VERITAS & VANITAS
A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE NONFICTION

EDITORS
AARON COOK
SARETTA DANIELS
AMBER ENGLISH
STEPHANIE HART
REBECCA PATTERSON
JONAS HAMEL
BEN WATERS
AMANDA YODER

FACULTY ADVISOR
JACQUELYN SPANGLER

2001
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
AT MARION
The editorial staff of VERITAS & VANITAS would like to thank Jacquelyn Spangler, Lynda Behan, Anne Bower, Scott DeWitt, Marcia Dickson, Stuart Lishan, Dean Dottavio and the Marion Campus Administration for their continuing support of this publication. We give special thanks to Scott DeWitt for his extra help with editing.

This issue of VERITAS & VANITAS is a project of English 662, Professional Publications class.

All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form by photostat, microfilm, xerography, or by any other means, or incorporated into any information retrieval system, electronic or mechanical without the written permission of the individual author.

All rights revert to author after publication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis Jones</td>
<td>Driving Myself Crazy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas Lewis</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoAnne Fitzgerald</td>
<td>In Search of Sophistication and Senioritas or Some Such Thing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Underwood</td>
<td>Learning to Fly</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas Shamel</td>
<td>Kurt Cobaine Is Dead and I Still Can’t Accept It</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianne Schluep</td>
<td>The Alarm Clock</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Payton</td>
<td>Death to the VCR</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abram Barnett</td>
<td>Tarot: Binary It Ain’t</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didi Fahey</td>
<td>That Which Divides</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Steigerwald</td>
<td>Road Rage Is No Accident</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Yoder</td>
<td>Knowing</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors’ Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

The editorial staff, along with Jacquelyn Spangler, would like to dedicate this issue of *Veritas & Vanitas* to the memory of June Coen. As the registrar from 1976-2000, June supported OSUM as a “true buckeye” who worked past retirement because of her loyalty and dedication to the students of this campus.
The editors are proud of this, the first annual issue of *Veritas & Vanitas*. We would like to thank everyone who submitted essays, photographs and artwork. This issue covers a wide range of ideas and experiences developed within the genre of creative nonfiction. Some of the contributors have been featured before, but others are debuting for the first time. This issue also includes three pieces from an English 110 class assignment. We chose them because they address technology, which is integral to all of our lives, at "the soft spot of the population," as Jeremy Payton puts it in "Death of the VCR." We hope that the first annual *Veritas & Vanitas* will challenge and enlighten all of our various readers.
PREFACE

This volume is the result of the work of many dedicated and enthusiastic scholars and students who have contributed to the development of this field. Over the years, the volume has evolved to include a wide range of topics and perspectives, reflecting the diverse interests and approaches of the contributors. We hope that this volume will be of interest to a broad range of readers, providing insights into the latest developments in the field and encouraging further research and discussion.

Various teachers

6
Driving Myself Crazy
Alexis Jones

I must admit, I have had a rocky relationship with driving. Most people go through life and get their licenses when they are teenagers and lead uneventful driving lives. Not me. From the day that I turned sixteen, my life on the road has been very unusual. To put it mildly, I have been through situations that would make crash-test dummies shriek in horror.

I had planned on getting my license in high school. I mean, wasn't that what high school was about—going to classes, hating gym and getting your license? I started out all right, getting my temporary permit and enrolling in driver's education. I was surprised at the ease of getting a temporary permit. Take a test, and voila, instant wanna-be-a-driver. Driver's Ed. was okay. I had fun in the simulators. It always puzzled me about those, though. I always drove well in the simulator at school, but I never could seem to make it around the track in one of those arcade-driving games. I never thought that there was that big of a difference. Drive around in a circle and try to go faster than the other people around you. Reminded me a lot of Marion, to be honest. Along with the simulator training, I received some in-car driving time. I did rather well and was actually getting to the point where I didn't leave grip marks on the steering wheel. I actually passed the class, and I thought it was going to be a snap to get my license. I didn't count on the difficulties that I would face on the home front, though.

The first and foremost problem was my mother. It seems that Mom forgot that I was sixteen and wishing to grace the roads of Marion like all of my friends were doing. As a result of that lack of information, she never stashed away any extra helpings of patience and composure. Oh, sure, she tried to go driving with me. Once. Personally, I thought that I did okay on the road. I stopped before the truck hit us. I did actually start
driving above twenty miles per hour, and even talked Mom into letting me drive back to the house. Okay, I will admit now that you do have to put the car in park before you try to hop out, but I was still learning. I really didn’t think it was bad enough that Mom would shake all night.

After that, Mom recruited my dad, and his insurance, to be my driving partner. I was getting better at driving, and actually thought I was ready to go make the appointment for my driver’s test. Then something started to happen. Relatives started to die. Three of them. Every two months, we’d have to pack up and go to Kentucky for another funeral. Now, I do love my relatives, but for a sixteen-year-old with time ticking down on her temporary permit, this was becoming exasperating. I tried to schedule my appointment for my test in my funeral off time, but I couldn’t find a time that my dad could be around to let me use his car. My mom, she started to cry when I asked if I could use hers. I was stuck, and my permit ran out.

It wasn’t until the late autumn of 1995 that I actually got my license. I was in college by then, and I was flat tired of having to bum rides from people. I figured that since I was working, I could afford to go to Ault’s Driving School and take a refresher course. I did this on my own. I was rather tired of my mom threatening to warn people about me if I asked for help. The lady that I had for my instructor was really nice, and really patient. We worked on my driving skills for about a month. I always seemed to have trouble with the maneuverability part of the course. The problem stems from the fact that I am only five foot-two. This lack of height proves challenging when trying to see over the front end of the car as you try to line up bumpers to cones. I thought for certain that this was going to be the downfall of my driving examination.

I remember when the time came for my test; I was an absolute nervous wreck. I had just spent an hour knocking over cones with my instructor, and I felt certain that it was a lost cause for me to ever drive. When I actually got to the cone set-up, I just told myself to wing
it and not go above one mile per hour. That is how the maneuverability test is. You can go as slowly as you want as you weave your way around the cones; you just can't stop or knock cones down as you line the car up. I took this to mind, and fifteen minutes later, I had successfully maneuvered through a cone set-up and back again. It took me a minute to realize that I had passed the test. I was so positive that I had failed it that when the exam officer told me I passed, I had to ask if he was sure. I found out afterward that my saintly Ault's instructor had gone to the window of the exam office and watched me as I was making my creep through the cones. She told me she had never laughed so hard in all her years there. I told her to laugh all she wanted; at least I passed the damned test.

After I got my license, I began my infamous parade of cars. I have been through four of them since I was nineteen. I'm twenty-three now, so we're talking quite a decent little turnover rate. My first car I shall call Imp. It was a 1977 Chevy Impala. If you don't know what an Impala looks like, just picture a small, dark blue yacht with four wheels. Now, for a person with some actual height to them, this wouldn't matter. For myself, though, it proved to be a challenging scenario. To actually be able to see over the dashboard, I had to sit on a pillow. Aside from checking my fragile pride at the door every time I parked my butt on that stupid pillow, this inability to see over the dash proved to be quite costly when I went to get gas at a Clark station two months after I got my license. I couldn't see how close the front of the car was to the gas pump; and as I turned in, I went up over the curb that the pump sits on. I tried to back off of the curb, but unbeknownst to me at the time, the gas hose was attached to my bumper. So I went backwards, and the hose went with me. Fortunately for me, the pump was turned off so it could be fixed. I vowed to my mother, when I could get a word in edgewise of her laughing, that I was going to get rid of the Imp if it was the last thing I ever did. I'll be the first to admit, this was not one of my most shining moments, but it was this
or walking; so I sat on the damn pillow and went to BP to get gas.

The size of the car was not the only thing that made me bow my head in shame, though. Picture a car with no dome light, no radio, no horn and that snowed little foamy pieces all over people due to there being no ceiling covering. This is what I had to live with for almost a year. Fortunately, though, that was about to change.

I finally decided to get a new car in October, 1996. I was working, and I could afford to make the payments on one. I looked around for about a week and became absolutely disgusted with the prices and sizes of cars. Mom ever so kindly offered to get me a clown car, though I declined. I was about to give up and get a horse when my mom and I found this 1987 Plymouth Reliant. Powder blue. Very small. Cheap. And it even had a radio and a dome light. I was sold on it. I bought the Reliant and burned my pillow. I actually had a car worth driving.

For about two years. In late 1998, Hoopty, as I liked to call the Reliant, had begun to show its age. First, Hoopty's horn went out. I was saddened by this event, but I felt that I still had a good relationship with the car. Next, the radio began to kick on and off. I changed fuses and checked for shorts, but the radio would still work for a while and then shut off. After a while, the radio kicked off and never kicked back on. I was stuck with a silent car once again. I counted my blessings, though. At least the outside still looked nice, and I could drive it.

It always seemed that just as I say a good thing about a car, the car goes bad. This is what happened with Hoopty. In April, 1999, I was still driving the car back and forth to school while also using it to take my husband to work. I was feeling fortunate. I had never been in a car wreck, and the car was working decently. I tried to take care of the car, and I was hoping it was going to last awhile longer. Well, lo and behold, fate decided to get a sense of humor with me. The typical rule for driving is when the light turns yellow, and you
can't get through it, you stop. I personally have always thought that to be a simple rule. I found it pretty easy to follow. Last April 9th, as I was driving to school, I came across a light in front of Perkin's restaurant that had just turned yellow. Not being one to disobey traffic laws, I stopped. Well, I guess that yellow lights don't deter some people, so as I stopped, the person behind me (I call him Idiot Driver) decided to keep going. Now, physics says that two objects can't occupy the same space at the same time. Idiot Driver proved this wrong and ended up bashing the tail end of my car and knocking me through the light and into the Airtouch Cellular parking lot. What was extremely amusing about this entire situation was that there was a police officer in the Perkin's lot. He didn't really buy Idiot Driver's excuse about me stopping too fast. I found it funny. With insurance, I was going to get paid for following traffic laws. And Idiot Driver—he was a high school kid—was going to have to tell his dad about the wreck.

After the wreck, Hoopty began to decay rapidly. Where there was blue metal, there was rust. Where there once was a muffler, there was a shell that was held onto the car with coat hangers. Where there once was a car that would run down the street, there was a car that would run for a block and then die out. I felt certain that I was going to have to go back to walking where I needed to go and was actually shopping for decent walking shoes when my husband's parents called one day and said that they had a surprise for us. And what a surprise it was. An absolutely adorable 1989 Eagle Premiere. It was big, it was gray, and it had a V6 engine. I could actually go above 50 miles per hour in this car. Add the fact that the radio actually worked (I always judged the quality of a future car by how it compared to that pride-buster, Imp), and I was feeling pretty damn good about this car.

Well, just as in any relationship, there were challenges to overcome. The main problem was gas. In most cars, half of a tank of gas will last at least a couple of days before needing to be refueled. I believed this to
be the case with the Eagle. (I didn't have a name for this car. I considered it low to name a car as upper class as an Eagle Premiere.) I was wrong. I found out after about a week that my car had a gasoline tapeworm. I would put five dollars in the car in the morning, and by the late afternoon, it would be on empty. Couple this with the gouging that OPEC was giving gasoline buyers, and I was pretty close to selling my husband in order to put gas in the car.

Do you believe fate get his shits and giggles out of tormenting people? I do. In January, things were starting to look up for the Eagle and myself. My husband had a new job, and we were able to start feeding the car on a more regular basis without sacrificing our grocery money in the process. I was starting school in Columbus, and I had a nice reliable car to take me there. That is, until the second day of winter quarter. I was taking my husband to his job in Delaware that morning, and we were on 423 going toward Waldo. Usually this is an uneventful drive for me, and I was taking the time to enjoy the morning and talk with my husband.

Now, before I go any further, I'm going to ask a little question: what's red and has eight sides and tells a person to cease his car's movement? That's right—a stop sign. Well, on that day, there was a dumb-ass who didn't seem to know the answer to that question. As I was driving up to the intersection where Angle's Nail Salon is, I looked down to check my speed when my husband yelled for me to watch out. I looked up, and I saw a black car pulling into the intersection. I locked the brakes trying to stop, but there was no avoiding what came next. I rammed into the side of the other car. My husband, he threw his arm out in front of me to try to stop me from going forward and into the steering wheel, and I remember vividly seeing the front end of the car smash upward toward us. I swung the car around into the yard and stopped. I felt absolutely numb at what I saw around me. The front end of the car was demolished. The engine was poking through the driver's side a little bit, and I could feel the spot where part of it (I still don't know what part) pressed itself into my leg and left an indent. And
then I felt my chest. Let me tell you, those seat belts hurt like hell, especially if you have a lot of chest. I peeked into my shirt and could see and feel the diagonal bruise start to form from my left shoulder to the top of my right breast. My husband, he wasn't bruised, but he was battered some by the impact. He was moving his neck around stiffly as we got out of the car to survey the damage. It was when we got out of the car that I found out the type of surreal situation I had landed myself into.

I truly feel that Driver's Education should teach drivers about what they shouldn't say after a car wreck. I say this because I don't want to see anyone go through the sheer absurdity of what I went through in this wreck. As I was getting out of the Eagle, the driver of the other car decided to get out of his, too. He came walking over to us, and the first words out of his mouth were (get this), “What happened?” It took me a second to comprehend the statement and who was making the statement. I think the problem was that I didn't expect him to say it like that. That's about as dumb as someone shooting a person and then asking if the gun was fired. If I wasn't so stiff, I know that I would have run after him swinging whatever large pieces of the car I could find. I didn't, though. I just sat there waiting for the State Troopers to arrive.

I found out later from my husband that the driver tried to worm his way out of getting cited for the accident. It seems that he tried to say that he was at a stop and didn't see anyone coming. It was then that he pulled out. Well, as fate would have it, that explanation got blown right out of the water. The person behind the driver came over and told the trooper that the driver hadn't stopped at all. In fact, he had passed most of the people on the road going at least 65 miles per hour. To add to the surreal aura of the morning, when he was asked for his name, the gentleman pulled out his business card, and my husband found out that he was an insurance salesman.

Well, I got money out of the accident. It wasn't as much as I had hoped (cheap bastards), but it was enough to get the car that I have now. My newest little baby is a
1989 Ford Tempo. The radio works, all of the lights light up, and the horn even honks. Okay, it did break down in Columbus—once, which resulted in a change of starter, fuel pump and alternator. But, my little baby is doing fine, now. I just hope my next car wreck will wait at least a couple of years.
Rain

Douglas Lewis

The sky is gray and it is raining. It has been raining for three hours. I'm sitting in the kitchen, typing—or more often not typing—preferring to listen to the drop after drop of each wet globe crashing. This is the sound of a machine rain, a "complicated mechanism," as the poet Francis Ponge described it: both "precise and precarious," a sort of divine, magic clockwork. I want to leave my table and just listen for the long fall and release of each splash. I am in a mood for rain, not a sad mood really, or depressed, or angry, simply not a mood for writing an essay. I am more in a mood for dreaming, for imagining myself being fully in the rain—eyes, body, and mind hearing and feeling a language older and more profound than any I could lay here on paper. I want to experience an invading rain, a rain cracking on each roof, rolling off hurried hats, and one for pushing "friends" to lovers under the only small awning available. I want to know a rain for ending drought, just at the moment when it makes its first appearance over the dry horizon. I want a rain for remembering.

This rain seems, at first, nothing more than an ordinary rain. Common in its sound and its feel, but not uncommon even in its angle, a pale shadow to the colors and treasures of more mythic rains. In 1888, a rain was said to have fallen, around the Mediterranean, which was red; even more peculiar than the color is that it carried with it the smell of meat (Fort 39). An 1880 rainstorm, which turned to hail, in Russia, is said to have included the colors red, blue, and gray. A similar fall in Venezuela, in 1886, also included red and blue, but differed from white as the third color (Fort 40). There are also stories of rains of lizards in Montreal and ants in England and France. Other stories tell of living frogs falling in little baskets of ice in a Dubuque, Iowa rainstorm (Fort 93, 95, 190).
The rain here today is more plain, more the reading of a dream than the dream itself. But it isn't the voice of the rain that leads people to believe, as having fallen themselves, the wet lizards they find escaping a flooded field following a storm. There is something in the sound and feel of rain that causes a person to expect the magical: to not see an army of lizards tumbling from above, but to know all the same that this—fantastic as it may be, is, of course, the most likely explanation for their sudden appearance. There is something about the rain that whispers that there are words around us, places and happenings that are just beyond sight. It is the background music for night worlds, dreaming places where a person might again feel the calm of a pre-birth existence. Places where we might be the rain itself, falling again and again into our own image, covering everything in our own name. Rain is both singular and plural, all of us and our thoughts, in one. Rain is a universal voice. Everywhere it reminds people of longing and what could be, either for the imagined and fantastic, as with falling frogs, or the more common lament for a love out of reach. Often seen in the world's widely dispersed poetry, shown in some of my favorite poems by Robert Creeley, Mei Yao-ch'en, Pablo Neruda, Rudaki, and Paul Verlaine. But rain is also a thing of memory. The Argentinean writer, Jorge Luis Borges, once described rain "as something that always happens in the past." It has the effect of carrying us, even as it's falling, to the memory of the falling, of reminding us of the underlying rhythm of time, and of our lives. It also whispers, to those who listen, the names and faces of childhood, and of the comfort of spending a Sunday afternoon just reading for the pleasure of it, and of sleep.

This rain today is clear, but with a little rainbow in each drop. It is just rain. There are no insects, animals, or amphibians hitching rides along its elevator always ending here, but it is still the rain of every other rain, even those mystery rains of unusual color and content. Just as each flake of snow has in it something of every other flake, and each edge of a fire has within it
the layout and feel of every other burning blade, these splashing drops of heavy rain are strange pears burying their seeds of every other fruit that might rise up. The effect of rain is to plant both the seeds of a sideways thinking while simultaneously blooming in memory and desire, or maybe I'm wrong.

Maybe each rain is nothing like any other rain. They may each have certain common elements, but maybe it is only this particular rain which could bring to mind my father's tulips in the last house he owned or the smell of the wet hair of the first girl I ever loved, yellow as the sun and wet with rain. Maybe every rain is uncommon, bearing a different world in its music and color, a different memory or a different hope. Maybe it is only this rain that leaves me unable to approach the page before me as an academic, causing me to essayer the topic more as Montaigne might have appreciated. Another rain might just as likely have sent me into a downpour of scholarly typing of the more common essay, my keyboard clicking the storm rhythm of an angry rain, splashing dark drops on darker pavement cataloging not experience, memory, and desire, but averages, commonalities, and the need of an umbrella.

The rain, this rain at least, is also something that happens independent of the observer, even as it is observed. I lose myself in rain, becoming a part of the larger falling, falling deeper into myself. There is a peculiar isolation and a freedom in rain, a meditation stirring the stuff of immediate experience and perception, creating an awakening, or a momentary enlightenment within. Rain does not join with the observer, but the observer joins with the rain, becoming a part of what was already there, invisible and everywhere. To know rain is to travel on the waves of the underlying order of the universe: an order every newborn knows, but quickly learns to forget or to imagine as fiction, but which is recovered, little by little, with each subsequent shower that is truly felt and allowed under the skin. It is a reenactment of its own effects, a reminding of every aspect of life colored by it.
The story and thought in rain is there to be read by anyone. This is the rising of rain, the reason I, maybe you too, feel a lightening of self at its falling, an angelic irresponsibility. It is the spiritual equivalent of stretching out your arms, curving your back, and tilting your head, feeling each splash gather with others, forming pools in your eyes and rivers curving and winding through your hair. The rain continues beyond you. A feeling of flying, you are aware suddenly that direction is arbitrary, that the falling of the rain is also the soaring of rain. It is the realization that all words of every story are there to be heard, to help clarify the origin of nature's poetry: a voice which the master writer does not learn to mimic, but learns instead to funnel. It is to observe so deeply that the observer enters the observed, becoming the thing itself, writing the rain with the ease with which that other rain falls. The story of rain is the experience of daydreaming and waking to find your work, whatever it was, already finished and laid neatly before you.

Rain, finally, is an ending. In this way, as well, it is "something which happens in the past." It is the only event in nature which is fully happening as it happens and yet also already distant. It is a tapering off and a sudden halt, itself a division between its own falling and the evaporation to come. It is a continuing, behind the eyes and through the blood of any who have known it. Rain is the repetition, the gradual re-lightening of the walk and the drying of the beaten grass it had clung to with calm indifference, the patient waiting for the next rain, an observer transformed.

Works Cited

In Search of Sophistication and Senoritas or Some Such Thing
Jo Anne Fitzgerald

I first saw my own "tiki" table in mid-May, in a shop at Polaris. The name "tiki table" is entirely mine, based on a long story concerning Florida—friend of a friend—cozy little bar for two—high stools—tucked beside a fireplace—beach just beyond the window—tropical breezes. It all added up to sophistication and a way of life that I am convinced my soul needs.

"Oh," I had said that evening in St. Pete, "How charming!"

"It's just a little Tiki Bar," my hostess said, dismissing my interest. "It really needs to be redone."

"Piffle to you," I sneered in one of those little asides I tell only to myself.

I had always thought that tiki referred to those strange stone images on Easter Island or some other far away place, but I assimilated it into my vocabulary quickly as meaning a cozy little bar for two.

No matter the meaning, I was already scheming to own one. With a nonchalant mental flick of the wrist, I ignored the problem of where I would put it in a house overcrowded with previous enthusiasms. I wandered back again and again that evening to look at this little bar, to sit on first one, and then the other of its high wooden stools and begin to imagine the wonderful change in my life that a tiki bar of my own would bring.

I decided I would place it near the big windows in what used to be the dining room before I threw out the table. I had moved in its place a sofa that allowed me to lie and watch puff clouds with faces of old bearded men and curly-headed poodles pass by. And of course, I had to drag in the chair crawling with blue and red hydrangeas to go with the couch. No more dining rooms in this house. Just a striped couch, a gaudy chair, and an empty space that was crying out for a tiki bar.
I would sit at my own in-house pub, with a cold drink sweating onto the bar top, and there I would create great and marvelous novels in my mind. I would gather to me accomplished and sophisticated friends, ones who were French and witty and who wore diamond bracelets with skin-tight jeans and who were on at least their fifth husband.

My life would reach the zenith of sophistication, and I would be complete.

“Oh,” I said the minute my husband and my friends were in the car and backing out of the driveway. “Did you see that tiki bar? I absolutely loved it. I wonder if I could design one.”

Husbands, at least mine, have a way of looking at the practical things in life.

“How would you want a bar when you don’t drink?” mine asked.

“Huh?” I answered inelegantly, picturing myself already sitting at my own tiki bar. I rallied to his provoking logic.

“I drink lots of things—coffee and sodas and iced tea, and I could mix orange juice with soda water and crushed ice. Rita (who sprang to mind as the most sophisticated friend I own) drinks those tropical drinks, you know—senoritas or something like that—and I could make them for her,” I countered.

The conversation on the homeward trip turned to golf, and I sat quietly, plotting and scheming.

I love clichés. The one appropriate at this point in the story is *life goes on, and months passed.*

This time it was California that influenced my life. My artist friend came to visit and off we went to Polaris for lunch. At Polaris, we drove from stop sign to stop sign—and on to yet another next stop sign. Just out of the corner of my eye on that jerky drive I noticed a shop window sporting a round striped and flowered footstool. Needless to say, it was in disgusting taste, the sort of thing that makes my soul laugh.

“That’s what I need,” I told California.

This time it was she who inelegantly said, “Huh?”
Lunch was postponed while I dragged her into the shop, looking for the gotta-have footstool.
We were brought up short by a barrier.
And instead of going around it, I stopped.
Déjà vu and pifflie!
There stood my tiki table.
In that instant, the bar concept went out the window—as well as anything so dull as that nightmare of a footstool. I stood there and bonded with my tiki table. I would have whispered to it, “I’m here,” except California thinks I’m normal, and I didn’t want to disillusion her.
This new love in my life was absolutely beautiful—small, maybe 24-inches in diameter, bust high and bistro sized. It stood tall and proud like Irish pub tables are supposed to stand. The top was pounded copper, little round hammer dents decorating the top in a swirling pattern. The chairs, too, were tall, made from wrought iron and hard leather. I just knew that those three wonderful pieces had come from Greece or some exotic place where I have never been.
The price tags added up to a whopping $1800. Plus tax. Plus delivery.
“Pifflie and so what?” I said to myself.
I was enchanted. The plotting and scheming revved into first gear, and I was off and running.
California made her exit, and the next person in my life was my old friend from Florida, who has been on countless adventures—as well as busts—with me over the past twenty-five years and was there when I first fell in love with that tiki bar. Florida was invited to lunch at Polaris.
“Well, it looks like you,” she said. I peered under the table, trying to find her little spark of enthusiasm.
Practical Husband was the third person whom I dragged to Polaris to see the table—I did not invite him to lunch.
“That thing?” He questioned my sanity, as he has done a few times in this long and tiki table-less marriage. “It hasn’t got fifty dollars worth of material in it. You couldn’t even get two plates on that thing.”
He seemed to lack vision.
That left my sophisticated friend, Rita. You know, the one who drinks exotic things in frosted glasses with large hunks of salt smashed onto the rims. I invited her to Polaris for dinner and she, too, was hauled into the store to see the coveted tiki table and chairs.

"Where would you put it?" she asked. Her tone of voice seemed to imply that the old chicken house was full, and where else would I put such a crazy piece of furniture.

I pouted during dinner and refused to share a dessert with her.

I tried to coax my daughter into the store. I suppose it is because she has been down this road with me before that she refused and said, "Oh, Mom, go get the darn thing if you want it. Just don't pass it off on me when you are tired of it."

By this time my soul was sobbing. None of the people who supposedly loved me had caught the desperate need I had for this tiki table and its two chairs. No one had suggested that I get a job mowing yards to be able to afford it, no one had offered to put a mason jar, rattling with a few quarters, on the kitchen windowsill with an "Annie's Tiki Table" sign carefully scotch taped to it. No one had mentioned Christmas or birthday or anniversary to me.

The cliché returns: time passed.

My soul longed for identification—a sort of completeness that could only be achieved through the ownership of a tiki table.

I found a 24-inch tin table on the patio, neglected and in need of paint. I hauled it into the appointed place that had been reserved for my beloved tiki table. This table was ordinary height. It took no hitching to get yourself into the chairs or to raise your elbows to rest on it. It was a hillbilly cousin to the real thing that lived in the south of France. I was saddened by its ugliness.

I bought a $34 tablecloth and slung it over the old table and dragged two chairs, regulation height instead of fascinating Greek-stool height, up to it.

It had no presence, no personality. My soul no longer sobbed, just hiccupped a bit now and then. I picked up my
disappointment and put it in my jeans pocket. Once more life had dealt me a blow, and I was trying to respond. Yet waffle weave tablecloths cannot be substituted for hand-pound ed copper. Grandma Helen's wooden chairs from the 1920s cannot compete with hard leather ones from far away places.

It looked like an unwanted table covered in a dime-store cloth, unimaginative and uninspiring. I topped it off with a half-dead, over-sized spider plant and proceeded to ignore it.

Time again went wandering by. I became resigned to not having a thing to feed my soul, nothing to make it sing and no reason to create poetry. Sophistication was again beyond my reach. I no longer said "piffle" with enthusiasm.

I avoided Polaris.

And then I stiffened my back. I held my head high and once again gave off the aura of a person on the go and after a goal.

I could do it.

I got my own little job, writing a column about pumpkin bread recipes and how to grow hydrangea bushes and how to get spots out of your carpet. I was at last a writer, hoarding ideas and overheard conversations to put in my novels when my French friends came to call. Sophistication still eludes me, but the paycheck is regular.

I'll fill my own mayonnaise jar. I'll save that money. And then out will go that patio table masquerading as a real piece of furniture.

Piffle and pumpkin bread!

Nothing to it!

And next summer, when I have finally taken my quarter-filled jar to the furniture store at Polaris and brought home my tiki table, you are all invited over for a cold, frosty drink—senoritas or something like that.
Ever since I was a very young boy I have dreamed of flying. From the time that I was old enough to walk I have been fascinated with flight in all forms. I had several books on birds and airplanes, gliders and parachutes, and nearly every form of flight known to man and animals. I always loved to fly kites and make paper airplanes. My imagination ran away with me and I could actually feel what it would be like to fly. Watching birds in flight and imagining the view of these fowl would often leave me feeling envious. Somewhere around the age of ten I grew apathetic with paper airplanes and imagining flight and decided it was time for me to move on to the next step.

As I recall the season was late fall and school had been in session for a few months. Many of the trees had lost their leaves and the ground was spotted with orange, yellow and red. We lived in a small house out in the country with a large yard and several large trees. I climbed these trees on a daily basis and the heights that I would reach made me even more eager to fly. The view from the treetops was breathtaking. On a clear day in the late fall I could see for miles in all directions. I could look to the south and see vehicles coming down the road long before I could hear them. Watching the sun set in the west was a beautiful and special treat. To the north I could see a small stream winding in all directions until it disappeared over the horizon. But this was not enough. The urge to fly was now overwhelming.

On a warm autumn day, what looked to be a disastrous event for my parents turned out to be the very break that I had been looking for. Our refrigerator, which was only a few years old, caught on fire and was reduced to a piece of scrap. Fortunately our home owners insurance covered the cost of replacing the refrigerator and a new one was in place the next day. My break came in the form of packaging that the refrigerator
arrived in, a huge cardboard box that measured at least ten feet across when laid flat on the ground. I knew the instant that I saw this box that I was about to realize my dream of flight.

It was Saturday afternoon and both of my parents were at work. My sister had spent the night with a friend and I had the entire house to myself. I awoke late, normal behavior for me on a Saturday, and skipped breakfast so as not to waste any time. This experiment in flight would need to be complete before my mother came home and put a stop to it. I began by cutting feather-shaped wings out of the large piece of cardboard. If this shape works for a bird, I thought, it should certainly work for me. I cut handles out of the cardboard that was left over and secured these handles to the wings with duct tape. A few splashes of paint and the wings were ready for flight.

The roof of the garage seemed like the most logical sight for my flight to take place. Trying to run on the ground and take off would require too much effort. Starting out at a fairly large height seemed to be an easy way to avoiding the hard work of taking off from the ground. In order to get the wings from the ground to the roof, I attached a small length of rope to the wings. Placing the other end of the rope in my mouth, I climbed the antenna tower to the garage roof. To hold the rope in my hands and climb the antenna would be extremely difficult. Once on the roof, I hoisted the wings up and untied the rope from the wings. I then placed my arms through the straps I had fashioned to hold the wings on my back. Wings in place and ready for flight, I walked to the edge of the roof. The ground seemed to be a long way down. I thought to myself, should these wings fail, the fall to the ground will be very painful. Inspiration struck me again. I climbed down from the roof, grabbed a rake from the garage, and raked up a huge pile of leaves next to the garage. Halfway through this tedious task, I began to believe that raking up the pile of leaves was a huge waste of time. The wings that I had meticulously crafted were sure to succeed. Now, back to the flight
position on the roof, no fear of being hurt, I was ready for
take off. Wings on my shoulders, I ran to the edge of the
roof and leapt.

I awoke to find myself lying on my back in the pile
of leaves. How long I had lain there is to this day un-
known to me. The wings that I had fabricated were
completely destroyed along with my spirit and my
dreams of flying. What went wrong? Why couldn't I
remember at least a fraction of what it had felt like to fly
through the air? As I sat in the pile of leaves sulking,
my neck stiff and my head throbbing, the events that had
taken place began to come back to me. After leaping off
of the roof the wings caught the air, as they were in-
tended to do, but my arms were not strong enough to
hold them in place. They folded up behind me and I fell
head first to the ground. My experiment, and my dream
of flight, ended in complete failure.

After this failed attempt at flight I felt totally
destroyed. I had felt confident that these wings were
going to work, and dealing with the end results proved
very painful and depressing. Although my head and neck
were extremely sore, my pride hurt more than anything
else did. Judging from the sour stomach, headache and
overall body aches, my mom thought that I had come
down with the flu. She sent me to bed early that night
"to rest." For this I felt grateful to her. Talking about my
failed attempt was the last thing that I wanted to do.

Despite the failures of my first attempt to fly, I
would never give up the dream of flying. Several varia-
tions of the wings that I had used along with a few at-
ttempts at making a parachute all proved unsuccessful at
flight. As I grew older, the thought of being a pilot be-
came very appealing. I enlisted in the Armed Forces
with the hopes of becoming a fighter pilot. This also
proved to be a failure. Although I had passed every
physical and every exam the military could administer,
there was one exam that I would never be able to pass.
My poor vision, which I have been cursed with since
birth, would never allow me to be a pilot. This would be
the final blow to my dreams of flight.
About a month after my failed attempt at flight, I discovered a new way of realizing my dreams and coping with this failure. When I was ten, my father lost his job with Marion Power Shovel due to a conflict in interest with government sanctions and boycotts. Times were tough and good jobs were nearly non-existent. My mom and dad both had to work just to make enough money to pay the house payment and buy groceries. This was also around the same time as the energy crisis in our country. The demand for fuel and electricity was high and the prices for these commodities began to soar. All over the country families began to look for alternatives that would help save money and avoid paying the high prices. For my family, this meant burning wood in the winter instead of using the furnace.

A chain saw in the hands of a ten-year-old boy is probably a bad idea. My family had little choice in the matter. With both parents working there was little time for even keeping up with everyday household chores, let alone the demanding hours and labor that come with cutting wood. I had been on several wood cutting trips with my dad, as a younger child, and I had learned quite a bit about the art of cutting down a tree and splitting it up into firewood. On Saturdays and sometimes on Sundays, my dad dropped me off in the woods of a friend with a lunch pail and a thermos, and returned after work to help me load the wood I had cut onto the truck. This became a weekend ritual for me for many years to come.

Most people think that it is cruel to expect a ten year old boy to do this type of work, but I did not feel that way at all. I thoroughly enjoyed spending time by myself in the woods. Nothing can compare to the feeling of peacefulness a person can experience while alone with nature. Cutting wood in the spring is not a good idea. Rain and mud make it difficult to get in and out of the woods, so I normally cut wood from summer to winter. Winter was by far my favorite season for working outdoors. Sitting in the woods during a mild snowstorm is something I will never forget. It seemed like I could actually hear the snow hitting the ground, and no other
sounds could be noticed. I have never experienced more peaceful moments in my life since.

Although I grew to hate doing this type of work, the payoffs that came from it later in life have been immeasurable. The very nature of cutting and splitting wood helped me to develop a strong body. This proved very valuable in high school sports and later in the military. Also the general mentality of hard work did not come as such a shock when I entered the work force. When others whined about being over worked and under paid, my thoughts were that nothing would ever be as bad as having to cut and split firewood.

Although my childhood years were spent living in poverty, they pale in comparison to the burdens of the children in Jonathan Kozol's book, Ordinary Resurrections. In this book, Kozol writes of the hardships faced by young children who live in the South Bronx, and the effects that these misfortunes have on their education. Living in poverty for many years as a child helps me to relate to the children in Kozol's book, but poverty is the only similarity between these children and myself. Most of the children in Kozol's book who live in Mott Haven are without fathers. Mine has been with me, loved me, and raised me from birth to the present. Illegal drugs are prevalent in the community and many of the parents of the South Bronx are dealers or addicts. Drugs were unheard of when I was a child and my family has never had to deal with drug addictions of any kind. "They aren't children, in the sense in which most of us use that word," writes Kozol, "they are really premature adults." Many people have said that I was forced to grow up too soon, but I do not feel that way at all. I simply did what needed to be done out of love and respect for my parents.

Many types of birds make several attempts to leave their nests before learning to fly. During these trials at flight, the young birds are cared for and nurtured by their mothers until they are ready to take flights and leave the nest. My childhood experiences relate closely to this order of nature. From trials and errors, ups and
downs, and success and failure, I have learned to fly, or, in other words, to be successful. With wings of confidence and wisdom, I will fly through the rest of my life without the hardships that I faced as a child. But, more importantly, my children will never have to face the same hardships that I faced growing up as a child.
A few quarters ago, I received a paper from one of my professors. It was a simple one-page response to a handout that the class was asked to read. Most of the time, I disregard all teachers' comments when it comes to my opinion (since I am a genius). This time was different. There was one comment that stuck out like a redneck at the opera. "You are a master of sarcasm," it mocked in red ink. This comment took me by surprise. I am not denying that sometimes I can be a little sarcastic. Everyone has that capability. There is an entire chromosome dedicated to the art of sarcasm. I am so accustomed to being sarcastic, it never registered in my mind how far I had progressed. So I started pondering this, and I found myself asking questions: What has made me such an expert on sarcasm? Does this make me a hateful person? What drives me to hurt people for my sick amusement? Why do ducks have webbed feet?

I consider myself a good person according to society's standards. I have a blistering-hard work ethic. I work two jobs and attend school full time. I pay my taxes, unless I can find a loophole or a high-ranking government official to blackmail. I believe I have a general concern for others' well beings. In summary, I strive to achieve personal happiness without stepping on anyone else's toes. So what is my problem? I live this seemingly normal life, if there is such a thing. There is something inside me that tells, no demands, that I say and write terrible things. With every newspaper opinion column I read about how violent television programming is and how it is the root of children becoming so violent. With every talk show I see featuring parents hoping that years of neglect can be miraculously erased by sending their troubled teenager to boot camp for twenty-four hours, with every customer that I encounter at my place
of work asking me where an item is located that stands not two feet in front of where I am, and with every ill-thought proclamation from the inept group that I like to refer to as "The Man," this sickness of mine grows. Right now, I could be making someone cry or plot my death with my sick brand of humor. One day, this disease will spread to what remaining compassionate parts of my brain are left, dissolving any thoughts of love and hope. It is at that point I will drive all my loved ones away for good. What will be my fate after that? Am I destined to a life of wandering around area stores talking to myself and propositioning the teenage girls?

Perhaps the media is responsible for my bad attitude. I grew up on massive daily doses of surreal images from television. I only went outside if threats of force or chores were issued. Every day after school and on weekends, I was bombarded with falsehoods. No matter how many bullets GI Joe traded with Cobra, no one ever died. Cars could talk and blast through the air with the push of a button. Wearing a certain clothing line would guarantee me success with the opposite sex. Cultural differences were celebrated, and all problems were solved at the end of a half-hour, except for the season-ending cliff hanger. When things got boring, or when my baby brother grew from six months to seven years old during the summer, my family moved away. In some cases, I starred in my own crappie spin-off. MTV was on the cutting edge of music. America was always the good guy, fighting the demonic forces of Communism. Everything the nightly news said was one hundred percent accurate and was not calculated.

So I took these images in for a good eighteen years, no questions asked. It was time to go to college. The first thing I learned was that all knowledge that I had amassed up to that point amounted to next to nothing. All of my notions about the world, most of which I received from television, were completely wrong. I could have been playing sports, reading, getting high, or even helping my community all those years I was killing my brain with notions that everything was going to be all right. The shock of this was added on top of having the
fragile microcosm of high school shattered. That's enough to scar the strongest of people. I thought about getting a lawyer and filing a lawsuit against the television industry. After all, it is their fault that I'm so dumb now.

I have been a part of the work force for about six years now. As one would expect, due to the fact that I had zero experience prior, I have performed (at times by gunpoint) some of the most demeaning jobs ever conceived. From scraping frozen cattle carcass off 700° grills to pushing endless lines of grocery carts in subzero temperatures while minivans stalked inches behind, I have done it all. There is one thing that I have learned from all of this spirit-crushing, mindless work. No matter how hard you toil or how much of the public's shit you eat and tell them it tastes like ice cream, it's never enough. "The Man" has an agenda to make sure that you are miserable where you are working. It is easier for them to brainwash people if they feel downtrodden. A million people could nominate you for sainthood and your work area could be sterile, but if one item is left undone, they whip out the threats. "Damn it, Jonas! You need to start taking your job seriously if you want a future here at Chucky's Gas 'n Stuff! We're not paying you $1.50 an hour to stand around doing nothing." I sometimes wonder how hard it is for the CEOs of these companies, who are the charter members of "The Man," to sleep on a giant pile of money while those who work beside me break their backs and grovel for a half-day's vacation and a tiny pension once they are put out to pasture. Six years of taking on "The Man" is enough to make anyone hate people, but it only took me about six days for this to happen. I'm not saying that I deserve to be making six figures for the work that I do. Everyone starts out doing grunt work for sub-slave wages. Managers must realize that this is not a career option. It's impossible for me to take some place seriously that guarantees an exorbitant top pay of $7.25 after sixteen years. My case against my former employers is still in the planning stages.

I love my parents very much and I am glad they split up because I probably would be on Death Row right
now if they weren't. Two sets of presents on Christmas and my love for the highest bidder was an excellent way to be brought up. The only problem was that instead of getting stuck with the fun parent, I was stuck with the bad guy. In my household, there was a solid foundation of Christian hypocrisy, extreme guilt, and repression. Most children are sickeningly resilient and easily bounce back from this. I guess I was too much of a wuss. Much like the little boy in a psychological experiment who is conditioned to fear white rabbits through the use of loud sounds, I was trained to panic at the sound of that voice. "Do you remember the time I carried you in my uterus for nine months? Remember that, huh? And you can't do this one little thing for me?" Most of the time, that little thing was shoveling dog poo out of the yard; to this day it confuses me as to why there was this desire to have a poo free zone in the backyard where the dog was trained to go to the bathroom. "That was selfish. I hope you realize how selfish you are and that selfish people go to hell." Yes, Jesus loves me, this I know.

Today, I can't even go to the bathroom without hearing her voice. Until my dying day, that voice will constantly scold me. No matter what I do in life, there will always be this overwhelming sense of guilt because of her voice. The ironic thing is that this person wonders why I don't care to spend any quality time with her. I was thinking that the years of mental anguish just might have had a slight effect on my current state of mind. The lawsuit against my parents was dismissed.

I hope to have adequately established the deeply imbedded roots of my sarcastic nature. This still does not explain what drives me to think and act the way that I do. If it is the fault of the media, "The Man," and my parents, then why must I take it out on those who have had nothing to do with my psychological scarring? The best explanation I could come up with would be a defense mechanism. I am not a strong individual, although I have been told I look like a rabid grizzly when I don't shave for a week. I would probably get my ass kicked by a third-grader if I started a fight with one. Being asser-
tive just isn't my thing. I have found that no one can take me seriously due to the fact that frequent molesta-
tion by cows during my childhood has made me look like Alfalfa. So the best thing for me to do to fight back is to
be the biggest smart ass I could possibly be. Instead of
beating my future wife, I'll make her cry by cutting her
down with the meanest insults my twisted mind can
conjure (at which point, the new baby will look surpris-
ingly similar to the mailman.) I will pass my smart
mouth on to my/the mailman's offspring. Hey, what good
is it to have kids if you can't warp their little minds?
They are no doubt going into the Guinness Book for most
detentions received. I'll just look at their teacher and
say, "I guess I'm not using the cattle prod enough."

All I have to defend myself are my words. Sar-
casm is my way of lashing out against a world that con-
tinually kicks me in the groin while I struggle to eke out
a meaningless existence that will no doubt end in a slow
painful death, most likely by "The Man" for trying to get
the truth across to the masses. This defense mechanism
is not the healthiest way of dealing with the ebb and flow
that is everyday life. I realized that long ago. Certainly,
there will be a heart attack in my future from all this
bottled up anger boiling inside me. There is not much I
can do about it. I am one of those grouchy adults that
never grew out of the angry teenager phase. Kurt
Cobain is dead, and I still can't accept it.

I have done some painful soul searching, and have
yet to find all the answers. The solution I was able to
come up with is that all of the aforementioned factors
have caused my sarcasm to flourish. However, these are
not the only reasons why I am so sarcastic. While the
people and things I intend to sue have screwed me up
beyond repair, it is ultimately my genetic coding that has
rendered me an asshole. Like I have said before, there
is an entire chromosome dedicated to the art of sarcasm.
However, I am still not convinced of my alleged mastery
of the fine art of satire. Perhaps someday I will have
obtained enough knowledge on the subject to where I am
able to produce a guide to the finer points of sarcasm.
The god-awful truth is, I like who I am. This world needs more dissidents such as myself to question the transparent values of our society. Where would we be without nuts such as myself? Imagine a world without Kevin Smith movies to stump and offend people. Howard Stern would not be around to subconsciously arouse millions of repressed far right-wingers. It's not as if I am totally indifferent. If I didn't care about anything, I would not work two jobs and attend college full-time. I would be your friendly neighborhood free-lance pharmacist. (If you don't know what I am talking about, then I suggest you drop out of college immediately!) I wouldn't donate a portion of my comic paycheck to local charities if I did not care about anything. Instead, I would wave a hundred dollar bill in a homeless person's face, take it away as he/she tries to snatch it up, then spit in his/her face. (God bless you, Bret Easton Ellis!) This does not take away from the fact that I am a bad person. I will always be a bad person. There is not one politically correct atom in my body. I prefer being honest with myself and being content with that to living in some silicon injected, Britney Spears loving, minivan driving, Access Hollywood universe. So with that said, see you in hell, Kurt!
It's 5:45 Monday morning. The music seems to blare in my ears. My hand reaches up for the familiar feel of the button that brings blessed silence to the room again. The glow of the red numbers is bright and there is no mistaking them. Rise and shine, again. The snooze button allows me fifteen more minutes, until Buddy Holly starts to sing about the day when he'll say goodbye. Although I love Buddy Holly, I give in to the long, red, smooth, oval shaped button; my hand knows this object, inch for inch. I roll over, knowing this contraption is only doing the job it was created for. The job it has faithfully done for the past ten years is to sit next to my bed plugged into the wall. It has been set to many different wake up times, played Whitney Houston, Garth Brooks, Beck, Nirvana, and the Beatles. It's been packed into boxes, plugged into many walls, and been decorated with stickers, as well as been despised, thanked, ignored, and obeyed.

This alarm clock was given to me as a Christmas present in the sixth grade. I think that it was then that I took one more step towards adulthood. I was now expected to wake up earlier and on my own. It seems a kind of initiation into the universal rat race. Funny how this alarm clock was given to me as a present that I had asked for, and over time have come to resent. I never questioned the need for an alarm clock. My mother, father, and older sisters all owned their very own, so naturally I regarded it as a "grown up thing." This desire was similar to my disillusioned plans of getting married, having babies, and starting to pay bills as soon as I could. Because those things would give me my own personal freedom? Well, the alarm clock did give me the "liberating freedom" that I so desperately needed from my mother, but at the same time, graciously handed me a whole new world of responsibilities. This alarm clock signified to me that I now had important things to wake
up for, thus taking me one step closer to the important status of adulthood.

Like I mentioned before, I have felt both hatred and thankfulness toward my alarm clock. Is there a lucky soul out there that doesn’t march to the beep of his/her alarm clock? Overall I think that I resent my alarm clock, though faithfully every evening I check to set the alarm time to make sure I have equipped this machine to do its job. It took the place of my mom’s voice and touch. It seems to have scared away those Sunday mornings of endless sleep, or the long awaited beckoning call of Saturday morning cartoons.

In part it represents the increasing pace and tempo of our American society that at times frustrates me. I’ve been told that if I were getting enough sleep that I wouldn’t need and alarm clock. Maybe one day in the future I’ll make time to get the sleep my mother tells me I need, perhaps eliminating the need for my boss, my coach, my friend, my alarm clock.

**DEATH OF THE VCR**

**JEREMY PAYTON**

There is a large cardboard box in the corner of my basement that collects dust and spider webs. It is sealed with an extra wide strip of electrical tape to keep out the bugs. If someone were to peel this tape away and fold back the cardboard flaps, they would reveal a tomb of an invention that arose a couple of decades ago. Inside the box lie a VCR and a bundle of VHS tapes.

I purchased a DVD player less than a year ago, and it has heavily influenced the way I entertain myself at home. Before I acquired the DVD player, the thought of putting in a movie was drab and lacked the satisfaction I longed for on a boring Sunday afternoon. Now that this DVD player rests safely atop my television, the fun of home cinema has returned.

The concept of how a film on DVD is viewed is far superior to that of a VHS tape. A VHS tape is packaged lin-
early, so that the tape runs in sequence from beginning to end. With a DVD disk, the scenes are listed in a scene index, allowing me to select the scenes that I want to play and to watching them in the order that I want.

The DVD disks offer special features that allow me to grasp a better understanding of how the film is made. With documentaries about the making of the film, director and actor interviews, and behind the scenes footage, the art that goes into making a movie shines through.

Although DVD disks seem to be the perfect invention for a home cinema experience, they come with a few flaws. The disks are fragile and can scratch easily, causing the movie to turn into a digital mass of colored blocks, ruining the movie. After each viewing of the movie, it is essential to wipe off the disk and return it to the case. If the disks are taken care of, they will last much longer than VHS tapes.

The DVD player has opened my mind to newer technologies. My urge to explore more of the latest electronics that have hit the market is at its peak. Convenience is the soft spot of the population, and these new technologies are hitting it right on the head. I can’t imagine watching a tape on the VCR ever again, and as long as I have a DVD player, I never will.

TAROT: BINARY IT AIN’T

ABRAM BARNETT

As comforting and familiar as the keyboard and mouse and the gentle, maternal hum of the CPU can be, ones and zeroes are not the only way to compress and process data. One of my favorite operating systems has little to do with binary code, nor even silicon wafers. It is one of the oldest artificial matrices the human race has ever used for data correlation.

No definite source has been found for the Tarot, but it is known that the Romanicheli (gypsies to you, gadje) carried copies of it in their caravans across Asia.
Minor and on into western Europe about the time of the birth of a nice Jewish carpenter who later got nailed to a stick. My time frame for the introduction of the Tarot into Europe is probably wrong, but it was the Romany who introduced it.

The first Tarot decks in Europe, however, were not the same version that is available today. Those nomads carried decks of about twenty cards, each with a different image and each with a different symbolic correspondence in the minds of the readers. This correspondence was and is vital to the operating system.

This sequence of about twenty cards has become twenty-two in modern times, and is called, alternately, the Book of Thoth and the Major Arcana. It is, in the jargon of modern sorcery, a segmented representation of developmental psychology. For those who don't give the anus of a Rattus rattus about psychobabble, it examines the development of a self-aware pattern of energy, as it exists within the fractal matrix. It examines, in a symbolic language, the potential path of evolution upon which every sentient entity might proceed.

I could explain each of the cards in the Major Arcana, but if you really want to learn about the path, there are plenty of books available. As one experienced in such studies, I suggest that since you have two eyes (I hope), you read two books by two different authors, to get a parallax view of each card's meaning.

The modern Tarot includes a portion called the Minor Arcana, which probably appeared well after the fall of the Byzantine Empire. This collection comprises four suits of fourteen cards each, with each following a similar numerical progression. The fourteen found in each suit are numbered first, one through ten, and then called (by various names in various dialects) Page, Knight, Queen and King. The suits are swords, rods, cups and coins. Each of these suits corresponds to one of the four elements, as dictated by Hellenistic alchemy, as well as to a component of the human experience. The first ten cards in each suit connect numerology with the appropriate aspect of life. For example, the Four of Coins
represents a state of financial stability on the edge: Four signifies the first stable state beyond the most basic (one), like the legs of a table, while the suit of coins deals in the affairs of physical and worldly activities. There are other styles of interpretation, but the underlying truth remains.

It may be of interest that the Minor Arcana, minus the Pages and plus one card from the Major Arcana, the Fool, became the traditional deck with which Europeans invented poker, blackjack, and crazy eights. To relate this to the silicate computers that provided you with this fine publication, I assert that the Tarot deck, as it is today, is a computer, although not of quantities (as per the average iMac or Apple Ile), but of qualities.

Most occidental philosophers presume that a human being is composed of a physical component and a spiritual one. I feel that this interpretation lacks much precision, but I must note that the Minor Arcana’s progression reflects the worldly experience of a given human as the Major Arcana’s reflects the (dare I type it?) spiritual experiences.

How can such a thing work? The standard use of a Tarot deck requires that the questioning party shuffle the deck until (according to popular scientific theories) the cards are randomly assorted. An individual versed in the symbolic systems of the Tarot then deals cards from the top of the deck and arranges the cards in some pattern on a flat surface. In this way, one may decipher the arrangement of cards and thus the qualities/ circumstances they signify, from their order in the stack of the deck, which is in turn derived by the actions of the shuffler.

If we assume that the proper Tarot deck contains everything in its symbolism that humans interact with in life, then the action of a human upon the deck should match that of the human upon its life circumstances. Thus, when one spreads the cards upon the table, if the dealer has not altered the arrangement, they shall reveal a scenario corresponding to that in which the shuffler finds himself. However, due to the displaced
perspective of the card reader and the impersonal medium of the cards, the shuffler can view the circumstances relatively unfettered by the ego.

Thus, the Tarot is actually a microcosm, a tiny copy of our universe-within that universe! This vaguely resembles a fractal reality, but for it to be a truly fractal pattern, the creation of the tiny copies would have to be a function of the bigger copies.

If all of this works like I think it does, necessarily, the essence of an experience or circumstance can retain itself within an image, and furthermore, that image can correspond to an energy pattern, such as that of a shuffler’s thoughts and memories. The shuffler’s energy patterns assign values to each card, and each card then is placed in the appropriate place via some sort of quantum buoyancy effect. This would depend on the inability of the shuffler and the dealer to perceive the order of the cards, a hallmark of quantum theory. Philosophically, it would also signify that the whole of being as we know it is little more than a collection of pictures, which can be shuffled, though at the least the dealing is quicker than the playing eye.

If modern computational techniques could use this effect, and if one could compose a truly fractal collection of symbols, in correlation with a computer of infinite quantitative computational power (don’t laugh; I hear Bill Gates is getting one for Hanukah), such a computer could conceivably answer any question—and for the first time in history, the answers might be right.

On the off chance that anyone does build the Supreme Quantitative/Qualitative computer, this is the idea of one Abram Isaac Barnett, and I (or my estate) want 19% of all profits derived from its computations, and 5% of all profits from merchandising.
Grass grew on one side of the wall. Even. Green. Cool. Wet. Big. In summer, my father and brothers would mow the lawn every weekend. We girls would spend Saturday mornings picking up things that would catch in the big mower. Stray crab apples and sticks, pieces of paper and toys, and other small things, all had to be cleared from the lawn before the mowing could begin in the early afternoon. In the evening, the boys would drag the heavy chairs from the patio and sit and talk loudly to each other until well after dark. It was a large area, extending several hundred yards to the frontage road that bordered our place, and completely filled with grass. To the south, a great forest of lilacs hemmed the yard. In the spring, purple and white blossoms grew high over my brothers' heads as they fumbled about in the bushes searching for baseballs, Frisbees, or anything else presumed lost or extremely important to their emerging manhood. In the fall, the lilac hedge forfeited her treasures as thick leaves covered the ground, hiding month-old footprints, flattened branches, and lost perceptions. All through my childhood, the boys spent their days playing on the lawn. Massive games of football, 500, kick-the-can, and any variation of war, (sometimes, the Indians lost, sometimes the Germans), were all played, or practiced in "The Boys' Area."

On the other side of the wall, Mother and Grandmother planted tiny seeds in their gardens. Not formal flower gardens, mind you, where ladies of leisure sipped tea and cordials on woven furniture, but simple vegetable and fruit patches that served their bounties to our dinner table. It seems that women in every family have their own gathering place. In some families, the women congregate in the kitchen. Others retreat to an old attic hen's nest, or back screened-in porch. In my family, we loved the garden. After dinner and dishes, we passed
through the rose arbor that separated one side of the wall from the other and "The Boys' Area" from the garden. It was here, amidst the squash and highbush cranberries, that we weeded and talked and bent and pruned our way through the springs, summers, and falls.

I knew that over in "The Boys' Area" they were discussing, and probably solving, the great problems of the world. Endeavors on scales so grand that they dwarfed the pyramids were dreamed and dismissed. On the garden-side, however, we rooted out and discussed more ordinary and common problems of the day. Some could be solved easily. What color should we make the Christmas dresses?

"Red is a hard color to wear throughout the year."
"But doesn't green fade too easily?"
"Too much effort goes into making them. We can't afford any mistakes."
"Dark green will do, nicely."

At the same token, we knew that most problems would likely never find such an easy resolution; instead, they had to be lived through.

"Should we invite the Macinni's to the July picnic?"
"Lenny drinks too much."
"Then Dad drinks too much."
"He's just trying to be social."

There were problems that belonged to someone else entirely.

"Will Steve finally ask Kathy to marry him?"
"It has been such a long time already."
"Perhaps it would be better if he did not. Some men just never take to being married."

The back garden served another purpose as well. At an early age, I knew that Mother retreated to the garden whenever she wanted to be alone. At night, when doors slammed so hard they shook the small white china horses on my bed stand, I knew that Mother would go stand in her garden. Sometimes, only a phone call or a broken dish would send her outdoors. Once, it was because I tried on Great-grandmother's old clothes. Sometimes, she would remain there for hours.

Sometimes.
This used to scare me, but gradually, I grew more curious than afraid. Once, when I was about seven or eight, I asked her what she did out in the garden alone. She told me that when I was older, she would let me in a secret about her garden, but for now, I should simply leave her alone. This approach never worked on me. For the next few weeks, I stood in the garden, just as Mother did. And waited. Nothing happened. I looked south, down range. Nothing. I looked toward the mountains. The Great Divide. Pretty, but nothing that couldn't be seen from the patio. I stood in the garden at dawn, noon, evening, and night time. Each time. Nothing. I never saw anything special, so I eventually passed this off as one of those weird adult things that I knew I would never do when I grew up. Eventually, I gave up caring about this, and began to care about other things. The boys still played on their lawn, doors still slammed too loud, and Mother still went out to her garden.

When I was a number of years older, and my Great-grandmother's clothes were beginning to fit even better than I could ever imagine, the whole valley was sweating though a late-June heat spell. During the day, temperatures climbed to nearly 100 degrees and never dipped below 75 at night. Too hot to sleep, I decided to go outside and soak my feet in the well-pond. Instead of turning toward the front of the house, I walked through the arbor into the garden. Mother stood just between the corn and asparagus patches.

"Can't sleep?" I asked.

"No. I like being out here when it's hot."

"Are you upset or something?"

"No. It's a hot night. I just like being here when it's hot."

"Why?"

"Listen."

So I did. I listened to the insects. Crickets, mostly. I heard a car passing on the highway driving into town. I heard a few raccoons scurrying—probably over the garden house roof.
“Listen to what? I don’t hear anything.”
“Bend down here. Listen closer.”

Kneeling on one of the warm, uneven flagstones beside Mother, I finally heard a little snap, or pop, or something even smaller than that. I heard it again, again. Again. More little sounds, smaller than snaps and pops all coming at me from the corn. I remember grinning and breathing out a small little laugh that almost drowned out the corn.

“It’s the corn?”
“It’s the corn growing. It grows so fast in the heat that you can hear it.”
“Little pops? Neat.”

Sounds too weak to be heard from the other side of the wall. Little cracks that would be drowned out by sunshine, lawn mowers, or boisterous games.

“You mean you come out here and listen to the corn? And you never told us about this?”
“No. I come out here so I can hear the corn. There’s a difference.” After a few small moments, she added, “When you’re older, you’ll know what I mean.”
It is not often noted that every socially-transformative piece of consumer technology in the twentieth century has been marketed on the grounds that it promises to liberate consumers from the crimping limitations of nature. The automobile, the radio, the telephone, the television, and now the personal computer and the cell phone all have been foisted on people behind the pretense that they will deliver us into a world of possibilities that distance, time, and biological failings had previously denied humanity.

To some extent, of course, these gadgets do permit us to transcend nature's limitations. But in so doing, they make us less human, precisely because humanity was never meant to escape nature's governance entirely. The things that define people at their best—work that improves on, rather than despoils nature; social institutions that make collective survival possible; and the wisdom to know that we must live beneath those limitations—rest on the delicate tension between nature's power over us and our equally strong instinct to gain power over nature. Consumer technology has thrived by destroying that delicate balance, and as it defies nature, it defies the best parts of us as well.

I have long wondered why people are so eager to accept technological products into their lives without questioning the larger consequences that they have. These things are so plainly self-defeating. I side with Sigmund Freud, who mused in Civilization and Our Discontents that "if there had been no railway to conquer distances my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice; if traveling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable to relieve my anxiety about him."
Take cell phones. Women particularly tell me that they need them for "emergencies." I'm amazed at how many people are having emergencies these days. They stand on street corners, having emergencies. They walk through campus, having emergencies. They do their grocery shopping, having emergencies—talk about your multi-tasking. Having purchased these insidious things against the remote possibility of becoming stranded along the road in the middle of the night in the wilderness with the wolves baying and the bogey man edging close, they find, gradually, that being five minutes late to the sitter's is an emergency, that ordering pizza is an emergency, that reminding the kids that they shouldn't drink all the milk is an emergency. Cell phones were supposed to make life easier; instead they turn everything into a crisis.

Many parents tell me that they wouldn't live without their cell phones, because that is how they keep in contact with their children, who evidently live equally hassled and crisis-ridden lives. I'm sure they are sincere. But as Freud implied, our lives would be far less complicated if we were not willing to buy into every technological fix that comes our way. I'm not really sympathetic to the parent who has opted to use the cell phone as a crutch to replace the face-to-face contact, the simple physical presence that a decent parent-child relationship must have.

I have even less sympathy for the business folks who claim they couldn't make a living without that phone. Many tell me that their competitive advantage rests on providing constant service to their clients, for example. But that really means that they have no private lives, no separation between the world of affairs and the world of leisure and solitude that alone can restore a sense of balance to one's life. I usually keep my peace when someone tells me this, but I always think: "How sad. If you were so important that your clients need you every waking second, why are you at their beckoned call? You are a slave, as self-deceiving as favored slaves have always been. If I had your job, I'd quit."
It is no mystery that our working lives, the relentless dehumanization that accompanies the physical separation of people and consumer technologies are all bound together in a bundle of mutually-reinforcing irrationality. It has always been this way, which is what connects the automobile to the computer and the cell phone.

The car was the first form of truly revolutionary consumer technology. It was the product through which modern mass production was refined. Henry Ford taught modern corporations how to dominate the lives of their workers by being the first to implant the moveable assembly line on a plant floor.

The car’s main purpose is to allow individuals to move without any necessary connection to the movement of others. We can decide when to go where, without being bound to bus or train schedules. We can go by ourselves, which means that we don’t have to endure the burden of sitting next to somebody we might not like on the train, maybe somebody whose personal hygiene might not suit our overly-delicate sensibilities. You never know: get on a bus; you might have to sit next to somebody who hears voices rumbling around in their head.

In a car—in my car—no such invasions of personal space are possible. I can listen to “my own music,” (which is itself an extraordinary self-deception, since “my” radio station is owned by a media conglomerate that is playing the same song at the same time on radio stations across the country and is most likely produced by one of the five multinationals that control something like 85% of the music marketed globally). I can even talk to myself—assuming, of course, that I stop moving my lips when I pass someone, lest they think I belong on public transportation. I can pick my nose, even at stoplights, one of the customs of the road being that Thou Shalt Not Stare at Other Drivers at Stop Lights. In my car, I’m liberated, liberated, that is, from any direct connection with other people.
That dubious liberation comes at a steep cost. Our physical liberation from the tyranny of public transportation usually leaves many of us in debt to the bank or the leasing firm. Few of us have any aptitude as auto mechanics, which makes us as dependent as babies when the alternator goes. I've often thought that no one should be given a driver's license unless they can tear down their motor and rebuild it in four hours. But these days, the car companies have driven independent mechanics out of business by computerization. Even the dealer's workers aren't truly mechanics anymore; they just look at computer readouts and do what they're told.

No one who has driven in any large American city lately can actually believe that the automobile is a tool of liberation, unless your idea of emancipation is sitting in traffic. You think North Columbus is bad? Try Seattle. Try Charlotte. Try Miami. Try Houston. Nor is this an American problem. Cars are ruining the ancient city of Athens. Sao Paulo is overrun. Seoul is a mess. In Jakarta, which has the world's worst traffic, it takes between three and four hours to make the fifteen-mile trip from the airport to the main hotel district on a good day. On New Year's holiday, it takes more than fifteen hours to leave town.

As the original self-defeating technology, the car is the original piece of consumer irrationality as well. It makes no sense to move 20,000 people driving 19,999 cars (liberally accounting for high-occupancy vehicles) from roughly the same place to roughly the same place at roughly the same time, when the same 20,000 people could be moved more quickly with three dozen or so trains.

The only justification that the car ever had was that it permitted the occasional, lark of a trip into the countryside. But the sprawl that they made possible has destroyed the countryside into which cars might once have justifiably ventured. Instead of reinvigorating country, we're now stuck with Wal-Marts and asphalt parking lots.
that are created with utterly no heed to physical appearance or the proper use of space. Look down Mt. Vernon Ave. next time you go out of campus. What's there besides hideous buildings that have no lasting value and parking lots that are never filled? I'll tell you what's not there: sidewalks, or any other paltry accommodation to human beings.

The campus itself reveals the same skewed priorities. The children from the day-care center take their lives in their hands just to cross the campus road, because few people have the decency to yield to them. Do you know that each parking space has more square footage than the typical faculty office? No wonder Morrill Hall was built without windows; it was apparently conceived as a garage.

The architects probably figured that no one would notice, since most of us live in "contemporary" houses, which are built for cars and their people. Go through any subdivision built in the last twenty years and you'll see row after row of garages with attached houses. The principal entry point is through the multi-car garage, which is the largest single space in the structure; the most convenient way into the home is through the car. And note that the garage has replaced the front porch, which for generations had been the symbol of neighborliness.

For the last half-century, auto-related deaths in America have run at about 40,000 annually, give or take a few. No other consumer product is permitted such carnage. A single child falls down the steps, and that baby walker is yanked off the market. We're in a national tizzy over cigarettes. But smokers kill only themselves. Drivers all too often kill the innocent. Yet nobody has broached the cause of ridding Americans of their deadly addiction to the automobile.

All of this aside, it simply makes no sense to rely on two tons or more of metal, fiberglass, plastic and rubber, all powered by a highly flammable liquid--the dependence
on which undermines national security and beckons war—that despoils the air and ruins the countryside, to move a 150-pound animal made up of water and blood and flesh and bones at sixty or seventy miles per hour, far faster than nature meant any of her creatures to move, when that 150-pound animal is perfectly capable of self-locomotion, bi-pedal self-locomotion at that.

An irrational gadget makes for irrational people. And that is why, once they enter their cars, even the mildest people become crazed maniacs. Once in the car, we think of ourselves as the only person around; all of those other creatures are mere obstacles to our getting where we needed to be a minute ago. Testosterone and the gas pedal have long been symbiotic, and so we are not surprised when the teenager listening to “his” gangsta rap tries to run over a pedestrian in a cross walk. But now we have soccer moms in SUVs listening to “their” Garth Brooks doing the same. Now that everyone drives tanks, the next step almost surely will be machine guns mounted above the headlights with triggers just above the cruise control; SAM missiles will soon be standard.

So the next time you see someone pulling out of a parking lot talking on a cell phone—if the call is so damned important, why don’t they just stay parked?—duck. They may be taking aim.
Not so long ago, during a casual conversation with a fellow student, I was brought up short by a rather pointed question. "How did you know you wanted to be a writer?" Brenda asked.

My first reaction, odd as it may seem now, was genuine puzzlement. How did I know I wanted to be a writer? The answer felt so elementary, my desire so deeply ingrained, that I could only say to myself, "How could anyone want to do anything else?"

When I think back to the first time I dreamed of writing, I picture the solitary little girl I was in second grade. My name was Amy, and that alone was a curse. In a classroom filled with pretty, perfect girls named Michelle and Bethany and Holly, "Amy" was the plain-Jane kind of name that nobody wanted. Still, it was my name, and I was stuck with it, just as I was stuck with dull brown hair in a room full of blondes. While my classmates made it through each day, smooth golden braids perfectly in place, I was forever attempting to gather loose strands of my hideously straight stuff back into stubborn rubber bands that either refused to hold or tangled and pulled mercilessly. Of course, my clumsy young fingers could never get the ponytails quite even, and I just knew that everyone around me could see how lopsided my head was. After all, how many days could I walk around with one long ponytail waving perkily from the top of my head and the other hanging low behind the opposite ear, before someone noticed the oddity?

With a common, every-day name, dull brown hair, and a pair of tortoise-shell-framed glasses, is it any wonder that I had other problems as well? Perhaps I was simply doomed to be forever uncoordinated, or maybe it was the fact that I was markedly chubby that made games of physical skill—such as the almighty dodge ball—difficult. But whatever the reason, gym class was an unparalleled trial for me that year. From my pathetic
attempts to walk the balance beam to the horror of the
exercise known simply as “bicycling.” I dreaded that
twice-weekly appointment with humiliation.

Art class was, unfortunately, not much better. My
performance record with the school’s standard thick,
white paste was less-than-stellar; I seemed to leave the
art nook/boiler room with far more of the sticky stuff on
my clothing than on my construction paper. Not that it
mattered much, as my clothes were nothing to marvel
at. While other little girls wore frilly dresses that fit
their slim figures perfectly, I seemed always to be pop-
ing out of homemade outfits that squished and
squeezed in all the wrong places. While the Judy’s and
the Paula’s could carry off the Marsha-Brady-double-
knit-jumpsuits, I was one of the first to discover that
polyester was quite unforgiving, even when it bore the
“Pretty Plus” logo from Sears.

Now, before you begin to fear that you have been
plopped down in the midst of a pseudo Greek tragedy,
allow me to ease your mind. While I was
an awkward
child and second grade was trying, the year was not
without redemption. Yes, there were plenty of embara-
rrasing moments, such as the day I dropped a glass jar of
jellybeans on the white and gray tile and a room full of
seven and eight-year-olds burst into peals of laughter as
hundreds of colorful candies skittered across the floor.
But there were also the bright spots, such as the day I
sang my first solo before the Huntsville Elementary PTA;
“The Good Ship Lollipop” remains, to this day, one of my
favorite songs. And there was Mrs. Benedict, second
grade teacher extraordinaire.

Mrs. Benedict was amazing in the simple fact that
she was neither perfect nor blonde. A slightly overweight
woman, she often wore her long brown hair in ponytails
located on either side of her head, just as I did. Since her
hair was also limp and fine, she too could be seen restyling
it in the afternoons. Of course, without access to a mirror,
it was certainly difficult for her to get those ponytails
straight and so, early on, I found a kindred, lop-headed
spirit in a second-grade teacher named Mrs. Benedict.
More important than her physical attributes was Mrs. Benedict's ability to not simply teach, but to nurture her students. She was the kind of young, enthusiastic teacher that waited at the door every morning, eager to greet each child with a smile and a hug. She was not afraid to try new methods of teaching, and she would not give up on a child simply because he or she failed the first or second or even the third time around. She looked for the good in every one of her students, and in the spring of 1975, she found the good in me.

The school year was coming to a close, and Mrs. Benedict was preparing our class for the more rigorous challenges we would face in third grade. Part of that preparation was an introduction to the “book report,” and to that end, she assigned a special combination art and reading project that was to be turned in the next-to-last week of school. She explained with enthusiasm the idea of a shadow box that each of us would make, recreating a scene from his or her favorite book. Along with the artistic portion of the assignment, we would write a short summary of the scene being portrayed, and would take turns presenting both to the class.

Although this was not to be a competition, the playground was abuzz that afternoon, as each child bragged of his or her shadow-box presentation. My classmates had such grand schemes, and every plan was richer and more spectacular than the next. When someone at last interrupted my game of hopscotch solitaire to ask what I had planned, I just shrugged and said, “I don’t know yet.” But as I returned to my game, I smiled to myself, knowing full well what scene I would put into my shadow box. Ah yes, this was going to be my opportunity to shine.

You see, throughout that difficult school year, I had become a voracious reader. Always the first to finish classroom assignments, I had worked through the optional reading comprehension program in record time. Having noticed this, Mrs. Benedict encouraged me to borrow from the school library books that would normally have been considered beyond my grade level. She even
spoke to the librarian on my behalf, informing Mrs. Stilson of my progress so she would not question the fact that I took home books from the third and fourth grade shelves. Sometimes, when all was quiet in the classroom, Mrs. Benedict would call me back to her desk, and we would discuss the latest stories that I had read. My teacher would explain any words that had been beyond my comprehension, and we would laugh over the antics of the characters I was coming to love.

One such book was *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and it was a scene from this classic tale that I planned on duplicating in my shadow box. I had read *A Little Princess* during the rainy month of March, when a book had been my only escape from the chaos of a house full of crying younger siblings and a second-shift father who needed quiet to sleep. Often times, I had crept into the den or even into the back seat of the family's blue Ford station wagon, looking for a quiet place where I could turn a page and step into the streets of London along with Sara Crewe, the "little-girl-who-was-not-a-beggar." It was in the chapter called, appropriately enough, "The Magic," that I discovered the undeniably *real* sort of magic that Mrs. Benedict had been encouraging me to find—the magic of the written word.

The scene, located near the end of the book, had grasped my attention from the very first reading. Burnett's description of the moment that impoverished Sara Crewe wakes up to find her dreams of warmth and comfort a surprising reality was so genuine that I could *hear* the crackle of the blazing fire, *feel* the warmth of the eiderdown quilt. This was not merely reading; this was living! In that moment, my surprise was as great as hers, as I realized for the first time that a good book allowed the reader to *feel* and *see* through the eyes of another. Not only could I *learn* something by reading, but also I could *experience*—thanks to the work of a truly gifted writer—a world new and beyond the realm of my quiet Ohio upbringing. I could travel distant shores, walk in others' shoes. In short, I could escape, leaving
my humble and not always happy existence for an hour or two, and yet return safe and sound in time for supper or bedtime prayers. It was a defining moment, a moment that made me who I am today.

For weeks, I poured over *A Little Princess*, memorizing every detail of the scene I intended to portray. Little clumsy-with-paste-me spent every spare moment at the kitchen table, meticulously duplicating Burnett's written description of the moment Sara Crewe awakens to find herself surrounded by the comfort and warmth she has not known since her father's death. With my mother's help, I brought that scene to life. From the blazing fire to the table laden with small covered dishes, I did not rest until every detail was perfect. I searched magazines and catalogs for pictures of a lamp with a rosy shade like the one the author had described, and crowed in triumph the day I laid hands on just the right thing. I completed the project with bits of fabric from Mom's sewing scraps, and at last placed the lid carefully on the shoebox so that nothing would be disturbed during the bus ride the next day.

I wish I could tell you now that my shadow box project earned a blue ribbon or launched a fabulous art career, but that would not be the truth. For even though my classmate's oohs and ahs were a much needed boost to my self-confidence, I'm sure if I could take out that shadow box today, I would find it just a simple elementary school art project pieced together with awkward hands. In fact, I am perhaps a bit relieved that my second-grade "book report" has not survived the years, for viewing it now would most likely be a disappointment. I doubt that the reality of that tenderly crafted scene could withstand the scrutiny of my adult opinion, and I would surely be disheartened to find it less magical than I remember.

So, rather than providing a "happily ever after," I will share instead a glimmer of truth from my own life. These days, when someone asks me why I want to be a writer, I tell them about a book called *A Little Princess* and a second grade project that awakened in me a love for
the well-told story. Twenty-five years ago, Mrs. Benedict and the author Frances Hodgson Burnett introduced me to the sheer beauty and the mystical power of a well-written book. If I can pass that understanding on to even one person, I will not have pursued this dream in vain.
Abram Barnett was a not particularly computer savvy student at The Ohio State University at Marion. He is now living in Upper Michigan on an Indian Reservation.

Didi Fahey is a dual History and English major who graduated from OSUM in Fall quarter 2000. She has been a regular contributor of Veritas & Vantias in the past, and hopefully she will continue to contribute as an honored alumni.

JoAnne Fitzgerald writes for the Morrow County Sentinel. She has a BA in History and a minor in Sociology. She now feels free to indulge in taking writing classes while participating in the over-60 program at OSUM.

Alexis Jones is a poet and writer who graduated from OSUM in Summer quarter 2000.

Douglas Lewis graduated from OSUM Spring Quarter 2000.

Jeremy Payton is a student at OSUM.

Jonas Shamel’s most recent work, “Kurt Cobain Is Dead, and I Can’t Accept It,” was published posthumously. Tragically, he was struck by a minivan while crossing the Meijer parking lot on Marion-Mount Gilead Road, in Marion. He later died at Marion General Hospital of massive head trauma. He is survived by his mother, Dona Shamel, Caledonia, father, Jeffrey Shamel,
Sugarcreek, brother, Josiah Shamel, and his two nieces, Alena (3), and Emma (2 days old), all of Caledonia. Any donations may be sent to his favorite charity, the People for Sending Pornography to Less Fortunate Teenages at 5737 Harding Highway East, Caledonia, Ohio, 43314. There is also a book in production by his girlfriend, Angela, to be published at a date to be announced, which will contain all of Jonas' works in anthology form. All proceeds made by the book will be donated to the Club a Baby Seal Foundation.

Dianne Schluep wrote "The Alarm Clock" as an assignment for Scott DeWitt's Spring Quarter 2000 English 110 class at OSUM.

Janice Skaggs has taken classes in photography at OSUM.

David Steigerwald teaches American history at OSUM. He has three cars too many, but at least he doesn't owe any money on them.

John Underwood is currently in his second year at OSUM. His major is food science and nutrition. He is employed by the Pillsbury Company as a production/warehouse supervisor. His only real interests involve his wife and his children.

Amanda Yoder is a non-traditional OSUM student, wife and proud mother of two. She divides her time between college classes, her own homework, her children's homework, cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, and finally writing. She hopes to graduate by the time she is eighty.
Supervisory Project, Teacher Enhancement, and inter-structure. 

Also (4) and (5) name two of the six categories. The categories may be used to improve student development, the teacher letter for student performance, to face performance, teachers in

372 {Handicapped Program - Career College - Text 192

There is also a book in preparation for the field. 

50-90. Each of these is given to the student to complete with work.

Angela is in preparation of a grade to be accomplished whose

will continue till January, which is another month in October-192

which is the grade for the book will be included to the Club a

weekly self-contribution.

Diane obtained some "The Atlanta Chart", as in

development for Sport DeWave Shack Chapter 1926

English 110 class of OSUM.

One section of these classes is photography at

OSUM.

The Department of Fine Arts, American Indian Program of OSUM.

and these are too many, and all in front of courses, can not

would had their

John Woodrow is Currently in the second year in

OSUM. His major is Social Science and Nutrition. He is

employed by the Hill north Company as a Photographer

wearing uniform. His only job is to increase the


Assistant Yager to the non-indigenous OSUM student, will

and many others. Two of the. She believes in time between

college classes, her own. Aromatics for allergies

Professor computer alongside the Internet, and

finance writing. She hopes to graduate by the time she is

eight.