Come on! That sounds like an urban legend.

**Cole:** It’s true!

**Katie:** Whatever.

**Randy:** Reminds me of this time when I took some weird pills and I thought I was looking at my reflection but I was just looking at a wall. For like, twenty minutes. Just staring at a wall. (pause) It was a creepy wall.

(Silence as they stare at Randy.)

**Matt:** Anyway . . .

**Julia:** Well, Rachel’s still missing and Mrs. Cooper isn’t back yet.

**Katie:** She’s not missing! She’s just playing a practical joke on all of us!

**Julia:** I’m not lying!

**Katie:** Whatever, drama queen.

**Julia:** I did not make this up! I wish to God that I had never gone up there!

**Matt:** Okay, okay, calm down, both of you.

**Randy:** Catfight!

**Matt:** Dude, cool it! (or some kind of shushing noise or gesture. “shhh!” may not work.)

(Both girls sit down, now angry. There is a pause. Matt paces.)

**Brittany:** Actually, I remember something that happened to me up there once. I didn’t tell anyone about it, “cause it was just so… Well, I had been up for two days straight catching up on homework and I hoped . . . or wanted it to be just all in my head.

**Matt:** What happened?

**Brittany:** Actually, I remember something that happened to me up there once. I didn’t tell anyone about it, ’cause it was just so… Well, I had been up for two days straight catching up on homework and I hoped . . . or wanted it to be just all in my head.

**Matt:** What happened?

**Brittany:** Well, it was last week before my scene with Cole. I was up there by myself looking for something--I think it was a stool or a coat rack--when I heard some footsteps behind me. I ignored it thinking I was just imagining it. I mean, you know those floors. But then I felt really cold. It felt like the temperature had dropped 20 degrees.
Cole: Then what?

Brittany: It was like I was in a vacuum. I couldn’t breathe. It felt like the wind was knocked out of me because I was gasping but I couldn’t get any air! But what really scared me was what I felt. I was scared but there was something else too... like something up there hated me and didn’t want me there. So I ran.

Katie: Yeah, you probably were just hallucinating.

Brittany: Shut up, I know what I felt.

Matt: Come on, ladies; let’s reel in the estrogen.

Katie: Whatever.

Cole: Anyway, there’s another “urban legend” floating around this school. This one goes back a ways.

Katie: Would you just stop it! Can we just sit here quietly and wait for Mrs. Cooper and Rachel to come back down?

Matt: Go on, man.

Cole: Okay. There was this other lady, back when this school was just a teaching school that disappeared one day, but she wasn’t alone. Two girls disappeared that day, but one of ‘em was found. She was found like, two days later, wandering in the woods. She was all disoriented and stuff.

Randy: (in the style of Keanu Reeves) Whoa.

Julia: Well, what did she say happened?

Cole: Nothing. She didn’t talk after that. Not to her parents, not to her friends. She either couldn’t or wouldn’t talk. I guess she lost her marbles.

Katie: That’s a bunch of crap. No way is someone just going to disappear and then reappear like that. I think that’s the hokiest urban legend yet.

Cole: No, it’s true! She died a year later. Her heart just gave out. She died without ever telling anyone what happened. And no one ever found a trace of that other lady.

Brittany: Did she disappear up there?

Cole: That I don’t know. It was too long ago.

Matt: I heard a story too.

Katie: Oh, lord, not another one.

Matt: This one’s really real. This happened about three years ago, when my brother was going to school here. He took theatre too, right? This was back before Mrs. Cooper was here. Tom said there was a friend of his that disappeared too.

Randy: (in the style of Keanu Reeves) Whoa.

Katie: But we would’ve heard about that. I mean, it’s pretty recent.

Julia: (muttered) It helps if you can read.

Matt: (jumps right in) No, this guy came back after a few days, just like that other chick, you know? But the school tried to buy him off, you know? Offered him free tuition and everything, but he wouldn’t accept it. He wouldn’t come back to school here.

Katie: I can read just fine, you delusional slut, and why would they pay him off? He probably got harassed by one of the coaches or something.

LIGHT CUE COMING UP

Matt: No, but after that experience, he kept having nightmares and headaches and just became the most paranoid person in the world. His parents brought a lawsuit citing his emotional agitation, and the school settled.

Katie: Oh, so they just let you in the courtroom?

Matt: I heard about it.

Katie: Riiight. Look, anytime now, Mrs. Cooper and Rachel are going to come down and we’re all gonna have a nice laugh, so could we just shut it until then? PLEASE?

Brittany: Jeez, Katie, you’re kind of rattled by all of this, aren’t you?

Katie: I am not! I just don’t like being the butt of a joke!

Julia: This isn’t a joke! I heard something and I know what I saw. This isn’t the first time!

Cole: You didn’t say anything about seeing something earlier.

Julia: I’ve spent many nights lying awake trying to forget it. I haven’t, and I don’t want to talk about it.

Matt: Tell us. We need to find out what’s going on.
Julia: I . . . (ponders it) I saw it in the mirror. 
Cole: It? 
Julia: I thought I saw a lady in the mirror up there. Except, she didn’t have any eyes. Just these dark sockets where her eyes should have been. And she was dressed in old-fashioned clothing. And that’s when it got really, really cold up there. But it only lasted for a second, so I kinda told myself I didn’t see it. But “It” followed me.

Randy: Whatya mean? 
Julia: (visibly shaken) Every time I’d close my eyes to sleep, I’d see her face. I . . . didn’t talk about it. I didn’t want to see the eyes anymore.

LIGHT CUE
(Lights begin to fade as if there were electrical problems then go to complete black out. There is confusion and a few chairs are bumped.)

Randy: Dude, I can’t see anything.

Brittany: What the hell? 
LIGHT CUE
(Lights come back up. Black out must be long enough for the glasses to be placed on the floor. On the floor is a pair of glasses)

Katie: What was that? (Getting increasingly frightened) What just happened? It was just a blackout right?

Matt: It’s an old building, these things happen, calm down.

Cole: (pointing to the glasses) Hey, where did those come from?

Randy: They aren’t mine. (pointing to eyes) 20/20 man.

Brittany: I’ve seen them before.

Julia: (picks them up) So have I. These are Rachel’s glasses!

(Pause. The students all look up at the ceiling)

Katie: This is not funny. You hear me???
(yells up to the ceiling) THIS IS NOT FUNNY. STOP IT!

Matt: It’s getting cold in here.

Cole: That reminds me. The lights . . . last semester when we did the one-acts? It was a late rehearsal and I was the last one out. I turned out all the lights, but as I was walking out, I saw some movement, out of the corner of my eye, right? So I turned and looked and there was some kind of white, filmy thing in the corner over by the window. (Points to the far corner window through the audience.) It was really cold then, too.

Randy: Dude.

Matt: Maybe it was Mr. Davenport you saw that night.

Cole: Who’s he?

Matt: He was the director of theatre here from ‘72 to ‘80, I think.

Brittany: Geez, are you saying he died up here?

Matt: Well, kind of. He hanged himself in this very room.

Katie: Enough!!! I’ve had it! I’m going to help Mrs. Cooper find that moron.

Brittany: Katie, Mrs. Cooper wanted us to stay here.

Matt: Mr. Davenport left a suicide note. The only thing it said was “Escape. The eyes are gone.”

Cole: How do you know?

Matt: My family is third generation here. A tenured professor decides to hang himself one night in the theatre classroom; it’s hard to keep something like that under wraps.

Katie: This is enough; I’m getting Mrs. Cooper!

Randy: (tries to stop her) They’re just harmless stories. Chill.

Katie: Forget it. I’m tired of being laughed at. (She stomps out and we hear her stomp CAREFULLY!!! upstairs)

Brittany: (looks at watch) They’d better all turn up soon. I’ve got Algebra in ten minutes.

Julia: Something is wrong.

Cole: She’s right. I have that feeling . . .

(Suddenly, we hear Katie scream loudly from upstairs, followed by a thud as something hits the floor.)

Matt: Oh crap--what the hell was that?

Brittany: It sounds like somebody fell.

Cole: Fell from what?

Brittany: How should I know? (Starts rubbing her arms like she’s cold)

Julia: We need to get some help!

Matt: Wait, I hear something!
(The cast is silent as the audience hears footsteps descending slowly (and carefully!!!). The footsteps continue to the door of 320. The rest of the students slowly, together, move toward the door, trying to jostle someone other than themselves at the front.)

**Cole:** Mrs. Cooper? Is that you?

**Randy:** Dudes, it’s really cold in here.

**Brittany:** (shivering) Oh my God.

**Julia:** Rachel?

(The door is rattled a bit for dramatic effect, the knob is turned, then the door opens and the lights do a super-fast fade.)

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**I Want To Play Too**

Graphite

by *Jill Trucke*
Riding down the black highway on a summer evening, my little brother, Austin, and sister, Cayla, were playing with each other in the middle seat of the mini van. They played with some cards and as usual, left me out because I always beat them. Mom and Dad, both in their later forties, sat in front with my father at the wheel steering north towards Jamestown where we would meet some cousins for the day. Seventeen years old and very annoyed with my siblings, I started staring out the window. Many thoughts went through my mind as I admired the scenery of the endless golden wheat fields of North Dakota: What should I do tomorrow? I wonder what my friends are doing? Will those two little brats ever shut up? Suddenly, I witnessed a doe and two of her fawns running behind her gaily. I started thinking of the time when my father and I went hunting at the cabin.

I was 13 and it happened to be my first time hunting. I brought along my Eagle Eye BB-gun and dad had his deer rifle. We hunted all weekend in the cold snow, and every one of my cousins and uncles shot their own deer. Every night, before I fell asleep, I wondered how they saw those deer from so far away and how they could shoot them. As my dad and I drove away from the cabin to end our hunting season, I asked him how he did it. Dad told me that we Bjugstad’s could pick out things other people can’t. The rest of the ride home I gawked out the window looking for more deer but never saw any.

At that time, I believed Dad because I was 13 and didn’t know any better. I also wished I had an ability that no one else possessed. As I stared out the window, I thought of something else. Was it true? Could I see things other people couldn’t? I decided to test it while no one was bothering me in the car. Looking out the window at the green ditch, I tried to pick out one single blade of grass as dad drove along at a 65 mile-an-hour pace. I felt if I could, I would be able to concentrate well enough to distinguish anything I wanted to see.

After about 20 miles of staring at the grass, I realized I couldn’t. I tried so hard but I only picked up a taller piece of grass or a different colored weed once in a while. The harder I tried, the more frustrated I got, and the tougher it became. It was impossible for me, and I wondered if others could focus so tremendously. What if someone could see things that other people can’t? What if the blades of grass were people and I was one of them?

After living 17 years of my life, I realized the world is a bigger place than I originally thought. I knew it was big, but it never occurred to me how small I seemed compared to the rest of the planet. I am only one person compared to the rest of the universe, just like that one blade of grass. That one piece of grass and I have a lot more in common than what meets the eye. We both need nourishment like food and water to grow. I get cut down by words and mowers take care of it. We are both delicate, and if we don’t receive one of our needs, we start to shut down. Grass becomes a whole different color when it doesn’t receive its need and then soon dies. I similarly, when I don’t get what I need, when I’m sick, for example, I turn pale, week, and could perish.

I started to think of how insignificant we both were in this world, and wondered if our existence depended upon whether others notice us or not. I was trying to spot that one blade but I couldn’t for the life of me. Am I the same way with everyone else, I wondered. Am I so normal that people don’t see me as unique and different? Am I so small in this world that it is hard for people to notice me? I tried so hard in my life to be normal like this one blade and now, unfortunately, I am, at least on the outside.

All forms of life are different in some sort of way. A blade of grass is no different in that manner. It may look like all the rest
on the outside but on the inside, its DNA is at least slightly different than the rest. That’s the same as me, I may look like all the normal people no one really turns their head for but I feel like I’m so different than everybody else. No one seems to notice that in me and it’s not their fault. I couldn’t see the difference in a blade of grass so why should I expect anyone else to be any different? I have a lot to offer to this world though. Just like a blade of grass gives color to the earth, I offer color in other people’s lives with my sense of humor, fun loving attitude, and creative mind. I seem to be a fresh breath of air to my friends and family, kind of like grass gives us clean air.

As my dad pulled into Jamestown, I lost my train of thought and tried to find it but I couldn’t. My brother and sister were fighting on who won and mom was yelling at them to shut up. Coming to a stop sign, I started thinking again that maybe someone out there will see me one day for who I am. After all, if I get close enough to a blade of grass, I can see the difference between all of them. That blade has had its chance to be seen and maybe my day will come too. Or perhaps that day doesn’t need to come. Maybe I don’t really need someone to see me, but it is nice to think someone will some day, and give me chance.

Compañeras
Colored Pencil
by Rosaura Salinas
**Essay**

**The Ocean**  
By Michael Loucks

When heading to North Dakota, I knew it would be different, but when I reached Fargo, a whole new world welcomed me. The difference between home and North Dakota did not hit that minute, only until I made my first steps outside the airport doors in Fargo. I am used to walking out a door back home and seeing the majestic mountain ranges to my right, or to the left the great Pacific Ocean with an assortment of islands that I grew up on. As I headed towards the purple van with my heavy bags full of clothes in the dry hundred degree weather, I realized how much I am connected with the ocean. A list of experiences can draw a person to a place, and the enjoyment that I had upon the ocean, and the splendor and the pure peacefulness it suggests, makes me yearn for it.

When upon the ocean, people can find happiness for themselves in many ways, but what brings the most pleasure is leaving the mainland for a boat ride or even setting off to the fishing grounds. When I venture out for a boat ride, I usually jump in one of my buddy’s boats, a 15 foot or 13 foot whaler, and we take off and disappear among the many hiding places. Sometimes we have a plan on the area we wish to call our own; and sometimes we have no clue and search for the perfect paradise. The majority of the time we go out to one of the many islands surrounding our little town to get away and set up camp for an evening. Other times a bon fire is on the agenda or my friends and I go and mess around.

Another way I have merriment out on the ocean is setting off for a day of fishing. There is nothing like waking up at three in the morning, being drawn to a lucky pair of rain gear that smells like rotten fish with the holes in the front from the camping trip last weekend, putting on a favorite fishing sweatshirt with that fishy good luck scent, and then preparing the boat for a day of fishing. The past two summers, I worked as a deckhand aboard the Ry-Guy, a 29 foot C-Hawk with a cabin that can sit six people comfortable, twin 225 Hondas that made us the fastest boat in the charter fleet, and enough deck space to play a football game on. Almost every day, my captain and I would take from two to six adults, and sometimes kids, for a day of snooping for the big flat fish: halibut, the mighty King Salmon, and Coho, also known as the Silver Bullet of the seas. I really enjoyed watching the happiness on people’s faces when they catch a fifty pound King Salmon; one old man was so excited, he was smiling from ear to ear and doing his own little jig right on the back of the boat. I always love hooking into a 60 pound King Salmon, where they fight with everything till the end, one that would and always will run you around the boat not once but three times, all the while knowing I only have one hook in him; that’s the adrenaline rush in fishing.

Everything need not be fun and games; I also love the simple beauty the ocean provides. The ocean shows its beauty, in many ways, including with its scenery, through its wildlife, and the sheer strength the water harvests. When going out on the ocean by Sitka, all one can see is an array of redundant islands with mountains towering. After passing the dormant volcano, Mount Edgecumbe, lie miles upon miles of open ocean.

Besides the pure attractiveness, many species of animals make the ocean their home. One of these is the Humpback Wale. The whales grow to practically the size of school busses and they perform acrobat maneuvers going so far as to propel themselves completely out of the water. What also amazes many is the whale’s means of feeding, which is called bubble feeding or bubble netting. What happens is a pod of whales join together and produces enough bubbles under the feed to disorient them and
make them boil on the surface of the ocean. The greatest part is watching this gigantic mouth pop out of the water capturing its prey. This is a sight to see.

The most beautiful view to see is the ocean water itself. The water has an attractiveness of its own. It can be calm one second, and in the next the tides change to bring a storm. Just one wave packs the power to throw a person from one side of the boat to the other. Seeing waves over 20 feet high and driving a boat up and over them, and sometimes jumping them gives a sense of the power which is the utter beauty of the ocean.

Though the ocean is very beautiful, it also provides a peaceful place to spend time. At three in the morning, the most peaceful thing has to be the sunrise, a giant golden ball creeping its way up from behind the mountains. The scene is breath taking, with rays of light breaking through the clouds looking as if God is blessing the world in the bringing of the new day. Another peaceful thing about the ocean is being able to go anywhere and everywhere; anything from finding a little cove with a sandy beach or being out on the ocean with your buddies cruising the seas. The most peaceful thing about the oceans is being out on it, floating on a boat, rolling along with the waves, smelling the sweet saltwater, and breathing the fresh air. Here one can lose one’s self, going to a whole different world, another dimension where everything is disconnected from the real world. This is where I find my peace and what makes me want to be on the ocean time after time.

After leaving the airport doors in Fargo, North Dakota, I can now grasp what is a part of me, what is in my blood, and what makes me who I am. It amazes me how one thing, such as the ocean can shape a people and their views as it did mine. All it took was growing up having a great time, enjoying the beauty, and just finding that peaceful place upon the ocean. Sitting back and thinking about this makes me wonder why I would ever leave such a paradise, but as the days carry on they start a new dawn, a fresh adventure for me to experience. As the North Dakota settings become familiar, unattractiveness gains a hint of beauty.
The Flame
by Nikki Laine Zinke
a Parody of “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall”

He thrust a pair of bandaged spectacles atop his nose while fumbling with the switch. Decades of coal dust had dimmed his vision and right now, he needed more light.

Ah, that’s better, thought George. No more a those ants crawling cross the newsprint.

Still, George squinted a bit, holding the obituary at arm’s length and willing the light from the lantern flame to flood the page.

“Ellen Weatherall, 79, died in her sleep Wednesday, Aug. 17, 1931, at Salem, Mass. Interment was Wednesday, Aug. 24, at St. Mark’s Cemetery, with the Rev. Daniel Connolly officiating.

Dammit. Dammit, dammit, dammit. "Ellen Olivia (Flanders) Weatherall was born May 3, 1848, to John and Martha Flanders, immigrants from Brussels. She was the first of 11 children and attended the country school at Salem until her twelfth birthday, when she began working in the house of Mrs. Robert Hawkins. Mrs. Hawkins particularly praised Ellen’s diplomacy with the negroes and her advanced needle skills..."

Ah, yes, Ellen did have fine fingers. So nimble, so soft. George bit his lip and instinctively drew out the long-yellowed handkerchief she had given him some 60 years past. One corner was frayed, but the navy stitches of his monogram (no finer tatting anywhere) remained flawless.

“...She was preceded in death by her husband, John, and daughter, Hapsy. Survivors include her children....”

Damn you Ellen. Damn you all to hell.

George resolutely removed his spectacles and sat, gazing blindly as the flames licked the glass of the lantern, smudging it. When the glass had thoroughly blackened, he switched it off, pushed his stool back from the pine table, then eased his trembling knees to the floor.

“Oh, Father. Father, forgive me. I been meaning to make things right with her. I swear I have, but the time’s just never been right. I just been too crippled up to ride all that way to call on her and she’d just of thrown me out anyhows.”

George tried not to imagine his wife, his could-have-been wife (no! my should-have-been wife!) all bustled into her finest wedding whites with her dainty chin turned up to him in anticipation.

He knew that too much time had a funny way of mixing the real and the imagined and he swiped at his sallow cheeks with the hank... then buried his nose in his knees and tried to stifle the swirl of memories. To hold them back somehow. But there they were, big and black, filling his lungs and stinging his eyes.

When George finally succumbed, he lay as a child, huddled and heaving on the sooty plank floor before the hearth he’d built of creek stones.

Alone and terrified, George sobbed and sobbed.

When he finally rose again, still heaving from the weight of ‘there are no more tomorrows now,” he limped to the nearby desk where he had tucked away a cigar box. The box held a crumpled letter and a crisp fifty-dollar bill. George removed both and shuffled back to the hearth.

He kneeled, offered his sacrifice to the flame, then bowed his head in prayer.
**Essay**

**Reborn On The River**  
by Max Klingenstein

In mid-August of 2000, my dad, my uncle, Bill, and his son, William, and I loaded a rubber raft, food, clothes, and other essentials into a 1965 Otter for the two hour flight across Alaska’s Cook Inlet to the Chili Kadrotna River. The one propeller plane with room for eight carried us between glacial mountain passages and over alarmed grizzlies and moose. Finally, the plane bounced and skidded across a glassy lake in the midst of endless grass and hills. After unpacking our things on a gravel beach, we watched the pilot taxi and take off, leaving us alone with 100 miles to the nearest town and no way to call for help. Thus, we began our five day float trip not knowing what to expect.

As we inflated our raft, I remembered feeling invincible just days before. After all, I’d enter high school in the fall. I never worried about death or harm because a long life lay ahead of me. I controlled my destiny. I earned good grades in school because I studied hard. I stayed healthy because I took care of my body. I believed in God and because of this, I thought I would go to heaven, even though I had never seen proof first-hand that He influenced and guided my life. Everything seemed perfect.

However, an incident on the first day of the trip drastically changed my views on God, even though the trip began uneventfully. The first few hours, we admired the vast emptiness and listened to the gurgling current. We pulled our life jackets off and gradually let down our guard as we let the river harmlessly control our raft. At one point, I noticed a female duck with her 16 babies. As we drifted within 30 feet of them, she filled the air with desperate splashes and squawks. In an effort to protect her precious young ones, she led us far downstream before she became satisfied and flew back to her brood. I smiled and thought to myself, “The wilderness isn’t so bad, there’s nothing to it.”

As the hours passed, however, the weather worsened and the river picked up speed. The river eventually led us into a narrow hairpin bend and suddenly revealed a ‘sweeper’. The dead tree jutted out half way into the river waiting for us to hit it. Despite our frantic efforts, the current slammed us right into it before we could react, and our weight pushed the edge of the raft under the rushing water. My dad and William, situated closest to the bank, hopped out and waded to shore. However, Bill and I were stuck in the middle of the current. Too shocked to move, I screamed, “Oh God, we’re sinking!”

“Get in the tree, Max,” Uncle Bill ordered. I instantaneously climbed out of the raft and clung to some of the sweeper’s sharp branches so hard my hands bled. Ignoring the pain, I knew if a branch broke and I lost my grip, the river would sweep me away, and my hip boots would fill with water instantly, causing me to drown. Bags started floating away as I watched helplessly. Keeping his composure as the raft continued to sink, Uncle Bill slid off into the waist-high water, which allowed the raft to resurface. This enabled me to cautiously maneuver myself back into it. Bill then grabbed a rope attached to the raft and towed us upstream to safety.

I was thankful to be alive but we still had to float past the sweeper. With a greater awareness of what was coming, we paddled furiously to try to get around it, but the current started to suck us right back into it again. Just as I was about to give up hope, Bill once again jumped out of the boat. He strained, tugged, and grunted, nearly falling head first into the icy water, and finally pulled us safely to the sandbar on the other side of this barrier.

That evening, we set up camp on a sandbar, and started a fire to recover from slight hypothermia. While searching alone for what dry firewood I could muster around camp, I noticed bear tracks and scat dotting...
the area. I hurried back to the tent as darkness approached, changed into a dry pair of clothes, and snuggled close to the campfire.

As I tried to warm my soul with a cup of Ramen soup, I looked into the fire and thought about how the float trip seemed like a spiritual voyage. I saw the first hours on the river as a reflection of my life up to that point. The quiet lull early in the trip appeared to be my complacent attitude towards God. The duck babies were starting life under the careful protection of their mother and, meanwhile, I felt safe because of God’s protection.

However, such peacefulness can come to an abrupt stop and life can suddenly change. The hairpin bend in the river provided a turning point in my life, with the sweeper being a wake-up call which saved me and gave me a chance to continue in a new direction. I saw the value of God’s love and knew it far exceeded the importance of the bags that had floated away. The pain in my hands did not begin to compare to the blood shed by Jesus for me. The two tries it took to get past the sweeper showed God’s willingness to give me a second chance. Bill’s leadership and readiness to sacrifice his well being for us signified a gift from God. Glancing up from the fire, I now sat in the warm light where before I had been cold.

Misjudging the dangers of the Alaskan bush taught me to never underestimate the power of God. It occurred to me that I could have been floating facedown somewhere along this river and the thought comprised one of the few times I felt vulnerable up to that point in my life. I realized God was with us that day and that we were not all alone. The someone who could help us the most had been with us the whole time. Since then, I have placed my life in God’s hands with the trust that He will take good care of me. That ‘sweeper’ swept away my old views and helped me gain a new outlook on life, and I have a stronger faith because of it.
As I sat in the blindingly bright hospital waiting room with Kianna, my frightened seven year-old daughter, on my lap, I could feel the fear emanating from her. Her little body felt so fragile next to mine. For a city as big as Twin Falls, Idaho, the waiting room was deathly silent, and the familiar antiseptic smell mixed with food made me want to grab my daughter and run. I kept thinking that this could not be happening again. I was sick of this place, sick of my daughter hurting and being scared, and sick of having to watch helplessly while she fought and kicked and screamed at every effort the doctors and nurses made to help her. My mind wandered back to the events that brought us here.

On Friday morning, approximately three weeks earlier, the school called to say that Kianna was sick and we needed to come get her. When my husband Daniel picked her up from school, Kianna told him she’d thrown up right on her desk and was really embarrassed. Once home, she felt a little better, and didn’t throw up any more that day. She told me her stomach kept hurting, but she never ran a fever or showed any other symptoms. That night, because of Kianna’s continuous complaints, I called the emergency room and talked to a doctor. He told me there was a bad stomach flu going around and she had probably caught it. Although hesitant with the doctor’s advice, I decided we’d wait it out despite Kianna’s evident pain.

By early Sunday morning, Kianna couldn’t even walk. After Daniel and I had to carry her to the bathroom several times because of her excruciating pain, we decided it couldn’t just be the flu and took her to the emergency room. The ride to the hospital took about twenty minutes and Kianna’s pain worsened with each passing mile. When we got to the emergency room, the lab technician took some blood and the results proved horrifying. Her white blood cell count measured off the charts. The doctor sent her directly to surgery and advised us it was most likely her appendix, but that he could not be sure until he opened her up. Daniel and I hunkered down in the waiting room, anxiously waiting for the doctor to return. Time stood still for us; the minutes dragged by. Finally, two-and-a-half hours later, he came to tell us that Kianna’s appendix had ruptured twenty-four hours ago, and that we were very fortunate. We came very close to losing her. The realization of his declaration posed quite a shock.

“Is she going to be ok?” I asked, my voice filled with fear and tension.

“She will have to spend a few days in the hospital, but I wouldn’t worry too much. Kids are resilient, she will bounce right back,” he replied.

A few days turned into seven and it was a horrible experience for all of us. In a matter of a few hours, I watched my happy, outgoing daughter turn away from everything. She would not talk or eat or try to get up and walk. Kianna became uncooperative with every effort to make her better. We fought about every little thing. The nurses said she had to try and walk to help in the healing process. She refused. She needed to eat, but she was afraid the food would leak out of the drain hole in her stomach. It broke my heart to see Kianna like that. I had never seen her so unresponsive. She didn’t want to read books, watch movies, or play games.

When the nurses came in to change her I.V., it took three or four people to hold her down while she kicked and screamed at the top of her lungs. That ripped my heart apart. Logically, I knew it had to be done, but my parental instincts were to protect her, wrap my arms around her, and make her world right. Daniel and I discovered leaving the room during those difficult times made things easier for everyone. Those were the longest seven days of my life. I never left,
and Daniel was on night shift, so he would come after work in the morning. Our whole lives revolved around that hospital.

On our last day, the doctor told us she could go home, but only with the I.V. in her arm. He explained to Daniel and I that Kianna had somehow contracted E. Coli and another weird bacterium I could not even pronounce, both of which could not be cured with oral antibiotics, so she would need an I.V. antibiotic twice a day for five days.

A home health nurse was sent to our house with all the supplies we would need to take care of her at home. She sat down with us the first time, and instructed us on what we were supposed to do. The whole process took about an hour and a half each time, but that wasn’t the only problem. The nurse had to change her I.V. about halfway through the medication, and Kianna wasn’t going to cooperate. Daniel and I had to hold Kianna down while the nurse wrapped a blanket tightly around her. This kept her from fighting so the nurse could insert the new I.V. into her wrist, but because of her struggling, the I.V. wasn’t in correctly, and she had to hold her wrist a certain way so the medicine would flow through the tube and into her vein correctly. After five days of begging and bribing, we thought Kianna would be healed and we could move on.

A couple of days later though, I noticed things were not quite right with Kianna. One minute she played and acted normal, and the next she would just lie down and say she didn’t feel good. Not willing to take any more chances, we took her to the emergency room, again. The doctor seemed doubtful. He must have thought us paranoid because the whole time there, Kianna pushed a stool around the room on her stomach. After I insisted that things were not quite right with her and that I was going to follow my instinct this time, the doctor said she could possibly have an abscess from the poison. If this occurs, the abscess may open and leak for a while, and shut again, which would explain why Kianna would feel good and then not.

He decided to contact her doctor to have a CAT-Scan done on her stomach the next day. So here we are. Feeling Kianna starting to shake on my lap jerked me back into reality. She was crying.

“Kianna, what is the matter honey?” I asked.

She just looked up at me with her big brown eyes filled with tears and asked, “Mommy are there going to be any more needles? I hate needles. They scare me.”

I wiped the tears off her face, gave her a big hug, and told her the doctor was just going to take some pictures of her stomach. Daniel came into the waiting room, a pained expression on his face and sadness in his eyes. He didn’t have to say anything; I knew.

“Why?” I asked, feeling rage boil up inside me.

Daniel calmly tried to explain, “They have to run a dye through an I.V. so they can see what they need to.”

A sense of helplessness washed over me. I was pregnant with my third child, and couldn’t go into the CAT-Scan room with her. Reluctantly, Kianna followed Daniel, but she kept glancing back at me with so much fear in her eyes. Finally, my husband got down on his knees, looked her in the eyes, and carefully tried to explain that they were going to have to hook up another I.V. so they could see inside her. Her body suddenly stiffened, and she instantly became defensive. I could see her through the glass window looking at me, screaming for me, and crying hysterically. My heart broke in two as I watched the x-ray technicians and Daniel restrain her to give her a shot to sedate her. The glaring whiteness of the cat-scan room blurred as my tears flowed. I had betrayed my daughter’s trust.

The consequence of that betrayal, purposeful or not, was a loss of trust from my daughter. She ended up having four abscesses in her stomach and was hospitalized for eight more days. I struggled with my own conscience every day, as well as with Kianna to gain her trust back and make her healthy again. It’s been five years.
since then, and although it proved a painful experience for our family, it turned out to be a rewarding one also. We are stronger because of it, more sensitive to each other’s needs, and we try to be as honest with one another as we can. Faced with such an intense situation, all we can do is deal with it, fight to keep it together, and trust our instincts.