The Mall: Writing from Butler University's First Year Seminar 2018-19

The Mall Staff

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THE MALL

Writing from Butler University’s First-Year Seminar 2018-19
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A Note from our 2018-19 Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

Thank you for picking up this publication of *The Mall*. The staff and I are pleased to present work from the 2018-19 first-year seminar students. During the spring semester, we read through countless submissions, from essays analyzing *Breaking Bad*, to personal struggles and triumphs, to essays that made us wonder. This publication was exciting to put together as it allowed us a glimpse into the lives of our fellow first year students and their Butler experience. I hope you have a similar experience while reading this edition of *The Mall*. We crafted this year’s *Mall* in the hope to continue to inspire and challenge future first year students by being representative of our university at large, and the great writing Butler students can create. The staff and I would like to extend our thanks to our contributors for being willing to share their writing not only with us, but with Butler University and its community. We would also like to thank the faculty that supported this publication by encouraging their first-year students to submit their stellar work. I hope you enjoy the 2018-19 edition of *The Mall*.

*Hannah M. Ratzer*
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Seventeen Years Together

Alexis Wallman

She was scared. She didn’t know why she was scared; she had had nine months to prepare for this moment. She had read every book and article there was—what to do before, after, and during. She took classes and talked to specialists. She wanted to be the mother she always wished she had. The mother she never got.

The drive to the hospital, one hand cradling her stomach, the other holding her husband’s hand, felt like forever. Overwhelming thoughts crossed her mind. Could she do this? she thought. Will she live up to her own expectations or fall short to her mother’s upbringing?

Her grip must’ve tightened on her husband’s hand because, when stopped at a red light, he leans over to her ear and tells her to breathe. In and out, he says. Just breathe in and out.

This was their first child, and although they were excited to bring a young life into the world, they were equally nervous. She knew it was a large responsibility to raise a child, but, for her, it was an even larger responsibility to raise a child who knew what it was like to make a choice for his or herself. To feel safe enough to venture out and make his or her own opinions.

Eighteen hours later, her baby girl is placed in her awaiting arms. Exhausted and sweaty from labor, she holds her daughter as long as the nurse allows. This little girl, so small and so naive, is hers. Wrapped up in a swaddle of pink and white, her daughter stares up at her in awe.

She had thought you only fell in love once in your life, and she thought her one time was with her husband, but she was wrong. Looking at her daughter’s little face, perfectly mixed with her husband’s features and her own, she is in love. Irrevocably and unconditionally in love.

It wasn’t until dark, did the nurse take her daughter away. Within seconds of her daughter’s absence she knew she would never be able to let her go. She knew she would have to one day, but she hoped that day wouldn’t come anytime soon.

She never took her eyes off her daughter. Not the whole ride back home from the hospital. Not when they walked into the house and laid her in her nursery. Not when her husband was telling her something about bottles and diapers. It’s like she was compelled—drawn to this little person who had
lived inside her. She vowed to always have a good connection to her daughter, to never let them drift apart as so many mothers and daughters do.

When a year had gone by, and they were making her daughter’s first birthday cake, she still could hardly take her eyes off her daughter. Every slight movement caught her attention, every little stumble made her worry.

At this point, she thought she got the whole parenting thing down. Her daughter went to bed easy every night, ate everything she fed her, and hardly cried or fussed. Even her daughter’s first word was “mama.” That had to be a sign she was doing something right, especially since her daughter would smile every time she said it. Her husband claimed their daughter smiled whenever she said anything, but she chose not to listen to that. She knew she and her daughter had a special bond. Even though she was only a year old, she knew they had something special.

She wasn’t stupid, though. She knew it wasn’t going to always be this way. They call them the terrible twos for a reason, her friends would say. But when it came time for her daughter to eat her first piece of cake, all the voices in her head of how it got harder went away. All she saw was her little girl stuffing her mouth, although, missing it half the time, with pink and yellow frosting. All she saw was the many, many years she had with her. All the years they had left together. All the time.

The first day of kindergarten was rough. Terrible two’s? She thought. More like Terrible fives. The twos were a piece of cake compared to now. Her daughter fought her on almost anything she could— clothes, food, bedtime. She was no longer the only child, no longer the only one who had her and her husband’s attention. It was now divided in half, and by a little brother, no less. She pushed him when he was in the way and yelled over him when he was talking. Still, she, even though her husband told her not to give in, would always give her daughter attention. Even when she didn’t deserve it. Even when her son would cry because she’s no longer looking at him.

She walks into her daughter’s room after breakfast to help her pick out something to wear. Instead, she finds her daughter already dressed. She has everything on except her backpack.

“Oh,” she says, “I thought you wanted me to help you pick out your outfit for today.”

Her daughter, dressed in jeans, a yellow shirt, and Cinderella sneakers, turns and looks at her. “But I’m all ready.”

“Yeah, I can see that,” she says more to herself than to her daughter. “Did you at least brush your teeth?” she asks her daughter.

Her daughter’s eyes light up and runs to the bathroom.
Sighing, she cleans up her daughter’s mess. It seems her daughter has taken everything she owns out of her closet and has thrown them on the floor.

She had been anticipating her daughter’s first day of kindergarten for years. She thought they would eat her daughter’s favorite breakfast, cereal, then get her all dressed and ready to go. She pictured her daughter wearing her long, wavy hair back in a headband with a cute skirt and matching shirt. She pictured them doing all this together, but her daughter seems to have other plans. She seems to want to do everything herself.

Letting your mother pick out your outfit on your first day of school is just one of those unwritten mother-daughter rules. Like, going prom dress shopping together or letting your mother make your bed one last time when you move into your college dorm. It breaks her heart to know she was left out of one of the rules.

Watching her daughter get on the bus is the hardest part. It seems too big, too grown-up. It seems like just yesterday she was watching her daughter blow out the candles on her first birthday cake. She remembers the pink and yellow frosting so vividly, something her daughter would only remember in pictures.

In the afternoon, as soon as she hears the front door of their apartment open, she picks her son up from the couch and runs to it. She only stops when she hears her daughter sniffling. She finds her daughter curled up in a corner by the door, crying.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” she asks.
Her daughter only looks at her, then looks back down. She puts her son down and goes to sit by her daughter.
“What happened?”
“Some of the girls in my class laughed at me,” her daughter says, wiping her nose with the palm of her hand.
“Why?”
“They said my shoes were stupid and only a baby would wear them.”
“Well, that’s…not true,” she tells her daughter, pushing her dark hair away from her face. “Your shoes are the coolest shoes a kindergartener could ever wear.”

Her daughter continues to cry. “That’s not what my friends think.”
“Well it doesn’t really sound like they’re good friends. Aren’t there any other girls that could be your friends?”
“Maybe,” her daughter murmurs, but tears still run down her face.
Her son, who was quietly playing with the rug by the front door runs over to his sister and puts his hands on her head.
“Why sissy cry?” He blurbs, looking at her, then squatting down to look his sister in the eye.
Her daughter goes to push him, but she quickly grabs her hands. “Don’t,” she tells her daughter. “You’d just be doing the same thing to your brother as those girls did to you.”

Her son goes back to playing with the rug by the front door as if nothing happened.

Her daughter looks at her, confused. “But they didn’t push me.”

“No,” she tells her daughter, “but did their words feel like a push?”

Her daughter shrugs her shoulders, “I guess so.”

“So don’t you think pushing your brother would probably make him feel the same way you’re feeling right now?”

Her daughter just puts her head on her lap and closes her eyes. “I’m happy you’re my friend, mama.”

She just smiles and strokes her hair. The familiar smell of her apricot shampoo filling the air. She knew although her daughter might try to fight her on everything, she was always able to get through to her. She was always able to make her laugh or smile. She took that as a victory. Every single time.

She knew middle school was a hard time for everyone, but her daughter seemed to have an extra hard time. The past two years have been a nightmare. All her daughter wanted was to fit in, and no matter what she said, she could never reason with her.

“Mom, that’s not even cute,” her daughter informs her. “No one at my school would ever think of wearing that.”

She puts the striped shirt back on the rack. Picking out clothes was the worst. They could never agree on any of the clothes the other picked out. It was like speaking two completely different languages and expecting the other to know it fluently.

“These,” her daughter says, holding up a pair of jeans. “These are what I’ve been looking for.”

They hardly looked like anything she had ever seen her daughter wear before. They weren’t just jeans; they were jeans with holes and patches and weird seams.

“Do you just want those because those girls you always hang out with wear jeans like that?”

“What?” her daughter questions with a look of disgust on her face, then rolls her eyes. “You always think I get stuff just because someone else has them. No, I just think they would look good for the first day of school.”

She considers arguing but knows that wouldn’t get them anywhere. “Fine, put them in the cart and let’s go. Your brother has a game at four.”

In the car on the way to her son’s baseball game, she tries and fails to make conversation with her daughter. Everything she would say, her daughter would either give a one-word answer to or just grunt.
Thirteen years old, she thought. Only a handful more years until she is on her own.

Sometimes she wishes time would slow down, but honestly, and she hates to admit this, sometimes she can’t wait until she is older and outgrows the phase of ‘being too cool to be friends with your mother.’

It stings a little, remembering all the days her daughter would come home crying to her after school. They would sit down and talk out all her daughter’s problems. Then, they would make cookies or brownies or some kind of sweet to cheer her up. It always worked, but one day it just stopped.

Now, if she asked her daughter how her day went, she would lie and say good, then go to her room and shut the door. She was always able to tell when her daughter didn’t have a good day. One day she even made brownies and cookies for her daughter, hot and ready for her when she got home. That was the day her daughter claimed she didn’t eat sweets anymore. She hasn’t made brownies or cookies since. Not even when her hungry, fast-growing son would ask her to. It just hurt too much.

The last middle school dance was a couple months later. According to her daughter, all the girls were looking forward to this dance because, as eighth graders, they could finally dress up in fancy dresses. For the past two years, her daughter’s dances consisted of wearing a jean skirt and a not-too-fancy-blouse.

One weekend before the dance, her daughter had, unknowingly to her, gone dress shopping with her friend and her friend’s older sister. She had been so excited to go dress shopping with her daughter, because lately they were getting along again. There wasn’t as much bickering between them, and her daughter even sat next to her on the coach and laid her head on her lap again like she used to. She thought it was looking up. So, when her daughter walked in with a blue sparkly dress, she was surprised.

“I didn’t think it would be a big deal,” her daughter says, standing in the kitchen with her dress in a garment bag slung over her forearm. “We didn’t even plan on picking out dresses, we were just shopping and then saw two really pretty dresses we wanted for the dance.”

“I told you I would take you dress shopping.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did. Last week at dinner.”

“I forgot,” her daughter says. “You weren’t there anyways, so I just bought it.”

“Well, I would’ve gone back and taken you,” she says, matter of factly.

“Sorry.”

“Where’d you even get the money?” she asks her daughter, crossing her arms.
“Dad,” her daughter replies, then heads up to her room and shuts the door.

Later that night, she gets into a fight with her husband about the money. He claimed she asked for money and he just gave it to her without asking her for what. They go to bed angry that night, her thinking he ruined her and her daughter’s dress shopping experience, him thinking she’s overreacting. It wasn’t until later did she realize that she didn’t even ask her daughter to show her the dress. She was too busy focusing on being mad.

The dance is two weeks later, and her daughter lets her do her hair. It’s a simple braid down her back, something she could’ve easily done herself, but she sees it as a peace offering, as a way for her daughter to include her. The apricot smell of her creek-brown hair, now curly, brings her back to when she used to play with her daughter’s hair. She holds back her tears, but only because she knows her daughter would be mad if her friends came to the apartment and her mother was crying. She just wants this night to be perfect for her daughter.

Watching her daughter pile into her friends’ mom’s car with all her friends and drive away is equally as hard as watching her daughter walk onto the bus the first day of kindergarten. Long after the car is gone, she remains outside her small apartment, holding back her tears because she knows she needs to practice in order to get through the next dance. Prom.

By the time her daughter is well into high school, she’s outgrown the ‘being too cool to be friends with your mother’ stage. She isn’t sure exactly how, or why, it happened, but one day her daughter started paying attention to her. She started staying in on Saturday nights to watch movies with her and wouldn’t walk far away from her at the grocery store. One day her daughter even asked her to make her brownies again like she used to.

It was like they were making up for lost time— they did everything together. Sometimes she even had to remind her daughter to go out, to hang out with girls her own age, to go on dates. She would say this because she wanted her daughter to have friends, but mostly because she realized she was becoming too dependent on her daughter. So much so to where, one day when her and her husband were fighting, she told her daughter everything. Everything you’re supposed to tell a friend your own age, everything you’re supposed to keep your child from knowing, she told her 16-year-old daughter. She didn’t realize she made a mistake until her daughter claimed she would want to live with her if her and her husband were ever to separate.

It was a Friday afternoon and they were sitting at their kitchen table with the view overlooking the river across the street from their apartment. They were both eating cereal, both waiting for her husband to come home. Both wondering where he was.
“It’s just a small fight, honey,” she informed her daughter who was nervously biting her fingernails. “He’ll be back. I’m sure he just needed to cool off for a second.”

Her daughter looks up at her and she finds herself starting into the eyes of her husband. Her daughter has the exact same eyes as him, brown as the mourning cloak’s wings.

“He’s been gone all night, and we can’t keep lying to him,” she stands up and gestures to the living room where her 13-year-old son was asleep, waiting for his dad to come home from work.

“First of all, you don’t need to do anything,” she stands up and walks to her daughter. “I am your mother, I protect you. I don’t need you protecting me. All you need to worry about is filling out college applications.”

Her daughter opens her mouth, then decides against it. Instead, her daughter wraps her arms around her in full embrace. This is what she was waiting for during those years of neglect.

“I’m happy you’re my friend, mama,” her daughter whispers in her ear, the exact same thing she told her all those years ago when those girls made fun of her in kindergarten. “But let me be your friend. Friends look out for each other.”

She smiles, not trusting her voice to be steady. She wishes she could stay in this moment forever. It was everything she saw the first time she held her daughter, and more. Her daughter’s pure depth of feeling fills the apartment, something she knows will be absent once she’s gone.

Her daughter releases her hold and starts walking toward her room, grabbing blank college applications on her way, leaving her door open.

Senior year prom was when it hit her. Her daughter is going off to college. Across the country. Every time she thinks about her daughter leaving, a knot forms in her stomach. She’s not sure she can live without her daughter. She’s not sure she will ever get used to her daughter not being there. Not sitting in the kitchen every morning eating cereal, not lying next to her while they watch the same movie for the sixth time, not being in the apartment.

“Mom,” her daughter yells, pulling her out of her thoughts.

She walks out of her room and finds her daughter with a brush in one hand and a panicked expression plastered on her face. She smiles, “What?”

Her daughter does not smile. “I’m glad you find this amusing, but I am having a problem. My hair is not cooperating with me.”

She isn’t wrong. Her brown hair, now cut to her shoulders, is as big as can be. The humidity isn’t friendly to her hair in the Spring.

“Don’t worry, honey. Just jump in the shower real fast and when you’re done, I’ll tone it down a bit.”
Her daughter sighs and walks to the bathroom, mumbling something about how taking a shower throws her off prom day schedule.

It isn’t until a couple minutes after she hears the water start that her daughter yells there isn’t any shampoo. Putting down the bread she was about to put in the toaster, she goes to get some shampoo from underneath her sink. She never thought shampoo would make her feel nostalgic, but when she pulls out the apricot shampoo bottle, she feels her eyes start to fill with tears. It takes her back to when she used to wash her daughter in the sink when she was a baby. It takes her back to when her daughter would lay her head on her lap, and she would play with her hair, the smell of apricots filling the room.

A half an hour later, she is straightening her daughter’s hair. Her daughter is looking in the mirror, sitting in the exact same chair she did when she did her hair for the 8th grade dance. Last time it was hard to figure out what to talk about with her daughter. She tried so hard to say the right thing and tried extra hard to not say the wrong thing. Instead, this was the conversation she imagined. This is what she wanted, what she knew one day would happen. Her daughter laughs at what she says and carries the conversation past one syllable words.

When she’s done pinning her daughter’s hair back, she sighs. Seventeen years old, she thinks. Where did the time go? I thought I had all this time with her. It feels like just yesterday I had all the time in the world with her.

“He’s going to be here soon,” her daughter says, standing up. “I should go to my room and get dressed real fast, then I’ll do my make-up.”

She scurries out of the bathroom and down the hall to her bedroom and disappears behind her closed door.

Prom pictures take forever because she takes pictures of everything. Her husband tells her their daughter’s prom group needs to get going, that the limo is going to arrive any second, but she’s too busy taking pictures to notice or care.

They say the more you do things, the better you get at them; but each time she says goodbye to her daughter, it’s harder. Only a couple more months until the fall, until she is across the country. She’s not sure how she’s going to say goodbye.

She hadn’t realized until now, until this very moment, that she was in denial about her daughter going to college, about her daughter leaving her. It’s not that she isn’t proud of her daughter, she’s just going to miss not seeing her everyday.

“I think everything’s packed.”

She looks around the room, all her daughter’s belongings taken off the walls, stripped off the bed, and removed from the drawers. Her daughter lays her head on her shoulder.
“We have a good connection, right?” she asks her daughter. “You feel comfortable talking to me, don’t you?”

Her daughter lifts her head off her shoulder, “Yeah, why?”

She smiles and remembers walking into this room all those years ago, her daughter fussing in her arms. “Because 17 years ago, in this exact room I promised myself I would have a good relationship with you. Better than the relationship I have with my mother.”

Her daughter gives her a small smile. “Well, I think if it’s killing me to leave you, to leave this, in a couple of days, I think you did a good job.”

“And you know you can make your own decisions?” she asks. “You can tell me a list of everything you believe and everything you don’t, and it doesn’t have to be the same as mine.”

Her daughter lifts her head off her shoulder, “Stop worrying about everything. You’re a good mom, of course I know that.”

They stand there, her talking about how the room was set up 17 years ago, her daughter listening and claiming she remembers everything she is telling her. They talk and laugh and cry. They reminisce all night until there’s nothing left to say, until they fall asleep on her daughter’s hard, bare ground with nothing but happy thoughts. Nothing but a mother-daughter bond.
Anatomy of a Scene: Season 2, Episode 1, “Nosedive”  
Aly Paul

Two college girls, both from the same hometown, are trying to get back home for Fall Break. There is only one seat left on the plane. Girl one has two thousand followers on Instagram; girl two has two hundred. Who gets the seat? In modern society, many people would answer ‘whoever gets there first.’ Sure, some people may value others based on social ranking, but corporations such as airlines do not. That would be illegal discrimination. However, *Black Mirror*, a television show known for tackling the dystopian future of technology, turns the tables and projects a world where online status is exactly equivalent to real life worth in an episode called *Nosedive*. The closing scene in *Nosedive* serves to sway the audience against putting social media and status before personal wellbeing and happiness through color psychology, symbolism, and character arcs.

*Nosedive* follows Lacie, a woman living in a world where everything is determined by her online rating. This rating is decided upon by anyone who meets her or sees her social media profiles. They give her a score out of five stars, and an algorithm averages it out. Lacie works painstakingly hard and becomes consumed in trying to be as perfect as possible in order to receive high marks. She is constantly faking a smile or laugh, staging a picture, and conducting herself in any way that leads to the mass’s approval. This goes to extremes at times, like when Lacie stops talking to a co-worker because he went through a break up and the rest of the office sided against him. Lacie seems content in her world and argues with her brother often about his lack of enthusiasm or care about his score. However, as the episode goes on, Lacie’s world slowly begins to morph from a daydream to a nightmare. Lacie gets into a dispute in the airport after a canceled flight, which causes her score to drop a full point. She then begins to spiral, losing out on usual perks like fine rental cars and nice treatment due to her rating. Lacie becomes erratic and drops her score down even lower, causing her friend to ban her from her elite wedding. Lacie shows up anyways, tries to give her maid of honor speech, and ends up disgusting people so much that her score drops into the negatives. She has a mental breakdown, screaming at her friend Naomi for treating her so poorly. Lacie gets sent to jail, where an incredibly moving ending scene takes place. Flaws in the ranking society are then put on full
blast, particularly in the final scene.

The scene begins with two guards leading Lacie into a jail cell. Everything is grey: the walls, the guards, the ceiling, and the floor. The only trace of actual color lies in Lacie’s blush pink bridesmaids dress, which lies disheveled on her body. It is a very subtle and muted pink, and it represents her ties to society. The outside world had always been represented as vibrant and colorful throughout the episode. Editors used an intense filter that lightened, illuminated, and brightened colors so they stood out. Blue was an icy mint, yellow a bright ray of sun. The contrast between the coloring of the rest of the episode and the last scene is conspicuously apparent. It is meant to showcase Lucie’s newfound disillusionment with society and the ranking system. Lucie used to be obsessed with her world, trying so painfully hard to improve her rating. Everything she did revolved around what could get her five stars. However, in the midst her downward spiral, Lucie broke down and changed her mindset. While giving her maid of honor speech, she went absolutely crazy and began to lash out at Naomi for all of the terrible stuff she put her through, like sleeping with a guy she cared about and promoting her eating disorder. Lucie began to realize the rating system is not all it is made out to be; people with high rankings are not any better, nicer, or kinder than anyone else. She also realizes that throughout her whole life, popularity has always been unobtainable. Naomi was always more desirable than her, no matter what she did. In the final scene, nothing is as bright and cheerful to Lucie as it once was.

After the guards guide Lacie into her cell, they quickly exit. They do not look her in the eyes, say anything, or show any hints of humanity. This depicts that Lacie’s status has dropped to an all-time low. No one values her or humanizes her in the slightest, all because enough people gave her a one-star rating. After the guards have exited, Lacie glances around her cell, looking much like a deer in headlights. She also walks around timidly. This represents how Lacie is lost without her ranking. In the past, Lacie’s rating is what made her who she was. Now, Lacie does not know how to live. Everything is foreign to her. Another blatant form of symbolism lies in the cell windows, which are clear and easily seen through. This is ironic, because it shows complete transparency. In the past, Lacie always had to put up a front with others, faking a smile and pretending to be perfect. Now, she is in her rawest form, no longer having anyone to impress. She has nothing to hide, because there is nothing to gain from her fakeness.

As the scene continues, Lacie takes off her dirty, wrinkled bridesmaid dress, bunching it into a ball on the floor. This symbolizes Lacie losing the last remanence of her previous world. Lacie is now in a white slip, which matches the white and grey color scheme of the scene. Lacie has completely lost touch with the outside world and its color. She sees the true evil that lies with the rating system. This represents a major character arc, since just a few
minutes earlier Lacie was so defensive of the rating system that she blew up at her brother for not supporting it. She used to take every single rating to heart, incredibly disappointed anytime someone gave her less than five stars. The fact that Lacie finally sees the corruption in everything speaks volumes to the dystopia in her world. Lacie’s character arc sends a powerful wave of critique towards the downfalls of society placing value on a person due to their social media status.

Next, Lacie takes seat on her cell bench and looks up. Tiny white particles, presumably dust, are seen falling from the ceiling. This causes tears to well up in Lacie’s eyes. Lacie has always been so busy striving for perfection, trying to take perfect picture, and attempting to boost her rating. The dust symbolizes two milestones for her. The first milestone is seeing something imperfect. Dust clutters rooms and is despised by most, so after living in a society where everything had to be perfect, seeing the world be content with something so imperfect is refreshing. The second landmark lies in the fact that dust is an incredibly small detail. Lacie was always focused on one task, such as taking a picture or schmoozing strangers, so she never got to appreciate the small things in life. In her past, she would have been too engaged and busy online to notice the dust. Lacie is brought to tears from this sight, and also lets out her fist genuine smile. The stress of her past is lifted off and Lacie is finally able to feel true joy. She laughs, knowing she can now experience and enjoy all of life, including its flaws and shortcomings.

In the next shot, a fellow inmate is shown in the cell across the hall. He had previously been unseen and hidden. This is a conscious choice made by the director, as the scene first had to accomplish Lacie’s growth and character arc. Now that her views have changed and she is flooded with disillusionment, it is the perfect time to showcase how this experience has changed her and how she now conducts herself. When Lacie first sees the man, she looks rather scared. Since the rules of society have now been lifted, Lacie no longer knows how she should act around others. Lacie stands up and goes through the hand motions of rating the inmate five stars. Lacie could have done this out of habit, or as closure since she can no longer rate anyone. Regardless, it doesn’t work since she does not have her technology anymore. Lacie looks down at her hand sadly, realizing life will never be the same. However, a glimmer creeps into her eyes and her face lightens. A mood of acceptance washes through the screen. Lacie lets go completely, ready to dive into her next chapter of life.

Lacie locks eyes with the inmate. She curses at him, saying “What the f*** are you looking at?” (“Nosedive”). Lacie was never allowed to curse or be rude, or else she would be docked points and would lose social status. Now, she is free to treat people any way she chooses. Although it may be unfair, Lacie takes out all of her pent-up emotions on the man. It is presumed that he has been alone in the prison for a while, as he actively hurls back
insults. Both seem to be releasing everything they have suppressed, and the interaction is clearly therapeutic. Even though they are making insulting comments, their tones and body language are devoid of anger. They almost seem joyous. It is a completely cathartic experience for them. The duo begins to escalate their insults, and the man says, “You look like a lost little lamb that just found out there’s no Santa Claus” (“Nosedive”). This comment is ironically spot on, as Lacie has just found out the world that she was once obsessed with is actually corrupt. She also realizes the rating system she has built her life around has no real meaning. It is subjective; one interaction with someone can not define a person and nobody is perfect, no matter how hard they try. Lacie is in fact lost like a little lamb, and she most definitely found out something she loved is not all it is cracked up to be.

As the scene comes to a head, Lacie and the man get playful with their insults and begin to laugh. A bond is formed, and they experience the feeling of complete freedom. No consequences come from their rude comments or cursing. This seems like an oxymoron, since while they are in prison, they are the freest. It turns out that their outside world and rating systems had been imprisoning them their whole lives. They continue to lash out at each other, beginning to incorporate more and more curse words. Throughout the episode, Lacie occasionally lets curse words spill out. However, she is instantly mortified as she knows they are forbidden. In the airport, Lacie gets put on probation and docked a whole point because of her cursing. It is clear that cursing is an outlet for anger and stress for Lacie. The scene ends with them both yelling, “F*** you!” (“Nosedive”). They scream this, and then everything goes completely silent. It is the calm after the storm.

The entire scene depicts the downfall of the ranking system, the issues of placing self-value in ratings, and the horrors technology can bring. It plays hand in hand with obsession, which is a major point of discussion in today’s society when it comes to social media. People fixate on different aspects of the online world, whether it be likes, followers, comments, or retweets. This obsession can take over people’s lives to the point where they spend a major chunk of time trying to stage the perfect photo, so they can achieve optimal engagement. In It’s Complicated, danah boyd discusses a teen named Andrew who actually deleted his Facebook because he felt it had an overwhelming control over his life (77). Andrew is not alone in his struggles, as many teens face the pressure of social media and maintaining an online persona. Boyd continues to touch social media addiction throughout the chapter, making it clear that not all teens are addicted like media might have you think, but those who are allow it to “wreak havoc on their lives, affecting school performance and stunting emotional development” (boyd 78). By saying this, boyd showcases how social media addiction is dangerous. People are not allowed to grow when they are addicted, and it causes them to fall behind in other
Aspects of life.

Similarly, “Nosedive” showcases this same effect by showing how Lacie’s emotions and relationships were suppressed. Throughout the episode, Lacie had to fake joy and therefore lost control of her emotions and could not develop them. Her whole life, all she had known was a fake smile. Also, the pressure of maintaining social status caused her to ostracize her brother, since he did not have a high ranking. Lacie’s addiction to her social media caused great harm, and she only felt free in the final scene when she could let go and be herself. The episode agrees with boyd’s thoughts on addiction being negative.

There is extreme power and influence in the last scene of Black Mirror’s “Nosedive.” The scene utilizes lighting, colors, story arcs, and symbolism to show the downside of the increasing presence and power of social media. From the beginning of the scene, there is minimal color to drown out the supposed happiness of Lacie’s world and to reveal the true disillusionment she discovers. The entire scenario is caused by a major change in Lacie’s mindset, where she realizes that she is not happy with the ranking system and does not want to fake her true thoughts and lifestyle in order to please others. Finally, there is a great deal of symbolism, from Lacie taking off her bridesmaid dress to the dust falling from the ceiling. There is a clear message of warning and disgust towards a world revolving around social media status. We are lucky to live in a world where a girl with 200 followers has the same right to a plane ticket as a girl with 2,000 followers.

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363 Days Later

Andrew Jacob

I walked right alongside the old train tracks for what felt like hours. I took it all in: the worn wood and metal of the tracks, the dying trees with their orange and brown leaves, the slight shiver I felt whenever a bit of wind blew past my ear. I felt like I did on that first night in September, walking down those streets I didn’t know in the middle of downtown Milwaukee, growing more and more empty with each step.

It wouldn’t have been so bad if it hadn’t been so good. July 12th. The beach. Waiting for the sun to set behind our backs because we didn’t even bother thinking about which direction the beach faced. Two of us on our backs, shoulder touching shoulder, staring up at the stars and just talking. A deck of cards and a plastic blue keychain she’d made just because she was thinking of me.

And then she wasn’t anymore. Everyone seemed less surprised than me when it happened. There were warning signs, I just chose to ignore them.

An early July bonfire crackling in her backyard, although she isn’t there. I sit among her friends and wonder why I do when she doesn’t. I hijacked the iPad and cued up an old doo-wop song. A deflated yellow ball is thrown around a table that holds only a single bowl of plain potato chips as we all collectively wait for her to arrive. When she does, she is quiet and tired but we are glad to see her nonetheless. I was always glad to see her in those days.

As soon as fall arrives, everything changes. A crowded house on the first weekend of school, walls sweat, LEDs periodically burn my eyes as they flash around the room. I look into an old friend’s eyes and see horror: she’s there too. I turn and look, only because I pray he’s wrong. But the opposite corner holds my dismay: a face I’d never think could make me feel like that.

It was storming the day I met her. I didn’t want to go but I was begged. When I stepped out of my house to get into the car, the loudest crack of thunder I’d ever heard shook the world around me; at first I thought I’d been shot. The bowling alley we’d decided to meet at was far nicer than the one by my house. There was not an inch of wall uncovered by a TV, each one playing something different. My eyes were drawn to the one screening Spider-Man; I’d rather be at home watching that in my basement than here, waiting
for friends of friends to come bowl with us. But, against everything that had
been planned, she showed up too. I never thought a face could make me feel
like \textit{that.}

And still, walking along those train tracks, I think back and I feel \textit{that},
and \textit{that}, and so much more. No matter how much time passes, sometimes
you don’t just forget.
America is not grand, and America is not amazing—or at least according to *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan. One could make a fairly substantial argument that the entire series of Vince Gilligan’s *Breaking Bad* (2008) is a harsh critique of America’s healthcare system at the time. If protagonist Walter White could have received decent healthcare following his diagnosis of terminal lung cancer, he would not have been forced to cook meth in order to pay for his treatment and leave his family without crippling debt after he passes. However, the premise of the series is only one aspect of Gilligan’s reprimand on the United States. Arguably his harshest look at America comes in Season 2, Episode 4, “Down.” The episode’s first line is literally “Hey, Captain America!” (1:41) spoken to Jesse Pinkman, Walter White’s former student and current meth cook and distribution partner, by a homeless man outside of a convenience store. This sets up the stage of Jesse being “Captain America,” a symbol of the country, throughout the episode. In this episode, Gilligan takes a scolding look at how in America, when someone is down, they stay down.

The storylines in “Down” center around Walter and his wife Skyler’s fraying relationship and her ever-growing distance to him, and Jesse’s life quickly turning into shambles. While Walter could also be looked at as a “Captain America,” Jesse is the one who is dubbed that in this episode. After Jesse is given the nickname, he walks into the aforementioned convenience store and meets Walter to receive his money from their most recent cook. Jesse is handed the money with red, white, and blue bottles in the foreground of the shot (3:12). The next time the viewers see Jesse, he is draped in yellow, typically symbolic of drugs, and he is getting legally evicted from his house. The arbiter telling Jesse that he must vacate wears a tie consisting of red, white, and blue color (9:41). Soon after, the scene with Jesse and his mother occurs – the scene in which she puts her foot down and tells him to leave. After this, Jesse is all but homeless, and she is well aware of it, too. He frantically asks her, “hey, where am I supposed to go?” She not-very-helpfully replies, “I don’t know, sweetheart.” (16:44) Later in the episode, Jesse throws the ice trays in a rage at the movers (20:50), he gets kicked out.
by his Twàughthammer bandmate’s wife (24:00), and he slams the payphone against itself after presumably either his friend Skinny Pete or Combo also do not take him in (24:30). His life is quickly spiraling down, and it soon gets worse. Almost immediately afterwards, his bike is stolen (25:10). The homeless man says, “not cool, man,” as he sits on a red, white, and blue bag.

Where else does Jesse have to go? Where else can Jesse go? He retreats to the junkyard where the RV in which he and Walter had constructed their makeshift meth lab is being held, only to fall through the Porta Potty and be stained blue all over, going with his white jacket and red-trimmed hat (26:40). Then, when Jesse finally gets inside the RV, he sleeps on a cardboard box while he has one of their cooking masks cloaked over his face. Eventually, he has dust-ups with junkyard owner Clovis (32:56) and Walter (41:43), and then he finally gets his desperately needed money from Walter at the end of the episode (43:50).

Creator Vince Gilligan is uber-focused on the minor details, namely colors, when it comes to Breaking Bad, as he explained in an interview with GQ. Gilligan said, “there’s quite a number of man hours spent discussing color usage and assigning colors to different characters and thinking in those terms.” In other words, the colors have definite meaning. Gilligan specifically mentions starting Walt with khaki colors and then turning his palette green, to show the significance of his desire for money. Skyler is typically blue to show her sadness around her failing marriage, Hank, Walter’s DEA brother-in-law, and most the of the other cops don orang or beige, Marie, Hank’s wife, has purple, and Jesse typically wears yellow to symbolize the use of drugs, or occasionally a red when someone dies. There has rarely been a combination of red, white, and blue, the colors of the American flag, thus far in the series. In fact, so rare, it is practically non-existent.

Prior to “Down”, the only glaring occasion the viewers see red, white, and blue collectively together is when Walter and Jesse are standing in front of red, white, and blue cars at the junkyard before their first non-fulminated-mercury deal with drug dealer Tuco (1.7 11:09). For ten total episodes, red, white, and blue is prevalent just one time – until “Down.”

As stated prior, when Jesse first receives his money, red, white, and blue is prominent in the shot. The arbiter’s tie consists of red, white, and blue. The homeless man sits on a red, white, and blue bag. Jesse himself eventually becomes red, white, and (mostly) blue. (There is also a shot of an old photograph of Jesse and his sick aunt who died of cancer – not surprisingly, she has some red, white, and blue on in the picture. Another reminding-rebuke at the healthcare system (14:34)). After one occurrence of red, white, and blue in the series’ first ten episodes, suddenly having four or five occurrences in one episode – an episode where the first lines spoken are “Hey, Captain America!” and is centered around a man who is not allowed to get back onto his feet – is not a coincidence.
There is an old adage that states, “if you get ‘em young, you get ‘em for life.” In this context, that can be interpreted as if someone makes a mistake as a young adult or child, it is nearly impossible to recover in society’s view. Jesse, Captain America, screwed around in school, did not “apply himself,” used drugs from an early age, and never seriously went to college (although he is in the DeVry University database (1.2 14:53)). Jesse has attempted to get out of the meth world before when he applied for the sales position at the beginning of “Gray Matter” (1.5). He is turned away, almost laughed at by the interviewer, because of his credentials. If no one will hire Jesse, if no one will hire these seemingly genuine turned-around people, what else are Jesse, the others, supposed to do? Time and time again, they revert back to essentially the only thing that society has allowed them to do – crime. In “Down,” Jesse pleads with his mom when he is being legally evicted from his house, “I’ve been thinking real seriously about business school, actually.” His mother simply shakes her head and evicts him anyways. Jesse cannot get out of the hole he dug himself because no one will let him – America will not let him.

Further going along with that point, Jesse tries just about everyone he knows who could take him in. No one does. From the WASP-y wife, to friends Badger and Skinny Pete, not one person says yes. Jesse is forced – forced by society, in a way – to resort to the only thing he has left, his RV and his meth cooking equipment. After Jesse falls through the Porta Potty, making him red, white, and now blue, he sleeps for the night in the RV. There are cardboard boxes full of the equipment since they had just moved everything inside. However, there is a cardboard box, already flattened and on the floor. If they had an extra box, why put in the RV? Why flatten it and place it prominently in the middle of the floor? This, of course, like most things in Breaking Bad, was done purposefully. Jesse, after being turned away by everyone, has no choice but to sleep on a cardboard box in his RV, signifying that he is one small step away from true homelessness, one small step away from having to live in a cardboard box. And what does our Captain America wear while he sleeps on the cardboard box? He wears the gas mask that he and Walter use to cook meth. The meth, and the money from it, is the only thing that can save him from homelessness because nothing else can.

America, the land of opportunity – or, at least, for certain individuals. Jesse, and others who are “down” are not those people. It is glaringly obvious that Jesse is down in Breaking Bad, particularly in the aptly named 2.4 “Down.” If society continuously keeps those down, how can they ever improve? If there is no opportunity for them, how can they ever get better?

Unfortunately, this is many Americans. The episode begins with Jesse being given the moniker “Captain America.” Captain America is not a strong, heroic man who helps everyone he can, because America does not help those who are most vulnerable and need help the most. Vince Gilligan paints the
picture of the true Captain America – a man who cannot be helped because no one will. Captain America is a meth addict.

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Don’t Rock the Boat: How Groupthink Keeps Society Complicit in their Domination

Kathryn Aldstadt

When we hear the phrase “don’t rock the boat”, we are warned against disturbing a relatively stable situation, whether that be for the better or the worse. This phrase is used to keep people from sharing their conflicting viewpoints and staying submissive to the majority’s opinion. In the 1970s, a notable psychologist named Irving Janis further elaborated on this phrase with the term groupthink, or our tendency to obey what the majority or those in power believe in order to reach a consensus and avoid possible conflict or consequences, and the most common example of this is the Jonestown mass suicide. Aside from the real life examples of groupthink at work, the fictitious stories of The Hunger Games (2012), “The Lottery” (1948), and “Harrison Bergeron” (1961) exemplify the detrimental effects of groupthink on already oppressed people.

The term groupthink was first coined by the psychologist Irving Janis in the late 1970s, and it primarily encompasses preserving harmony, even if that leads to horrendous decisions. Most commonly, the incident of Jonestown in the 1970s is used to explain how powerful the idea of groupthink is. To preface this, Jim Jones started a church called The People’s Temple, and this was based upon his Evangelical Christian and communist beliefs. Once he amassed followers by traveling throughout the country to host rallies, the group moved to Guyana to live in utopian society known as Jonestown. Jim Jones was able to convince his followers to undertake a mass suicide by drinking cyanide-laced punch. This tragedy was commented on by reporter Tim Reiterman, who stated that:

‘Peoples Temple was – as many communes, cults, churches and social movements are an alternative to the established social order, a nation unto itself’, he wrote in Raven. ‘The Temple I knew was not populated by masochists and half-wits, so it followed that the members who gave years of labor, life savings, homes, children and, in some cases, their own lives had been getting something in return,’ (Conroy).

As we can interpret from this quote, the people of Jonestown had a great sense of loyalty toward Jim Jones for providing a self-sustaining utopia. When it came time to drink the poisonous punch, the members did not speak
out against it because everybody was doing it, and a dissenting opinion would cause uproar in their community. This mentality can prove detrimental for unbiased decision making because it forces the minority to obey what the party in power, like Jim Jones, believes and fear retaliation. Moreover, since members did not see other members actively fighting the system, they believed everyone agreed and that they would stand alone (Conroy). Likewise, this mass-mindedness and absolute control can be applied to numerous fictitious examples, as well.

In the award-winning trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, written by Suzanne Collins and directed by Gary Ross, twelve districts face oppression from The Capitol by being forced to compete in the Hunger Games. As the propaganda for the games plays before the reaping, viewers can see how the games are depicted as a “peacekeeping resolution” to past rebellion. Additionally, the audience can see how the games have been occurring for over 70 years, and because of that, almost nobody remembers a time without them, so all citizens have grown up accustomed to this torment. Therefore, since nobody remembers a time without them, no one dares to venture into the unknown by dismantling the system and reverting to life before the games.

Later in the film, the audience can see how citizens of The Capitol, the upper class that holds all of the power, fully enjoy the games. However, one can postulate that if even a few members of the Capitol, who would still hold more power than the districts combined, were to speak out against the games, they would likely cause a quicker change throughout Panem. Sadly, the citizens of The Capitol have never spoken out against this brutal form of entertainment, yet they do not feel any form of remorse or guilt for this decision. That is because with groupthink, the individuals themselves do not feel personally responsible for the consequences of the group’s decisions and actions even if they were pivotal in making that choice. To clarify, this is similar to the bystander effect, for someone assumes that another will do something, and that thought process proves to be detrimental. For example, if you need help and yell “somebody call 911!” into a crowd, it is much less likely that someone will assist you than if you point at a person and yell “you call 911!” In this real-life example, we can see how the idea of groupthink causes individuals to not feel personally responsible for the group’s actions despite being able to alter the actions, and this demonstrates itself with The Capitol’s silence towards the games.

Throughout the trilogy, viewers observe the brutal retaliation faced by the districts from The Capitol as a result from their rebellion. Because of this, citizens in the districts are forced to collectively stay submissive out of fear. However, when Katniss is brave enough to start this revolution and stop the groupthink mentality that is overcoming the country, citizens start to follow in her footsteps to dismantle the system. Overall, when applying Irving Janis’ concept of groupthink to this fictional series, we can not only see how a
multitude of factors, such as punishment, has kept the districts from rebelling even sooner but also how one person breaking free of that mindset empowers the rest to do the same.

Likewise, the short story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson encompasses the concept of groupthink and its deadly consequences, as well. In this story, a town draws names out of a black box to determine who will be stoned to death that year. In the very beginning of the story, the narrator describes how since the town is relatively small, the lottery is finished quickly so that they will, “...still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner” (Jackson 1). This strikes readers as very ironic because it shows how the villagers feel no remorse as they enjoy their meal after literally stoning an innocent person to death. This then ties into the concept of groupthink, for the individual villagers feel no guilt for their actions because everyone participated equally. Additionally, Old Man Warner, the oldest member of the community, leads readers to believe that this system has been occurring for at least 77 years. Therefore, nobody remembers a time without the lottery, so nobody questions its existence because it’s all they know. Later on, when Old Man Warner hears about a neighboring town neglecting the system, he states that there is “Nothing but trouble in that” and that they are a “Pack of young fools,” (Jackson 2). This further exemplifies the concept of groupthink by showing how citizens will face disapproval, all though not physical punishment, if they disagree with whatever practices are in place. Throughout this story, readers can analyze how groupthink mentality allows such a barbaric practice like stoning to continue into a civilized society.

Lastly, the story “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. exemplifies the effects of groupthink but with much less deadly consequences. In this story, all citizens are made to be true equals by wearing a handicap, such as a mask to hide their beauty or an earpiece to disrupt their thoughts. This system was put in place by several amendments to the U.S. Constitution and the United States Handicapper General, which symbolize the authority and people in power.

Throughout the story, we can see the consequences of citizens even merely debating removing their handicaps, for when George Bergeron, Harrison’s dad, contemplates that the beautiful ballerinas should remove their handicaps, a large ringing plays in his earpiece to disrupt his thoughts (Vonnegut 1). Additionally, when Hazel Bergeron, Harrison’s mom, suggested that George should relax and remove the birdshot canvas bag that was secured to his neck, he testified that he will get, “Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out,” (Vonnegut 2). These two examples show the key points of groupthink in how the citizens are punished for disobeying the laws, and they have learned from others who tried to do the same. Therefore, they all collectively remain complicit in their abuse. However, when their son Harrison Bergeron was brave enough to break free
from his constraints, he encouraged and empowered the musicians and dancers to do the same, which resulted in a beautiful display of talent and grace (Vonnegut 5). Although they were able to perhaps inspire the television viewers to do the same, the Handicapper General Diana Moon Glampers came in and murdered them on live television, which further perpetuated fear of revolt in the general public. Although Harrison did not serve as much as a catalyst for change as Katniss did, it would be right to hypothesize that his act inspired more people to rise up and revolt in the future, leading to a possible rebellion.

Overall, the concept of groupthink is widely used in getting peoples’ compliance with a harmful system. In all three examples, The Hunger Games, “The Lottery”, and “Harrison Bergeron”, readers can see how long-standing methods and traditions held up by authority figures prove difficult, if not impossible, to demolish. However, if one brave soul, like Katniss Everdeen or Harrison Bergeron, dare to break this mold, then they may spark a revolution and cause others to follow their lead. When reviewing these past deadly real-life examples and the mimicking fictitious stories, people can realize that when we’re warned “don’t rock the boat,” disobeying may be for the better.

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Aristaeus (After Anis Mojgani’s “Sisyphus”)  
Miriam Berne

In February it was too cold for bees but they showed up anyway. My dad stepped on a hole in the ground and was stung 5 times in the leg. The bees filled the room of feathers and the chapters written by them. Nikos saw them drown in honey. Tyler stands in a field of suns watching them fearlessly. They take over my mom’s summer flower box beneath our window seat.

I peered over the drain where the charm fell through. I’d managed to catch the others that hung on the same chain. I felt the hum before I heard it. I braced myself against the sink and watched the bees fly out of the opening where the green had disappeared. That was the first week they followed me. I took them wherever I went; they clogged the drain while I showered, flew up through my straw during lunch, carried me on my bed while I slept. I don’t pay them much mind anymore. The buzz I don’t hear until he walks past and suddenly the vibrations make it too hard to stand. I always thought dreams were meant to be followed but for weeks I slept in darkness and my compass pointed down.

Sylvia Plath took up beekeeping in June. She did not make it through the winter.

I knew it was going to end that Tuesday, at practice. I hadn’t seen you in a few days and you weren’t making any effort to speak to me unless I spoke first. It’s four months later but it would have been 365 days. I found your sweaters in the back of my closet. That is all. I have nothing left of you, just the clothes you once wore, and the photos we once took. For months your name was stuck in my throat and only now is the blue leaving my face.

Sometimes the bees just watch me and I don’t even notice them. I know they’re there though, and I know that they check in on you, too, but you don’t know what their sting feels like.
I called on Thursday after not seeing him for a week. He didn’t want to talk. He didn’t want to listen, either. He went every Monday and Friday to play and she was there. It felt like he knew exactly what had happened and why he was leaving but he didn’t—wouldn’t—tell me. But it’s hard to breathe through someone else’s tears. February was cold and so was March and April but I put my winter coat in the attic today. I didn’t have time to write you a letter.

When Pharaoh forced young Moses to decide between gems and coal, he chose to speak with a certain unsteadiness. When my tongue was swollen from the bee stings, I chose to speak with written words. It is believed by some that a swarm of bees was to be avoided because while the swarm was on the move, they were carrying messages and doing the biddings of the gods. As I cried my tears turned to bees, delivering messages to the pages. Sometimes I beg them to stop because I can’t see myself in the mirror anymore, “please bees, not now. please, stop” and the trails on my face turn to honey.

His sweaters I don’t know if it fits me as well anymore. I don’t know if it’s due to the cold it lets in or his memory, or maybe something inside of me, that my body can’t regulate warmth as bumps rise from my arms.

Did you ever care Chris? Which planet did you land on? I keep receiving letters from the bees, messengers between worlds, but it’s in a code I can’t understand.

I let the bees follow me wherever they want, now. I didn’t ever really have that choice but I’m okay with it now, with seeing them always. They went with me from my house to his house, then the moments we shared, to the memories we will always have, and then back to my house where he doesn’t visit anymore. I let the rest of them fly back to the water and the sand and the lagoon where we first sat, watched them fly away. Their hums made a vibration of pain and love mixed together that I felt in my bones. The following day, as I left the floor of my room, the sky made the same time. As I lie trembling, naked on my floor, the cold seeped in and the sweaters stared at me unable to help. Ra created the honeybee from his tears. The messenger. Sent down to earth. The tears delivered the messages from the heavens, bringers of wisdom, they were revered.

Aristaeus was the god of the bees. He chased Eurydice when she was bitten by a serpent and died. Her nymph sisters punished him. His bees began to sicken and die. To the fountain Arethusa he went, where he was advised to establish altars, sacrifice the cows, and leave their dead carcasses. From them came new swarms of bees. Hades was the god of the Underworld, to which
the bees bridge to the natural world, like the River Styx.

I think of the bees I let fly away by the lagoon with the ducks. How the air blows them back towards me. They keep speaking to me, but I can’t understand. Stand tall and steady. Bones shaking with their buzzes. The pentagons hold the sweetness they give us for free, rub into my skin let whatever wishes stick to me because not much else will.

Did my love just not count as high as you could? Thirty-four weeks left your head so quickly, it was as if it never happened. What a beautiful dream. When you drove away from my house, you stole a year of my life with you. What a beautiful dream. A beautiful murder of a dream, taking a part of me that I didn’t have time to reach myself. I used to try to stretch towards it but I tore muscles reaching that far. I keep walking.

Once, bees kept our flowers alive and which kept springs alive. And now they follow me. So I keep on listening. Just in case their language begins to make sense in my head.

It was said that when Hades took her, while she leaned down to pluck a flower, he rose from the Underworld, grabbed her and left the world up above. Demeter threatened to take fertility from the earth, and thus an agreement was born; the seasons changed. Winter fills the void of Persephone. Death must occur in order for life to begin again because poor Persephone was fooled into a false love that shielded her from the flowers and trees that wanted to bloom but had to wait. I wonder if the bees that rose from the carcasses are the same that follow me. If that which was a second chance was passed on to Aristaeus wrongfully.

I went back to the lagoon where we once sat. A new touch dowsed my hand in alcohol, cleansed me of the words and love I once bathed in. I am not where I am now that I was with you. I am not stuck in February, and the dark winter whipping around my hair and thoughts is now warm May. But some days that winter returns. I unravel a sweater and knit it back together. I let the cold melt. Come May again, I fold it gently into the back of my closet, visiting the bees who hide while I close my eyes, soaking my skin with warm honey.
The Fate of Humanity

*Molly Roe*

Victor Frankenstein aspires to achieve greatness by creating life, yet, when he accomplishes this task, he abhors his creation and eventually dies at its hands. The creature aspires to be loved, yet after exacting revenge on Victor he consents to die alone. Both creator and created fought against what they believed compromised their happiness, but to what end did they truly succeed in achieving that happiness? According to Christopher Ketcham, the failure to find happiness stems from searching for the wrong thing to begin with. In juxtaposing Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* with Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Ketcham raises the question of what we strive for, and what that means for humanity. On that note, he in closing asks the following of the reader: “Whither humanity?”

To answer that question, we must first understand the two parallels of humanity that Ketcham presents the reader. In his novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche explores the potential of humanity, should we abandon religious or moral standards of good and evil. For Nietzsche, God is dead. There is no heaven or pleasant afterlife, and more importantly there are no divine punishments nor expectations. Consequently, he encourages living life to the fullest now, so that if given the chance to live our current life over and over for the rest of eternity, we would readily choose to do so without any regrets whatsoever. Thus, happiness is not the endpoint nor the guiding principle; we must instead strive to endure life’s burdens (Ketcham 79). Those burdens may vary from person to person, depending on what it is that person is meant to achieve, but ultimately what matters is that we claim responsibility for what we do, and we do it well, held back by nothing.

While Nietzsche advocates for an abandonment of religious rules and constraints, Shelley demonstrates a concern for this same matter in *Frankenstein*. Often, Shelley alludes to the idea that Victor is playing God, tampering with what is out of the domain of man. However, Victor is a brilliant individual with a unique means of bettering society, should he have chosen a different outlet for his intelligence. The real issue is that his concern for bettering his own reputation and esteem overpowers his desire to serve others. In other words, he abuses his talent, focusing more on personal gain than society’s needs. He has his own will but lacks responsibility and
accountability for his actions.

Just as Victor suffers from selfishness, so too the creature is unable to see past his own desires. Initially, the creature is the personification of what Nietzsche deems the “Übermensch,” the ultimate successor to humankind and an enlightened being with pure potential and power. He is innocent in a way only children are, but unfortunately, is corrupted by the pain of rejection. The creature cannot move past his need for companionship and love, and thus he begins a destructive path that seals his tragic fate. There is no opportunity for the creature to grow in a productive way and recognize his full potential. Because he gives into hate and engages in violence, the creature loses the chance to better himself, and drives, not only himself, but also Victor into ruin.

However, where did Frankenstein and his creature go wrong? Both allowed their passions to guide their actions – Victor’s immediate disgust with his creation leads him to abandon him, and the creature’s anger towards his absent creator leads him to lash out violently at innocent people. The two have the same short-term goal of thwarting (and eventually ending) the other, but neither truly pauses to reflect on what comes next until after Frankenstein’s death. At this point, the creature realizes there is nothing left for him and resolves to die as well. If Frankenstein was the true barrier to the creature’s happiness, he would have chosen a different fate for himself after Frankenstein was gone, and similarly if the creature was the true barrier to Victor’s happiness, he would have thought before bringing it into being. The focus on happiness that motivated them to action is what killed them in the end.

While Nietzsche is not asking for somber, unhappy lives, he is asking for a new purpose – one that isn’t selfish or temporary, but one that is altruistic and sustainable. Nietzsche suggests asking not how to be happy, but how to simply be. Victor and the creature fail to recognize that the happiness they seek is superficial, and that true happiness comes only from living life fully with no regrets. In other words, they forget to just be. Victor is so concerned with the repercussions of his work that he never pauses to revel in success. Had he taken a moment to move past the physical imperfections of his creation, he might have adopted a completely different perspective on his progeny that could have drastically shifted the dynamic between himself and the creature. Even if Victor failed to change his outlook, had the creature not taken rejection as an absolute setback but rather continued to focus on his own personal growth and development to assist a smoother transition into society, he might have eventually stumbled upon an opportunity for genuine connection without the need for violence. Had Victor and the creature not been so fixated on happiness and instead focused on being on the best possible version of themselves, the tragedies that resulted from their conflict might have been avoided. As Nietzsche suggests, the possibility of
enlightenment – of the Übermensch looms – just out of humanity’s reach, with the illusion of seeking happiness clouding the way.

Thus, we return to Ketcham’s question: “Whither humanity?” Where is humanity going? What is our fate? It depends. We live in a society that is driven by impulsivity and pleasure. We crave happiness, and we cannot wait patiently for it. However, we must recognize that this kind of happiness is an illusion, not attainable forever. We cannot chase our happiness or find it hidden somewhere. Instead, we must direct our focus on being who we are meant to be and engage life and its burdens. Oftentimes, this kind of being means knowing that we will undergo hardships and that we will struggle. We may not always be happy in the moment. Even though it is difficult, if we embrace living our lives to the best of our ability, fulfill our responsibilities, and strive to do the best we can, then we will naturally achieve happiness. The fate of humanity hinges on what we strive for. If we strive to be the best we can be, then we may become Nietzsche’s Übermensch after all.

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What Does One Poisoned Fruit Say to Another? Eat Me.

Josephina Levin

Whittle away at the story: shed the pink skin and bare its bones to the open air. Snow White is white yes, but also red. Red in the blood spilled, hearts cleaved from open chests, the robin red breasts taking flight. While a single story “never occurs in its pure form,” it can be “derived from a comparison of many individual tales”. There are two tales to tell here. One was orally compiled throughout nineteenth century Germany and the other, born in contention with the first, in the Chicago suburbs in the December of 1999. Between them they share two sides of an apple, red and white. Neither begins with the birth of so called Snow White. Before that, a woman sat with her needlework, wishing for a daughter. She pricked her finger and “thought to herself, ‘If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood in this frame’”. Another woman, in another iteration, was more of a knitter. She sat on her porch, stuffy towers not her style, and stared into the open blue sky. She still desperately wanted a child (son, daughter, she already had both. She wasn’t picky) and she still pricked her finger (broke both her elbows, big difference). Regardless of circumstance, Snow White was born of her mother’s want for her. All in accordance with the cracks in the barest bones of an old story.

Though not proclaimed by a fairy upon her birth, there was a spell placed upon Snow White. It needn’t have been supernatural in origin to grip those who hear its whisper in the old tale. “The strange spell that is cast by folktales does not derive simply from their otherworldly motifs”, instead it comes to fruition from very human, but no less dangerous, folly. Maybe her mother died or her father left, either way Snow White grew up in a broken home. Like any curse worth its salt, this one took its time rooting into her life. “Snow-White grew up and became ever more beautiful. When she was seven years old she was as beautiful as the light of day”; when a different Snow White was seven, the trees were bare and sleeping and her skin was pale and her lips were bleeding. She was so white that the boy behind her in class held a piece of paper up to her bare arm and couldn’t tell where she ended, and the depthless bleach began. And to accompany her rapidly paling, or rather beauty blossoming, skin were those blood red lips. Blood red, named for the blood rushing to the surface when she bit the chap of them. It was in the
spell, the cold that closed her pores, stilled her childish movements, and softened the beat of her heart till it could scarcely be heard through her rib cage.

In the ninth grade, Snow White wore tight leggings and a soft gray tank top out into the street with her friends. When her mother’s car pulled up in front of them, the woman jumped out and grabbed her daughter. All the way home she tells Snow White all about the dangers of being seen. “Your body is public property,” she didn’t say. Snow White understood regardless. Beauty belongs to men, or at least the beauty of the hairless, precious, thoughtless variety does, and Snow White and her beauty are inseparable. A prince sees no difference between possessing her frozen corpse and marrying her breathing body. “I cannot live without being able to see Snow-White. I will honor her and respect her as my most cherished one,” he said. That kind of beauty does not inspire pity, but greed. In the version of this tale where her mother doesn’t die, she instead said, once, twice, a thousand times, by the light of a fire, “normally babies are ugly, but you were different. You were beautiful. And because you were beautiful, everyone wanted to steal you away.” It is a memory stained with pride and fear and love and grief, lying atop each other as they often do in the minds of girls who grow up beautiful. And Snow White grew up beautiful, she must have, with all the people telling her so. Likewise, she grew up cursed.

With no indicated reason, the spell stuck to Snow White more as she aged. In the summers she used to look like every other kid, all smiles and sun-soaked skin, blisters rolling over her swollen lips. Now the absence of color was all encompassing. White seeped into her eyes, blanketing over her vision. She saw specks of color behind them, soon blanketed in snow of her own making. Her lips stung against the air. She applied Chapstick by the metric ton, the sting only growing. A curse needs no explanation, “all that is important is that the persons are enchanted and must be disenchanted. Who cursed them and why - these matters are beside the point”. Snow White grew so white, a doctor prescribed four bottles of pills to supplement her color and listed off the twenty deficiencies she accrued from a life avoiding that poison. She could not just avoid the apple, after all. Poison spreads. It went from apples to oranges to grapes to the gallon of milk in the refrigerator door above them. It spread so far she stopped opening the door at all. She stopped going to the kitchen.

So, Snow White grew, whiter and redder until the introduction of a poisoned fruit to her diet. It’s hard to remember which one was the inciting fruit. History would point to the apple. And while once it would have been easy to tell, for “the apple had been so artfully made that only the red half was poisoned. Snow-White longed for the beautiful apple, and when she saw that the peasant woman was eating part of it she could no longer resist”, a Snow White who knew of the danger from stories of her own would not be so
easily tricked. Her mother warned her about the crab apples growing on the
neighbor’s tree, but Snow White found out later they weren’t poison at all.
“They weren’t good for you anyway,” her mother said in defense of the lie. It
makes a kind of twisted sense: if poison never killed Snow White back then,
then maybe everything that doesn’t kill her now is also a poison.

What was it with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? That they
bit into the forbidden fruit and found themselves naked and ashamed? Well
Snow White took a bite into beauty and found herself sleeping. In that sleep,
she became that beauty to be bitten. “We cannot bury her in the black earth,”
the seven dwarfs would say, “and they had a transparent glass coffin made, so
she could be seen from all sides”. Another time, she was in a dreamlike state,
feverish out of her mind, away from home and in tears. Laying in an
unfamiliar bed an unfamiliar woman stroked her hair and saying “Don’t cry.
You’re too beautiful to cry.” For reasons she didn’t know, this only made her
cry harder. A boy kissed her once, well she kissed him, well she tried to kiss
him and she hit his eye with her nose and even with their lips in the proper
placement, she thought “this isn’t right.” That kiss didn’t wake her. The one
that did occur two years later. The other girl tasted timid and excited and
girlish and Snow White said “I love you. I love you so much.” Because she
kissed when she said it, it became true. A kiss, a real kiss, is powerful; it can
cast a spell or break one, as the case may be.

Here’s where real life and stories diverge, at the end. The real
difference between my and that of Snow White, indeed “the secret
power of the folktale” itself, “lies not in the motifs it employs but in the
manner in which it uses them - that is, in its form”]. Beauty is not what they
told her it was, in stories. What happens when Snow White grows up, what
happens when her own beauty is surpassed? The prince loved her rosy cheeks
not the growing bags below her eyes. Perhaps the story is cyclical, when being
told of the depth of “a beautiful woman, but she was proud and arrogant, and
she could not stand it if anyone might surpass her in beauty”? Maybe once,
but not now. Snow White gets ugly. She cuts off all her hair, stops smiling at
men on the train, starts cursing and wearing leather. “You’re scaring me”
everyone thinks but doesn’t say. Snow White is glad. Even the barest bones of
a story can twist unexpectedly.

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The Intersection of Multiculturalism and Feminism in Kingston's “No Name Woman”

Claire E. Porter

Maxine Hong Kingston has been lauded as “the most widely taught living American author on college campuses” (Moyers), and her work “No Name Woman” is part of the literary canon for many universities that strive to promote diversity by teaching multicultural literature. However, this work has also received substantial literary criticism from Chinese American scholars for catering to a predominately white, first-world, feminist audience and not accurately depicting Chinese culture and values. In “An Open Letter,” Katheryn Fong explains that Kingston’s Woman Warrior has too often been taken as an accurate representation of Chinese patriarchal society, rather than an autobiography of a Chinese American woman’s experience growing up in America. She states, “the praises from white reviewers have given excessive weight and ‘legitimacy’ to your story as the ‘true representation’—the history— of Chinese and Chinese Americans” (73). It is tempting to read this work solely through an American feminist lens, which can lead to a sense of cultural superiority—because after all, don’t American women have substantially more rights when compared to compared to women in this Chinese culture? This perspective contributes to Orientalism, the negative stereotyping of Chinese culture from a western colonial perspective. Kingston’s work must be evaluated with an understanding of the political and cultural complexity of Chinese society at the time in order to have an informed and critical feminist perspective of the tragedy of the “no-name woman.”

“No Name Woman” begins with almost a dozen “hurry up weddings” and a mass exodus to the coast of the American Pacific. What Kingston does not explain, however, is the reason why so many men are leaving China, and why they are unable to bring their wives. The answer to these two questions is rooted in the traditions of colonialism from both Britain and the United States. The combination of the two Opium Wars with Britain, the substantial losses of territory and trade leverage enforced by the Treaty of Nanjing, and other unfair trade treaties with Japan forced the Chinese government into bankruptcy. This financial stress increased taxes on the Chinese people to an unbearable degree, forcing them to immigrate to the
United States in order to find lucrative employment.

However, American immigration laws would not allow Chinese workers to bring their wives and children along with them, effectively limiting Chinese settlement in America and exploiting the Chinese for temporary labor. (Chan 7). When all of these factors are considered, it is more understandable why the villagers reacted so violently towards Kingston’s aunt: a combination of desperation, lack of resources, and loss of control may have prompted a disproportionate response to the aunt's act of adultery.

As Kingston points out, adultery was viewed as extravagance, a luxury that may have exacerbated an already tense situation. Yuan Shen supports this position in her article, “Cultural Politics and Chinese-American Female Subjectivity” explaining, “the villagers’ attack upon the family could be construed as a symptom of the restlessness of a feudal and colonial society which would readily direct its own energy of confusion and frustration toward anything accessible, rather than as a premeditated moment of Chinese patriarchal practice or a ritualistic pattern practiced at the village level in China,” (209).

Kingston’s description and analysis of the villagers may misrepresent all the cultural and political factors that would have contributed to this event, and lead to unjustified and uneducated opinions on Chinese peasants as both inherently sexist and “mischievous, inhumane, and irrational” (208). One of the goals of multicultural education is to dispel the inaccurate stereotypes that surround minorities and the cultures they originate from, and considering “No Name Woman” on its own may do more harm than good in this respect.

Jennie Wang points out another possible problem with the liberties Kingston takes with her description of the “no-name woman” which is rooted in Chinese religious and cultural beliefs about sexual intimacy. She states that “[Kingston’s] cultural conceptions, including those of gender construction and gender relation, are American constructs” (8). To elaborate on Wang’s criticism, American culture is strongly influenced by Christian values, which state that any sexual intimacy outside of marriage is sinful.

While the Confucian and Buddhist traditions assert that sexuality should be controlled by both parties in some situations (27), it provides no basis for how Kingston imagines her aunt as some man’s “secret evil” or that he would possibly organize a raid against her and her family (Kingston 386). In fact, much Chinese classical literature suggests that in such situations, both the man and woman would bear equal shame for their acts of infidelity, and would sometimes even commit suicide together (Wang 27). As both Wang and Kingston herself state, the character and story of the “no-name woman” are strongly influenced by the American Puritan narrative, *The Scarlet Letter* (28-29). With this in mind, it is easy to see how Kingston’s literary
imagination may be disproportionately influenced by American thoughts and values.

While Kingston probably did not intend to misconstrue Chinese gender roles and gender relation, students studying “No Name Woman” from an American feminist perspective may draw uninformed opinions about the way that Chinese culture functioned at this time. While ancient Chinese civilization definitely included patriarchal structure (as seen in the practice of foot binding and female infanticide), the perspective of the reader may change when this story is contextualized within the religious and cultural values of China during this time. Once one considers traditional literature and its reflection on Chinese beliefs surrounding sexual intimacy, this story can be understood as the misogynistic experience of one village rather than the norm of an entire country.

While Kingston’s work addresses important themes of American sexism and racism and is a beautifully written mix of autobiography and fiction, it is not the all-encompassing experience of the Chinese-American community. Kathryn Fong expresses the frustration many Chinese-Americans feel when reading Woman Warrior: “Since there are so few works by Chinese Americans being published—works that could present a variety of experiences—the definitions presented by you [Maxine Kingston]...become the only recognizable ones” (Fong 72). Perhaps one way to accomplish this is by presenting “No Name Woman” in comparison to other works of Chinese literature. In order to prevent American ethnocentrism and a misunderstanding of the complexities of the Chinese culture, readers must learn to separate “what is Chinese tradition and what is the movies” (Kingston 385) by critically evaluating literature and contextualizing it within a broader scope of politics, history, and culture.
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Walking through the locker room, teammates and staff greet him as they would any other day. They exchange game notes or small talk, yet as he continues on, an underlying sense of awe persists. Over time the sensations have faded and personnel have acclimated - taking for granted his presence as a phenom. In fact, he will be arguably the greatest player of all time, and he still has elite years coming to help validate that notion. But, this isn’t LeBron James or Tom Brady, as you may have assumed. He gets his headphones and continues his walk - R&B and Hip-Hop are the pregame norms. The walk concludes with him grabbing his glove and putting on his jersey, the back of which reads, “Trout”.

27 years ago in quaint Cumberland County, New Jersey, his story began. Nicknamed the Millville Meteor for his time spent dazzling across Little League fields and later at Millville Senior High, it was there that people realized the boundless ceiling he possessed. Michael Nelson Trout is the humble, kind, and generous man that a small town appreciates, as well as the face-of-the-game superstar they could never dream of. His rate of production aligns with or even surpasses the previous legends of the game, but he would be the last person to tell you that.

I, on the other hand, would be one of the first. Playing baseball for about a dozen years in my life led me to watch plenty Major League Baseball. I’ve always been a fan of the game before any specific team (during in-depth sports conversations I take pride in being the ultimate, unbiased sports fan). Ironically, this trait was strengthened once my hometown Cubs won the World Series, as most of my teenage years were spent hoping they’d finally break the curse. Once they did, I felt much less obligated to root them. This freedom allowed me to simply enjoy the best, the unique, and the crazy of the league. I found myself rooting for the Mariners to break their depressing playoff-drought, or for the Indians 2017 win-streak to never end, or any other admirable campaign. This overarching fandom led me to begin watching Angels games when I could, in the same manner that fans of basketball would watch LeBron play - because he is legendary. My LeBron James became Mike Trout. Watching Trout play, looking into the statistics and analytics of his career and its trajectory wowed me. How is this guy not heralded as the greatest of all
time? In an era where the Stephen A. Smith’s of the world debate anything...why don't people argue this? Eventually I realized that it obviously wasn’t the skills - just everything else, especially the human behind the stud.

Trout is the embodiment of 9 to 5; he comes in for work, grinds, and goes home. Longtime teammate Garrett Richards said, “Being able to watch him the whole time, I feel like he doesn't get enough credit...they don’t see what he does on a nightly basis.” Richards followed that up with, “He doesn't like the spotlight off the field. He likes to sit in a deer stand. He likes to hang out with friends.” Trout is never creating drama or being associated with off-the-field issues. But he also is rarely documented taking part in lavish or exuberant activities like Rob Gronkowski or Russell Westbrook. Trout is more likely to be spotted at an Eagles game than Hollywood. He isn’t a wild partier or a socialite, his fascination is weather - weather - he loves monitoring and studying weather.

At the 2018 All-Star Game, Trout is approached by the Fox on-field correspondent, after hitting a homerun, and this interview commences: “Normally I’d ask you to break down your homerun, but let's go to the weather map, this is your truest skill! What’s going on here?”

The uniqueness of the full exchange is comical. I can’t think of another star athlete that would engage in a conversation about such a mundane topic on national television. But it is these personality traits that highlight the distinctions between Mike Trout the man and Mike Trout the baseball player.

Trout shines under the stadium lights but stays out of the spotlight. He is widely cited turning down promotional deals and advertisements and interviews to spend time with his wife. All of this is sweet and tells you a lot about his true character and humble attitude, yet it is a primary obstacle in being associated with the “GOAT” title.

Mike Trout and Bryce Harper have some uncanny parallels. Since their first full seasons in 2012, both have been associated with the peak of baseball - the best of the best. For the entireties of their careers to date, Trout and Harper have been in major markets, L.A. and D.C. respectively. They each hit their 150th home run at the exact age of 24 years and 295 days. Nevertheless, it is Harper who runs his own campaign to "Make Baseball Fun Again" and is signed to national T-Mobile, Jaguar, Under Armour, and Gatorade endorsement deals. Harper also speaks out regarding boundaries between athletics and religion, as well as interjects on social issues. To be fair, Trout is featured in Subway commercials and does a lot for MLB’s “I Play” and “#This” initiatives, but those are just clips of Trout carrying on baseball activities - signing autographs, playing catch with kids, and hitting or catching baseballs. Trout is convincingly better, but it is Harper who is most likely the household name. Mike Trout is an ideal role model for his genuine kindness and the lengths he goes through with the aforementioned interactions, not to mention the hustle and quality with which he plays the game, but his outreach
pretty much stops there.

The rarity of Mike Trout is best showcased through his megastar status on the field and his subdued, “average-joe” nature off of it. Over the summer, Trout got brought up in awkward fashion when Major League baseball commissioner Rob Manfred used him as an example of baseball’s modern marketing struggles. The commissioner then elaborated, bringing up Mike’s apparent disinterest in “building his brand” and saying that “he has to make a decision that he’s prepared to engage in that area. It takes time and effort” (Canepa, 3). This riled some folks up, as blatantly calling out prominent players is quite uncommon in any league. Backlash for the commissioner came on all fronts - the Angels organization, other players, and countless media outlets.

Now, I’m all for individuality and respecting the personal life of Mike Trout, and I think Manfred handled himself poorly, but the subject at hand goes deeper than media banter. Trout has an immense love for the game and Manfred is right to want the stars of his league to be as prominent as possible. In an era where LeBron James is one of the most recognizable people on the planet while the likes of Kevin Durant, Steph Curry, Tom Brady, and Aaron Rodgers are within shouting distance fame wise, the opportunity is there. Trout should never be obligated to do anything for anybody, but he should be much more inclined given his stature. Being an elite professional athlete gives a select few extreme outreach and a platform consisting primarily of the next generation. It is the foremost hindrance I can think of to Trout’s GOAT campaign, as in an era where sports are so tied to media and communications in general, the elites must “walk the walk and “talk the talk” - he doesn’t do much talking.

Again, Trout is his own man, he dictates what he does with his time. He has chosen to form a massive disparity between his life and career. Does his utter disinterest in brand building hurt his fame? Absolutely. Does his quiet, humble nature limit the phenom hype? Probably. But, does he play on the West Coast? In fact, he does - taking the field in “primetime” slots where he majority of the continental United States is asleep due to the time gap. Is this west coast team a dysfunctional franchise that is also always struggling with injuries? Yes indeed. Trout has only been to the postseason once and his Los Angeles Angels lost. This combination of factors has somewhat shielded Trout from the public eyes and these eyes scarcely dig into advanced metrics. If they did, they would find a burgeoning player trending towards eclipsing baseball royalty.

WAR is a baseball metric. It stands for Wins Above Replacement and can be defined as a calculation of one’s value compared to if a league-average player were in the same spot. It is very telling, as it encompasses all parts of the game into a single stat. Mike Trout has lead the American League in WAR in 5 of the previous 6 seasons, in the outlier, Trout missed about 50 games
due to injury...and was 10th in all of baseball. Also note that Mike Trout has only played 6 MLB seasons. In his 5 full seasons, he has taken first or second in the MVP voting every time, winning. Craig Biggio, an excellent baseball player (Hall of Fame, 3000 Hit Club, 20 seasons), will be passed in cumulative career war by Mike Trout in by the end of the 2018 season. Currently in his age-26 season, Trout is continuing on a historic pace:

<table>
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<th>Player</th>
<th>Alex Rodriguez</th>
<th>Rogers Hornsby</th>
<th>Mickey Mantle</th>
<th>Ty Cobb</th>
<th>Mike Trout</th>
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<td>WAR</td>
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<td>56.9</td>
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The above chart is only updated to September 14th, 2018, so Mike Trout, through his age-26 season, is on pace to be the greatest of all time. Excluding the injury-shortened campaign, Trout averages 9.46 WAR per season and he is only now entering his theoretical prime (26-30 is the commonly accepted range). Regression in performance is inevitable as a player ages, however the next couple of years could be his best.

This idea doesn’t garner much attention, partially due to baseball being a more classical sport that doesn’t rage in controversy like basketball/football often can. While people debate about LeBron v. Michael Jordan, that is aided by LeBron welcoming the fame and hype, while Trout lays low on the subject. It is the great difference between him and other athletes of his caliber.

Mike Trout epitomizes etiquette and is a generational talent. One without the other would be duller, however they go hand in hand. His being, coupled with the underappreciated nature of it, is a travesty to me, which is why I’m writing about it. I love baseball and Trout is far and away the best baseball player I have ever witnessed, so him being underrated is an issue to me. He isn’t in G.O.A.T. consideration because he is a modest, polite, and simple person who steers clear of the celebrity lifestyle, ergo drastically limiting his clout. But that isn’t fair and it shouldn’t be a factor, much less a detraction, from his legacy. The contrast present between elite performance on the field and casualness off it is gigantic. Yet, that’s exactly what he wants. Trout will look to elude the path transcendent athletes have taken and look to reach the peak of profession sports through his play alone. He is looking to build fame as a humble, kind, and generous man that a small town appreciates - and if he can’t do it in in that style, I think he’d rather not do it at all.
Gemini
Grace Johnson

On December 8, 2018 I leave the gas station that doubles as a convenience store. I hold a lottery ticket in my hand. It was my 18th birthday. Could you call it that? It has been 18 years since I was born and 17 since I was relabeled. Sitting behind the wheel of my car I wonder what has my life been but a series of choices. I choose to play baseball. I choose to run track. Am I happy with these choices? I think so. How can I know until years in the future when I choose to be something else? Who chooses? Do I choose? What would she have chosen?

I choose to attend college, but I don’t have a major. That choice is too much. Too broad. I try to narrow it down. I do not like science. I like people. I do not like math. Maybe he would have been good at math. I feel that I am my own person; that I make my own decisions, but how can I know? How do I know that someone is not pulling my strings? Would he have made the same decisions? How would we have been the same and in what would we do differently? Why is it my life and not his?

I watch through my eyes. I wear my glasses. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I go to practice and wonder. What would she have been like? Would we have had the same eyes or smile? I am an only child to my friends, but I am happy. I attend school and plan my future. My classes focus around my love of science and I know I will excel and grow in that field. I do wonder how life could have been different for me. What could have been my reality?

I am an only child to my friends, and I wonder if it hurts my parents when they hear someone else talk about their children. What could have been? Where would the human race be without imagination and conjecture? How do these factors allow me to live life with a friend in the back of my mind? It makes life less boring sometimes.

Taking time back to the year 2000, you watch the nurse walk into the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. A row of newborns on her left. She goes from one to another checking their vitals. She pauses. She notices this one needs his food for the day. The nurse makes her way to the next baby, but quickly turns back. She has realized her error and rushes to revert her mistake, but it is too late. She breaks down and waits for the monitor to go off. Out of two unlabeled tubes she chose too quickly inserting the food into the bloodstream.

In loving memory of what could have been.
Luke Arvid Johnson
December 8, 1999- Jan 20, 2000
L’amour pour les Fleurs
Sarah Johnson

Some come back,
being more divine than before.
Some vanish,
ever to be witnessed again.

L’amour pour les fleurs

Some cause agony when caressed,
do not touch.
Some feel as soft as a feather,
make contact.

L’amour pour les fleurs

Some are fair,
but inside may be poisonous.
Some are plain,
but the smell captivates your mind.

L’amour pour les fleurs

Do you love them?
Or do you love the idea of them?
Flaunt them around.
Hold them close to your heart and don’t let go.

L’amour pour les fleurs
The Apartment Upstairs
Josie Fieger

Sunday, August 12, 2018
8:57 A.M.

I walk up to a townhouse in Over the Rhine on the east side of downtown Cincinnati, OH. The exterior is modest with weathered red brick and ivy that cascades down and across the upper half of the building. I veer to the right side of the house and squeeze the rusty gate handle to unlock the black, iron gate fence that spans its entire width. As I stand on the doorstep, a bush brushes my arm as I reach for the doorbell. The doorbell is tucked between the cream-colored door frame and a plaque that reads “Law Office 1411 Sycamore Street.” I know to ring at least three times in order to be heard. My uncle, the owner and lawyer of the building, opens the door, and our interaction goes as follows,

“Good morning.”
“Good morning. How are you?” I respond.
“Fine.”

Much like our small talk, the interior of the ground floor is formal and concise—nothing extravagant or excessive. A townhouse located in a notoriously dangerous part of the city may not be the traditional law office setting but inside seemed terrifyingly ordinary. The walls are an off-white color, and a furniture set of brown leather chairs and couches are scattered in his office, conference room, and waiting area. It is so quiet that the hum of the refrigerator from the back can be heard standing in the foyer.

In a room off the main hallway, there is a door in the far left corner. It stands quietly by itself among the deafening stacks of brown cardboard boxes, overflowing with case reports, timesheets, and contracts. Opening the door, a gush of cold wind sends a shiver down my body before I proceed through the doorway. A narrow flight of stairs invites me to the apartment upstairs. White lights wrap around the railing and illuminate the otherwise dim staircase. The walls are crammed with paintings of all different sizes, shapes, and scenes. Some are large landscapes from the mountains of Italy with grand, golden frames while others are small 4x4 squares that feature abstract shapes and fabrics. A majority are religiously based, depicting different types of iconography and portraits. One foot after the other, I climb
the wooden steps that creak with the slightest amount of pressure. This particular staircase is unique as it acts as a gateway to another world. Each step takes me closer and closer to a place widely outside of my comfort zone: a place I have little experience and almost no expertise.

9:02 A.M.

I plant both feet on the top platform and turn left into a repurposed kitchen that has a sink with a small counter on one wall. The other wall has a large table that holds supplies and current projects. My aunt is usually hunched over a painting or frame, detailing the piece, when I walk in. Her face lights up, and she greets me with a soft smile. Almost immediately, she begins her spiel on the work for the day, weaving through different rooms to point to projects that need to be completed. I struggle to keep up with her as I contort my body through hallways and doorframes, trying to avoid knocking over the stacks of paintings. They are hung on every inch of the wall, and then the overflow is pushed up against walls, leaning against each other like folders in a filing cabinet. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of art are packed into a one person apartment, symbolizing the years she has spent dedicated to her craft. To the untrained eye, it appears that art thieves have just completed their tenth heist, hiding their treasures in the most inconspicuous place: plain sight.

My aunt affectionately gave me the title of “apprentice” to anyone that asked what my summer job entailed. At first, I laughed when I heard her tell others this. I’ve never been an artistic person or even artistically inclined. My specialties reside in subjects with definite answers and physical evidence that leave little up for interpretation like math and science. I took the job for the sake of earning some easy money before heading off to college. I didn’t have any interest in learning about the fundamentals of art, much less the extensive process of creating a painting. Even as I became more comfortable at my job, I still did not see myself as an artist in training. I would have classified myself as a glorified handyman at most. I was usually framing paintings, stapling the canvases into the frames and then fitting them with wire. Occasionally, I would strip the original paint of an old frame with sandpaper and then stain it with a new color. I felt like I was cheating her of her money being assigned to such menial tasks. I’d spent hours just sorting beads based on color, shape, and size. My eyes would be so dry and bloodshot by the end of a shift that blinking felt like when I’d scrape my knees on concrete as a kid.

_Do you really need this money?

I’d ask myself over and over. Then, I was invited into “the room.”_
The sun peeked through the unfinished wooden shutters with its blinds sporadically turned up and down. Even through the thick layer of ivy that covered the outside of the building, the sun warmed the front room and clothed it in welcoming hues of gold and orange. An underlying scent of drying paint, wood stains, and spray paints lingered in the air, partially masked behind an antique smell. Looking around the front room, there were shelves filled with oil paints, primers, varnishes, paintbrushes of every size, Q-tips, and paint splattered rags. A flat table served as a desk, adorned with sketches, post-it note reminders, and inspirational quotes. A large easel dominated the middle of the wall with an even larger white canvas balanced between its arms. The sight of the stark white canvas was lifeless, unmotivating, and frankly ugly.

I watched her draw lines—straight, curved, parallel, perpendicular, and diagonal—with an old pencil that had Santa Claus and gingerbread men printed on it. I felt like I was watching an architect lay out the blueprints to a new building. The hundreds of lines of graphite effortlessly floated onto the canvas and connected to each other like magnets. While she sketched, I was assigned to cleaning her palette. Unlike the cartoon pictures of oval-shaped palettes with a hole at the bottom for a thumb, her palette was the size of a small table on wheels. It lacked all order, resembling a mutiny of the color wheel that resulted in layers of dried oil paint. As I scraped chunks of what looked like Fruity Pebbles off the palette, she explained her “artistic process,” comparing it to writing an essay. She said the hardest part was always starting—picking up the pencil and filling the white abyss. Since painting and writing are dynamic works, they are subject to any amount of change, including the dreaded “do-over.” I figured that by having more than thirty years of experience, she would be able to paint anything with her eyes closed, using her non-dominant hand. She reminded me that the only easy paintings were the ones that came in a pre-packaged box that had “Paint by Numbers” on the outside.

Working alongside my aunt as she painted, I found myself in a losing game of Twister every time. I had to crouch under or reach over her as I painted base layer for fields and the outline of trees. I quickly learned how invading someone’s personal space forces an intimate relationship without ever asking permission. We quickly became each other’s closest confidants, giving unbiased advice and mutual support. For most of my life, I saw my aunt in the way most people did—extremely talented, beautiful, and posh. I knew little of her early life in which eating disorders consumed her early twenties, and I would have never imagined the severity of her financial
struggles during the beginning of her career. These types of topics were classified as “family secrets” and were barely audible whispers if they were even talked about at all.

I asked her how she was able to land big commissions with companies and universities especially in a male-dominated art world. She claims it is about being disciplined, which means working seven days a week in order to stay self-sufficient. She is constantly adding to old paintings, giving them a modern, breath of life. Her daily routine consisted of standing under blazing studio lights from sun up to sun down, gripping a paintbrush with white knuckles. Her eyes were trained to continually scan the entire painting while her hand was restricted to making centimeter wide strokes. I would find myself becoming light-headed with beads of sweat seeping from my hairline after a few minutes. I would become nauseous to the point that thick, black dots appeared in the corner of my eyes, robbing me of my vision. My body wasn’t used to standing in such rigid and unnatural positions. Meanwhile, my aunt calmly stood next to me dotting the canvas with pink, yellow, and white to create the flower petals on a Dogwood tree in bloom.

11:42 A.M.

Before my eyes, abstract strokes of green, red, and brown became trees, buildings, and roads. The entire painting became clearer, sharper, and more vivid as if I put on a pair of new prescription glasses. I could count the bricks on each of the buildings in the small centralized town and see apples growing on trees on the outskirts of the painting in farmland. A kid was hunched over a stream that ran behind his large colonial style house, in which black shutters made the white paneling glow in the sunlight. The painting was a movie; it developed over time as characters and scenes were introduced. It contained its rising conflicts in trying to incorporate so many elements. Ultimately, it reached a climax, accurately depicting a small town located in the countryside. A rich brown frame with beaded embellishments symbolized the final scene of this particular movie. The frame cemented the scene in time, turning the movie into only a picture. Wrapping the painting to be shipped was like watching the credits roll at the end of a movie; we didn’t pay attention and began to think about the rest of the day.

12:00 P.M.

Room by room the lights were switched off as we ended the morning. A small bell sat in the corner of her desk that I ceremonially tapped to signal the end of each productive work day. This particular Sunday would be my last day in the studio—my last Sunday of summer. I stood in front of the bare easel and took a long breath in. I closed my eyes and exhaled, knowing that I was leaving with far more knowledge, experience, and appreciation for art than I ever wanted. Now, I find myself missing the
therapeutic nature of painting and having my stress slip away as I mixed Phthalo blue with Auburn brown paint on an old salsa lid. As we descended the stairs, entering into reality again, I asked my final question, “How do you know when a painting is truly finished?”

“That’s easy. Whenever it’s due.”
The Rosewater Foundation in Rural America
Grace Johnson

The city of Galesburg, Illinois grew out of “prairie grass and wildflowers,” it was settled on June 2, 1876, and today hosts 30,769 people. The city is home to many things: Knox College, the County Courthouse, good restaurants, an old and significant steam train engine, an abandoned strip mall, a giant prison, some great people, some crummy people, three grocery stores, and two hospitals. It just happens to be located 30 minutes away from my house and hometown. Galesburg is a secondary hometown for me; my parents work there. I was always in Galesburg with them because my actual hometown, Altona, has 500 people, and Galesburg is the nearest grocery store and hospital. I grew up in a rural community, and while I grew up I was able to better see separations in the school and community based on money. I saw Galesburg as more than just a place to shop as I started to drive. My parents told me where I would be safe in the town; I saw as local businesses struggled. Galesburg, Illinois, could have been the town that Kurt Vonnegut was envisioning. Allow me to introduce you to a modern-day Rosewater County and show you how Galesburg fell into poverty.

“We love apple pie, baseball games—we’re just kinda cheesy Midwesterners,” said Galesburg local Jackie Cummins (Broughton). The small, rural towns of the Midwest are similar because they struggle, they have bad and good sides, they have crummy education, and they have a few Elliot Rosewaters who give back to the community. In November of 1835, Thomas Simmons purchased the land for the future Knox College, a college that would go on to host the 5th Lincoln and Douglas debate, a college that still stands with beautiful brick buildings adorned with white wooden framed glass windows. Across from the main campus of Knox sits our county courthouse in grey and formidable stone, and whose construction started in 1885. My mom works there today and has for 13 years. There are steady and reliable jobs in Galesburg, and these jobs can prompt citizens to better themselves. Elliot promoted education and personal growth, which he brought to Rosewater County; the railroad brought these same qualities to Galesburg in the 1970s.

The railroad came to Galesburg in the mid 1850s and brought life to the town. In 1970, “the Burlington Northern Railroad Company merged with
7 other companies” and formed the “largest railroad in the United States in terms of mileage operated”; this ran through Galesburg, and growing up, I have seen how the railroad has been part of the city ever since (History of the Galesburg Railroad Museum). I was stopped by train after train in my youth, but as annoying as that was, the railroad has been a major source of jobs for the community. In Galesburg, the railroad holds the same importance as the saw mill of Rosewater and employs many. I have a friend whose father is an employee for BNSF, and the railroad has helped put his family in college and provide them with a home. The railroad employees need good training and an education to work in the railroad, and the Galesburg high schools partner with the local community college to provide 16 free credits per year to those in need in the community (Galesburg Promise). This program, called the Galesburg Promise, reminds me of the ideals of Elliot Rosewater. Just like Elliot, Galesburg is still trying to help the low-income families and their children in the community. How did this town come into a situation where families needed the excessive amount of financial aid?

First, one of our two factories left in the 1950s. This was one of many brickyards that spread over my county and brought jobs to many during the war. You can see the bricks from the factory across the world if you visited Chicago, IL; Deadwood, SD; Bombay, India; streets of Paris; or Panama City, Panama for the Panama Canal. The brickyard and company Purington Pavers officially closed in 1974, and today the land is owned by some of the folks of Galesburg (Purington Brickyards). The community was changed by the loss of the factory, but the main cause of poverty in Galesburg came about in September 2006. The Maytag Factory had been in Galesburg from before the 1970s and was another example of how Galesburg and Rosewater are connected. If the saw mill were to shut down in Rosewater County, there would be no work for the people of the town, and the Maytag factory was almost that big a part of our city. I remember the mayhem that came to the town when it closed. In the prime days of the factory, “it buzzed with the work activity of nearly 5,000 people.” While this does not put a large dent in the roughly 31,000 citizens of Galesburg, the closure did thrust those 5,000 people out of work and into poverty. The factory was “the size of over 40 football fields packed together,” and after it closed, our middle-sized Midwestern town became just another town in the Rust Belt of America (Broughton).

Galesburg became a dying fossil of the olden days. The closure left the “Noah Rosewaters” of my town with, “damn little work for him anywhere,” and many went elsewhere to find work in other towns (Vonnegut 42). Today, the old factory is a crumbling pile of a building that sits on the edge of town. The loading doors are what I notice most when I go past. It was such a big factory and all the loading doors are just sitting closed, and I
look at them like one looks at windows painted shut, knowing they won’t open again.

What does this plant closure have to do with our town? Why does this one plant make such a large impact? How does it turn Galesburg into an image of Rosewater County? Well, we are not close to other large town with factories, and families thrust into poverty cannot afford to pick up and move.

Of the towns near us there are Peoria, Illinois, a 45-minute drive, or Monmouth, Illinois, a town with little work; therefore, the solution is to try to scrape by in Galesburg. These limited choices leave many in low-paying jobs in the area, transforming our residents into the residents of Rosewater County. You can walk down our main street and see the fire station next to our historic church or the old barber shop next to our courthouse, which are not much different than Elliot’s town. Here, Rosewater County is not an image but a reality. During his speech in the 2004 Democratic National Convention, President Obama spoke of the people of Galesburg. He talked about our insignificant town to the world because we may not be well known, but we are not alone:

And fellow Americans, Democrats, Republicans, independents, I say to you, tonight, we have more work to do...

... more work to do, for the workers I met in Galesburg, Illinois, who are losing their union jobs at the Maytag plant that’s moving to Mexico, and now they’re having to compete with their own children for jobs that pay 7 bucks an hour; more to do for the father I met who was losing his job and choking back the tears wondering how he would pay $4,500 a month for the drugs his son needs without the health benefits that he counted on.

This is not a new story of a family struggling in Galesburg or the Midwest. Galesburg, much like Rosewater, is a community that is mostly safe and is a place where I could live, but it is not usually a place people can thrive, excel, or rise above the class they are born into, although it is no fault of their own. I know that it would be a great town if there were more people who lived there that possessed the drive that Elliot Rosewater had for his town, or even the money that Elliot had. More people who could help the babies born into poverty.

The Carl Sandburg Mall used to be where I played mini golf with my Dad when I was around the age of 5, and I think I was around that age when the mini golf closed. It’s our local strip mall, and the mini golf is the first store I remember leaving and stores have been leaving ever since. “After Maytag left and more stores in Carl Sandburg Mall shut down, the tax burden shifted to residents, who’ve seen property taxes rise as the housing stock declines,” further hurting our injured town (Broughton). The dogs outside the fire station in Rosewater were happy to greet people just like the dogs, cats, rabbits, and other animals when there was adopt-a-pet at the Carl Sandburg
Mall. My Dad and I found two of our dogs at the local mall on the third Saturday of the month. Cassie, the one of those two still alive, has become so old that she barks at everything in that same way that the dogs in the town of Rosewater howl at the fire siren.

Personally, my mom and I shop in a larger city more often than the local mall due to a lack of choice in our local strip mall, a decision that was reflected as I watched the lights slowly flicker out in the halls. The mall was shaped like a giant “X” with K-Mart, Sears, Bergner’s, and JC Penny’s at the four ends of the “X.” First a combined grocery and clothing store left, then Sears the appliance store, then Bergner’s went bankrupt, and JC Penny’s clothing closed this summer, but more importantly, all the small stores in-between, which were locally owned have gone; the mall is being leveled within the next few years. On the opposite side of town, a new strip mall opened.

I don’t know why, but Galesburg received a plethora of new stores including a Burger King and Kohls, along with clothing stores, restaurants, and cell phone outlets. The many new stores are doing well to improve the job market in the town, which can be seen as a way to help the families of those affected by the Maytag factory closure. Although the stores are a way to strengthen the economy of the town, all I can see are these new chain stores closing locally owned businesses in the historic, quaint downtown of Galesburg. The local pet store with the in-store family cat is being pushed out by PetSmart, a home owned appliance store is pushed out by Home Depot and a second larger hardware store, and local coffee shops are pushed out by two Starbucks. One of the first chop suey houses in this area of the Midwest retired due to lack of public interest as well as management, but the town welcomes a Burger King and a Culvers.

But don’t you understand, readers? Galesburg is still my home. I am home. I know that this has always been my home – the town of Galesburg, the Township of Galesburg, the County of Knox, and the State of Illinois (Vonnegut 43). The imaginary town of Rosewater and Rosewater County is embodied in not only Galesburg, Illinois but in all the Midwestern towns across the Rustbelt. Rosewater County is every empty brick factory with tiny, broken, glass window panes and with the weeds placing the modern building back into a time of prairies. Rosewater County is seen in every person working two part time jobs, struggling to put their children through school, giving their children enough money for sports equipment, or paying their rent. Elliot Rosewater is every person in every town that helps: run the local food pantries, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Clubs, the Reading and Tutoring Programs, any volunteer coaches, or any volunteer firemen. Even the kids in our Rust Belt do just as Kurt Vonnegut wanted them to, “to be fruitful and multiply” (Vonnegut 275). While I just described a really sad and beat down town, it’s also lively and full of people who do their best to get by and be happy, and I wouldn’t have wanted to grow up anywhere else.
Works Cited


“City of Galesburg.” *City of Galesburg*.

“Galesburg Promise.” *Carl Sandburg College*.


“Purington Brickyards.” *Knox County Historical Sites, Inc*.

Dear Grandma,

I miss you. I think about you all the time and still can’t believe you are gone. You were the best person I have ever known, and you touched so many lives when you were here on Earth. To make your passing a little bit easier, I like to think about all of the memories you have left me. My favorite memory is of all of our family get-togethers. I would walk into your ranch house with your door left wide open, because anyone and everyone was welcome. I would turn to the right and immediately be greeted by you. What I loved most was that you and grandpa always made sure to coordinate your outfits. Whether it be a purple top and grey pants or a red top and khaki pants, you two always matched. This was something I always looked for when we would all get together. I remember coming up to you, and receiving the best hug—the kind that you never wanted to let go. You would then tell me to “go,” our secret language for, “go to the golden apple bowl sitting on the end table.” It was the bowl that held the peanut butter M&M’s. I would take a handful before my parents would be finished greeting the rest of my family and run into the kitchen. There, I would begin to shove the candy into my mouth.

Every sports season, every dance, every play, you were there. Every time I was over I had seen it on your calendar in the kitchen for the past few months that you were going to attend the event. After every game you would give me a hug and tell me how proud you were, and every time you would tell me what I needed to work on—whether that be my ball handling skills or how I should get around a defender—because you were not afraid to tell me as it was. I loved that you treated me as an adult and never a child, even when I acted like one. You were my idol long before I realized how much I looked up to you.

I remember the day I was told about your illness. I was sitting on my couch doing my homework after school. Dad came in and sat down on the couch with me. I thought it was odd because he had such a distraught look on his face and was staring into blank space. “I have some news for you and I’m not going to hide anything from you.” He then went on to tell me how you
were sick. I didn’t know it, but you had gone into the doctors the week before to get your chest looked at for a cough you had been having for the past couple weeks. I knew something was wrong because you missed my lacrosse game that week, but I didn’t think much of it. Dad then told me that what we all thought was a harsh cold had turned into Stage III Lung Cancer.

After receiving the news, I sat there, not making a sound. I was paralyzed. I always heard of cancer, of people having it and surviving. I also heard of people not winning the battle and passing away. During this I heard that the words that you had cancer, but it wasn’t processing through my mind that your time left on this Earth was starting to tick away, faster and faster each day. I was trying to envision you at my games cheering me on, or happily cooking our family dinners while we all sat in the family room enjoying everyone's company. I didn’t get it, you were never sick, you were invincible and I had never seen you take one day off. For heaven’s sake, you delivered Meals on Wheels at age 80 to people ten years younger than you. You even went to the gym everyday with grandpa, so I knew you were in great shape. Why was this happening? This was not supposed to happen, not to you.

The next couple months were a blur. Days were going by in a haze and quite frankly, I don’t remember most of it. The moment your illness started to sink in was two months after we were told about the diagnosis. Dad had shielded me by not letting me see you while you quickly started to decline, he wanted to make sure I didn’t see you in your moments of weakness. I was thankful for that, because all while you were declining, I was still able to think of you as the healthy individual you were just a couple months ago. However, those moments of weakness quickly turned from hours to days to weeks. Since Dad shielded me, I didn’t have enough time with you before you passed and because of that I became lost for a long time. It made no sense why you were such a big part of my life, yet in your time of struggle I couldn’t be a part of yours. A piece of me will always hold regret not having enough time with you before you left us.

My recitals began to have an eerie feeling to them once you fell ill. The chair next to grandpa started to become empty, an image I struggle to get out of my head. I remember looking at him, wearing his green shirt and khaki pants, all while imagining you wearing the same outfit. It broke my heart seeing him alone, knowing you were in bed at home, lying there in pain. My parents finally decided to let us see you when your illness began to progress significantly. The medications weren’t working anymore and you were becoming far too weak for surgery. Your quality of life was declining and Dad told me that they just wanted you comfortable. The cancer had spread, and it spread fast. You were slowly fading away.

The day I came to visit you I was a mess. You couldn’t tell from the outside, because I was trying so hard to hold it all in. I walked in and saw everyone standing outside, their faces red from crying. I knew I was going to
see you, but I thought I was going to see your old self. I walked through the
doors, and like a wave, the realization of what was going on hit me. Up until
that point I had known what was going on, what was happening to you, what
was happening in you. But I hadn’t seen you since you had become extremely
ill. As the wave of realization hit me, so did the emotions. Tears flooded my
eyes as they locked with yours. You still looked at me the way you did after
my games, but your body was not the same. Tubes upon tubes were
connected to every part of skin open on your body. Your hair was patchy and
your skin was translucent. I walked up to you slowly, tears still flowing. I
remember you outstretched your hand and looked at me with peace in your
eyes, assuring me you had accepted what was going on. It was almost with
that one look I understood that you were okay with leaving the world, but I
still wasn’t.

I hated that you had brought in a priest that day to recite a prayer for
you, reassuring you of your Catholic faith and what is to come once you pass
away. I didn’t want you to be okay to let go because I wasn’t ready for that to
happen. In a way, I had built up a wall around the fact that I could lose you,
because I thought you would be in my life forever. I thought you would be at
my graduation, watching me walk across the stage. I thought you would be at
my wedding, like you were at my cousin Kate’s wedding. I thought you would
see my first child be born. I thought you were invincible and you would
always be here to be my grandma.

Being in that room with you was the hardest thing I have ever had to
do. You were in my life since the day I was born. Next thing I knew, I was
the one in the hospital as your life was being taken away. I couldn’t help but
think, why are you being taken away now? What could you have possibly
done wrong to have been diagnosed with such an awful disease? I hated the
fact that this disease existed, and that it was taking you away. After visiting
with you that day, I shut down. I stopped talking to my family and friends
that reached out. I missed school for days, only leaving my bed to eat and go
to the bathroom. My hair became knotted and I became weak from laying
around day after day. I was lost.

Having you in my life was the best gift I could ever ask for. You were
the glue holding our family together. Now that you are gone, I realize how
thankful I am for what you left us. You left our family with knowing the value
of family. I was scared when you passed away that our family would never be
the same, but those family get-togethers that were put on hold when you were
sick are happening again. It was your house that we always gathered at, but
now it is at mine. And for Christmas last year, the words “I Love You,” were
taken from a card you gave me one year for my birthday and were made into
ornaments. They were handed out as gifts to each family to hang on their
Christmas trees. It was so special because that was your favorite holiday and
now we will always be able to have you with us during that time of the year.
The only thing missing is your golden apple bowl being filled to the rim with candy.

Death for me was an idea that never hit home until it took you away from me 3 years ago. Losing you is a memory that will always linger in the back of my mind, no matter how hard I try to push it away. Going through this experience has not only changed me, but our family’s dynamic as well. We have figured out how to remain close, even though it was incredibly hard after you left. Now that I look back on it, you never stop to see who is really holding the family puzzle together, until that puzzle piece is lost and never found again.

I miss you more than I have missed anyone. Your passing still is the most difficult thing I have ever gone through, but knowing you are at peace and out of pain is enough to make the image of that empty chair go away. I love you.
Throughout history, the struggle for influence and dominance has consumed humans, resulting in war, poverty and destruction. Governments have, on occasion, used propaganda to sway a public in one direction versus the other. The term propaganda often has a dishonest, manipulative, egocentric connotation. Over time, although technology has progressed from radio to television and cinematic broadcasts into our digital era, propaganda has remained a stable feature of media technologies. Major studio productions today, such as Gary Ross’ *The Hunger Games* (2012), include substantial examples of propaganda, primarily through television broadcasting.

Throughout the film, people are blinded to reality through the very sheltered portrayal of life provided to them by Panem.

In a style that is not dissimilar, Nazi Germany consistently masked the harsh reality of World War II, using films made by Leni Riefenstahl, which emphasized the positives of life under the Nazi regime. The propaganda themes seen in *The Hunger Games*, such as speeches meant to inspire goodwill, the portrayal of power and spectacle, and benevolence, can similarly be found in the films of Leni Riefenstahl, who promoted Hitler and Nazi Germany, particularly in her film *Triumph of the Will*. Today, propaganda, while more subtle, can still be found. In our even more advanced age of technology, effective propaganda must take on the most modern media platform.

Similar to today, Leni Riefenstahl was successful because of her proficiency in producing propaganda using the technology of the time. Leni Riefenstahl, full name Berta Helene Amalie Riefenstahl, was born in Berlin, Germany in 1902. Riefenstahl was a natural performer from a young age, dancing on stage up until a knee injury limited her to acting. In 1934, she directed and starred in her first film called *The Blue Light* in which a woman, who is thought to be a witch, is the only one able to successfully climb a treacherous mountain (Rentschler, 1989). *The Blue Light* was monumental for the time as women did not typically direct blockbuster films.
Through its shots which captured the audience and inspired feelings of witnessing the sublime, *The Blue Light* caught the attention of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party, and Riefenstahl was asked to photograph the 1934 Nazi rally. From this event came *Triumph of the Will*, perhaps Riefenstahl's most well-known work. *Triumph of the Will* became a compelling piece of Hitler’s propaganda, as did *Day of Freedom, Our Armed Forces* (1935), which displayed the readiness for battle and the will of the new army (Lebovic, 2018). After the Führer was charmed by Riefenstahl’s films in 1938, he had Riefenstahl produce another successful film titled *Olympia*.

The film was a captivating documentary of the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympic Games and as stated in an article from BBC, it became “a meditation on everything the Games stood for, and everything Germany could achieve” (Barber, 2016). The type of propaganda that Leni Riefenstahl excelled at was influence through manipulation, which was tremendously successful within Nazi Germany leading up to and throughout World War II.

Propaganda often seeks to convey a vision for a society; for *The Hunger Games* and *Triumph of the Will*, this is a vision of wealth, strength, and superiority. One way to project this ideal is through the power of speech. Hitler, as presented in *Triumph of the Will*, and President Snow, as presented through propaganda from Panem in *The Hunger Games*, both seek to motivate their citizens through persuasive speeches. For instance, in *The Hunger Games* during the propaganda film presented at The Reaping, the event at which two representatives are selected to be sacrificed in order to presumably maintain peace, President Snow says, “this is how we remember our past, this is how we safeguard our future.” This parallels words spoken by Hitler in *Triumph of the Will* while standing before the German army in which he chants, “before us Germany lies, in us Germany burns, and behind us Germany follows” (49:33). The two phrases speak of the past and of the future as a way to remind those listening why, in Hitler’s case, the German army must rise and fight, and in Snow’s case, why the Hunger Games must continue.

Another parallel in the speeches of the two dictators is the call to action directed towards the young. Hitler, in *Triumph of the Will*, tells the Hitler Youth “All of Germany sees you for the first time. I know that as you serve Germany, Germany will see in you its proud sons marching with joy” (37:26). In comparison, during the tribute parade in *The Hunger Games*, President Snow tells the tributes “We salute your courage, and your sacrifice.” Not only does saying this allow the Hitler Youth members and Hunger Games tributes to feel a sense of glory, but it also shows those watching the distinction and honor which is awarded to these youths, and pushes the viewer to strive for that same renown. In this way, Hitler and Snow have successfully manipulated generations of citizens who, as long as their dictatorship continues, will aspire to please their leader.
In addition to motivational speech, successful propaganda will attempt to portray power and solidarity in the face of challenge. In both *The Hunger Games* and *Triumph of the Will*, power is portrayed through military strength, order, and numbers. In *The Hunger Games*, as District 12 watches a propaganda message from Panem during The Reaping, clips of soldiers running into battle is shown. On top of that, victors of the Hunger Games portrayed in the propaganda film are strong, and closely resemble statues of Greek gods. Likewise, in *Triumph of the Will*, masses of soldiers stand at the ready to fight for their country (34:10). The men shown appear young and strong and, while the sheer size of the army standing before Hitler is threatening to those who would oppose them, it is comforting to those who support them. Projecting the size of an army to a population will certainly evoke fear and conformity because while it indicates that they are protected, it is also a threat. Political rallies today communicate solidarity, and social media can be a means of sharing that common belief, or experience.

In both films, the control exhibited throughout the propaganda becomes a source of security for the public. In general, people want to feel protected and provided for by their nation. Today, in times of natural disasters or mass tragedies, the government communicates directly through social media the lengths they have gone to in order to help and protect people.

Propaganda strives to remind the community of the nation’s generosity in times of hardship. Leni Riefenstahl depicts benevolence in her film *Triumph of the Will*, as does Panem in the propaganda we see in *The Hunger Games*. In *Triumph of the Will*, particularly during footage taken from the Hitler Youth camps, pitchers are often seen overflowing with water (15:48) and food is in abundance (16:32). Much like this, in *The Hunger Games*, while many people in the districts struggle on a daily basis to put food on the table, the tributes are well fed and experience the plentiful treatment that Panem provides its citizens. In this case, the Hitler Youth members can be closely compared to the loyal citizens of Panem, who are both well provided for in appreciation of their allegiance. Additionally, the propaganda film shown during The Reaping includes President Snow, who says that the tradition of the Hunger Games “would serve as a reminder of our generosity and our forgiveness.” In this way, the public accepts the tradition of the Hunger Games with the mindset that Panem is unselfish and that things could always be worse. Hitler projects a similar message in *Triumph of the Will* as he says, “Our gratitude is the promise to stand by you, through thick and thin, whatever comes our way” (24:50). The German people are then led to believe that if they fight hard for their nation, that Germany will protect and provide for them as best as it knows how. In addition to the content of propaganda, the way it is portrayed is critical to its goals.
Besides similarities between propaganda elements within the films of Leni Riefenstahl and Panem, there are similarities in the setting and filmmaking style of Triumph of the Will and within The Hunger Games propaganda. One close parallel is the use of the flag. Footage at the Nazi rallies are comparable to the televised tribute parade in The Hunger Games: long, parade-like spaces lined with crowds stretched in front of hanging Swastika flags. In The Hunger Games, the Swastika flags can be swapped for those adorned with the symbol of Panem.

The inclusion of the flag in the propaganda film and televised propaganda is an extra reminder to the public who provides for them and leads their nation. Background audio also has a large part in film propaganda. Throughout Triumph of the Will and the televised events of The Hunger Games, trumpets play in the background. The trumpet sound is significant because it is “more closely associated with power than any other instrument” (Vienna Symphonic Library). The incorporation of the trumpet into the televised footage that is viewed by those in Nazi Germany and in the districts of Panem communicates, once again, who holds the power in the nation. Overall, the sound of the trumpet works in conjunction with the elements above to create effective propaganda.

To conclude, propaganda is at its most influential when it results in blind, undying loyalty by a nation’s citizens to those in power and also induces paralyzing fear. Through the style of propaganda produced by Leni Riefenstahl and Panem, the messages are made unmistakable. Within both Triumph of the Will and the propaganda films in The Hunger Games, the rows of soldiers that appear, paired with the audio of the trumpets, make the message perceivable without words. The public conforms with limited resistance because they understand the spoken and unspoken messages, and that is why we can summarize that the propaganda was effective in The Hunger Games and Nazi Germany. Through inspiring words, and the representation of proficiency, power, and support, the people of Nazi Germany and of the districts of Panem conformed to Hitler and Panem’s demands with limited resistance. As powerful and effective as propaganda can be, it doesn’t guarantee long term success or victory, as both Nazi Germany and Panem eventually fell.

Today, social media provides a platform for propaganda in a way it never has. Over time, past events have served as a lesson, and the repercussions have served as a reminder of the threat of propaganda. Dystopian novels, such as The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins, aim to remind the public of the dangers of propaganda, and can be considered a form of propaganda themselves. People today hold on to that false sense of security; propaganda is still relevant and has the same effects, only in a new
form of digital media. Therefore, is mass manipulation on digital media a new threat that we haven’t given sufficient concern to? Could it pose a greater threat than we think given that past events/dystopian novels teach us to be cautious and wary time and time again?

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How to Survive a Bad Day
Kalie N. Miles

Sometimes, individuals feel that their day is a series of unfortunate events. Whether it be as small as waking up with an obvious red blemish or as large as getting fired from a job, people complain and sulk until their struggles pass. What if one’s misfortune never ends? Jean-Dominique Bauby’s never did. This healthy young man had a stellar career, loving family, and promising future. A sudden stroke robbed him of his life, and it left him with eternal paralysis. Bauby’s diagnosis was locked-in syndrome; he could hardly rotate his head and move his left eye, but his mind was left perfectly intact. In his memoir, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, he writes about his life post immobility. With assistance from irony and sarcasm, he sprinkles dashes of humor to ease the intensity of his frozen state. However, at times, this lightheartedness fades. Bauby shows his readers that feeling sorrow in difficult times is normal and understandable but being positive and hopeful is crucial to remaining a strong, healthy individual.

Upon first learning about Bauby’s rare condition, potential readers may assume that his memoir’s tone is bleak. However, after reading the literary work, they find this prediction to be false. Bauby quickly shows his audience that his story has layers beyond negativity and sadness. When describing his syndrome at the memoir’s start, Bauby states, “It is small consolation, but the chances of being caught in this hellish trap are about as likely as those of winning the lottery” (Bauby 11). In other words, “What are the odds?” Bauby takes the irony of developing a condition as rare as winning the lottery and uses it to make his audience chuckle. He could have utilized a different, darker example to show his case’s rarity, such as going to prison for life as an innocent man. The author eliminates the perception that his tale has a pessimistic mood. In addition, he reveals that the purpose behind his writing goes deeper than teaching his audience how to sulk.

Bauby continues to reveal his purpose while informing readers of his new lifestyle. His dramatic weight loss forces him to transition back to his college wardrobe, which contains cashmere aplenty. In addition, his paralysis causes him to salivate uncontrollably. He jokes, “If I must drool, I may as well drool on cashmere” (Bauby 17). One would expect a middle-aged man in a similar situation to demean and ridicule himself. Instead, Bauby uses this as
an opportunity to elevate his spirits by using sarcasm and making fun of the bewildered crowd. He wants readers to practice this behavior and realize that laughing at one’s self is necessary and healthy. If people take their flaws too seriously, they are bound to have minimal self-worth.

The author promotes poking fun at one’s self as well as judgmental peers. In physical therapy, Bauby sees people of various ages recovering from injuries. He considers these people “tourists” because their stays are temporary, unlike Bauby’s (Bauby 33). He stands out like a needle in a haystack with his frozen body and irregular appearance, not to mention needing to be strapped to a platform to do his exercises. Individuals stare and study. Bauby notices. After Bauby moves his eye to acknowledge their looks, the observers’ eyes simultaneously scatter to a ceiling smoke detector. He remarks, “The ‘tourists’ must be very worried about fire,” (Bauby 33).

Bauby knows why he caught the patients’ attention. He is an eyesore, and others cannot help but ponder his story. Rather than feeling ashamed, he turns the attention on his viewers. He uses sarcasm to make these individuals, instead of himself, seem out of place. Bauby urges readers to do the same with their critics. Sometimes, victims of stares or harsh words let their perpetrators get to them. Individuals can avoid this by following Bauby’s example: ignore others’ bitterness and realize that the tormentors are the ones at fault.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly emphasizes the importance of maintaining a lively attitude; however, it also includes deep emotional moments. Particularly, the tone changes when Bauby mentions his family. First, he informs readers of the relationship with his father. Before the stroke, Bauby catered to his elderly father’s needs, such as shaving. Suddenly, Bauby needed constant care, and he was less functional than his father. “Now I am the one they shave every morning,” he writes (Bauby 45). The irony of the caretaker becoming the patient is devastating. Without the ability to help or even speak to his father, Bauby feels guilty and helpless. He wants readers to address difficult emotions such as his. If individuals suppress sadness, they will make themselves miserable.

Bauby was a father as well as a son. Seeing his lively, young children while stuck in his locked-in state crushed him. He recognizes that he will never again completely fulfill his role as a father. He will never tell his children, “I love you.” He will never wrap them in his arms. He will never play ball with his son in the backyard. He will never walk his daughter down the aisle. Perhaps Bauby’s most devastating realization surfaces when his son, “Théophile, dabs with a Kleenex at the thread of saliva escaping [his] closed lips” (Bauby 69). Not only is he unable to take care of his children, but his children must now take care of him. Unfortunately, this ironic role reversal came thirty years too soon. Again, Bauby feels guilty. He knows that he is useless and his relationship with his son and daughter will deteriorate with
time. The author reveals the hardest parts of his syndrome when irony 
provokes sorrow rather than amusement in readers. By unveiling these 
moments of weakness with his family, he clarifies that feeling defeated is 
understandable. Rather than hiding from and being ashamed of emotional 
weakness, readers should face it. Therefore, Bauby sees no shame in crying in 
dismal times; he encourages it.

In one of the memoir’s shortest chapters, Bauby uses literary devices 
to bring up both sadness and humor. The patient is in his hospital room, and 
early everything is going wrong. His feeding machine lets out irritating 
beeps, his eyelashes are tickling his face, and the catheter’s disconnection 
leaves him soaked in urine. Finally, a nurse comes to his aid, but, first, she 
turns on the television. It reads, “Were you born lucky?” (Bauby 57). The 
audience could view this chapter in one of two ways. They may chuckle at the 
irony of the sarcastic prompt, for Bauby is the definition of an unlucky 
individual. Or, they may experience remorse for Bauby’s unfortunate life. The 
answer is foggy, like the answer to coping with one’s individual struggles. 
Bauby gives his audience tools to manage, but the decision is personal. 
Depending on the situation and the sufferer, one may need to cry or find a 
way to laugh. Here, Bauby encourages his audience to persevere however they 
see fit.

This perseverance is an important part of Bauby’s story. In his 
memoir, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, he writes about his thoughts after a 
sudden stroke leaves him with locked-in syndrome. The abrupt transition 
from a successful middle-aged man to a permanently paralyzed patient is 
catastrophic. With little to no hope, people in Bauby’s situation are 
chronically depressed and lack ways to feel remotely happy. However, he 
manages to find glimmers of light through irony and sarcasm. He wants 
readers see light in their lives’ lowest points as well. Yet, the author 
acknowledges that mourning and weeping is necessary and acceptable. By 
offering details of his thoughts and experiences, the author equips readers to 
decide how to cope with their life’s distresses. If one reads closely, Bauby’s 
account is a secret guide on how to survive a bad day.

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It was a meaningless game of 162. The Oakland Athletics were hosting the New York Yankees in the middle of September in 2004. The A’s were on their way to a second-place finish behind the Los Angeles Angels, while the Yankees were looking to finish their third straight season with over 100 wins. It was just another game. The important part was one of the fans watching the game that night. All the way up in the nosebleeds sat a four-year-old at his first baseball game. Using his dad’s binoculars, the little boy looked down to the field and focused on one jersey, one number, and the player wearing it. The jersey was the grey and navy of the Yankees’ away uniform. The number he found was the number two worn by the Yankee shortstop. The player was a man who the young boy would soon learn was named Derek Jeter; a man who would impact this boy’s life in many more ways than he would have thought.

The first thing the young boy would learn about Derek Jeter was who he was as a player. A Yankee through and through, Jeter had never played anywhere else and had no plan of ever doing so. He wasn’t much of a homerun hitter, never hitting 20 or more in back to back seasons, but for whatever reason, the young boy gravitated toward him. The boy struggled to communicate why The Captain was his favorite because, statistically, he wasn’t the best. Jeter always had a pretty high average, but it wasn’t the best. He was definitely never the best homerun hitter, but he was one of the best defensive players in the league. There was one play that always stood out to the kid, so much so, that he still calls it the “Derek Jeter” play. A ball grounded to the far left, so the shortstop would have to field the ball backhand and across his body as he was running toward shallow left field. He picks up the ball and transfers it to his throwing hand, then he jumps and throws across his body, nailing the runner at first base by a hair. Jeter first pulled off the move in the 1998 ALCS, before the little boy was born, but he had since pulled it off a number of times. Of course, this was only one of many famous plays that Jeter had pulled off during his career, but since the young boy didn’t have any stands to dive head-first into or Jeremy Giambi to throw out at home plate, this was a play that the kid could practice over and over again at any field whenever his dad was free.

It wasn’t until the boy was older and learned what made Derek Jeter stand out from his competition. Jeter, who made his major league debut in
1994, played through one of the most notable eras of baseball: The Steroid Era. The MLB in the 1990s and early 2000s was defined by home run hitters like Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa and almost every other player who took Performance Enhancing Drugs (PEDs). For the few who didn’t and still had notable careers, became all the more respected. Some notable names on that list include Chipper Jones, Ken Griffey Jr., and of course Derek Jeter. The other two are already members of the Baseball Hall of Fame, Griffey with the highest voting percentage of all time at 99.3%, so it would be of no surprise that Jeter would be the leading member of the 2019 induction class.

For someone to have played twenty seasons where he only played under 130 games twice, and once because of a lockout, to never have taken any banned substances to improve his numbers especially when everyone else was doing just that showed the little boy, who at this point was more of a teenager, that it took more to be a great player than just the stats a player puts up every season. The teen had started picking up on the values that Jeter had shown throughout his legendary career. Most notably to him was Jeter’s loyalty. In a world of sub-tweeting and trash talking in sports, Jeter has never once gone behind a teammate’s back to put himself into the spotlight or left his team in search of more money. Now obviously, the argument can be made that because he was on the Yankees, nobody had more money to offer, but there is definitely something to be said for a player staying on one team for as long as Jeter did. Loyalty to teammates, the team, and, most importantly, the fanbase is something that not many players can attest to.

Another characteristic that the teen found in Jeter was respect. This principle might be the largest part of Jeter’s pedigree, as it is the reason that many sight for the way he played his game. By never doing anything that would jeopardize his ability to play, whether that be by taking a banned substance or doing something risky outside of the season Jeter showed his respect for the game itself. By never talking bad about teammates, coaches, or opposing players, he showed his respect for those who play the game he loves so much. By staying humble in his success, he showed respect for those who supported him throughout his career. Respect is such a large part of who Derek Jeter is, that it became the slogan of his Jordan Brand campaign.

In the same year as Derek Jeter’s retirement, the teenager joined an organization that would revamp his commitment to those principles. It was an international Jewish youth group whose driving morals ran along the same line as Jeter’s and expanded on them with brotherhood. Throughout his time in the organization, the teen learned a tremendous amount of skills like leadership, philanthropy, and how to teach people rather than do things for them. First, he led the most active term of social action and community service that his chapter of the organization had ever seen. Later, as vice president, he created a program that paired unexperienced event planners
with people who had done it multiple times so that it wasn’t just the same people doing everything and making the first-time experience less intimidating. Due to the lessons and experiences he had in this organization, the teen became a man. No matter what he did, the young man’s core morals and principles always tied back to one person. Not his dad, not his mom, not his rabbi; Derek Jeter.

Derek Jeter is my favorite player. I am that little boy in the nosebleeds with oversized binoculars focusing on one person. I am the navy pinstripe in the sea of green and gold. I am the kid practicing Jeter’s throw from the 1998 ALCS on any available infield my dad and I could get to. The number 2 is my lucky number, and the jersey number I request at every given opportunity. I stopped playing baseball in the 5th grade, but that hasn’t stopped my love for the game or for my favorite player. If anything, it has only made me dig deeper into baseball and Derek Jeter. Being removed from the game has made me look at baseball and its players in a much more analytical sense, which has only reaffirmed my love for Derek Jeter.

Posting a career WAR (Wins Above Replacement) of 72.4, Derek Jeter is rated as the 57th best player of all time. This might not seem like the biggest accomplishment, but one must consider that, in a league with approximately 17,000 players since its creation, that being in the top 100 of all-time is remarkable. What more to consider is that, while being undoubtedly incredible, Jeter never broke any league records or was ever in the conversation for “best in the league” as often as players like Alex Rodriguez, Barry Bonds, Bryce Harper, or Mike Trout. One thing that separates Jeter from at least two of those names, however, is his aforementioned lack of steroid usage which certainly would have boosted his career hit and home run numbers. Even without all of that, anyone who knows baseball has to acknowledge that Derek Jeter is one of the best to lace up a pair of cleats.

There is one quote that sums up Derek and my admiration for him. He once said, “There may be people who have more talent than you, but there’s no excuse for anyone to work harder than you do.” Jeter is undeniable. He will never be the best player, probably not even the best shortstop with players like Jose Lindor, Carlos Correa, Corey Seager, and Didi Gregorious who are all very talented fielders and who can all hit for power with numbers higher than Jeter could have ever reached. Through all of that, nobody can deny that Derek Jeter is one of the best players of all time. That is what makes him relatable to me. I’ve never been the best at most of the things that I do, but that does not mean that I shouldn’t put in the most effort possible to succeed. That is what Derek Jeter means to me; more than a player, more than a person, Derek Jeter is the idea of resilience and perseverance that has helped me often in life to get through hard classes and tough times. Derek Jeter inspires me to be the best me that I can be.
The Life of Jack Redford, Albuquerque Beetle

Sam Bannon

Jack Redford loved his life. He had everything. Granted, there were some aspects of his life that he did not particularly enjoy – like the fact that he technically was a stink bug and he couldn’t fly and was happy. He lived in a bustling urban city, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and had a beautiful newlywed wife who was expecting their first children. After all, what more could he ask for? He was a dentate stink bug beetle living in a great city with a great wife, and a family on the way. He was two months old, about a third of the way into his life. His life was just beginning. Jack Redford was happy.

Jack, like most of his kind of beetle, stayed home all day under he and his wife’s rock until dusk, when he would go scavenge the area for small bits of plants to bring back to the home for dinner. However, food was unfortunately becoming few and far between for Jack and his pregnant wife with the recent drought that had struck Albuquerque. It wasn’t quite the Goldilocks climate that he and his wife had come to expect – dry enough so it was habitable and hospitable for them, but not too dry so that the plants, their food, couldn’t live. The continual lack of food Jack would shamefully bring back became a strong point of contention in an otherwise fruitful and fight-free marriage. With his wife already irritable due to the hormones and the larvae growing inside of her, the pressure continued to build and mount like a dormant volcano that was not going to be dormant for too much longer.

The date was April 5, 2009; one week before it happened. The time they spent at their home together during the day was almost completely silent. Typically, when two beings are comfortable around each other, they can blissfully share a silence together. They don’t feel that they need to yak about mindless, trivial things in order to feel comfortable. They can just sit there and be comfortable in silence. Of course, Jack and his wife had shared many of these instances. Who was more comfortable around each other than two beetles who loved each other? However, the silence between the two on that day was almost painful, and certainly not a comfortable one. Jack’s wife was angry, she was hungry – and she blamed him. It hurt Jack that his wife was shutting him out due to things out of his control. It wasn’t as if he simply brought back less food because of some incompetence or lack of ability to
provide – he brought home all that he could, because a man provides. It wasn’t his fault.

Jack was sitting there, in silence, next to his wife, living in his own head. Jack, normally a confident beetle, was skittish and nervous. A million thoughts went racing through his mind like the cars on Gold Ave during the rush hour. What do I say to her? How can I assure her that everything will be okay? How can I tell her that I have no control over this without her exploding in anger? Can I have a conversation with her, or will she just continue to incessantly shun me? Surely, there must exist some combination of words. There must exist certain words in a certain specific order that can cause her to not be so cantankerous. All of these sprinted through his head. Finally, after hours of silence, Jack finally settled on what to say. However, he butchered the delivery and felt like he came off scared. He weakly said to her, “hot one today, huh?” He instantly regretted it. Out of all the thoughts that ran through his head, this was what he settled on? He thought he was an idiot. However, it became exponentially worse after his wife’s response, or lack thereof. She simply looked at him and walked away like he wasn’t there.

The date was April 6, 2009; six days before it happened. The night before with Jack and his wife was contentious. He brought home even less food than he had been bringing. He noticed his wife was becoming skinnier from the malnutrition. He became terribly concerned, not only for his wife, but the larvae on the way. He felt helpless, like he was a David going against a Goliath – except this time, David did not have a sling, and Goliath squashed him. He brought home even less food that night. His pregnant wife continued to not speak to him, and she continued to get weaker and more malnourished.

The date was April 11, 2009; one day before it happened. Jack Redford never felt any animosity towards his wife throughout the ordeal, but especially not now. He loved her; he always had. However, with less food each night, she and the larvae became increasingly starved. Toward the end, Jack liked to tell himself that he she didn’t talk to him because she was too weak to talk, but Jack knew it wasn’t the case. She had not spoken to Jack in about a week. Jack’s wife blamed him for her and the larvae’s starvation, whether it was fair or not. The piercing looks she would give Jack only served to make him feel ever more dejected. Once again, they sat together in a painful silence throughout the day. She sat there, blaming her husband for her starvation, and he sat there, concerned for his wife’s well-being, and impotent to do anything about it. Eventually, Jack left to forage for food in the crevasses of the sidewalks in the city, while his wife stayed home, silent.

Jack himself had not eaten in the previous two days. He had given his portion of the food to his wife, but it still was not enough for her. When he was out searching for food, he was determined to bring home an abundance of plants for his wife. He felt that she maybe did not have much time left, but
he was unclear on how much there could be. He thought he had maybe another week to give her enough food so she could not be starving anymore. Jack was frantic in his search at dusk. He knew it was dangerous, but it was a risk he had to take for his wife – Jack had to venture into Gold Ave, and try and find food there. He was desperate. He knew if he could simply just find enough food tonight, he could potentially get his wife talking to him again, and help save her and the larvae. He needed to find the food. He knew there was not much out there, but there was some – and he was desperate to find it.

Jack scuttled out of the alley where their rock was into the busy, bustling Gold Ave. He took one step with one of his six legs, and he immediately had to step back into the alley. There were people, giant human beings, all around. He knew there would be some, but he hadn’t a clue that there would be so many. The odds of Jack being able to frogger his way through the unrelenting river of stomping feet were minimal, but he had no other choice. He needed to get about 48 inches to the other side of the sidewalk in order to get to a ridge, where small bits of plant are sometimes held. Jack felt that he was on a suicide mission, but he was out of options.

Jack peered his head out from the corner of the alley, hoping to catch a break in the flow of feet. For a small interval of time, there weren’t any. But, finally, he found one. He scampered out from the alley and scurried across the sidewalk as fast as he possibly could. As more and more feet came pounding his direction from seemingly all sides, he thought about his wife. He thought about how he loved her, and how he was doing this for her. He ran harder. He was almost there. The people seemed to be stampeding toward him. He thought about his wife more. He ran harder. He was almost there. Finally, just as it seemed he wouldn’t make it, he leapt into the crevasse of the sidewalk. He was safe. He could finally look for the food his wife desperately needed.

Jack was in the sidewalk, safe from all the feet that were too wide to step on him below. The more people above, the more likely it was that there would be food in the cracks. However, the drought that caused his family’s shortage of food was far more reaching than he had even anticipated. There was no food anywhere in sight.

“No, no, no, no…” Jack frantically screamed. “No! This can’t be!” Jack darted down the sidewalk for what seemed like eons to him, just trying to find something before dark. He didn’t have a lot of time with which to work, as beetles only can search for food at dusk. He was running out of time. Panic-stricken, he continued to search, but he knew it was hopeless. There was no food here. He waited a small bit in the crack of the sidewalk, defeated, realizing his wife and larvae would have to go another night with little-to-no food. After the foot traffic on the sidewalk died down, he made his way back to the alley. As he was going back, he felt like crying.

His wife, critically needing food and expecting it, sat there, waiting
for her husband to get back. She heard his voice before she saw him. He feebly said, fighting back the tears, “hey, sweetie.” She turned to him and saw that Jack had brought back no food. “I’m sorry, but there—" before Jack could finish, she cut him off, and spoke to him for the first time for the first time in about a week. With the little energy she had left, she plainly said, “fuck you, Jack.” She walked away, and Jack simply just sat there, hungry, terribly saddened, and alone. More alone than he had ever been. He didn’t know how much longer his wife and the larvae could last with such little food and nourishment.

The date was April 12, 2009; the day it happened. The day Jack awoke to find his wife and her larvae dead. They had starved. Jack, at first, thought she still was not talking to him. She wasn’t speaking before, so what would change that, especially after last night? Jack thought. Until Jack began to realize that she was not moving, he did not think anything was more wrong than it had been. But, sooner rather than later, Jack realized that she wasn’t moving, and this caused him to grow concerned. In the back of his mind, he knew what had happened. He knew she was dead.

He cautiously crept over to what he hoped wasn’t his wife’s lifeless carcass. “Honey?” he probed, “are you feeling alright?” There was no response. Jack swallowed and tapped her on the side with his front right leg. There was no movement from her. He was fighting back the tears, hoping and praying that the worst had not happened. But he knew it had. “Honey…?” he softly repeated. He tapped her again, this time much harder. She toppled over onto her side, legs and antennae stiff. Jack felt what he thought would be the worst feeling he would ever experience. He was right. His wife, and his unborn children, were dead.

He was paralyzed with sadness. He could do nothing but stand there and look at her lifeless body with tears in his eyes. He wept, blaming himself for what had happened. He held her body, clutching the woman that once loved him and was full of life. Upon holding her, he thought back to the night before and what she had said. That was the last thing she ever said to him. He clutched her body tighter and cried harder.

Jack Redford hated his life. He had nothing. He had indirectly killed his wife and her larvae. He wanted nothing more than to be a dad, and now that was gone. He felt like his life was over. He decided to go on a walk. He had no direction in mind. He was going to keep walking until he couldn’t anymore. He set off with tears in his eyes.

Jack had no idea where he was. It seemed like a bad part of Albuquerque, but he had no way of knowing. He made it to the corner of Pacific and Commercial. He did not know how far he had walked. The only sound he could hear was the rush of a freight train barreling by. There was one man around him, a man dressed in yellow with white shoes. Jack ducked down into the sidewalk crevasse for safety like how he had done before, but
he soon realized that this man was friendly. He crawled across his hand, almost playing with him. He needed to feel something other than the emptiness he felt.

He heard a pair of footsteps approaching. The second man greeted the first man, so he assumed the second man would be friendly like the first. The next thing Jack heard was the second man say, “damn, bitch!” An instant later, Jack Redford felt the most excruciating pain he had ever felt in his life. His entire body was smashed into the sidewalk by the second man’s shoe. The man twisted his foot, and swiped it across the sidewalk, erasing any semblance of Jack Redford. Jack Redford was dead.

Works Consulted


A faint smile she wears as she lays in the hospital bed absorbing all of the information as the doctors take us through the protocols that must be enforced before being lead to surgery. Mind boggled as I listen to all of the outcomes of such an intricate and lengthy procedure, fearing for my mother’s life. Circular, sticky foam pads distributed all around her head as if she were some sort of alien. Hospital gown and socks on. Tags around her wrists identifying who she is along with her blood type in case of emergency. Monitors, an IV, and so much more to take in just sitting in what feels like a tiny hospital room that continues to get smaller and smaller. So many doctors entering and exiting to introduce themselves in what is already a compact room of my dad, mom, two sisters, and me.

Beyond everything that is going on, the one thing that gets me through it, is that faint, but radiant smile on my mom’s face. From never having any prior health issues to having to go through an eight to ten hour procedure and intense recovery in order to remove none other than a brain tumor. My mother’s strength beamed throughout the room that especially struck me. Under all of the hospital clothes and surgical items that attempted to take my mom away from me, she did not allow it. All I could vibrantly see was my loving, caring, beautiful, devoted, hard-working, strong, and inspiring mother. Nothing makes me prouder than the fact that she is my mom. Her strength is what got each of us through her surgery and allowed for her to have such an astonishing recovery. Every day it is her strength that I see shine throughout and inspires me.

The perfect view from the window of my mom’s recovery room. Lake Michigan was sparkling as the sun reflected off of it. It did not take long for darkness to transpire. My dad, sisters, and I were brought to this room and told to wait for my mom because she would soon be arriving from surgery. I left to go to the bathroom before her arrival, but as I walked back to the room two nurses were pushing her on her bed into the room. I was the first to see her since her bed was facing me outside of the room. My sisters immediately looked at my face to see my reaction. Nothing could stop my tear drops from trickling down my face. Pale as a ghost. Still as a statue. She was not making a sound. Based on my reaction my sister asked the nurse if
my mom was responsive. The nurses were very affirmative saying how much my mom had actually been talking. Then came the moans of a zombie as if my mom were coming back from the dead. My sister says to her, “Hi mom, it’s the girls, we are here with you now.” Abruptly my mom’s eyes sprung open and locked onto mine. She responded back with a “hi girls” and immediately following was the never-ending thrill of puke fest. I dashed out of the room as I heard the shouts and cries of my mom.

Seeing my mom for the first time felt as if it was not actually my mom I was looking at. It was as if she was transparent and I was just looking right through a pale, empty, motionless figure. I was told that when she came out of surgery she might be unable to talk or she’d remain asleep for an unknown period of time. Her head could be wrapped up like a mummy. Her face might be distorted because of the nerves they were working so close to in order to remove the tumor. So many thoughts, so many options were rushing through my brain when I first glimpsed at her. The wave of emotions that crashed over me may have been fear and sorrow, but at the same time, joy. As traumatizing as it was to see my mom in these conditions, I knew how much worse it could have been. I may have left the room due to the sounds exerting my mom, but the main reason was so my mom would not see me as the mess I was. I could not let my mom get confused by my emotions that were already confusing me. I was not crying because I thought she was not doing well, it was because she was doing even better than I imagined. I was slapped across the face seeing my mom in such excruciating pain, but again I saw her strength. The strength my mom boasted to be in the condition she was already in, just a few hours out of surgery, was astonishing. I knew I could not do anything to weaken her strength which is why I would fight back the tears or leave the room before she could see my emotions. Nobody wants to see or hear their mom in pain, especially not post brain surgery. But there was nothing I wanted more than to be by my mom’s bedside every step of the way. What was already a long day, just became even longer.

Nighttime fell fast and visiting hours came to an end. My dad was supposed to be the only one staying overnight, but I was elected the lucky winner to also spend the night at the hospital. My mom lay there in her bed moving in all directions attempting to find any position comfortable for her head. My dad and I stand next to her bedside as he says to her “Alexis and Maddie are gone but Sammie is staying the night with me to help look after you.” My mom’s eyes crack open and look right into my eyes as she says, “hi punk” and I instantly felt the rush of warmth run through my body. I took the first shift so that my dad could get some rest. It was a never-ending thrill of a night. I stood next to my mom’s bed holding an ice pack over her head while holding onto her hand. I would run my fingers over her arm to give her comfort and so she knew I was there. My eyes were drooping, I could hardly keep them open, but it was the slightest squeeze of the hand from my mom
that kept me awake. Between running to the nurse station in the hallway to find the nurse, to scurrying to grab the puke bucket, to raising my mom’s bed up, to waking up my dad, there was so much going on.

I could go on and on explaining what I saw and everything that I had to do that night and the next six days in the hospital but trust me nobody really wants to know. Just as I wish I never had to experience everything we encountered. But it was from the moment I first saw my mom after surgery that I knew I never wanted to leave her side. The worst part of it all were the flashbacks I was having from being at my grandma’s bedside when she faintly squeezed my hand to acknowledge that she knew I was there before her passing.

I walk through the door and I immediately notice all that is not right. The guest bed from the basement is in the front living room. There is a walker at the foot of the bed calling my mom’s name. The rug by the front door along with the rugs in the kitchen are all removed so that the walker does not get caught on them. Laid out across the living room table are more pill bottles than I have ever seen at once. A daily schedule typed out stating which pill to take, how many times a day, at what times, and how many of those pills to take at once. A notepad to be written in for each time my mom takes a pill. Blanks left to be filled out with information including what time the pill was taken, which pill she took, how many of the pills she took, and the initials of who gave her the pills. 6 vitamins to be taken every morning with breakfast, a nausea pill to be taken twice a day with lunch and dinner, a very powerful steroid with a strict fifteen-day schedule to be taken at exact times each day to slowly ease her body away from needing it, and a pain med to be taken only every six hours when needed. Such a precise schedule that was so crucial to make sure my mom could have the smoothest recovery and avoid any other difficulties and concerns.

Next to the guest bed on the floor lay a small inflatable bed for none other than yours truly. Every night I had to sleep on the floor incase anything was wrong or bothering my mom. Every time she woke up in the middle of the night in pain, or just to go to the bathroom I had to be there every step of the way. 6:00 am when the alarm went off for her steroid I was there to wake her up and give it to her and late at night when she needed it again. Each morning when she would wake up for breakfast I was there to make it for her. Lunch time, there I was again making her the meal of her choice. Pushing her daily to eat, drink, and most importantly stay awake. She struggles to keep her eyes open and to sit up. All she wants to do is lay down and sleep more, but she knows that it is not an option as much as she fights for it. The look in her eye of determination and the change in the tone of her voice meant everything.

I became known as the drug dealer around my house hold. Due to the fact that I was the one in charge of my mom’s medicine and keeping up
with the strict schedule. There is nothing harder for me than seeing my mom in the conditions she was in. Never had it crossed my mind that I would be the one pushing my mom to stay awake, eat food, stay hydrated or make her meals. That is what my mom has always done for me. As hard as it was for me, I knew that it was harder for her. I knew that I needed to stay strong and take authority over the situation. When you are little you are taught to not talk back to your parents or yell at them. Well, I had a complete role change in which I had to yell back at my mom in order to get her to sit up and stay awake. My sisters and I would even pull out the good cop bad cop scheme to see if it would help.

There is no worse feeling than yelling at your mother, especially knowing how much pain she is in, yet how badly she wants it. The look of determination she would get in her eyes because she was aware of what needed to be done. That look is what assured me that what I was doing was okay. That as much as she hated me for pushing her and yelling at her, it was all going to be worthwhile. The change in her tone of her voice set the mood. As easy as it could have been for me to just give up and back down on her, it was the look on her face and her tone that was deep down telling me to keep going. Until you hit certain points when you just had to know that is enough whether she wanted to stop or not. And don’t get me wrong, she did everything she could to lay back in bed and try to sleep, and what kept me sane during it all was her sense of humor and the minor jokes she would crack and I’d just know, that is my mom still in there fighting her way through this every step of the way.

It was a little past midnight and I was leaving for college at 4:00 a.m. Because of the surgery my mom was unable to bring me to college, see my dorm, help me move in, and drop me off. It was heart breaking to me, but I knew going into her surgery that she would not be able to and it was what had to be done. I crack open my mom’s bedroom door to see the nightstand’s light peak through a little as I find my mom sitting up in bed. I go and lay down next to her and wrap my arms around her as I hug her and pull her closer. I bury my head into her as I cry and explain how I do not want to leave or go to college. She holds me tighter and begins to soothe and comfort me by rubbing my back and assuring me that everything is going to be okay. She made me smile and laugh comparing me to my sisters. She reassured me that I’m only three hours away and she would come visit me as soon as she was able to. The roles had switched again that night as my mom was the one comforting, encouraging, and staying strong for me. As the tears slid down her cheeks she said to me, I am not crying because I am sad, but because of how excited I am for you and the amount of fun you are about to have.
He hustled to the airplane bathroom to eat passport pages, piece by piece, forever destroying the evidence of his fake identity. Knocks began to rap on the door sending him into a scramble. He ripped out the pages with pictures and returned to his seat. He continued, piece by piece, ordering a Guinness to wash it down, then sat anxiously for the duration of the flight. Days later he signed with the Chicago White Sox for $68 million. Jose Abreu’s story is movie material, but it is not uncommon. Aspiring baseball players in Latin America go through unprecedented measures to play in America. Players like Abreu devote their teenage years to baseball because it’s an escape from their often poverty-stricken or violence-ridden lives. Major League Baseball has provided countless happy endings for Hispanic players, however, the means to reach ‘the show’ expose a tricky situation that possesses social and cultural significance. With paths to the MLB marred by unethical developmental practices, shrouded in mystery, and inherently illegal, baseball’s dark side is fully underway and under the radar.

Abreu was 26, alongside his fiancée, parents, and sister, on a raft in the dead of night. Immersed in darkness and surrounded by waves at sea, the moment a passing boat sent 15-foot swells over the Abreu’s dingy could have been the end, but they survived the 12-hour voyage and arrived in Haiti…to complete the first step of the journey. Abreu said it himself, “It was dangerous, the waves were high, but the Lord was at our side. God gave us the chance to reach our destination.” After a brief stay in Haiti to generate fake documents he was on the move again. In the Dominican Republic Abreu got picked up by a local athletic agency in Santo Domingo, eventually leading to him latching on at a New York Yankees training complex in the country. His agents held workouts and showcases, drawing interest from a majority of MLB teams. The Chicago White Sox won the bidding war, and now all Abreu had to do was make it to America. *Sports Illustrated* recently obtained and released evidence on the subject. The story above can be put into overarching context through *SI*’s summary of the trend:

The migration of Latin American talent to Major League Baseball—particularly players from Cuba—has long been an
unseemly business, shrouded in don’t-ask-don’t-tell secrecy. These exodus stories often come suffused with tales of bribes, kickbacks, side deals with smugglers, dubious immigration documents and middlemen skilled at working around immigration laws.

If you can succeed at the pinnacle of baseball, seemingly nothing else matters, which is questionable business ethics and generally just wrong. Major League Baseball represents asylum. Whether one has immigrated illegally or endured the unregulated training complexes. The aforementioned don’t-ask-don’t-tell nature holds true for both immigrants and those who arrive though the twisted training in other countries. While these players shouldn’t be condemned for following their dreams, there are blatant sins occurring along the way, signifying a need for change and - at the very least - truth.

The truth would be ugly. Baseball recruitment in Latin America can be traced back to the 1940s. For the next 60 years it expanded, unregulated and corrupted. Teams would scout players beginning at the age of 10 and establish independent training complexes to house teenage talent. The kids would train and live at these facilities, working to impress ball clubs that would come periodically for showcases. The pressure to be signed combined with the unregulated environment led to rampant usage of steroids. In these often-impoverished communities, it is bootleg horse steroids or veterinarian substances that teenage baseball recruits inject themselves with. An uptick in documented deaths in the early 2000s prompted outcry, to which Rob Manfred Jr., then head of MLB's drug program and current MLB commissioner said “We're trying to gather some information and re-evaluate what we want to be doing. We don’t want to flush a lot of money down the toilet.” The policy changes that soon followed led to additional money for testing of Hispanic players in the minor leagues, but limited action abroad. Countries like the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Cuba have their own leagues out of MLB jurisdiction, so the status quo prevailed.

In 15 years since the initial backlash from the severity of steroids abroad, seemingly the only lesson learned is that using cattle steroids is a poor technique. All 32 teams have baseball operations located in a Latin American country, in fact all 32 teams have training centers in the Dominican Republic alone. Franchises capitalize on these lawless lands to develop pipelines to farm systems. A former executive described the situation by saying, "it's a Third World country, and that's the way [the clubs] treated it.

Today, it is not nearly as lawless as it used to be, but it is far from fair. Buscónes are modern agents who often identify kids with potential and begin training them, eventually putting them on the radar of MLB teams. These street-level trainer/agents broker contracts between the parties… a nice portion also goes to themselves. The Spanish word translates directly to swindlers. They are known to falsify documentation and ages, while
encouraging PED usage and identity theft when necessary. It is important to note that buscónes are self-employed, so some utilize proper, selfless means to develop and nurture young players. The recurring problem is that it is totally unregulated. MLB has said that they can’t intervene because of antitrust type legislation. That seems like a faulty excuse considering the Major League Baseball Players Association has included buscónes in contractual talks in a join-representation structure. Not to mention the simple sphere of power and immense oversight an organization like Major League Baseball possesses could most certainly generate action from within foreign governments to implement protocol of some kind. If not, players could still risk subjecting themselves to unfair treatment.

Alexis Quiroz grew up in poverty. Baseball was his savior. In 1995 at age 16 he was offered his first professional baseball contract from the Chicago Cubs. He was hesitant to sign, as many amateur players are first sent to the Dominican Republic - dubbed by other local players as “Vietnam”. Yet, he signed for $6,000 (minus the $2,000 that went to his buscónes). The lure of Major League Baseball and Wrigley Field was too much to resist, but Quiroz would never make it. He spent a year living with two dozen recruits in a single-bathroom dormitory with no running water in the D.R. They were fed 3 scant meals a day and funneled performance enhancing drugs. The next season Quiroz separated his shoulder and the Cubs cut him.

Quiroz is important because he, unlike almost all others, had a burning desire and found a way to share his story. He came to America and confronted Cubs officials about the conditions in the Dominican Republic - becoming the focus of a Chicago Tribune article. He also corroborated on a book detailing his life and its power as a case study in the world of Latin American baseball operations.

Examples like Quiroz generated the first wave of response, occurring around 2003, when the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) went to the Commissioner’s Office complaining of widespread injustice. MLB complied, introducing procedure such as providing contracts in Spanish, suggesting a global draft and planning addition drug testing. Earlier I described how the heightened drug screening was drastically limited by a lack of power aboard/cooperation, and the notion of a global draft never picked up much steam. But, at least, after about 65 years, Hispanic players could read and sign a contract that was written in a language they could understand!

However, the second wave of response is underway now in 2018. Within the past few months a Grand Jury of the U.S. Department of Justice has been investigating the MLB with the possibility to prosecute under the Foreign Corrupt Policy Act. In the Sports Illustrated dossier, conversations and specific team actions are depicted, summarizing legal aspects by saying:
The dossier also appears to describe efforts to circumvent federal laws and MLB rules requiring Cuban players to establish residency in another country before negotiating and signing with a team. Among those efforts to circumvent, the dossier includes a transcript of a Nov. 21, 2015, text message conversation between two Dodgers executives in which they discuss the need to “shred” a contract signed with a player before MLB had approved the document. There are also indications that dates on other official documents were doctored before they were forwarded to the MLB office. (Carl Prine, SI)

The Los Angeles Dodgers are a team frequently mentioned in the dossier as well as commonly brought up in media outlets due to their famous signings of international players. However, the immoral nature in their activity, and perhaps more shockingly the bluntness of it, is ridiculous. Within the dossier is a chart, dating back to 2015, that ranked recruiting techniques by “Level of Egregious Behavior”, with the average rank being “Significant; aware of and facilitates shadiness” and the most severe being “Criminal; oversees the operation, people and money”. Five Dodger employees earned the “Criminal” rank for their work in Latin America.

Few know that better than former Dodger Yasiel Puig. He had been attempting to slip out of Cuba for over a year, where the $17 a month he’d get for his baseball career wasn’t cutting it. Puig escaped via boat on his fifth try. After being intercepted by the Cuban government or the U.S. Coast Guard on his previous four attempts, Puig made it to Mexico. There, a crew of smugglers held him for a month waiting for their money to arrive. Puig rarely recounts the tale, but says he faced threats such as a “whack with a machete—“chop off an arm, a finger, whatever, and he would never play baseball again”. It took a fake kidnapping planned by Puig’s agents to get him on the move again. Even when he got to America, he was routinely threatened unless he continued paying the smugglers. Puig asked a friend to make a stop and got a guarantee that the situation would be “neutralized.” Soon after the head smuggler was found dead in Cancun (Robertson,3).

Furthermore, once they get to the United states, Latin American players have historically been taken advantage of. Massive new TV deals balloon salaries, making way for some splurges on Hispanic talent for teams like the Dodgers, Red Sox, and a handful of others. However, Jose Fernandez signed with the Marlins and made $490,000 his first year despite being a previously heralded pitcher. Miguel Tejada got $2,000 to sign with the Oakland Athletics and was the MVP a couple of years later. Baseball scholar Kevin Kerrane calculated in 1975 that major-league organizations gave U.S.-born players selected in the draft an average signing bonus of $60,000, while the signing bonuses for foreign-born Latin Americans acquisitions averaged
$5,000. In 1997 the league average salary was $1.3 million - the Cleveland Indians signed 40 foreign players for $700,000 the same year.

The examples I mentioned cover a sizable portion of baseball history, and obviously the salaries overall have continuously risen, but the wage gap is unchanged. Today franchises like the Athletics, Marlins, and Padres bargain hunt with Hispanic players by the dozen (Baseball America). To repeat a quote from earlier "it's a Third World country, and that's the way [the clubs] treated it." Because the “prospects” of the area are often trapped in financial hardship, agents get them for pennies on the dollar, so to speak. Rene Gayo, who worked as the Pittsburgh Pirates Latin American Scouting Director until last year, agreed, saying “These guys, if they don’t play in the big leagues they’re going to end up selling mangoes in the street.” Gayo believes since these teenagers have no other options, MLB’s stingy offers are more than enough.

And yes, they are. More Hispanic ball players are coming to America and succeeding, to the tune of over 32% of players on 2018 rosters being Latin American. But there is just so much wrong in the ways that they get here. It's unfair for them and unfair for MLB, as a business, to loophole and discard laws that other businesses have to abide by. There have to be changes and they should come from all sides. It is the duty of Latin American players, like Abreu and Puig, to go to courts of law and divulge the absurdity of their situations. It is the duty of Major League Baseball to actually act like a powerful organization and work with governments to bring about policy. And good god - the players union - the MLBPA has to start standing up for these players and bringing attention to their struggles. It is a travesty that significant portions of their MLB earnings are subject to blackmail and ending up in the hands of gangs and smugglers. It should be a combination of those things. The issue involves all of them to varying degrees and each group has different abilities they can bring to the plate, which at the end of the day is where everyone wants to be.
Time in a bottle

Jack Streberger

Suppose there exists a world where time is the only medicine. Time is also
only used for medicine. It is known around the world for this one purpose.
Sickness and disease is spread around the world. It is normal for the people to
be sick. Receiving a prescription of time is there only hope. They do not
know death can be caused by old age. They only believe time has run out or
did not sufficiently work to make them healthier, when someone has died.
Time is looked at as the holy grail. It is made into a religion that everyone
believes in and abides by.

A man, in this world, walks alone in the ill infected streets. His face
covered with a frail safety mask covering his mouth. His single reason to even
be outside is to travel to the medical center, where he will be diagnosed with a
three week illness. As he passes abandoned shops and houses, he is nervous
and focused on hearing from the doctor. His symptoms are red dots around
his chest and respiratory issues. This is a common illness spread around his
location. The medical center is planted deep behind the city, in an untouched
forest area, but has roads connected to the main city. After the man returns
home with his diagnosis and medicine, he greets his wife, one child, and
Grandparents, both diagnosed with cancer. The Grandparents are given one
year time from the doctors to heal.

They live all together in a small apartment downtown. The man
works two jobs, both inside large buildings where everything is constantly
sterilized. He sits hunched in his small office chair inside his one in a million
cubicle. Every day the man debates whether his life has a purpose. He asks
himself if it is worth keeping up with the ongoing illnesses that cannot be
escaped from. He does have trust in time and eventually decides that sickness
is a battle worth fighting.

Life does not bring others joy either. It is a constant boggle with
time. Time is the only thing helping the people in this world. There is no
reason to work harder than your peers. No amount of money can escape you
from illnesses. Large salaries become worthless due to the fact that there is
nothing to do. Everyone is in their separate homes, sterilized and distanced
from the others. Thus, all around the world consists of a similar lifestyle.
Work a small stress free job, make enough money to buy food for your family and pass on these habits to your children.

Around the dinner table the man and his family talk solely about time. This conversation resembles a gloomy yet peaceful talk among the family. If life is this black and white than what keeps them going? What are each of them looking forward to in order to find a purpose in this world? The people are not scared of death. They only fear their current illness, but are unaware why. It is only evolved that illness is bad. To them, time is so sacred that disrespecting it and being mad at it for a death is unacceptable.

After dinner, the child walks alone is his sterilized house, up to his room. Filled with no color, no cartoon heroes, or no favorite sports team. While taking off his clothes for bed, he finds red dots on his small, undeveloped chest. He only thinks about his no purpose school, dying family and future similar to his father's. Sadly, this boy cannot find a purpose. He is not educated about time enough. His next action will change the course of history, in the world where time is the only medicine.
Blanket Forts and Bike Trips

Anna Nelsen

I anxiously sat in the car in a large, half-filled parking lot next to the football stadium awaiting her arrival. She was twenty minutes late—what was taking so long? I grew nervous as girls ran past the car, silently hoping that she wouldn’t see me, and trying to avoid making eye contact with anyone. The sun was on the brink of beginning to set and I was growing ever-more anxious as girls slowly started to walk out to their cars. I finally spotted her from my parked car about two hundred meters away. She walked around for a few seconds, searching for the car and appearing slightly confused—the car was not in its’ usual spot. We finally made eye contact and her face lit up when she saw me. I heard her yell “Anna!!” excitedly. “Kayla!!!!” I screamed her name excitedly as I swiftly hopped out of the car and sprinted to her. We met in a warm embrace and laughed in disbelief as she questioned what I was doing there. I explained that I had had a dentist appointment earlier that day that she had forgotten about and that our mom and I had planned to surprise her. My heart overflowed with joy as she told me that this was the highlight of her week. As we got in the car and pulled out of the parking lot, a small knot formed in my throat as she softly proclaimed that this surprise made her heart happy and that it made her want to cry.

Sisters are much more than sisters. Sisters are surprises and warm hugs. Sisters are blanket forts and nature clubs. Sisters are cringey dance videos and iconic movie makers. Sisters are stuffed animal camps and art clubs. Sisters are Hogwarts students and H2O binge-watchers. Sisters are crack-of-dawn royal wedding watch parties and late-night conversations. Sisters are secret-keepers and storytellers. Sisters are running buddies and spontaneous bike, hammock, and picnic trip-takers. Sisters are haunted house creators, game makers, and “store owners.” Sisters are never-ending inside jokes like “I guess it’s better than a dishwater.” Sisters are laughing doubled over on the floor and late-night impromptu dance parties. Sisters are carpool karaoke singers and intense ERS players. Sisters are clothes-stealers. Sisters are always right. Sisters are fights. But more importantly, sisters are the anchors that keep you tethered down in this crazy game of life. Sisters are the comfort in the pain, the love in our veins. Sisters are support systems and best friends. Sisters are always there for you and pick you up when you fall down...after they finish laughing. Sisters are the glue that holds your life together. Sisters are sisters, and no one can take their place.
Venus and Serena Williams. Jenna and Barbara Bush. Mary-Kate, Ashley, and Elizabeth Olsen. Jessica and Ashlee Simpson. Anna and Kayla Nelsen. The commonality between all these names?—they’re all iconic sister duos (and trios). You don’t recognize the last two names? Well, that’s because they’re my sister and I. I mean, I think we’re pretty iconic. We go together like peanut butter and jelly or mac and cheese. Sisters are a gift from God, and I can’t imagine life without one. From our nature clubs and blanket forts to our long conversations and hammock trips, Kayla is my other half, the peanut butter to my jelly; I would feel lost without her. The beautiful thing about sisters is that you may grow older, but you’ll never grow apart. Now that I’m in college, the importance of our relationship as sisters is finally coming to full fruition. I’ve always felt a special bond with my sister. Between living my last year at home and transitioning into college this fall, the necessity of that bond has been made even clearer and has strengthened our relationship greatly.

The soft fuzz of the cream-colored blanket overtook me as I carried a handful of blankets down the hallway. Kayla brought her share of blankets and we began constructing our masterpiece—the infamous blanket fort. As we draped the first blanket over the couch and railing of our staircase, we realized the precarious piece of architecture we were about to attempt to execute. “Ok if I hold this one here and tie it down, then you put the other one overlapping on top and we’ll just have to hope they don’t fall,” Kayla declared. I pulled the blanket as tight as I could and tied it to a spindle on the railing. Kayla did the same and we stepped back to inspect our creation. “Hmm…” we said in unison. “I think it’s missing something…” Kayla chimed in. “Yeah I think so too, I just can’t put my finger on what it is.” “A door!” we shouted out with joy as we had just cracked the case of the century. Together we placed the final blanket over top the other two and draped it over the gaping hole in the front. Now it was perfect! Inside, we placed large couch cushions and pillows, complete with a DVD player—there’s no doubt that we weren’t living in style in our new creation. We lifted the door and crawled inside, the space just sizable for the two of us. We peered down through the openings between the spindles of the railing and saw our mom walking around the living room—this was the perfect spot to “spy on our parents!” She looked in our direction and smiled as she heard our giggling echoing through the front entryway. “What are you girls up to up there?” she questioned. We spent hours up in that fort watching movies, reading books, and doing whatever else we pleased, sharing plenty of laughs along the way. This was now the swankiest place in town and was exclusive to Kayla and I. Little did we know that this is where we’d make some of our most vivid memories. At night, we’d add makeshift lighting to it so we could continue our shenanigans long into the night. Eventually, that fort had to come down, but we would rebuild it often, and always found ways to continue our adventures together.
There was always something magical about those blanket forts. During all those late nights in the fort, time stood still. We were young and carefree and didn’t have a single worry in the world. It was amazing how long a few blankets piled on top of each other could capture our attention. In our exclusive blanket forts, Kayla and I shared some of our most memorable moments, whether it was laughing uncontrollably at the littlest thing or spying on our parents from the confines of its’ walls.

I hopped on my bike quickly as Kayla was getting impatient and had already left. She was probably about two hundred meters in front of me the whole time. I grew ever-more annoyed at her as she refused to wait the thirty seconds that it would’ve taken her to wait for me. When she arrived at the park, she questioned where I had been. My anger grew as she seemed annoyed at me for being slow, but she was the one who hadn’t waited for me. I said something that I can’t remember and then decided to just ride home instead of joining her for our planned picnic. I recall texting her because I was so frustrated with her, but she wasn’t responding, which made me even more mad. I told her several things that I regret—none of them were true, but I was just too angry to be rational during this conversation. I remember her text popping up on my screen as she was apologizing for “not being a good sister,” semi-passive-aggressively, which I understood because what I had said was out of line. My heart sunk when I saw her response and I realized how wrong that I was, instantly causing me to regret everything that I had just texted her. I apologized a million times, but she didn’t seem to accept it. When she got back from her solo picnic, I was laying in my hammock out in the backyard. I remember laying there with a lump in throat staring up at the tree above my head thinking about how mean I had just been. I was disappointed in myself for being that harsh and it deeply saddened me thinking about it. After arriving home, she finally came out to the backyard and we talked it out. I told her how sorry that I was, and she said that she knew I didn’t mean any of that and that it was okay for me to feel that way. A few tears escaped the corners of my eyes when all of her love poured out and comforted me greatly.

It was in that moment that it became clearer to me how lucky I was to have a sister like her. I still think about that day and am disappointed in myself for ever saying what I said to her that day. However, no matter what I do wrong or how badly I mess up, she still loves me just the same.

Unconditional love is the only way to describe the relationship between two sisters. While we may fight sometimes, we love each other deeply and have learned to forgive ungrudgingly. The importance and strength of our relationship has been reaffirmed since my transition to college. I have realized how much she looks up to me as an older sister and how much she values my advice and how much she loves having me around. Since moving to college, our relationship has only strengthened, and it has
been an influential step in our relationship.

The week before I went to college, Kayla went back to school (she’s a junior in high school). A few days before leaving, my mom and I were doing some last minute shopping at Target since I had put it off as long as I could because the thought of going to college scared me to death. As we drove home, my mom told me that Kayla had been crying a few days after she got home from school. She was feeling really lonely and missed having me at school with her. It broke my heart to hear how sad she was preparing for me to leave. A knot formed in my throat and I fought back tears as I thought about the transition myself and reflected on all of our wonderful memories together. I realized that this was the last time that I would be living at home long-term and that this chapter of my life was coming to a close. While the transition for me was easier than I had expected, it was a really hard transition for Kayla and my parents. It took them awhile to get used to my empty bedroom, the silence at the dinner table as my spot at the table was left barren, and the absence of my random stories and countless jokes.

While the days of blanket forts and bike trips may be over, the days of surprise visits and unconditional love never will be. Closing the door on one part of my life has allowed me to open a new door and begin a stronger relationship with Kayla rooted in our crazy childhood memories and rollercoaster of conflicts and emotions. Just like stars, I know that even though I won’t always see her, I know that she’s always there. There for me after a hard test. There for me when I’m up to my shoulders drowning in homework. There for me when I’m homesick or having a bad day. There for me in my proudest moments and my weakest ones. And for that I’m forever grateful. So what I’ll say to you now, Kayla, is:

Dear Kayla,

I know I don’t always say it, but you’re my best friend and I love you so much; I can’t imagine life without you! Thank you for being the best sister I could ever ask for and thank you for blessing my life with all of your funny stories and weird dances. But most of all, thank you for your endless support and unconditional love. Thank you for being you and your crazy unique self! It is because of you and our blanket forts and bike trips that I am able to now reflect on our relationship and begin to strengthen it even more as we head into the next chapter of our lives, our college years and beyond. I can’t wait for many more adventures with you!

Love,

Anna
A Small Fish in a Big Pond
Samantha Hartman

In the essay “Sink or Swim”, published in The Mall 2016-17, Serena Maag ensures that nobody is alone in the struggles that students encounter upon arriving at college. Everyone fears the rumors of gaining the freshman fifteen, the scary professors, the never ending pages you have to read for homework, the impossible exams, and not being able to make any friends. In Maag’s writing, she uses a unique approach in order for us to gain a new perspective. She tells her story in third person from the perspective of a wooden bench. A wooden bench is represented as something that does not actually know anyone but knows people through its own observations. Maag enforces the concept that when first transitioning into college, it is easy to conform. Everyone wants to fit in and not stand out as weird or different when thrown into a large mass of people you do not know. It is important in college for everyone to discover themselves and their identity. Many may not realize how easy it is to fall for conformity. Magg states “She realizes that even though this small act of conformity didn’t have any real impact on her life, it could easily send her down a slippery slope of mass conformity.” Maag encourages freshman to rise above conformity and choose to overcome it and not allow it to engulf them.

We encounter these struggles against conformity on a daily basis along with several other daily challenges. These struggles and challenges are described as sink or swim moments throughout the essay. In each of these moments, as individuals, we have the decision to make ourselves if we should sink or swim. Sink or swim is used as the idea of whether we choose to keep going and stay on top of our tasks and the challenges we face, or if we allow them to tear us down, unable to manage and overcome them. Maag uses the numerous fears of freshman year as sink or swim moments. She makes clear that half swimming will not be enough to stay afloat. She writes “The one arm and one leg doing all the work will eventually get tired. And the other half of you, having already checked out on the whole experience will not step in to help, leaving you to sink.” Therefore, when faced with adversity, don’t give up and put forth 100% of your effort from the start. The idea of not giving up is reinforced in the essay through the author’s repetition of “She just needs time to learn how to swim.” This prompts us to not give up
because she is telling us that anything is possible and we are all capable of overcoming the adversities we encounter daily.

As a first-year student in college this essay affects me on a more personal level. I am able to learn a lot of valuable information and realize that I am not alone. I have become intrigued to learn even more which is why I chose to contact Serena Maag.

**Q:** You choose to tell your story in third person through the perspective of a bench. Was there a significance behind this bench your freshman year? If so, what was it? If not, why write from the perspective of a bench? What made you decide to share your story in third person rather than from your own thoughts and perspective in first person?

**A:** The main reason I chose to write with the perspective of an inanimate object is because it was part of the prompt requirements for the FYS that I was in. However, it did allow for some originality in that not many stories are from the perspective of a bench. It also allowed for some close observations of the main character that you might not be able to get away with in a 1st person viewpoint. I didn’t want to use thoughts or quotes to describe how she was feeling or what she was thinking, I wanted it to be illustrated through body language so the reader could make their own predictions and assumptions.

**Q:** At the start of the essay you describe how the bench enjoys the fall because it gets to watch all the new freshman come to campus and choose a specific freshman to keep it’s eye on. Do you find yourself at the start of the new school year observing the new freshman come in? What do you notice as an upperclassman about the freshman that arrive? Do you observe freshman that seem to be going through the same experiences you found yourself going through? How so/ in what ways and experiences?

**A:** I do find myself guessing if the new faces I see are freshmen or not, and humorously enough it’s quite easy to pinpoint who is and isn’t. It’s interesting to see the same trends develop each year. There’s visible nerves and optimism at the beginning of the year which slowly transitions through various stages of stress and self-doubt, then finally ends with a small sense of assuredness in themselves and their place on campus. I think everyone goes through their own version of the same experience when taking their first steps in the college world. It’s a whole new ballgame than high school was. There’s an obvious transition period that most make it out of better than they went in, but for some it takes a little longer to realize what they want for themselves as an independent baby adult.
Q: You define your struggles throughout freshman year as sink or swim moments. While you were encountering these struggles did you know at the time that they were sink or swim moments? Or did you realize it when given this assignment. What do you define as a sink or swim moment?

A: A “sink or swim moment” is a point in an ongoing struggle where you can choose to surrender to the challenge or to power through. Most of the time this peak in conflict and the decision made is rooted in your subconscious. You’re aware that you have to make a choice, but often you’re not fully aware of the vastly different effects that choice could have. Not until you look back on the path you’ve taken do you find the core of what took you down that path.

Q: You repeat throughout the essay “She just needs to learn how to swim.” I took this quote as a way to tell us to not give up because anyone is capable of overcoming their struggles. Did you ever learn how to overcome your struggles? What actions did you take in order to learn what was necessary of you to do and learn how to “swim”?

A: I definitely overcame some initial struggles, but there are some things I’m still working on. There’s the cliché that everyday there’s a new struggle to overcome, but they’re manageable with the right mindset. I realized that I had to change my mindset from feeling wounded by everything that life threw at me to looking at it as a challenge, something that I had to overcome to prove that I’m the boss of my life not chemistry or really tempting Atherton desserts. Swimming just means you have a hold on your life and you’re not letting it slip out of control. You don’t necessarily have to conquering everything, you just have to be working towards conquering it.

Q: Conformity seems to be a big problem when transitioning into college. You wrote “She realizes that even though this small act of conformity didn’t have any real impact on her life, it could easily send her down a slippery slope of mass conformity.” Did you ever find yourself stuck in this mass conformity? If so, what happened and what did you conform towards? What would you do in order to avoid and not fall for conformity?

A: It's all about groups and whether you’re apart of them or not. When you’re just beginning to figure out who you want to be there’s a lot of influences that can have an effect on you if you let them. I had always said that sorority life just wasn’t for me. I don’t have anything against it for other people, I just feel that it would limit my ability to be my own independent self. However, when you’re a freshman just trying to find your place and find friends it can be easy to see it as a way to get both of those things. It also doesn’t help that Greek
life makes up a very large portion of the campus, so it can feel as though not being involved makes you apart of the “other”. In the end, I just had to reaffirm my beliefs to myself. I had to sort out who I was and what my priorities were apart from outside influences.

**Q:** At the end of your essay you say that every day she is faced with the question: should I sink or swim? Do you continue to face sink or swim moments? What kind of sink or swim moments do you still have and are they similar to those from freshman year? Have you ever chosen to give up and sink?

**A:** I absolutely face sink or swim moments, maybe not every day. I do face choices every day that can lead me towards that pinnacle moment, but I feel as though I’m more aware of them now. I can assess the situation and see the possible future of each decision’s path. No one will ever know exactly where and how their path will run but based on past experiences you can venture a good guess. It’s a cliché but you really do learn from your mistakes. I do still struggle with the body image topic. It’s hard not to compare yourself to others, and I do find myself slipping and wanting to give up thinking I’ll never look a certain way. I just have to remind myself that I don’t have to look a certain way I just have to feel a certain way. My daily reminder is that I want to feel comfortable in my body no matter what that looks like. I’ve never chosen to sink. I think that would involve a total abandonment of myself, my values, and my goals. Luckily, I’ve not been met with such a challenge that would lead me to do so.

**Q:** I took away numerous themes and lessons that I was able to get from your essay. Some of these include that we are not alone when it comes to the struggles we face, that we all have sink or swim moments, it is important to not conform when transitioning into college, to not give up, and to put forth 100% rather than putting in half the work. Did you mean to include each of these themes throughout your essay? Which ones? What was your purpose behind this essay? If you could choose one lesson for your readers to take out of your essay, what would it be?

**A:** I think you hit the nail right on the head. That was exactly what I wanted this essay to be. I wanted it to be relatable to many, and not sugar coat the very real struggles we all face. I didn’t want the essay to end with a happy victory like she aced every test and got her dream body. I wanted it to end in the middle, she knows all her struggles won’t just disappear but she’s more prepared to meet those struggles now. The main lesson I want readers to walk away with is that you’re met with unpredictable problems in life, but you have the power to choose how those problems effect you.
The Complex Transformation of Home

Erin Mast

The concept of “home” is generally one that transcends human differences. No matter geographic location, culture, language, age, or gender, most everyone has their own meaning of home. For many, home is redefined with time and experiences. Children move away from their parents. Immigrants flock to a new country for safety. Or, it can be as simple as moving to a new house down the street. Author Marjane Satrapi is one that knows the struggle of having to continually redefine home. As an Iranian woman who grew up in a war-torn country, abroad in the safety of Europe, and now in the United States, she has had to understand what home means in a multitude of contexts. In her autobiography, Persepolis, she uses the unique medium of graphic design to illustrate her evolving relationship with home. To achieve this, she includes a symbolic bird painting on Marji’s bedroom wall that consistently transforms during impactful moments in her Marji’s life.

When Marji is a child, home, very simply, is an immovable safe place. This is cleverly captured by the initial bird painting above Marji’s bed. The pure white bird faces the morbid black background with its head cocked defiantly and beak open to whatever the bird wishes to say (Satrapi 12). It is not coincidental that Marji is reading in the darkness beneath her confidently perched friend. Home, both her house and her country, is still a place where she can dream without fear. This includes the desire to be educated and successful as a woman. Within the comfort of her own home, she could read all the books she could get her hands on (Satrapi 32), as depicted by the towers of novels that surround her like turrets (Satrapi 12). Very much like the bird on her wall, she is unafraid of the power of words, despite being surrounded by the deafening silence of the oppressive government. She knows words are her weapon, which is why she is often telling her parents she wants “to demonstrate on the street… [because] for a revolution to succeed, an entire population must support it” (Satrapi 17). She still has great pride in her country and people and wants to be able to fight for the betterment of it.

Unfortunately, Marji learns fairly quickly that her words are not safe outside of her home, although her parents often extend her a safety net. When Marji and her classmates start to goof around during the mandatory
beating of the breast, their teacher suspends the entire class when they take a stance against her (Satrapi 97). This decision brings every parent to the teacher’s office, very unhappy with the situation (Satrapi 98). In this case, their teacher, hidden in her black garb symbolizes the oppressive darkness Marji is using her words against. The black also is reminiscent of the dark background that threatens to overpower the singing bird on her bedroom wall. Although her words did not work out of the safety of her own home, her parents, an extension of home, came to her defense, reminding her that they would always love and support her.

When Marji is a little older, she once again faces the realization that her voice is not usually welcome outside of her bedroom walls. When she is confronted by the Guardians of the Revolution, who also hide behind their head to toe black garb, they yell at her for wearing “punk shoes”, a Michael Jackson pin, tight jeans and a headscarf not pulled down low enough (Satrapi 133). Similarly, to the incident with her teacher, she has no means to fight back with her own voice due to fear of greater punishment. However, this time her parents cannot come to her defense. When she gets home, she feels the urge to regain the control that was unfairly taken from her and sings at the top of her lungs in her bedroom. She once again is the bird trying to make its voice heard against the merciless darkness.

As Marji continues to grow older, and see her beloved country fall deeper into chaos, she begins to realize that home is not always going to be a safe place. This transformation in her definition of home is greatly expedited by seeing the hand of one of her friends and neighbors sticking out of the rubble of their destroyed house (Satrapi 72). When she begins to realize that her house and country are not going to protect her voice and passions, she turns to what will, her family. Even though her family cannot always protect her from the darkness around them, she realizes that their stability and permanency is what makes a home. Once again, Satrapi’s use of the bird imagery in Marji’s house mirrors the new understandings she is coming to. While Marji listens to her Uncle Anoosh the bird peers over her shoulder, but it has taken on a more solemn black coloring this time. Despite the change in coloring, it still stands proud and has a wide inquisitive white eye that starkly contrasts the dark coloring of the wings. The background also makes a significant change, becoming a pure and contrasting white (Satrapi 56). All of this coincides with the lessons she learns from Uncle Anoosh who was locked away in prison for nine years but was able to come back to his family and feel the same love. (Satrapi 60).

In this context, Anoosh is the darkness. He was overcome by those who wanted to silence his voice, but he kept his head held high because he knew he was surrounded by the love of his family who would also be his home, waiting for him to return. After telling his story, Anoosh makes sure to tell Marji that it is important that she knows the stories he tells because their
family memory must not be lost (Satrapi 60). He also gifts her a swan he made in prison out of bread. This physical gifting of a bird is his way to give her his voice that will not only be able to preserve her family’s future, but the future of her country. The bright future is also symbolized in the white background of the photo hanging above the pair. Even though Marji learns that it is harder to be together as a family when one does not conform to one’s society’s definition of it, the bonds and love of family is a compass that will always lead you home, no matter where that may be.

What brings Marji back home after her trials and tribulations abroad is not solely her family, but herself. When she is at the lowest point of her life thus far—homeless and letting herself be carried by the tramway—she realizes that without any sense of home she has lost her sense of identity (Satrapi 238). Home for Marji becomes staring in the mirror at herself covered in a veil again for the first time in years (Satrapi 245). It is both the harshness of seeing herself conform to the reality of her childhood, but it is also the familiarity of seeing the veil, a symbol of home. It is neither completely good, nor completely bad, but what makes something home is familiarity. Once again Satrapi cleverly uses the bird guarding her room to elaborate on this transformation. The bird that she sees when she walks back into her room for the first time in many years is almost completely black and set against a black background. The shape of the bird comes from the sliver of a white outline that highlights the shape (Satrapi 247). The oppressive darkness is not only meant to reinforce the burdens of living in Iran, but in this scene, it is meant to illustrate the emptiness inside Marji. The delicate white outline, or one may even say silver lining of the bird is the ray of hope that will always emanate from home. The bird may not be completely recognizable or look anything like it did when she was a child, but it looks familiar.

While home, Marji begins to redefine who she is, as a student, as a woman in Iran, as a lover, and as a daughter. Eventually, she finds herself through what she loved as a child, creatively expressing herself. Although her new home is not one to support a woman’s voice, she speaks through her art, her dance parties, and she is even able to use her voice to make changes to the dress code for the female art students at her university (Satrapi 298). Just like the bird on her wall as a child, she is starting to regain the light in herself by relying on what feels familiar and right. Although being in Iran is what helped Marji find herself and the feeling of home again, she came to the very important realization that home is not really the house she grew up in, or even the country of Iran, it is where she can truly be herself and nurture a sense of comfort and familiarity. Of course, her family is a vital part of her home, but they do not need to be with her every day for her to feel at home. Their love and support have always been the silver lining around the darkness. By the end of the book, Marji finally understands this idea for herself. She tries to make Iran a true home; however, she knows that the
comfort she is searching for will not be accessible in her country. Just like the evolving bird on her wall she knows that to be her authentic self, she will have to open her wings and fly away. Although this requires leaving behind her family and friends, she has developed a meaning of home that is transformative and ultimately rooted in herself.

Works Cited

Since the publication of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* in 1991, graphic novels have exploded in popularity, subverting expectations of the medium and even working their way into classrooms with all ages of students. Though some may dismissively characterize them as glorified comics, graphic novels span numerous genres and come in a variety of styles, with experts becoming more in tune to their conventions and advantages. Ottaviani and Myrick’s *Feynman* and Redniss’s *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout* are graphic novels serving as biographies of the titular Richard Feynman and Marie and Pierre Curie, respectively. *Feynman* and *Radioactive* are contrasting views of what a graphic novel can be; *Feynman* largely adheres to convention, making use of traditional, medium-specific styles and maintaining a generally linear timeline, while *Radioactive* does away with many norms of the genre. However, though wildly different, both graphic novels make similar use of color and of the medium of graphic novels to craft legitimate biographies.

As Pascal Lefèvre notes in his 2014 publication from *SubStance*, a graphic novel, while sharing many features with other media, “uses those features in unique ways; think of drawing styles…, the way verbal and visual elements are combined (eg., in…balloons), the breakdown…of story elements into distinct panels, and the interaction between individual panels and page layouts” (Lefèvre 14). Lefèvre describes what seems to be an image of the conventional graphic novel, emblematic of a comic but perhaps more literary, a description that fits *Feynman* well. Ottaviani and Myrick utilize a drawing style emblematic of most comics, combine verbal and visual elements through the use of speech and thought balloons, and break Feynman’s story into what are usually distinct panels. Occasionally, the distinctness of the panels erode for emphasis, as can be seen on pages 113 through 116, where Feynman and a counterpart are working feverishly on quantum electrodynamics. However, this is more of an exception than a rule. More often, the pages in *Feynman* are structured in a way that guides the reader on how to read them, giving the novel a natural and comfortable flow.

In *Radioactive*, however, the drawing style is much more abstract, text is displayed independent of bubbles, with the speaker being identified by name, and a lack of distinct panels is present on every page, the starkest
contrast when first viewing the two graphic novels. In their 2017 publication in *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, Professor John A. Bateman and collaborators from the University of Bremen write, “…page layout makes a particularly significant contribution to the operation of the medium of comics and graphic novels” (Bateman et al. 477).

As previously noted, *Feynman* follows a traditional approach to page layout. However, Redniss decided to abandon these conventions in *Radioactive*. Each page serves more as a spread and rarely contains any hint of the structure found in panels. It could be said that each spread serves the function of a panel, though the storytelling on each page is different than what is offered in a panel. The lack of structure allows the reader more freedom in how they read and interpret a page. For example, on pages 74 and 75, Redniss draws her reader’s eye in two conflicting directions. In a graphic novel like *Feynman*, authors rely on the reader’s inclination to read left to right and top to bottom to guide them through a page in the correct order.

Redniss however, exploits this on these pages, placing a large section of text on the left of the spread and a short quote from Marie Curie in the top right side of the spread. This neutralizes the natural route of the eye on the page, allow the reader to choose their path as well as forcing them to take a moment to consider their choice. The quote on the right side of the spread, which reads, “During eleven years we were scarcely ever separated,” can be interpreted as an epigraph for the block of text to its lower left or a sign of what is to come later in the novel depending on whether it is read first or last (Redniss 75). Though unconventional, the structure of *Radioactive* still plays a vital role in how it functions as a graphic novel.

The use of panels is more than just an aesthetic choice; continuing with the ideas of Lefèvre, panels are commonly used to depict “the chronological sequence of events recounted in a narrative…and the sequentially arranged discourse cues that allow the reader to construct a timeline for those events” (Lefèvre 15). With its traditional panels, *Feynman* once again adheres to what Lefèvre describes as convention for graphic novels. Though *Feynman* is told as a flashback, with an older Feynman narrating his life story, it otherwise, generally speaking, follows a linear timeline. The book begins with an anecdote about how Feynman’s father instilled the curiosity in his son that would enable him to become a successful scientist and ends with Feynman’s role on the Challenger Commission, his cancer, and his fascination with Tuva, all events directly preceding his death. The conventional and straightforward panels in *Feynman* help to push the narrative forward seamlessly and linearly, something not seen in *Radioactive* but also not missed. Again, defying convention, Redniss, while telling the Curie’s story with a linear timeline, frequently interrupts this main narrative with asides, often connecting the Curie’s work to its implications.
One of the most abrupt and perhaps the most functional of these asides occurs in Chapter Six, where Redniss writes, “For a disaster created by multiple, unanticipated failures in a system…sociologist Charles Perrow coined the phrase ‘normal accident’…Such, Perrow contends, was the case…at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant…” (102). Redniss takes a break from the narrative to talk about Three Mile Islands and how it affected local plant life at a crucial and intense time in the story of the Curies. On the prior pages, Redniss describes Pierre Curie’s brutal death, which could also be considered a “normal accident.” Staying connected to her narrative by pointing out parallels in the two stories, this aside serves the functional purpose of allowing Redniss to give her readers a moment to reflect on Pierre’s death, effective even if it may reject convention.

Despite their differences, Feynman and Radioactive share similarities in both their visual and literary aspect. Regarding their visual components, Professor Ashley Dallacqua of the University of New Mexico writes in her 2012 publication from The English Journal that “…in a graphic novel…images are not additions to the story; they are part of the story. Each image in a graphic novel gives important information to the reader and pushed the plot forward” (Dallacqua 65). Dallacqua then emphasizes the importance of color in helping the reader sense the mood of the story at a given point. While Feynman and Radioactive share almost no visual resemblance to one another, the color use by Ottaviani and Myrick and by Redniss manifests itself in similar ways.

Even when flipping through Feynman with no regard for what is on the page, it is clear that the use of color has been calculated. The panels depicting Feynman’s childhood are tinted green, his teen years are orange, and his college years are red. When the book covers his work on the Manhattan project, the colors in the panels are emblematic of the military influence of the project, containing beige and olive green. As the book continues through Feynman’s middle and later life, the colors shift through shades of blue approaching purple. This gradient, almost entirely following the orders of the colors of the rainbow, helps the reader keep track of the timeline in the story and shows when flashbacks occur, but also, as Dallacqua notes, serves a key function in depicting the mood. While color manifests itself in this way throughout the book, nowhere is it more prominent then when Ottaviani and Myrick discuss Feynman’s life during the time following his work on the Manhattan Project. During these years, Feynman struggled with the ramifications of his role in creating the atomic bomb and even struggled to maintain his interest in physics. As Ottaviani and Myrick’s Feynman says, “Physics research had begun to disgust me a little” (Ottaviani 110). While the text works to depict the darkness that Feynman experienced during this period, much more impactful in illustrating the grim mood is the dominance of grey in the panels throughout the section. When Feynman finally begins
finding joy in his work again, the panels start to incorporate more and more
color, effectively using color to show the change in mood.

*Radioactive* makes similar use of color to convey mood and emotion. The first twenty-six pages in *Radioactive* are almost colorless, using black and white while detailing Marie and Pierre’s lives prior to their first meeting. For both Marie and Pierre, their early lives were bleak. Both experienced immense heartbreak and struggle, reflected in the text and drawings as well as in the absence of color. The first use of color for something more than a word or a transitional page comes on page twenty-seven, when Marie and Pierre first met at a party. Redniss colors the last line of text on this page red, standing out among the other black text and the white background. Flipping the page, the reader is met with an explosion of color. Thick, scribbled lines of orange, yellow, and green surround Marie and Pierre as the appear on the page for the first time. Redniss, with this stark contrast in color use, conveys how Marie and Pierre impacted one another; intellectually and emotionally, they formed a flourishing partnership that gave them joy and success.

Contrary to what may be common perception, graphic novels can do more than just tell a visual story. According to Professor Gretchen Schwarz of Baylor University in her 2006 publication in *The English Journal*, “The graphic novel offers an engaging medium…to analyze information and persuasion in different ways” (Schwarz 61). Schwarz points to how graphic novels have covered topics ranging from American militarism to diversity while still incorporating strong research and references (61-62). Not just for looks, both *Feynman* and *Radioactive* epitomize this type of graphic novel, providing the reader with a thorough biography, albeit in an entertaining and unconventional form.

Both works feature extensive references after the conclusion of the main narrative, with Feynman dedicating pages 253-261 and *Radioactive* dedicating pages 187-193 to their bibliographies. The research includes peer reviewed journal articles, print biographies, and primary sources from Feynman and the Curies, showing that Ottaviani and Myrick as well as Redniss engaged in respectable research to craft these biographies. Further, independent of the medium, both *Feynman* and *Radioactive* are comprehensive biographies of their subjects. Though they incorporate visual art to tell Feynman and the Curies’ life stories, these graphic novels do not allow their artistry to override their purpose to educate. Rather, as Schwarz suggests, whether be the use of color, page structure, or narrative liberties, these two works use their artistry to engage and enhance how they tell the stories of their subjects.

Ottaviani and Myrick’s *Feynman* and Redniss’s *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout* illustrate the range of the increasingly popular graphic novel. Though both fall under the same classification, they show the variation within the genre. *Feynman* typically adheres to the
conventions of graphic novels, while *Radioactive* veers from this path. Despite their differences, they both take advantage of the medium to tell their stories and are successful biographies epitomizing what experts find to be effective in graphic novels as educational mediums.

Works Cited


Subconscious Perception

Matthew Morris

We have much less control over our perception of the world than we think. Our environment and our upbringing influence every thought we have in some way. All of these factors are taken into account by our subconscious, which then pushes us to think and act in a certain way. *Subliminal* presents the actions of the unconscious mind to us and makes us think about just how much we owe to our subconscious. By analyzing the quotes presented to us at the beginning of some chapters, we can easily reflect on how the subconscious affects our society as well as us personally.

This quote well describes the unfamiliar strength of our subconscious: “These subliminal aspects of everything that happens to us may seem to play a tiny part in our daily lives. But they are the almost invisible roots of our conscious thoughts.” (Carl Jung). Due to our nature, we like to think that we have total control over our thoughts and actions. Interestingly, the one thing that stands in the way of total control is us, or more specifically, our subconscious. As we have discovered throughout the book, *Subliminal*, this invisible part of us plays a crucial role in nearly every aspect of our lives. This quote summarizes this concept perfectly. All of the interpretations of our environment are first run under the filter of our subconscious. When we are first introduced to somebody, we make assumptions about them. Now, some of these assumptions can be considered rude in today’s society, but everyone does it, whether they realize it or not.

These assumptions are our body’s threat assessment. They are our mind’s way of aiding in survival. Everything the subconscious does is to increase your chances of survival. The book, *The Power of Habit*, went into this as well. Habits—actions that we perform that require little to no input from our conscious mind—help us be more efficient. Instead of wasting what little conscious brain power we have on small repetitive tasks, such as stopping to tie our shoes, we can just delegate it to our subconscious mind, allowing us to focus on more pressing matters, like seeing if a bear is sneaking up on us.
On a personal level, this book has made me realize that the subconscious has influenced me in more ways than I could have imagined. Everything that has happened to me growing up has contributed to how I behave and act in some way. A bizarre, yet relevant, example that comes to mind is a memory I have of when I was much younger, around seven or eight years old. I was using the restroom during a party at my cousin's house, when someone, one of my cousins, opened the door. Instead of just closing the door as any reasonable person would, he decided to leave it open and laugh at me and call my other cousins over to laugh at me as well. While I realize that we were all young and none of us knew what we were doing or the impact it would have, it is still something that I remember very distinctly. This is an experience that has stayed with me my whole life and I believe contributed to the general shyness I have whenever going to the bathroom or whenever I’m in locker rooms. Now, while I could be completely incorrect in this assessment and could have some other underlying problems, I believe that this is due to my subconscious. In altering my bathroom habits, my subconscious is trying to protect me from experiencing that tragic and traumatizing moment again.

However traumatizing these moments may be, they still contribute to how we see the world in our current lives. “The eye that sees is not a mere physical organ but a means of perception conditioned by the tradition in which its possessor has been reared.” (Ruth Benedict). This is a beautiful quote. It continues to drive home the idea that our subconscious is a culmination of our past experiences, acting to increase the speed at which you can assess your environment. The actual assessment of our environment is incredible as well. Using our eyes, we can take in little waves of light and, with the help of our subconscious, turn that into something familiar. If recognizing a square isn't astounding enough for you, think about reading a book. All our eyes do is capture the light that is reflected off of the page and send that information to our brains. Then, our subconscious kicks in. It can take that light, register each letter, recognize that different combinations of letters create different words, understand what those words mean, put them together in a sentence, and put punctuation and context into account. All of this occurs almost seamlessly while you're reading.

Now, of course, with all of these different processes, there are bound to be weak spots. In our eye, it's the blind spot. For our interpretation of information, it isn't as much of a weak spot as it is an opportunity to save energy. By only interpreting a portion of the information and filling in the rest ourselves, our minds can be more efficient. That in itself is thrilling as well. The idea that when we look at a picture we think we see a whole, complete object when in reality, we’re interpreting maybe a fourth of the picture and filling in the rest mentally, is fascinating.
To me, this quote means that we see people the way we are raised to see them. The most prominent example of this in my life came from my dad. My parents always made me do sports, regardless of whether or not I liked them. From the beginning, my parents were pretty strict, or in today's terms, *traditional*. Whether or not they intended to or not, they had always instilled in me that anything to do with homosexuality is wrong. Not so much that it is a sin, just that it is unnatural. Now, this was before middle school and I had no idea what being gay even meant, just that I shouldn't be it. So when my parents put me into a summer baseball team with kids who were already friends from another school, I got picked on a bit. I'm not sure I completely understood what was going on when they were picking on me, all I knew is that I didn't like it. They called me gay a few times and I associated that with being picked on and it made me mad. A couple of years later, when I played basketball in middle school, my dad pulled me aside after a really tiring game and told me that when I run with limp hands (like you might do if you've been sprinting back and forth for the last hour and a half) people would think I was gay and that would be embarrassing for him. This has stayed with me to the point that whenever I see someone “acting gay,” my first thought is: “Oh, that person is not normal, and I don't want to be associated with them.” Now that isn't the opinion that I continue to hold, it’s just an instinct almost, that I've gotten pretty good at recognizing and stifling. I would say it's a very unhealthy mindset. All the time, I'm questioning my actions, asking things like, “Is the fact that I'm using an umbrella making me less masculine? Would a “real man” just get wet?” (This is honestly a question I've asked myself.) This line of questioning doesn't make any sense and eventually, I catch myself with these thoughts and put them behind me.

This quote further explores this idea of these "instinctual" thoughts we have: “There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect.” (G. K. Chesterton). Small, insubstantial qualities can completely alter how we see someone. The pitch or speed of their voice can determine whether we see them as condescending or modest and intelligent. A slouched posture can make us think the person in front of us is lazy when in reality they've just stayed up all night working on their doctoral dissertation. We interpret these qualities in such a way, once again, due to our upbringing. We had an experience, an annoying teacher in primary school that just happened to have a high-pitched voice, and that led us to believe that someone we've just met is annoying, simply because of their voice. As the quote says, none of this goes through “intellect,” or our conscious mind. It goes straight from our eyes, or ears in this case, straight to our heart.

The effect of our subconscious, the preconceptions that we have about someone, based on nothing, takes time to overcome. One of my closest friends “acts gay,” and that was something that made me stay clear of him for a while. My instinct was to remember the experiences I had as a child where
my parents drilled the idea that “Acting gay is not normal, something is wrong with them.” Eventually, though, by creating new experiences to mask the old ones, I overcame that assumption and we became friends. Unfortunately, much like Coach Dungy’s football team forgetting their training, we often revert to our old habits and assumptions without noticing. With people like my parents, they don’t say things with ill intent. They’ve simply been raised one way and it’s difficult to go against what they’ve been taught and what's been reinforced throughout their lives. The old saying “It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks” sums this up. To add to this, social standards change at a pace that most people cannot keep up with, hence why every generation thinks of some older generations as being intolerant, or “traditional.”

The subconscious mind is a formidable tool that shapes who we are. It is a way for our mind to use and learn from any impactful experiences that occurred in our lives. It allows us to simplify extremely complex things to make our lives easier. The books Subliminal and The Power of Habit was able to explain these concepts easily with concrete, real-life examples. It was indeed a strange experience to realize how much impact something we don't even notice can have on our lives. The books manage to work together in a way that I did not expect. Subliminal made me realize what habits I had when it comes to subconscious thoughts and actions, and The Power of Habit gave me the means of changing those habits if need be. The combinations of these books have made an already potent tool more controllable, and therefore more powerful.
Vacuum Decay: Erasing the Universe

Lilly Boehmer

The universe has a self-destruct button. That is to say, a clean and efficient way to end existence as we know it. The ultimate catastrophe: Vacuum Decay. Physics as it is presently relies heavily on two ideas, the first of which is Energy Levels. The higher the level the more potential there is for it to be set free. Imagine a ball on a hill. No one would argue that it would stay on the slope. Clearly it would roll to the ground awaiting below it seeking its ground state. The second idea that holds physics together is Quantum Fields. Imagine that these fields operate as the rules governing the universe. Physicists believe that all of the fields have reached their lowest energy level. Well, all except one. This lone rebelling field is called the Higgs Field. Higgs is in charge of how things interact and behave in the universe. Higgs may be metastable meaning that it has not reached the lowest energy level. Imagine again the analogy of the ball on a hill. This is the Higgs field. It is only in a small dip on the hill and not on the lowest valley. It is satisfied here for now but anything could send it plummeting down the rest of the hill. This would quickly release a massive amount of energy moving at the speed of light to devour everything in its
path. Deleting the universe with no warning and no solution all in a fraction of a second. Physics as it is currently would no longer exist. Life as it is known is impossible.

But do not fear for this all might be wrong. It is only a frightening theory. The world now has more immediate and needless problems to concern ourselves with.
The Mall publishes writing from Butler University’s First Year Seminar and shares exemplary work produced in FYS courses. We aim to empower students’ understanding of writing. We hope that this resource serves as a learning tool in classrooms and the larger community.

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