Veritas and Vanitas
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J. A. Conley is the father of two beautiful girls. He is a senior at The Ohio State University at Marion majoring in English and plans to get his Masters in Education.
As the nurse was reaching for a blanket to wrap our newborn in, the doctor laid him on his mother’s stomach. Once the cord was cut, the nurse wrapped the newborn in a blanket sealing in the warmth and only exposing a tuft of black, wet hair, and a small, innocent, slightly blue, but mostly pink face with two coal-black eyes that were trying desperately to focus on their new, cold, sterile environment. The nurse turned to me and, as she handed him to me, said, “Here’s your son.” She said it so casually, like she was unaware of the previous six months of careful planning, anxious waiting, and nervous nights as the due date had crept closer and closer. I was trying desperately to remember all I had been taught: support his head, keep one hand on his bottom, hold him close but don’t squeeze. All these instructions and more came rushing back in an instant. I couldn’t do it. I was confident of only one thing—I was going to drop him. The nurse, unknowing of my thoughts and newfound clumsiness, placed him in my arms, and I, feeling as awkward as a child taking his first steps, took him.

Exactly one week after my twenty-first birthday, Sunday, November 30th, 1986, Ian Tyler Conley was born to the proud parents of J. and A. Conley. Ian weighed in at 9 pounds, 2 ounces, was 21 inches long and had a 19-inch chest. “That explains the thirteen hours of labor,” clarified the doctor. “He’s a good-size, strong, healthy boy.” Those comments alone are enough to make any father swell with pride, but to see and touch him, to be able to actually count fingers and toes and know they are all there, that’s what makes any parent’s heart skip and lay to rest any worries.

To make a choice is to decide. I have always been told and strongly believe that you always have a choice. That choice may be between two unappealing alternatives and it may seem like you don’t have a choice, but the fact remains that there is a choice and a decision needs to be made. Decision-making is something we all do every day, and the majority of these are so mundane we never give them a second
thought. Occasionally we make life-altering decisions: college, marriage, kids, etc. Most of these life-altering decisions not only concern us personally, but often times affect those who are closest to us. In turn, their opinions, attitudes and feedback reflect in our decision-making. Sometimes, once a decision has been reached we find ourselves reflecting on major choices wondering “what if...?”

We really hadn’t talked about having kids; the furthest our discussions had reached was getting married. January 1, 1987 was the date we chose for the simple reason that, to us, it seemed appropriate that our new lives together should start with a new year. I had had two years to get the partying out of my system and was ready to take life a little more seriously. Besides, it was only February; that still gave us about ten months to plan the wedding and allowed me to enroll in college by the fall. These were conscious decisions I had made. Her getting pregnant was not. May 17, 1986, we were wed, and, like most newlyweds, the world was ours.

For the next six months, we did everything typical, expecting newlywed parents did. We fixed up the spare room in non-specific gender colors and decorations. We had agreed, much to the chagrin of the grandparents, that we didn’t want to know the sex of the baby until it was born. We read and followed the advice of all leading experts on prenatal care. We even read, talked, and played music to our child in the womb. No decision concerning our child was too great or small that we couldn’t overcome, except choosing a name.

Name books were bought, suggestions listened to, and every time we thought we had found the perfect pair of names (one male, one female), a week later we’d be searching for new ones. She argued for family or biblical names; I fought for unique, seldom-used names. In an attempt to make our task easier, we decided to let the father choose a boy’s name and the mother choose a girl’s name, with the understanding that, although it may not be the other’s first choice, it would still have to get the other’s approval. A month before Ian was born, names—ones we could both live with and, we hoped, our child could also—were chosen.
There are decisions that we would rather not make or confront, hoping that if we ignore them, they will work themselves out or just go away. If we choose to handle a decision in such a way, the end result, more times than not, turns out worse than the original options presented. Coping with a decision in this way can be a result of fear, anxiety, or just avoidance of reality. Fear is a result of what other people will think or say. Anxiety comes from not knowing or understanding how we got ourselves into this situation. And avoidance is simply the unwillingness to cope—"It can’t be happening to me."

It was the end of March when she told me she thought she was pregnant: "I took a home pregnancy test and it came out pink."

"So, that means what?" I asked, already afraid of the answer.

"That I’m pregnant," A. replied

"Fuck!" was all I could say. Visions filled my head: no college, no degree, working construction the rest of my life. I could feel the weight of the world pressing—no cutting—into my shoulders. "Father,” "Dad,” all of a sudden, these words I had used so nonchalantly in my twenty years had new meaning: RESPONSIBILITY. I was out of smokes and took hers saying, "You won’t need these anymore.” I smoked 18 cigarettes in the next hour-and-a-half as we talked about what we should do. It was decided: we had to tell our parents.

The previous six months had passed without a care for me. Suddenly, past family conversations came rolling back. My cousin at fifteen had just given birth to a baby that she put up for adoption. A secretary at the family business was pregnant and unwed. My mom and dad had just bought a brand new Chrysler New Yorker, and my comment to them was, “That’s a grandparents’ car.” A prophetic statement. How was I going to tell them that they would soon be grandparents and that I had managed to achieve what the rest of the family was ridiculing?

On a Sunday morning two weeks later, I awoke to a phone call: "My parents are having breakfast with yours." Knowing that I had been unable to live up to my end of the bargain, I had a good idea what the conversation over breakfast entailed.

"I didn’t tell my parents," I answered.
"Neither did I. My Dad found the pregnancy test under the front seat of my car," A. said. "He's mad and Mom is hurt." I could sense the nervousness and a quiver in her voice as A. said this.

"Well, they know now, so we have to face up to the music." By the tone in her voice, I knew I had to sound confident. I only hoped that confidence came through.

Once we allow someone else to start making our decisions for us, we lose part of ourselves. No longer is the decision ours but that of someone else. We may find ourselves thinking, "This is what I want but not how I want it." Our decision-making process becomes hampered by the what, where, when, and how or by the conforming to what everyone else wants, not because we can't make decisions, but because they affect so many other people. But as long as the end result nets us what we really desire, then the rest is trivial.

Most of the wedding plans were made that Sunday morning when both sets of parents and the two victims of circumstance were all gathered in my parents' family room. A. and I just kicked back and let the decisions be made. It no longer mattered to her parents, who were devout Christians, what we wanted. I fought briefly for the first of the year like A. and I wanted. I lost. It was more important that we were married before A. started to "show" and definitely before the baby was born. It was her parents that pushed for this and made these decisions about our lives.

My parents watched, listened, and didn't offer much input other than setting a wedding date. After the smoke cleared and we were alone, they said, "With adult games come adult responsibilities." I didn't receive disapproving looks, catch hell, or get a lecture. Instead, the law was put to me plain and simple: "Getting married is your decision, but being a father is no longer a choice. You are. Whether you get married or not, you will be a father, and you will be there for your child, emotionally, financially, and anyway that you possibly can." Another decision made for me.
Some decisions are made before you are aware they are being made; they're instinctual. Split-second decisions are not made in haste but of necessity. They are made to protect.

A severe case of jaundice sent Ian to the hospital for an overnight stay when he was about a month old. Ian's blood was taken every two to three hours so that the jaundice level could be tracked. This painfully scary procedure required nothing more than a prick with a needle on his heel, which would supply the nurse with the blood required, but also inform the entire wing that tremendous pain was being inflicted upon my son, as he would let out scream after scream. At least we knew his lungs were still in terrific health. He was kept under a fluorescent lamp to help counteract the jaundice. The lights appeared to be doing nothing because his levels were creeping ever closer to the danger zone. I am not able to remember what the critical levels were or where Ian's were, but I know that he was drastically close to where brain damage can occur. A. decided she would stay the night with him, concerned and unwilling to go home to what would be a now unnaturally quiet apartment. I decided to stay also. A nurse set up two cots with a curtain to help block out the shine of the lights that Ian would be forced to sleep under.

Ian had only slept fitfully throughout the afternoon and into the evening. Around midnight, he fell asleep from pure exhaustion, I think, with another blood test only two hours away. The nurse suggested we get some rest as well, saying she would wake us when she came in for the next test.

I awoke to a blood-curdling scream that I knew to be Ian's desperate plea for help. Disoriented and half-awake, I saw a strange figure standing over my son with a needle in her hand and a smile on her face. Lips were moving, but no sound registered in my head. I lunged at the figure in white, fist clenched and drawn, ready to inflict some serious pain on the person who caused Ian such grief. As I saw a look of fear pass over the figure-in-white's face, I heard a familiar voice say "Don't!" and, as I turned and saw A., my mind unclouded, and I realized where I was and what was happening. As the hatred and anger
must have washed off my face, relief and color came back into the nurse’s.

A. later told me all this; she saw nothing in my eyes but blank hatred as I focused on my victim, and she was actually scared that I was going to kill the nurse. I only remember hearing Ian scream, a strange person standing over my son and, intuitively, deciding to protect my own.

As a parent you make many decisions for your children. Not only are you guiding them, but you are also teaching them a process so they can make their own decisions someday. But when children are very young, parents are their lives, their worlds and, God-like figures. The decisions that you make for them shape, mold, and aid them in becoming who they will eventually be. These decisions are the most critical we will ever make.

On the last Sunday of February, 1987, everyone had gathered at A.’s parents’ house to celebrate her birthday. Ian had just eaten, and A. laid him down to nap on her parents’ bed, while the rest of us enjoyed cake and ice cream in the next room. As the dishes were being cleared from the table, A., with ears only a mother possess, noticed that there weren’t the normal stirring or sleeping noises coming from the next room.

“I’ll check on him,” replied Ian’s overly anxious grandpa. He was notorious for not being able to let sleeping grandkids lie. We knew Ian would soon be awake.

As the light flipped on, I heard a soft desperate plea: “A., J., come here quick!” I looked on the bed expecting to see Ian in some cute or funny sleeping position; instead I gazed at a gray-blue, lifeless form. Commands flew out of my father-in-law’s mouth; forgetting shoes and coat, I got the car, my mother-in-law called the hospital, Grandpa began administering CPR, and A. stood still from shock.

Because they lived close to the hospital, it took only five minutes to arrive. We rushed through the emergency room doors into the awaiting team of doctors and nurses. Ian was snatched from my
father-in-law. As A. and I tried to follow, a nurse blocked our path. Ignoring our pleas—"We're his parents!"—she forbid us from going any further. We could only watch as Ian disappeared behind a white curtain and insurance forms were thrust into our now-empty hands.

Time no longer moved forward but hung in the air, suspended. Relatives began showing up. The story of what had happened was repeated with each new arrival; it ended with eyes nervously glancing at the white curtain. Eyes continued to glance from magazines or hands to the curtain. I waited, hopefully—fearfully—for news from behind the curtain. The doctor sauntered out, grim-faced, staring at his clipboard. I wanted to run, to leave this behind; I didn’t want to know how Ian was or what had happened. I just wanted out.

"Your son’s breathing, sporadically." The words fell out of the doctor’s mouth. A spark of hope. "Right now, it’s hard to say how much damage may have been done. Life flight from Columbus’ Children’s Hospital is in route" The words hit like bricks. The spark flickers but fails to catch.

"Take backs" are not allowed in the decision-making process. The most we can hope for is to prepare ourselves in every possible way before making our decision. Gaining knowledge and basing the decision on wisdom and the gut oftentimes is the best approach to a decision. Often decisions are regretted, the wrong choice was made. Never regret a decision. Regret fills you with unanswerable questions and doubt, thinking it was a mistake. Take the decision as it was made, review it, learn from it, not as a mistake but as a learning experience.

Ian was twelve days young when he had his first professionally-taken picture. Snapshots at Christmas exist and a few others, not many. More are present of five days in the hospital than are from three months of life.

Grandparents and parents were crowded into a small, shelf-lined room. We sat on orange vinyl-cushioned industrial-type couches. Ian was wheeled in, all wires and tubes were removed before he was
laid on his mother’s and my laps. Briefly he was my son again: no machines, no wires or tubes, just a small boy dependent on his mother and father. I wanted for him to open his eyes and smile at me, to see him one last time. I tried with everything I had to will my life into him. So many emotions—anger, hate, loss, disappointment—swelled in me. I concentrated on love, hoping that if I loved him just a little more, a little harder, that’s all it would take.

Everything was quiet as we walked through the lobby, eyes swollen, humbled. Wearily a voice spoke: “Let’s go home.” It hit then. Everything hit, and it hit hard. I collapsed. I could feel the energy, the life, drain out of me. What I had tried so desperately to give my son just minutes ago was gone from me now, too late and spent in the wrong direction. For five days and nights, the purple-blue ICU lobby had been my home: the institutional couches my bed, the elevators my windows and doors to the rest of the world. Home? I sank to the floor and tears filled my eyes for the first time in five days.

“That’s it, we just go home?” I asked. So much had been put into the last five days, it couldn’t be as simple as going home. Going home had meant seeing Ian, family, the three of us eating dinner, changing diapers, grousing in the middle of the night when Ian woke up crying. That was home. I had no home. These things had been taken away from me. Maybe I had even taken them away from myself. No, we weren’t going home; we were going to where we lived.
Ryan Cook is a sophomore majoring in English at The Ohio State University at Marion.

The War Within

Ryan Cook

My family probably isn’t much different from most others. I can make this generalization because it is like many of the families my friends had. Most of my friends’ parents are now divorced also, a common thread. None of my friends saw it coming, either. Their parents appeared to be acting fine one minute, and the next-Wham-nothing but arguing. Then came divorce. We were all been ambushed, left with the same questions.

It didn’t occur to me that my parents actually had arguments. Yet, I can think of a million times my best friends and I had arguments much the same way. We would fight over stupid things like girls or which club was the coolest. And, much like my parents were acting, we didn’t want anyone to know of our fights. That would have just been too embarrassing.
My parents were just like most others. They seemed to love each other, and why shouldn’t they? They were, after all, married. I can’t think of a time when I didn’t hear my parents say “I love you” as they walked out the door to work. They seemed to get along, at least around my brother and me. It was very hard to notice that things were slowly falling apart between the two of them, especially since they didn’t let it show very often that they were unhappy.

My parents were very good at hiding their emotions. They wanted everything to appear normal, and they did a decent job at accomplishing this. Almost like clockwork, each night when my dad arrived home from a stressful day at the office, my mom had dinner on the table waiting for us. They always took dinner more seriously than my brother or me. Dinner to us meant we would have to sit around and discuss what happened during the course of our day at school, probably the most unappetizing subject to eat over. I usually said nothing. I tried to keep my mouth as full as possible, hoping to avoid discussing anything. I wanted to listen to their days, not mine.

One night, my brother and I both had the intention of going to bed, but that quickly faded. We shared a room together, equipped with bunk beds. Since I was the oldest and the biggest, I figured it was my birthright to get the top bunk. My brother didn’t see it the same. In fact he hated that I got the top bunk. He thought he would get even by pushing up on the top bunk. This always seemed to backfire on him; I would somehow manage to slip my arm down the side of the bed and the wall and lasso his leg with the belt from my bathrobe. What a sight to see. He was persistent with his kicking, but seemed to always find himself at my mercy. After roping him, it was normally time to let the games begin. Our favorite was commandos; we must have played it every night. We thought we would be real cool and attempt to sneak out of our room in order to ambush our parents. Mistake number one. We actually got more than we bargained for. We managed to find ourselves thrust into the middle of World War One between our parents. I still picture it plain as day. I was usually the brave one who would assume the duties of being in charge. This meant I had to stay close to our room in case of attack, while my brother was out on a
reconnaissance mission. Aaron seemed to love the mission he was given; I still blame it on younger brother syndrome. I can still convince my brother to do some rather dumb things. I think it is some sort of faith which the youngest brother puts in the older brother, hoping that what he is told to do will not backfire on him. My brother and I have always gotten along great, partially because he always followed my advice. He was never really one to question what I had ordered him to do until it was over. Now if he ever got caught I would support him, but not until the following morning.

My brother was the first to go downstairs; he crept down each step slowly. We both knew where each little creak lay. He was supposed to report back but didn’t. So, naturally, I decided to see what the holdup was. No holdup, just excessive observation. I couldn’t blame him, because I became glued to what he was watching, too. It was something neither of us had ever encountered before—our parents fighting. At first, my reaction was of shock and big deal. However, it was bigger than I had thought; this was a full-blown argument. We both heard words we wouldn’t understand for years to come.

We knew that this was wrong and that we would have to attempt to stop it. Therefore, we retreated back to our base to make our plan of attack. We had it! This plan was great! It would have made the greatest of war strategists jealous. We pulled out our erector set and Legos to see what weapons of war we could construct. Before long we were both covered in plastic armor, complete with swords, arrows, and a shield.

Now came the fun part—getting to the war zone without being detected. As usual, my brother went first to our position to dig in and prepare to give me the signal. Once we were safely in our position, I began to bark out the orders. Basically, the orders consisted of “Fire when ready.” We were hoping these suction-cupped arrows would pay off. We were right, after a five-minute barrage of arrows. This was great; we had arrows flying everywhere. I’d swear to this day we even had one blast the TV. This worked better than we had thought—the attention was turned towards us. The fighting had stopped, and we
were about to declare victory. We didn’t have time to declare it, however, before we heard my father say, “I thought you two were supposed to be in bed? Now get up there and I don’t want to repeat myself.” We thought we had won and decided it best to retreat. We didn’t get halfway up the stairs until the fighting kicked in again.

By the time the fight finally stopped, my mother had decided it would be best if she spent the night at her sister’s house. Things really went down hill from here, and all my brother and I could do was sit back and wonder why?

With my mother deciding it was best to stay at our aunt’s house we were thinking this was sort of cool. Why not? How many kids can just pack up and go to a different relative’s house when they want to. I would have to say we looked at it as more of a vacation than as our parents actually splitting up. We had not even begun to discover the war between our parents that lay ahead.

I remember it all, that one night at my aunt’s house. It quickly turned into much more. Within a week, my mother had begun to search for an apartment in Worthington. It didn’t help that the bulk of her strategic planning came from her sister. Her sister was very nice. However, if given the chance she would have gladly launched an attack against my dad. In more ways than one she really did.

I can’t honestly say that my mom’s sisters hated my dad, but it sure did appear that way. No matter what he did, it seemed to always upset them. They would seem to always poke fun at him during the family gatherings; he let it roll off his back. They just didn’t think that he seemed to do enough for his family. Who in the hell were they to decide what was right for his family? They had enough of their own problems. Each and every one of their marriages had failed. Most of their problem with my dad was the fact that he was doing more for my mom than had been done for them in their previous marriages.

When my mom came home to tell my dad that she was going to move out, she dropped a big bomb on us all. That’s when the magnitude of the events leading up to this hit me. I am not too sure that my
brother could really understand what was happening. To him it was probably still very much a vacation. True, we would both be going and coming a lot. But that was going to get old real soon. Especially since our parents, as we came to find out, were going to fight over us as much as they were fighting about themselves.

I remember my brother and I being marched out of our school here in Marion and arriving in Worthington where we would now enroll in a school which seemed to be four times larger than the school we were previously enrolled in. This new school seemed awkward at first. We didn’t really know why we had been switched there in the first place. We were given strict orders once we arrived in Worthington; no one could sign us out of school except for my mother. This was just crazy! Talk about responsibility; I was left with no choice, knowing that there was a possibility someone might actually want to come down and physically remove my brother and me. This was, of course, if they found force necessary. I remember constantly walking around the school trying to get a fix on my brother’s position. I was more aware of what he was doing than what I was doing.

We didn’t know what to think. I was in the third grade and felt that the world was crashing down on me. I could barely remember my homework assignments, let alone care for my brother. What else should I be thinking about? Thank God my friends understood. They tried to make me feel not too alienated. However, I am sure that many of them wondered what was going on in my family. I know that I sure did. Back then, everything was pretty much a blur. I am just now to the point where I can begin to analyze and try to understand what exactly went on. I wonder about many of the decisions which were being made for us. Many of them I find unfair, especially since my parents were, well, supposed to be just that—parents. However, they were not acting like it. They were acting more like children, and my brother and I were left to do the parenting. I can now begin to see where this twisted mess people call divorce becomes so crazy. Heck, neither one of my parents really knew what was best for us. How could they? They were too busy fighting their own problems to worry about how we were being torn apart because of them.
It was a vicious cycle; my mom was afraid of us being taken away from her by my dad and his troops. Rightfully so. After all, my dad was trying to hold things together. In order to do so, he would have to reconstruct our family, member by member. No matter what one of our parents did, the other would dislike it. We were now beginning to see a part of the picture that would have been best left unfinished. Being so young, my brother and I became likely targets for an attack. Our parents were now starting to switch from an emotional side to a side which appeared motivated strictly by the possibility of financial gain. There is still not a doubt in my mind that our biggest importance to each parent in this situation was one of financial gain. We were now just pawns in a hopeless game of chess. Each move now had to be carefully thought out. There was no room for error. I am in no way insinuating that we were no longer loved; I am just saying our parents were going to attempt to use us in a conspiracy against each other. The goal now was to see who would be left standing at the end.

Now that I am a little older, I can see why my mother was so paranoid about my dad coming to take us back “home.” There really had not yet been a trial to settle the custody issue. My dad didn’t want to lose us and neither did my mom. Once again, we were placed right in the middle. It was starting to seem to my brother and me that we were actually the cause of the problem.

I still wonder if things would have turned out differently if my brother and I would not have gone along with my mom to Worthington and, instead, stayed at home with my dad. I think that my mom would have felt a much greater sorrow and emptiness than she was already experiencing. It is very hard to analyze her thoughts and feelings. I can only attempt to compare them to the feelings of hate and anger my brother and I were facing. She must have felt as if she was ruining everyone’s lives. In my opinion she did, to a certain degree. However, I have long since forgiven her for what happened. I haven’t forgotten; I have simply decided to do what they should have done. Let bygones be bygones.
My dad and mom continued to argue back and forth; the only thing was now our arrows and swords were worthless. We had to think up new methods that would stop the fighting. We had never been accustomed to this type of warfare before. Both of our parents were now living in two separate towns. In order for us to see one or the other, we would have to be escorted around like POWs. I felt this way, and I am sure my brother did, too. We both experienced a weird feeling of emptiness together. My brother Aaron and I were both so darn lost in this whole issue we didn’t know where to turn. Neither of us openly discussed this recent family problem; we just downplayed it and tried to think up different problems we could relate to each other and get a hypothetical answer for. I started to notice a change in my brother and me, a sort of empty feeling. One that I still have today. I just feel that they both did my brother and me a huge injustice. What were they hoping to accomplish, especially my dad? I don’t think anyone in my family will ever forget the night my dad came down to get us. We were returning home from the store when my mom noticed an awful lot of police cars and activity in our neighborhood. When we turned onto our road we saw my dad at one end and, right behind him, his attorney. What a mess. Police cars were now following us towards our house. My mom was really scared, and my brother and I were not helping any by crying and telling her we didn’t want to go to jail. We did not turn into my mom’s house; instead, we drove a little further down to my mom’s attorney’s house. No sooner had we pulled in the driveway then we were surrounded by the police cars.

I don’t blame my dad as much now as I did then for creating this huge spectacle; after all, he was trying to do what he thought best for my brother and me. I don’t know what I would have done if I were put in that position. I just wish he had taken a closer look at the situation. Here are my brother and me with no idea what is going to happen to us, or, for that matter, to our parents. We are then thrust into a new school at a very young age. Then, to top it off, we have to constantly wonder if the cops are going to try to take us back to Marion.

I kept wondering what these stupid cops were doing the whole time my mom and dad were in the house arguing. The worst thing was
that my brother and I were trapped. We couldn’t do a thing. We had a police officer standing right beside the car who wouldn’t let us out. I said everything mean that I could think of to the officer. Even though that officer was doing her job, I hated her. I know that is a strong word, but I didn’t have any other feeling but hate towards this person. She was, once again, doing what she thought was right for us. Since when did a cop become a child psychologist? She surely could have been out catching a robber or murderer. But no, she had to stay and hold my brother and me hostage, while my parents undoubtedly fought it out inside. We couldn’t do anything. We felt helpless.

Why did our parents just up and decide to split? It still is a stupid idea to me. I just wonder what went wrong. Did they really mean all of those nasty words my brother and I heard them call each other?
Lori Halfacre is a dual Information Systems and English major! Wow! She plans to be rich someday. And Famous. She’s pretty cool.

Making Connections
Lori Halfacre

Nove says, “I can’t believe how much she looks like her daddy!” Uncle Everett says, “No. She’s a Sullivan.” He has mashed potatoes on the end of his nose. He is old. We all smile at each other but no one will tell him. After a while he and my mother are dancing a jig around the kitchen drinking some muscadine wine he keeps in the basement. I slip out and go to the bathroom. I gaze at my face in the mirror. I do have my father’s cheekbones and high forehead but my mother’s freckles hide them. Suddenly it is visible to me that I am his daughter. I touch his forehead and cheekbones. I am not as tall as he
was but everyone says I am tall for a girl. Yes, he and I are related. We are made from the same flesh.

Discovering what my ancestors were like is difficult for me. I have never really known any of my grandparents. Only two were still alive when I was born, and we moved several hundred miles away from them when I was quite young. They seemed like strangers to me rather than grandparents, people we would go visit maybe once or twice a year. There was no special bond between us. Before I had the chance to start to get to know them it was time to go home. They both died a couple of years ago. My maternal grandmother died a year before I was born, which I guess is why I inherited her name.

My paternal grandfather occupies an inordinately large part of my thoughts at times. I can’t help but wonder why he did what he did. Questions race through my mind. I try to understand. Was my grandmother so bad that he could not stay with her? She seemed like a decent enough person to me, although I knew her only casually. Was he just this lusty, self-indulgent person who cared for no one? This seems more likely when I look at the number of wives and children he had. I don’t like this answer though, because it reflects on his progeny. If he was such a bad person, by our standards, I wonder if his descendants might inherit those traits. This doesn’t seem likely knowing most of his posterity, but what if these traits rear their ugly heads later in life? I worry they might manifest themselves in me. I also wonder if, perhaps since his parents did not raise him, he had no real sense of roots. Maybe he thought he was not wanted and when the least little thing set him off, he ran as far and as fast as he could.

My father died when I was very young. He dropped dead in the back yard while mowing it one day. No one, not even he, knew he was ill. How can one know that a killer blood clot is traveling through his body making a beeline for his heart? It isn’t felt unless it’s that nagging little pain in the left leg that will pass. It passed all right, through his heart. He did not know that he would be laughing and playing with his two youngest children in the back yard one day and lying in it gasping his dying breath the next.

She says he stuck his tongue out as he walked by the window. She was doing the dishes. She heard the lawn mower shut off and he
didn’t come in. What could he be doing? She went outside. She screams. My sister and I run outside. Why is Daddy lying on the ground? He looks purple. Purple is his favorite color. Aaayzee! Aaayzee! She screams. A. Z. is at the neighbor’s house. A. Z. comes to give him CPR. He does not respond. The ambulance comes. My older brother picks me up. His wife picks up my sister because she is smaller. We will go with them. My mother is still screaming.

I am standing in a field looking into the sky as the swollen, ghostly clouds creep across the sea of cerulean. I see apparitions in these clouds. One resembles a mushroom, another an elephant. That one looks like the portraits of an angelic Jesus I always see. I don’t know if I believe in Jesus. Sometimes I want to. I imagine that I can see what is on the other side of the clouds. I see the great kingdom of God, as I know it from pictures. My father is there. He is happy. He smiles down at me and watches over me. He is my guardian angel. Sometimes I do things I think he would be ashamed of and I hang my head. I wonder if he sees me doing these things. Today he is joined by many other loved ones who have gone on to this kingdom. They are all watching me, cheering for me.

I know that my father loved me very much, although I may suffer from a type of syndrome I read about once. People tend to idolize those close to them who have died before they got the chance to really get to know them. This doesn’t happen with everyone who has died, only with the people who made an immense and enduring impression. My father made a very large and permanent impression on me, and yes I guess I do idolize him for that. Maybe I put him on a pedestal and give him traits no human could possibly possess, but I hear others talk about how wonderful he was. They seem to verify my portrayal of him with their own accounts of his intelligence and his caring ways.

I remember watching television with him one night. I must have been about three. I fell asleep on the couch beside him. I awoke as he was gently lifting me to carry me to bed. I wondered if when people were asleep and they were lying straight they stayed that way. My father carried me around the house locking doors and turning out lights.
All the while I was holding my legs straight out and pretending to be fast asleep. He knew I was awake but he did not put me down and make me walk; instead, he carried me up the stairs, tucked me in and kissed me good night. This is one of the fondest memories I have of my father. It is one of the precious few I have.

This may be the reason I idolize him. Perhaps I only remember the good memories. I can not recall a time that my father ever spanked me. If my sister or I ever did anything to upset him he would simply sit us down and discuss our wrong doings with us. He never, as far as I remember, lifted a hand in anger. My mother says that if we wanted something we would ask him for it, not her. He never refused a wish to any of his children. My older sister taught us this trick. My mother says that if she denied Cherita anything, Cherita would immediately go ask our father and he would consent. I can only remember him appearing angry one time in my life.

Mom is in the house making our latest fashionable clothing. My younger sister, Lynn, and I decide that we want to visit China. She asks me what we need to do to get there. “Isn’t China pretty far away?” No problem says I. We will dig to China. “Where should we start digging?” The only logical place is in the middle of the dirt driveway. We dig frantically, for we are excited about meeting the Chinese. Every ten minutes or so I must go in to wash my hands. I can’t stand to have dirt under my fingernails. Mom asks what we are doing. Just playing.

“What in the world are you doing?” I look up to see my father’s face reddening. I try to explain. He pulls my sister and I out of the hole. “GET IN THE HOUSE!” Okay, Daddy. I have never seen him so mad as he is today.

After a very quiet dinner my father sits Lynn and me on the couch. He asks us if we know how dangerous it is to dig such a deep hole in a place where cars can drive over us. No, Daddy. He says he doesn’t know what he would do if anything ever happened to either of us. He wonders aloud how he could go on living without one of his little girls. My sister and I start crying. We have hurt our father. Something we never want to do again.
It is truly ironic that he died when I was so young. I found out later in my life that he spent most of his adult life searching for his father. His father abandoned his mother and their two sons when they were both very young. My uncle was three, which would have made my father five. The fact that Luther, his father, ran out on them haunted him most of his life. I like to imagine that if Luther had not been killed in a car accident in 1945 my father would have eventually caught up with the bastard. Yes, that’s my opinion of him for doing what he did. Knowing what little I do about my father, I wonder if it wasn’t a good thing that Luther left. He turned out to be a decent, caring man without the aid of his vagabond father. I also sometimes wonder if the fact that Luther was half Cherokee had anything to do with his wandering spirit.

I have a picture of Luther. He is very tall and thin with dark hair and dark brooding eyes. I have a picture of my father in the exact same stance. I hold these side by side and compare. These two men were made from the same flesh and blood. You can see the Cherokee in both of them. They are obviously father and son. They have the same manner, the same hair and the same high forehead and cheekbones, although their eyes are different. They have the same dark colored eyes. But somehow my father’s look friendlier, more inviting. Perhaps it is the smile on his face. I have never seen a smile on Luther’s face.

My father found, through many years of searching, his many half brothers and sisters, some older, some younger. This was not a bad thing, for I now have quite the extended, loving family. None of his offspring inherited Luther’s indifference to other people. They are all wonderful human beings. They all have warm smiles and friendly eyes. Without them I would have had a rougher time getting through my father’s death.

My aunt, my father’s half sister in Missouri, had horses. My sister and I loved these horses, which is why my father took us to visit these relatives frequently. I also think it was because he had such a strong sense of family. I awoke sometime very early one Easter morning in the worst pain I could imagine. My legs hurt badly. The doctor called them growing pains. I woke everyone in the house with my shrieks. After calming me and sending everyone else back to bed my
father massaged my legs for hours; neither one of us got much sleep that night. He eased my pain the best he could.

My father, who owned his own business, was always helping out this extended family of his. Uncle Sonny, my father’s half-brother, came to work for him for some time. Uncle Sonny had a problem finding and keeping a job. My father, who always took care of his own, employed him at his shop and Uncle Sonny lived with us for a while.

Lynn and I adore Uncle Sonny. He is the most fun uncle anyone could ever ask for. He always tells us jokes and lets us ride on his back like a horse. Whenever he comes home he gives us candy. We can’t tell mom. She won’t let us eat the candy, but Uncle Sonny does. At dinnertime we all sit around the table laughing. We are one big happy family. Sometimes our brother Tim even eats with us, when he is not at his girlfriend’s house or driving around in his new GTO. I wish we could live like this forever.

I, like my father, have this insatiable need to understand who Luther was and perhaps why he did what he did. I don’t know if it has something to do with the fact that I am afraid I may have inherited some of his bad genes and that who I am is shaped by what he was. I think this, in the back of my mind, while I rationalize that it can’t be true because my father was such a good man, but then I remember that I have put my father on a pedestal and define him by an ideal that no man could ever live up to. I find myself torn by the information I have. I can not decipher the true answer.

I had a dream that my father came to me one night. He did not make his presence known but I felt it. I was afraid. What does my father want? He has been dead so many years, why does he come back now? Is he trying to tell me something? I don’t know. I hide my head under the blanket. Go away please. NO! Stay. I was afraid to touch my father in his casket. I had never seen a dead person before. My mother caressed his cheek. My brother dragged me up to the casket and made me look in. I started crying. Why is Daddy lying there? Why won’t he get up and talk to me?

I may never decipher a true answer to the question of who Luther was. I have no sources to consult. Everyone who knew very
much about him is dead. His aunt and uncle raised him. The uncle’s name was Mr. Midget. This is the most information anyone has about him. No one knows what happened to his parents or even what their names were. His children never got a chance to get to know him. He did not allow it. The only thing I can do is look through my family’s historical “facts” that have been captured on paper. There are very few “facts” about Luther. It is almost as if he were a specter, someone who is there but always vanishes in the mist.

My Uncle Van, my father’s full brother, originally could not stand to hear the mention of Luther’s name. He wanted nothing to do with the extended family my father had found, his many half-brothers and sisters. When my father died his attitude changed completely. Suddenly he was alone. My father, his big brother, meant the world to him. I know because my sister and are like goddesses when we visit his home. He can not do enough for us. Yes, we are a little spoiled. When he heard I was researching Luther he was thrilled. He also spends a lot of time with his “family” from Luther’s second wife.

I am not ashamed of Luther for what he was. I am proud to be a descendant of a Native American. I may not yet fully understand what it means to be such a thing but I devote much of my time to realizing who my ancestors may have been. If this sounds like a contradiction imagine the turmoil in me. I am proud of what Luther was, not who he was. I try to keep an open mind about what he did. I try to understand Luther but it is hard to do when standing in my own shoes. If I were someone outside his lineage perhaps I could grasp a better understanding of Luther. As it is, I must rely on my ability to separate “fact” from emotion to gain this comprehension.

The disconnectedness of my family has created an empty place in my being. I sometimes feel that I have no place in this chaos we call the human race. I am a disengaged star in a large galaxy of connected systems. I am alone, floating away from everyone else. Yet this is not entirely true. I do have family. I have my mother, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. But sometimes I feel like I don’t know them either.
Everyone lives so far away. Welcome to the twentieth century. If I want to see someone I have to hop on the next plane to Dodge.

I have a fantasy that someday I will have enough money to buy a large estate. This estate will have many houses on it. My mother will have her own house. My brothers and sisters will each have their own houses, which they can share with their significant others who, knowing my family, will come and go in time. My nieces and nephews will all have their own houses. We will live in this large, communal setting happily ever after. I know that my fantasy will never be realized though. How will I convince everyone that I am not crazy for dreaming up this scheme? They already think I am a little loony. This would clue them in for sure. Also, how will I persuade everyone to move to the same state? They all have their preferences, and, as we are a very strong-minded family, there will be numerous arguments about where the Grand Halfacre estate should be. One more problem is how everyone would get along if we all lived in such close proximity to each other? We have a hard time behaving when only a portion of us gets together for the holidays.

I know this is a crazy notion. Even now I wonder how I will put up with my mother’s surprise visits. Sometimes I feel guilty for devoting so much time to analyzing Luther and my father. I do so at the expense of my mother and her ancestors. I am constantly drilling her for knowledge about the two of them. I wonder if she feels slighted in any way. If she does she never shows it.

As I stand on my front deck and look at the Clearfork of the Mohican River that is lazily gurgling by below me, I wonder when my life will come together and I will feel whole. I imagine myself as this fork. I am torn between my past and my future. I want so much to understand all that has happened in the past. At the same time I realize that I need to let it go and move on with my life. I wish to be happy like the river as it laughs its way toward the sea. I want the two pieces of me to come together in a happy whole and to move on towards my life. I wonder if I will ever find this piece.
Eva Brooks has been a wife and mother for the past 17 and 16 years respectively. Returning to OSU as a senior English major after a 19 year break she finds the Marion campus aesthetically beautiful, the work challenging and stimulating, and contact with college students and professors refreshing. She is on call as an EMT about 40 hours a week for her local Emergency Squad.
In and Out the Lost and Found
Eva Brooks

I’d gone to the local university seeking information about finding a room to live in with access to a kitchen. It just so happened that an Indian girl had fled back to the pueblo when college life and the old lady who’d given her a room became too much for her. As luck would have it, there was a place for me. It was not to work out for long; the lady was too affrontive, superior, demanding and disquiet. No wonder a probably sensitive Indian girl was chased away.

Santa Fe is a jewel of a city tucked in the foothills of the Sangre de Christo mountains. The mountain air on my scenic two-mile walk to work at the deli each day cleared my mind of the cloud of authority that hung over the house I now shared. One day, another waitress told me about a cheap room at a Zen Center. I called, was invited to dinner, and the next thing I knew, I was in my own little room there.

Five a.m. The clackers, two oak two-by-twos about ten inches long and smooth as glass, rang out, sharply reverberating in the bare-walls hallway and quickly softened in intensity as the shoji exited the door leading to the courtyard with its rooms and small apartments arcing around it, facing east under the generous overhanging roof. To the large back lot he went where the clacking could barely be heard amid the verdure, the potter’s cottage standing off by itself, the tipi erected by a visitor, and the back apartments and rooms. The few more seconds of sleep to be had were tucked gratefully into the pillow like a kiss. The other eleven residents were mostly more diligent than I was, their feet preceding the return of the shoji, past the hallway door of my tiny room-with-two-doors, just barely interrupting my pillows’ kiss.

The shoji came back clacking loudest right at my door, or so it seemed. I only had a minute now so I hurried into my loose clothes and then to the first available cushion in the zendo, a long room whose floor along the walls was lined with black, square cushions topped by a round one. Behind each meditation seat was a Japanese cup, small enough to fit into the palm of your hand. On cold days the shoji rose earlier and started a fire in the woodstove in the front room right off the
first doorway to the zendo where community members entered. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, a housewife, a social worker, arrived quickly, at five a.m., quietly, efficiently, taking off their shoes then entering the zendo with a bow and seating themselves cross-legged or in the lotus position. The shoji would check the fire, make sure the morning cook was up, fetch the big, aluminum teapot filled with hot tea from the kitchen, come into the zendo wordlessly bowing before each “student” as he or she served tea into each cup extended. This tea was served amazingly fast. Beside each outstretched cupped hand the other hand was extended, palm up and open. The shoji barely watched the tea and the teacup but watched the other hand closely for the signal to stop, a sharp movement upward. It was good to be fully awake by then because if a mind was still sleepy, not paying attention, the hot tea would spill over till the proper hand gave the proper signal. In this way the shoji was able to move swiftly twice around the zendo serving tea twice, if one so indicated by holding out cup and open hand. The tea was so hot that sometimes managing to get down one cup was work. Taking one cup was mandatory because the tea began our zazen (meditation practice); no one new was admitted after it.

Settling legs and rear into a comfortable tripod formation with the back straight, chin and shoulders down, teeth closed, breathing from the diaphragm, hands loosely clasped on the abdomen at the center of gravity, the wait for thirty minutes of Sanskrit chanting was short while the meditation leader lit incense and did a short series of bows before a small Buddhist shrine. Eyes were supposed to be down, but I had a hard time not stealing a glance to see someone I knew well, bowing to a little statue, something my Bible studies of childhood had told me never to do. Then seating himself, the drummer and he began chanting to the slow beat of the drum: “Kan ze on bo sa....” Everyone else joined in, most of us with our eyes on the booklet from under the cushion. By the end of thirty minutes, the cadence of the drum and chanting were so fast I could only manage a steady hum, so I always felt glad when it was over.

Chanting that early in the morning also gave me an incredible feeling of harmony in my body, the drum, the vibration of so many
voices and my own, instilled a strong feeling of well-being. After the chanting we arose and in single file we walked briskly out of the zendo, snaking in various patterns all over the grounds of the compound. After about five minutes of this speed-walking, a time you could also drop out and go to the bathroom if needed, we returned to the zendo to sit in silent meditation for about thirty minutes when, again, we walked, repeating the silent meditation and walking until 6:50, when we left the zendo after a short chant. Then the people of the community left for their jobs or breakfast and we residents were assigned ten minutes of cleaning or other jobs to be performed in silence. In this way the Zen Center was kept clean at all times. Then, if it hadn't been your turn to cook breakfast, everyone sat down to eat.

The job of cook is performed by each resident once a week, morning or evening, your choice. The rules are both meals require "three bowls" and tea. The three bowls mean not only three different dishes but literally bowls. There are shelves in the kitchen where instead of dishes, standing all in a row are colorful little cloth-wrapped packages so comfortable to take into your two hands. Seated inside are three bowls and a Japanese cup. Beside each bowl set there is another small cloth-wrapped package of either chopsticks or fork and spoon or both. It is all so efficient. Instead of washing your dishes in the kitchen sink we could take a last serving of tea, transfer it from cup to bowl, stir with finger, proceed until the last bowl was clean, then drink the tea. In fact, this was required when our Japanese Zen master came to the Bodhi Mandala, our parent Zen Center in Jemez Springs, and gave "sesshin." People sometimes came from all over the world and the place was packed for week-long meditation sessions that started at two in the morning and lasted until ten or eleven at night. At these sesshins, meal-time had to be really efficient and was.

Early on in my life, I learned it was easy to get lost. Not just lost from your family at the beach but lost as in missing your purpose, as in doing what others want you to do without knowing what it is you want. As a shy, sensitive child I often imagined myself running away to the village pictured in my Alice and Jerry reader. It was a beautiful picture
of a small village with a few roads and footpaths leading to and from it, nestled in a verdant valley down the wooded mountain path from where Alice and Jerry stood, pointing to it. Often feeling consigned to the world by the seemingly endless cycle of school and the abundance of crudeness there, I could hardly wait to get to reading circle to begin imagining a day in the village or in the mountains above it.

When I returned to Europe as a young adult I saw real villages that looked like the one in my reader and realized it was of such places and of community that my earliest memories consisted. In Germany, where I was born, my mother and father had a gemeinshaft of family and friends. There’s no English word that explains it. I was a baby passed to and from many loving arms, a center of attention. In my tiny two-year-old heart, “village” had already been well established. Perhaps it was in the very stuff, the very material, of my brain, a strong sense of community, passed down from centuries of such living by my Hungarian and German ancestors. All I know is it was there, like a never-ending song in my heart, a room in my head, like the magic closet in _The Lion The Witch And The Wardrobe_ by C.S. Lewis, a room always empty of real live visitors but a room where I needed to go frequently to feel like there was somewhere I really belonged, really communed, really lived, wholly and vibrantly.

If my family knew how deeply the drudgery of school marked me with loneliness, it was of no solace to me. I communicated my anguish. There was nothing they could do. Every child had to go to school. They watched me closely, maybe with pity or the slightest hint of possible understanding, especially my father. He could always feel my spirit, as though I was a piece of his own being, torn away from him by a world rapacious in its demands. His breath became suspended and hung there in his middle when my words poured out in explanation. He tried to give me understanding. He explained quietly, hardly breathing, everyone must have a job. He gave examples; school was my job. I simply had to do what was asked of me there. When I cried, his stronger, firmer, nearly demanding voice insisted I explain why it was so hard for me. I could only cry. Eventually his face became flushed and he became angry. Not until I was much older
did I recognize he felt helpless in the face of my tears, that his anger was not with me but with his own incapability of removing my pain. Because of his anger I learned to hold back my tears, to withstand the pain, control it, push it deep into my center until it was a hard knot that separated my heart from my brain. This was precisely the opposite of what my father fully intended to give his children as a personal heritage. I came to loathe, then fear, inciting my father’s anger. My father tried to help me stay integrated, find a sense of peace, find parallels to the necessity of school, by telling me about his own life and his schooling.

Jesuit monasteries in the tenth century in Hungary tutored boys from the surrounding countryside. The boys, sent by their families, lived at the monastery and were taught Greek, Latin, mathematics, and all the other subjects well-educated young men going out into the world or planning a cloistered life needed. Such monasteries still existed in 1922 and were run in much the same fashion when my father, amid an uproar in his family, was sent to one in Eger, Hungary. At nine years old, my father’s behavior indicated he was more interested in girls than in his studies. His mother and father, both teachers, decided at the monastery his mind would be more greatly engaged in his studies. He came home during the summer and at holidays.

By the time he was eighteen and ready to graduate to college and to the Army he knew history like the back of his hand. Like scribes he had copied portions of the Bible until his handwriting was like typewritten script. He had read completely through the Bible several times. By the time college and his military training was over, he was an expert and a teacher of fencing, skiing, horsemanship and had earned a doctorate in the Philosophy of Law. He had risen to the position of Captain in the Hungarian National Cavalry after completing his education, and, during non-war times, he was a head of military police in his hometown of Eger.

This strict upbringing and education of my father’s was brought down to my older and my younger brother and me in many ways. On Saturdays when every kid in my neighborhood was watching cartoons, we were not allowed. My father had looked at them and thought them stupid, violent, utterly useless, and, therefore, possibly dangerous to our
young minds. Instead we had to get up early on Saturdays, exercise on
the back porch or go walking. In springtime we’d pick fresh chives
from the garden bed for our eggs afterward. We had to work with him,
holding boards while he handsawed or hammered them, learn how to
fix all manner of things, to clean guns, handle machinery, oil our bi-
cycles, all to keep things running smoothly at our house. He never
realized that when I went back to school or saw my neighborhood
friends, I had no reference to their typical conversations. They all
talked for what seemed like hours, mostly regarding cartoons and TV
shows. We were only allowed to watch *Lassie* on weekdays and *The
Wonderful World of Disney* on Sunday nights. I cried during every
*Lassie* show, but *Disney* shows were always terrifically inspiring and
usually filled me with joy that lasted and sustained me through many
school days.

When I started kindergarten I couldn’t speak English and my
name was changed when I was too shy to stand up and say it in front of
the class. I went from “Ava” to “Eva” as the teacher tugged me to
standing by my shoulders and said my name for the class. We didn’t
speak English at home. We spoke German. That made visiting children
feel weird, so they didn’t much come into the house. At school a boy in
my older brother’s class called me Nazi one day when I wore a trench-
style raincoat. He was big and a few other kids at school joined him in
taunting me. My older brother never stood up to them in any way.
Even now, being close to tall, unfamiliar men sends a tiny, instinctual
flutter of fear across the surface of my bones. Kids in my neighbor-
hood were different. Outside in the yards, in the trees and treehouses
we climbed in, in the sandboxes, our play was sometimes suspended,
and we would get into quiet, important conversations. I loved these
conversations because I could always bend them toward my deepest
concerns. These always regarded God, Jesus, heaven, eternity, and
the right and wrong behavior of people in our lives. I remember feeling
a triumph, private and profound, when a sandbox buddy told me his
family had started going to church.
The spiritual aspect of life consumed my mind until the third grade when prayer was taken out of the schools by the federal government. No longer were we to say the Lord’s Prayer every morning with the Pledge of Allegiance and, like a sudden chill wind overcoming one as the sun slips behind a cloud when on a warm winter late afternoon you’ve removed your coat, the nature of school was suddenly, abruptly changed. The light was different; a brightness retreated to the heavens or the church. My school was across the street from my church, and the two had always been a continuation of one another in my mind. I prayed at school, behaved morally there, according to scripture, and I learned at church, writing, reading, and coloring. My purpose in life was a daily play always unfolding in the present moment; angels were watching, Jesus would come. In my most anguished, unloved, loneliest times, usually at night, lying in bed, I prayed long and hard, pleading, begging, demanding Jesus show himself, prove love was alive and well, but if that were impossible then angels show me my name written in that big book up in heaven. I knew my prayers were heard; nightly I had visions that set the world right, congealed my understandings so I could finally sleep in peace.

When the yellow brightness of morning stirred my senses to pre-waking and I had either fallen asleep before finalizing, or had disturbing conclusions to my visions before sleeping, my hair would catch fire, flaming yellow, orange, crackling, until I woke completely gasping with pain until I was wide-open-eyed and upright, feeling my head with my hands, astonished my hair was actually still all there and that the pain was unreal. Such an awakening sent me from my bed with an urgent need to find someone I could be with until my mysteries could begin to unfold. Almost never adamant with ideas, even on such mornings, I usually found everyone too busy to be quiet with me until the real question would reveal itself.

I loved living at the Zen Center. My father’s sudden heart attack and death sent me into a profound period of loss and constant grief. The discipline of a regular meditation schedule instilled a sense of myself as a singular energy in the universe, and the grief became quieter in me as I spent more time quietly just being myself. “Do this! Do
that!" the voice of authority had always been saying. At the Zen Center in Santa Fe, I discovered a quietness that belongs only to me and with that quietness came a new freedom and strength.
Stanton Swithart is an English Major!
IN POETRY, NO LESS!
Yipee! He’s pretty cool!
An Aquired Taste
Stanton Swihart

We all have to eat. Some of us eat more, some of us eat less. But we all have to eat. People who suffer from anorexia have shown us that not eating can lead to bad places. Eating can lead to bad places, too, though: namely, having to watch other people eat. As the introspective teenage character Angela in the short-lived cult TV show My So-Called Life observed with disgust while watching her family eat, “I mean, if you stop to think about, like, chewing, what it really is, how people just do it, like, in public...?” This half-finished, grammatically-poor, characteristically-teenage statement actually says a mouthful. First, eating is not something that we tend to think about. It is an almost-involuntary action, an automatic response, a reaction. At least it becomes this way over time, as if it is a conditioned pattern, a nucleus around which we base our lives. Secondly, eating is something that is generally done with someone else, and often in the presence of many people. It is a public event, there for anyone to see. Naturally this is logical, because we cannot watch ourselves eat, unless, that is, you make it a habit to eat in the bathroom, in front of the mirror. We can, however, watch other people eat. This can lead to a third idea which is hinted at in the above quote: watching someone eat can be a bad experience.

I would guess that 97 to 98 percent of the population are good eaters. “Good eaters” is a term I use to describe people who, when in public, exercise a certain degree of decorum when they eat. Good eaters, whether they consciously recognize themselves as good eaters or not, take some pride in the art of eating. A good eater may or may not know which fork to use in which situation or how to properly use a napkin or which wine goes with which food. I don’t know any of these rules. Knowledge of dining rules is not a requirement for good eating. Who really cares about or wants to follow a list of steps every time they eat? Good eaters do not necessarily have a taste for exotic or gourmet food. I frequent Taco Bell and Pizza Hut probably more than the next guy. Still, even at these establishments, I have rarely come
face to face with a bad eater, though I have seen evidence left by bad
eaters from time to time.

Keep in mind that bad eaters are not necessarily bad people. In
fact, they usually are quite well-adjusted, happy people. The only thing
setting bad eaters and good eaters apart is pride. Good eaters take
pride in how they eat. They are commonly referred to as “having good
manners” when they eat. In contrast, bad eaters wouldn’t know a good
manner if it poked them in the eye.

I’m sensitive to the problem of watching people eat. I could
probably count the number of bad eaters that I have known on one
hand. At the very most on two hands. Bad eaters are an extremely tiny
minority. It’s not something I really even pay attention to, and certainly
not something that I am always on the lookout for. It is not a character­
istic that I would probably even notice at all if it didn’t hit so close to
home.

My mother is a good eater. She cuts her food in manageable,
bite-size portions. She swallows the food after she chews it. In terms
of eating, she has good manners. And she practices what she preaches.
I remember as a child being taught manners by my mother:

DON’T STUFF YOUR MOUTH TOO FULL
DON’T TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL
DON’T PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD
GIVE YOUR FOOD TIME TO DIGEST

These phrases ring out like mantras to me now, a part of my subcon­
scious. In retrospect, her advice seems overly commanding, but it
worked. I don’t do any of those things. My mother raised a good
eater. She has, in fact, raised many. My mother has run a daycare
business for over twenty years. She has seen many children come and
go in those twenty-some years. Children are, by nature, bad eaters.
They literally attack food, deconstruct it. Food no longer resembles
food when children are finished with it. It is usually smeared some­
where—if not all over the plate, then on clothes, in hair, their own or
someone else’s, it doesn’t matter. In the most impractical places. Often
it ends up on the floor. I have seen children, under my mom’s tutelage, evolve into good eaters. As good as children can be, at least.

My father is no longer a child. He has been under my mother’s tutelage for thirty years now. Still, my father is a bad eater. Perhaps the worst eater ever. I have observed him eating now for twenty-three years and still cannot find the words to describe his manners: Hilarious. Amazing. Revolting. Perplexing. Scary. Intriguing. Frustrating.

It continues spiraling downward from here. All of these words are part of it, but none describe him properly. A bad eater is often compared to a cow chewing its cud, but this comparison is too easy and, anyway, not accurate for describing my father’s habits. At least the cow chews. Chewing is only a perfunctory act to my father. He would take food whole if he could (and sometimes seems to). I, personally, like to taste my food. I like it to at least graze my tongue on the way down. My father, on the other hand, usually cleans his plate in less than fifteen minutes. This includes second helpings. And this is during leisurely meals. He eats like a frog snapping up flies one after another out of a swarm, one mouthful per second.

If he only ate rapidly it wouldn’t be so bad. But my dad eats loud. He makes sounds that you wouldn’t believe. Barbaric sounds. Sounds not even of this world. Imagine someone gargling his tongue, and you’re halfway towards what my father sounds like when he is devouring a meal. He often chews with his mouth open, his tongue darting in and out, as if he is scraping peanut butter off the roof of his mouth, or like an old person scraping his or her toothless upper gums. Often he makes this annoying smacking sound of wet flesh against wet flesh, his tongue doing cartwheels in his mouth. I can always locate my father by those smacking sounds. They’re like homing devices. Not only can I hear my father from one room to the next, but I can pick him out of a crowd as well. I suppose this could be useful in certain situations. I bet I could pinpoint the sound of food barreling down his throat from fifty paces.

My dad is a messy eater as well. He is notorious for the messes that he makes. It’s seemingly an art form to him. He doesn’t so much make a mess around himself as make a mess of himself. Almost inevita-
bly—in public as well as in private—my father gets food on his clothing whenever he eats. Usually it is something bright red—ketchup, pizza sauce, jelly. He no longer even tries to hide his food stains. They’ve become like battle scars in his ongoing tussle with food. In the last few years he has been collecting other types of war badges as well: bits of food, usually some kind of sauce, left on his face, sometimes in places like his cheek that, really, when you think about it, are not too close to his mouth. When someone points this out to him, he usually laughs and tosses off one of his favorite sayings: “I was just saving it for later.” Repulsive, but in an endearing sort of way.

My father’s eating really used to bother me. I would sometimes confront him about it. Frankly, it was somewhat embarrassing to me. I imagined—but was too afraid to look and see—that, when in public, his eating would draw a crowd. I would then, by association, be guilty of causing a disturbance. When at home, it was easy to ask him bluntly why he ate as he did. And he sometimes got upset when I called him on his poor eating manners. But I know he realizes it now. I’m sure he realized it then, too. It has become a joke between us. A joke that only we share. It is something that my father has taken—and, in a way, has passed on from his past. He no longer gets angry when I give him a dirty look in public. Instead, he always invokes his past, the way in which he was raised: “I grew up in the country. I have country manners. I’m too old to change my habits now.” I understand what my father means when he says this. He eats like his father before him ate. Even if he could change now, I believe that he wouldn’t want to. It is a reminder of who he was. Who he is. And where he came from. It allows him to hold on to a part of himself that I have never known. Lately, I’ve found myself falling into some of my father’s patterns. I’ve inherited some of his mannerisms. Occasionally I’ll accidentally smack the roof of my mouth when eating, or I’ll catch myself stabbing up vegetables too rapidly, not allowing myself to chew properly, to take a few breaths between bites. And this has gone beyond eating as well. I find myself walking, hands in pockets, shoulders hunched, looking at the ground, like him. I’ll catch myself adjusting my glasses in a certain way. Or standing just so. It terrifies me. It forces me to
wonder if we learn things or if we simply become them, gradually, over long periods of time. If all our actions and reactions are already determined for us. Perhaps my father once was a good eater. Perhaps it is inevitable that he became a bad eater, like his father before him. Perhaps it is my fate, too.

As I grew older, I began to resist everything that my father was. Maybe I'm still doing that to a certain extent. All the things that I respected about him are all the things that I also wanted to avoid, or, at least, have the freedom to avoid. He has worked for nearly forty years at boring, thankless jobs that could in no way satisfy him, just to raise and support a family. When he came home from his long days at work, he diverted himself by watching sports, or reading superficial things that he wouldn't have to think about. Somewhere between his early twenties and now, my father had lost the ability to dream, to grow, to change. My father decided that he no longer wanted to evolve. These are all the things that I am fighting against--the loss of fulfillment. I gave up sports entirely; I don't even watch them anymore. I am now interested in art, music, and literature that my father couldn't care less about. It may have started as reaction against him, but it has turned into who I am, my passions, my desires, my goals. I certainly do not eat in the same way that my father does. In public, when chewing, I tend to block my mouth with my hand or a napkin, so no one sees me eating. I am self-conscious about eating because of him. And as much as he probably wants me to be like him--as all fathers, I'm guessing, want their sons to be--he doesn't want me to be like him, too. He wants more for me. My dreams have, by default, become his. He does everything to make sure that I reach my goals, or that I never stop reaching. He no longer does anything for only himself.

It's funny. I've noticed recently that my dad often searches for my approval, like I used to do with him. He bought for the first time a CD player and some "hip" CDs as well. He occasionally buys what he thinks of as "real" literature and poetry. It doesn't matter that I would never read The Complete Love Poems of Danielle Steele. He is making the effort to grow. And he makes it a point to show me these things, to show me that he learns from me, too, that he can like some of
the things that I do. Part of me loves that he cares that much about me that he wants my approval; part of me even resists this, too. My mother has made the statement often--more now than in the past--that I am just like my father. I can’t help but argue against it. I never want to place my life on hold indefinitely, or to live vicariously through others. I want to be myself, and to grow in the ways that I can say are only mine. I want my father to be himself, too, even if it means reading magazines, watching bad movies, too much television, and bad eating habits. So I can find him in a crowd.
Charma Messer is a Junior majoring in English. She plans, one day, to write a best-selling biography of Elvis Presley and to live off the royalties the rest of her life.
Muddy Waters
Charma Messer

There's a picture at my grandma's house that has hung in the same spot on the wall, near the door in the living room, for as long as I can remember. The picture, black and white, has two people in it. The man, who has the sharp features of a Cherokee Indian, is very precise in his dress and manner. He is standing next to a short, fat lady with a square little hat, crooked on her head. At the age of nine or ten, I remember my aunt, Charlene, asking me who that lady looked liked. After I thought about it awhile, I asked "Pappaw?" The mystery of my grandpa's family, my great-grandparents, began to unravel. My short knowledge of the family's history didn't include any in-depth thought of the picture or the people in it. I knew that my grandpa was an orphan, but I didn't know when, where, or how. Since, the great story of how my grandpa became who he is has been considered during numerous conversations around our dinner table.

The picture tells the story of my grandfather who, in 1915, was born on Island No. 40 in the middle of the Mississippi River near Memphis, Tennessee. His father had traveled down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers from Wheeling, West Virginia until he landed on the island. He stayed on the island because at that time anyone who wanted to could "homestead" on the land. After a person was there for a certain length of time he was considered owner of the land he claimed. This is where Grandpa's father, Andrew Robinson, chose to homestead with his wife, Nettie, a native Memphian. His daddy (as Grandpa would say) was a farmer on the Island and worked for the government tending marker buoys on the river. The buoys were used to warn boats and keep them from running into the bank. Because at that time there was no electricity on the island to light the lamps, people had to check them and fill them with kerosene. Andrew Robinson was employed to take his boat every night and check the lights. He was doing this when he was killed by pirates who were illegally running booze on the Mississippi. Up until this time in 1922 or 1923, my grandpa lived with his mother, father, and three brothers. My grandpa,
Johnie, was supposed to go in the boat with him to check the buoys that day as he often did, but his father insisted that he stay home. I have thought that possibly Andrew had some way of knowing or maybe some sort of premonition of what was going to happen to him, and that is why he refused Grandpa’s pleas to go with him. The men who killed Andrew Robinson were well known outlaws on the island, and Grandpa was later told by his aunt that his father was killed because he wouldn’t cooperate with the bootleggers who wanted him to transport sugar on his boat to make it easier for them to concoct their moonshine. My grandfather’s aunt told him that these men beat his father, shot him, and then tied him to his boat and sunk the boat in the Mississippi River. The body was never found. It wasn’t even looked for. Even though any form of alcohol was illegal at the time, the actions of many people who made booze were overlooked. The crimes associated with the illegal making or distributing of alcohol were often dismissed, especially if they were committed against poor people. Andrew Robinson was dirt poor, and no one ever really cared what happened to him or his family. Of his father’s death, my grandpa said, “All I know is that he never did come back.”

Two years later Johnie and his brothers, the youngest still a baby, were sent off to the Tennessee Children’s Society, which at the time, was run by the notorious and now infamous Georgia Tan. When he was sent to the Leif Orphanage in Memphis, Grandpa met Georgia Tan. He told me that “Miz Tan was a real nice lady.” Georgia Tan, now known for becoming a millionaire by stealing and selling babies from unsuspecting mothers and renting older children to foster families, distributed the three oldest boys Johnie, Robert, and Joe to foster homes around Mississippi and Memphis and had the baby, Jessie, adopted out. Although, my grandpa, the oldest, attempted to keep in touch with his brothers Robert and Joe, Jessie was thought lost forever. With the help of my Uncle Johnie, my grandpa found Jessie in 1987. Uncle Jessie was living in Memphis not too far from his brother Joe, and in fact, Uncle Jessie’s boy had worked on the river on the same boat as Uncle Joe’s son-in-law for many years, never knowing that they were related. Since Jessie had been adopted, his parents never
chose to tell him who he really was. It wasn’t until my Uncle Johnie showed up at his doorstep with a ridiculous story of how his birth mother had given him to Georgia Tan, that Jessie knew he had been adopted. After thinking that they had seen each other for the last time sixty-four years before, the Robinson brothers, with the exception of Robert who died in 1979, were reunited.

Their mother chose to give her boys away because the drunk of a “man” she had married didn’t care for children, especially hers. Being poor and uneducated, she really had no other choices. Grandpa’s views about his mother are very different than my views from the nineties. Being raised by a single mother, I think that a mother should always stay with her children regardless of what she has to suffer. Grandpa sees it differently. He understands his mother’s decision. He told me, “See, when you don’t have no education, Charmie, I mean like me, I’ve been all over, ramblin’, I know different. But she was raised in one place. Whatever anybody told you that’s what you believed.” She probably did feel that she didn’t have a choice, and giving her boys away was the best option. Our family is convinced that someone talked Nettie out of her children, whether it was her new husband or Georgia Tan we don’t know.

The man she married was named Luther Powers. The way my grandpa tells it, the boys were probably better off on their own rather than having to live with Luther. Not long after moving the Robinson family across the Mississippi River to West Memphis, Arkansas, Luther came home drunk with another drunk man following him and threatening to kill him. Luther gave my grandpa, who was seven or eight years old, a knife telling him, “Hey, if this guy jumps on me cut ‘im off, will ya.” Today, eighty years later, reflecting on the situation and thinking seriously about my question of why Luther did this, Grandpa answered by simply saying, “I guess somebody was a coward, that’s all.” I have always thought of Luther as an evil man because he caused my grandpa so much pain. In my opinion Luther Powers was an appropriate name for such a man because only Lucifer could have the power to convince a mother to give her children away. He has always reminded me of an evil story book character who has influence and control over the
powerless. If Luther was the one who convinced Nettie to give her children away, it was the day that a car came from Memphis to take Grandpa and his brothers to Georgia Tan that he showed to be his most powerful.

Grandpa was sent by the Tennessee Children’s Society to work on a farm in Mississippi. Carrying a suitcase containing the photograph of his parents, he was shipped by passenger train with another boy named Polk Adams, to a foster home near Philadelphia, Mississippi in Neshoba County. At the first home he lived, the people were mean to him, so he was transferred to another home nearby. Tom and Annie Dewitt, a childless couple, became his foster parents. Grandpa stayed with Mr. Tom and Miss Annie for about ten years. During his stay at the Dewitt’s, Grandpa completed his third grade education at Bloomo School (a school my grandma would later attend), and then decided that was enough school for him and quit to help Mr. Tom farm. After my grandpa was about eighteen and was old enough to go out on his own, he “hoboed” back and forth between Memphis and Philadelphia. He jumped trains and hitchhiked all over Mississippi and Tennessee. He considered Mr. and Mrs. Dewitt his family, and during his travels, he always seemed to go back to the Dewitt’s home.

I love to sit and listen to Grandpa’s stories about his time in Memphis working on the river in the thirties and the adventures he had “down on Beale.” He tells of working in the CCC camp in Tiptonville, Tennessee during the Depression and, with great pride, will display the 1936 Thanksgiving menu or his blacksmithing certificate to any interested soul. He’s told me more than once about the tornado that struck when he and my grandma lived in the Mississippi Delta. When the storm started, Grandpa thought that Mary and Bobbie, his oldest daughters, were outside playing. While he was looking for them, a tree fell on him and crushed his leg. The local men threw him in the back of a truck and took him to Rolling Fork, Mississippi, the nearest town. The doctor there took one look at him and said, “Get ‘im outta here. Ain’t nothin’ I can do for ‘im.” The men threw him back in the truck and took
him fifty miles to Vicksburg to the hospital. He now has a metal plate in that leg.

My grandpa and grandma completed their family by adding six more children to the brood. All of my aunts and uncles were born in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the same town in which my grandmother was from and in which Grandpa lived with the Dewitts. Grandpa did several jobs to support his family. As professions, he sharecropped and logged. As a logger his job was on the crosscut saw. With a "good buddy" on the other end of the saw it wasn't such a bad job, but if the guy on the other end didn't like him, Grandpa had to do most of the work by pulling the saw plus the weight of the guy. He also farmed cotton, and on a good day he could pick three hundred pounds. Logging and farming weren't sufficient enough to feed ten people so my grandfather came to Ohio. The family knew that jobs were plentiful in Ohio because my grandmother's brother was stationed in the army at Bucyrus, Ohio. He told my grandfather about all the jobs that were available to people. My grandpa thought this was a great opportunity for his family. He came up by himself to find a job, and then, ten months later he sent for my grandma and the kids to come by bus to meet him.

My mother tells awful stories of how horrible my grandpa was as she and her brothers and sisters were growing up. Stories of how he would whip my aunt Mary and my uncle Johnie and how Grandpa would scream at all of them at the top of his booming voice using foul, unrepeatable language. My mother told him one time that if he hit her again, he wouldn't live to tell about it. He believed it and never touched her or her younger brother and sister again. The rage that he took out on his own children, I think, was the rage that he wanted to take out on the mother that gave him away.

The man she tells about is not the man I know today. They say when I was born, he changed. The anger is still there, and at times he can be loud and verbally cruel. His anger is no longer centered on his children or Grandma. He is no longer the vengeful man he once was. He seems to be trying to make up for the years he was mean to his
children by being the perfect grandfather to his grandchildren. He is partial to the younger kids it seems. We all lived near by and visited him quite frequently when we were younger. Now, he is the friendliest guy, and everyone in town knows him. Now eighty-three, he has a fat, round face that greets everyone he meets. He’ll stop anyone on the street and display and explain the mechanics of the Elvis pen I bought him during my last trip to Graceland. Being the youngest of the grandchildren and being always at his house, Grandpa paid close attention to me, forming some sort of attachment that is completely unbreakable on both sides. I don’t know if he felt sorry for me because of my own parental situation of lacking my own father or if he saw something in me that only grandparents have that ability to see, but to grandpa I was special. He became my father. I have always been his favorite, and if you ask him, with a huge grin and a southern accent he will proudly explain, “Ah, Charmie Lee, you know better than that. I reckon no one else could be. Now don’t you go tellin’ no one else I told you that.” Maybe this is because I am the one who makes the most effort to listen to what he tries to say, something no one else seems to be willing to do, a result of the busy lives we lead.

Because I stayed at Grandma’s and Grandpa’s house so much when I was little, most of my good childhood memories are centered there. I love remembering from Grandma and Grandpa when I was very little. How he had an old blue work car. I remember climbing up in the back seat and the smell of the interior. It was sort of a stale version of Old Spice mixed with Swan Rubber. The hot summer sun brought out the comforting scent of my grandpa. I remember in the winter after a blizzard he came home after dark from work with icicles hanging from his eyelashes. I was really impressed that he had icicle eyelashes. When I was little, before I started school, I liked to have Grandma’s biscuits and Karo syrup in the morning and watch Grandpa’s favorite television shows, The Price is Right and Sanford and Son. Grandpa used to play beauty shop with me, and I would put bright pink and yellow barretts in his silver
hair. This, along with playing dolls with grandma, was the highlight of many of my days.

When I went to school, I would go to Grandma and Grandpa’s house every day, before and after school. My mother went to work before I went to school and didn’t get off until after my school day ended. When my mother did come to get me, I would cry to stay at Grandma’s house. I didn’t want to go home. Home was a great place, but Grandma’s and Grandpa’s house was better.

Now that my grandparents are aging, and I don’t stay at their house all the time, I try to visit with them as often as I can. I want to know everything about our family, who we knew, what we’ve done, and where we’ve been. I’m the only one who wants to know all of this it seems, and I can’t get enough of it. Everyone else is too busy with jobs and families to bother with them. I beg both of my grandparents to tell me the stories of their youth. When Grandpa tells me stories, we usually talk about the picture of my great-grandparents. We are determined to find his mother. We have tried, but failed. Together we wonder what Nettie Robinson Powers must have thought the day she gave her children to Georgia Tan.
An Alumni at Last!

Dixie Strawser

For all of my childhood and adolescent years I had wanted to attend college, and I thought that’s what I would do. I had no specific life work in mind; I just wanted to be there. Perhaps the idea was planted in my mind because I knew how my father felt about education. Since Dad was the oldest son in his family, my grandfather took him out of school long before he was finished to help with the family farm and Dad always regretted it. Both of my parents made sure that we youngsters (there were five of us) did our homework and our chores. Only after these were completed did we get to do something else.

When I finished high school, going to college was impossible. There was no money. A long-awaited dream was shattered. I went to work but the desire for education was still with me.

After spending some time with other corporations and a brief stay-at-home Mom period, I was hired by Ohio State University. Well, there was no way I could be around the academic world without realizing a chunk of my life was missing, being a college student.

My first job was with the faculty as typist. Those text book titles and attached syllabi were so fascinating. I thought “I can do this.” Five years later I got my chance. It wasn’t as easy as I had expected and I had been away from studying for a long time. I really struggled and that shocked me! I only took one class per quarter and managed to put three classes behind me with relatively decent grades. They certainly weren’t as good as my high school grades. But I still had not really settled on a major, although I was leaning towards business.

The first of my setbacks on the long road to a degree occurred at this time. Family illness made it necessary to stop taking classes for awhile. When I was able to return to the classroom, I scheduled a course in History of Art and followed it with a class in Psychology. I was excited about both of these subjects and couldn’t decide which one to stay with. Luckily the same adviser had both majors and he was very patient with me while I switched classes back and forth.
My husband’s disability and eventual death left me with an academic schedule that was the exception rather than the rule. During this time I realized psychology was more beneficial and more in line with the work I was currently doing at OSU in the Financial Aid Office.

I knew I needed to finish this. I wondered whether I could manage the chaos and hardship, yet I did not want to admit that I wasn’t strong enough to handle the situation. With the blessing and support of my supervisor, William Lush, I doubled up on classes. I even managed two quarters with full time classes. What a thrill it was to be named to the dean’s list for both those quarters. All of the students I dealt with during this time must have thought I was a walking zombie.

Then a new challenge came. I saw an opportunity to do an honor’s thesis on a pet issue of mine, 'Overweight Discrimination.' You can imagine how many hours this added to my already overstuffed world. I had the best of advisors for this subject, Dinah Meyer, Professor of Psychology. Defending this thesis was the most frightening experience of my college career, but, also one of the most rewarding, especially when my committee of three said, “Congratulations, well done.”

At last my work was done. I soon would be graduating and with “honors”. Seventeen years of struggles, heartbreak, and some very high rewards were within my reach. Plans were made for my graduation. I was treated like a real celebrity when a whole week was declared in my honor here at OSUM. It was a wonderful week-long party and my deepest thanks go to Dawn Heimlich and Betsy Blankenship for putting it together for me. I really choked up when I saw my name on the message board at the front of the campus. More was yet to come. I was astonished when a reporter from The Marion Star came to interview me and a photographer followed to take my picture. The article appeared in the paper the day before graduation. My Mom and siblings were proud of me.

There was one time of sadness at the end of this journey. My father was not alive to see what I had accomplished. In addition, my mother’s health prevented her from attending my graduation. But there
would be other rewards. My OSU family was with me all the way. A crowd of both staff and students were there to watch me receive my diploma.

I was overwhelmed when E. Gordon Gee, president of the university, recognized me personally for my accomplishment in his speech. Finally, it was time to walk to the stage to receive that wonderful red folder that states you have your degree. I received some hugs and congratulations along the way. When it was placed in my hands by Dean Dominic Dottavio, I just knew my OSU family was cheering and waving their arms wildly. On the way back to my seat, the Columbus OSU photographer stopped me to take my picture with my diploma. Just before leaving St. John Arena, I had my picture taken with Dr. Gee and it now hangs on my office wall.

There is no greater feeling (or “high”) for any student, traditional or non-traditional, than the one that happens when your diploma is placed in your hands. I am proud to say that as of August 29, 1997, I am an alumni at last!

Dixie Strawser has lived in Marion County all her life. Prior to working at The Ohio State University, she spent some time with GTE, Wyandot Popcorn, and Jay Maish Advertising. She currently works in the Student Financial Aid office counseling students and parents about financial aid and doing research for financial aid problem solving. She really likes flowers, her cat, and she hopes to soon have a dog.
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