Table of Contents: Submission Critiques

Not an Aspiring Gymnast Among Us, Elementary Lessons: Spread For Success  Alyson Provax 2
The Monkey Box Monkey See, Monkey Do?  Julie Rast 5
Pears Innocence Devoured  Gretchen Thesman 8
Little Rich White Girl, The Grass isn’t Greener  Shawn Osborn 11
From the Balcony, The Aftermath of War  Lana Beardslee 13
Stories I’m Not Supposed to Tell, When You Have Other Things To Think About Miguelanjel Acosta 16
My Last Pair of High Heeled Shoes, Maintaining the Fountain of Youth  Troy Bookout 19
A Desert Tale, Survival In The Wasteland: ‘A Desert Tale’s Beauty And Grit Dana Keating 21
From the Back Row of Jazzercise See, Save the Next Generation Lauren Cyr 24
Stories I’m Not Supposed to Tell, Signs of Utter Impermanence Chris Sentieri 27
Dust Art, Beginner’s Mind: A Beauty Where You Least Expected It  Adam Long
Gods and Machines, What’s in a God? Sara Twitty 34
Four Nable Truths, The Elusive Truth Mike Baldwin 37
Lists, Death and Public Transportation: Jordan Kreyche 39
Lost in the Department Store, America: The Land of the Free? Kyra Brown 42
Killer, The Taking Tree  Davis Banta 45
Ponte de Barco, Portuguese Wisdom Jeremi Plazas 47
Day of the Dead, The Smile of Death M. Eugenia Ruiz 51
Little Rich White Girl, Pain vs. Privilege Joe M. 54
There is a memory remaining clear through the haze of childhood, one filled with playground taunts and teases. My tiny friends and I, with our popularity contest: who can do the splits? Front to back? Even, maybe, side to side? I could not. No matter how hard I tried, no matter how I strained, I was unable. At some point this lack of ability stopped being of consequence, and the boys became important. Somewhere in murky preadolescence the switch was made. The poem ‘Not an Aspiring Gymnast Among Us’ strives to bring us back to the playground, but with our adult perspectives’ intact. As the poem nails the emotional truths of that stressful age, it brings up adult issues of sexuality and power. It shows us that our childhoods are not quite as we remember, and we were not as innocent as we would like to think.

I loved the poem’s quiet hark back to childhood with it’s small stresses seeming all important; but the men I talked with said that they didn’t understand, that the poem seemed silly. This indicates that it is a more female-related issue, something private between girls. They were just more comfortable skipping over this poem about the abuse of female sexuality. Although this poem in no way suggested that men are to blame for any of the issues that it brings up, I think that the men were uncomfortable thinking about how their gender may play a part in the dysfunctional relationship which some women have with their bodies and sexuality.

As young girls we asked it and
still they ask it
so often
on the playground or at parties
upon meeting each other:
can you do the splits? And always
the ricochet response: can you? (Martin-Travis 94)

The placement of “young girls” at the very beginning of the poem, gives it emphasis, and sets the stage. Perhaps my enjoyment of this poem was directly related to being female.

Traditionally, females identify themselves in groups, and often times have a strong group connection, without separation between individual and group. Therefore the group identity becomes vitally important. This partially explains the vital importance of this ability to do the splits at this age, when the girls’ self-esteem is so attached to their identity in the group, any chance to improve their status is welcome.

Take note of the use of the word “ricochet”: “And always/the ricochet response: can you?” suggests that the response to the question of “can you do the splits?” is automatic to these little girls. (Martin-Travis 94)
meaning of the word ricochet, it means to bounce off of something, which clearly implies that these girls are mimicking.

_Those who cannot, say no, calmly resigned their inability._ (Still they practice, when alone or with others who say no, stretching their tender ligaments.) _Those who can must defend their credibility and demonstrate._ (Martin-Travis 94)

The addressing of the situation of those little girls who cannot do the splits indicates that perhaps the author had my same childhood problem, and also could not. The calm resignation of these girls who are unable to do the splits seems to be hiding their secret shame, as they practice: “_when alone or with others who say no._” (Martin-Travis 94) They even go to the lengths of “_stretching their tender ligaments_” causing themselves physical pain in an attempt to raise their social status. (Martin-Travis 94) This idea of sacrificing body for a raise in rank is common enough, but most people think of it as a problem setting in at adolescence with drugs, alcohol, and meaningless sex. It can continue in adulthood with such simple and common things as working extra hours in a job you hate so that you can have a fancier car. Some adults (and teenagers) with wistful thoughts of childhood would be shocked to remember that they were selling themselves to raise their social status even when they were young and innocent.

_“Those who can/must defend their credibility and demonstrate.”_ (Martin-Travis 94) The issue is so large that the girls are not taken at their word, they must show their ability, perform their skill. This mistrust is a very normal part of childhood. Although children’s opinions may be seemingly easily swayed, they also have the tendency to not believe something until they see it.

The poem gains dangerous metaphor when an adult understanding of life is used to approach it. The last lines of the second stanza gradually brings that adult understanding to the table. “And/everybody knows the sideways splits are better than front/to back.” (Martin-Travis 94) Is a more direct sexual reference, implying that the more sexual form of splits is also the more valuable in the little girls’ social hierarchy.

_Among each other,_
_so young,_
_we pay for our status/spreading our legs._ (Martin-Travis 94)

The idea that the most popular little girls were the ones able to spread their legs mimics the commodity which female sexuality is in consumer culture. A pretty girl can sell beer; sexual favors can get you a pay raise: this is unknown to the little girls on the playground, who are “_pay[ing] for our status/by spreading our legs._” (Martin-Travis 94) The sexual innocence of the real girls in this situation and the imaginary girls in the poem gives this metaphor an added edge.

The little girls in this poem have no real compensation for their leg-spreading. Instead, these little girls “_pay for ... status._” (Martin-Travis 94) That
they are the ones paying, rather than being paid, implies that our capitalist culture, which supposedly rewards those who work hard and achieve status, is instead robbing us.

Contrarily, it is also saying that the competition is between the girls, without the influence of anyone else. “Among each other,” suggests that this competition, which is itself a trait considered to be masculine by our society, is without the influence of males. (Martin-Travis 94) The girls are play-fighting, and play-losing, which is a “masculine” thing to do. This may be a kind of make-believe practicing of situations which they will later encounter in real life: either as competition, or sacrifice for social gains. Or it may be idle child’s play. But either way, it is admittedly easier to see this as a poem about the reality of the life of a young female child separately from it’s other face as a statement about adult women in society. These two issues that it simultaneously brings us are uncomfortable together, which is where the poem gets it’s strength. It is the of contrast between elements of childhood, sexuality, and power which make this poem worth reading, which take it beyond just another look back at childhood or feminist rant. Issues of female sexuality as commodity have been discussed for decades, but this poem singled it’s self out with it’s freshness. It also brought a new layer of reality to the surface, the idea that as children we did something we thought only adults did: sacrificed our bodies in an attempt to raise our social status.

**Works Cited List**

The prose poem The Monkey Box incorporated certain feelings and memories that I believe most people experience when they are young. The author brought the sort of thought process and emotions children show and are passionate about. In this poem, I intend to prove how she captures the naivety and maliciousness of children and uses it to show how her experiences as a child have shaped her thoughts and feelings today.

Right away, the first sentence of this prose poem took me in, with a vivid memory. “I was new at school and had red leather shoes.” Normally, red is a color that people notice right away, which would explain why the red leather shoes stand out in her memory. Another reason why the red leather shoes are important is the point that the other girls in the story don’t have the red shoes. Keeping in mind that the author was new at school, she is already feeling a little out of place, and to add to the feeling of trying to fit in, the girls have shoes which are probably a little more popular and trendy. So far, from the first two sentences, we know she is feeling a little uncomfortable but trying to fit into the loop with the new and “popular” (according to the shoes) girls of the school. Her beautiful descriptions of a lazy summer school day bring me into the element: “The sidewalk was veined with tiny cracks stained by walnut hulls, crisscrossed by ants searching for water. It was September, the hottest month, and we kept to the shade, scuffling through leaves.” She accomplishes transporting the reader to the scene by not only using the sense of sight, but by the sense of sound as well, and one can almost hear the soft pitter-patter of shoes as they shuffle through fallen dry, crackly, leaves.

The author again brings other senses to the reader in the second stanza when she mentions, “Our cotton dresses were limp from sweat and heat. I pushed my bangs to let the hot air cool my forehead.” I know this description reminds me of those hot days in elementary school when what you cared about was the heat, and not the awful sight of your matted bangs. “Sandy and Karen had yellow hair, but Debbie and I had brown.” This is the first sentence in which the author brings in the thought process of a young girl. The hair of the girls is not “blonde” but “yellow”, and not “brunette” but “brown”, which are words children can relate to, being that they have a lot of time around crayons. One can assume this because of the next few lines when she says, “Our knees were skinned from rollerskating, from when the wheels caught in the sidewalk cracks. Our fingers smelled of crayon. The edge of my left hand was smeared with pencil lead.” These three lines describe the typical actions of young girls who are just out to have fun and be little kids.

When I was in elementary school, I remember my friends playing tricks on each other, including me, and the horrible feeling of being left out on the trick, when the joke is on you. I can relate to the author when she says, “We scuffled along, but then the other three screamed and jumped onto the grass. I froze and looked down but saw only ants and veined concrete under my pecu-
liar shoes.” Not only does this girl still not understand the joke, even though she has looked for it, but the mention of her “peculiar” shoes sort of highlight the fact that she really still doesn’t belong to this group of girls.

In the following stanza, the author tells of how she steps in a concrete block, which apparently is named Monkey Box. When one steps into the Monkey Box, you are a “monkey” for a week. Classmates tease and pretend to be monkeys around you. The Monkey Box in this story is one of those “Step on a crack, and break your mother’s back” sort of childhood urban legends. All children know about them, and follow certain “rules” that you have to abide when coming across these situations. In this case, the author has to give up her dignity, and essentially become a “monkey” whether she likes to or not. “They’d act like monkeys whenever they saw me, because I was one.” With this line, she further emphasizes the loneliness and distance from the girls she is walking with.

Another rule comes up in the next stanza: “If you jumped the while monkey box, you turned yourself back into a person.” The other girls argue whether it was fair for their new friend to become a monkey, since she didn’t really know about it in the first place. “She didn’t know, Sandy said. Debbi said, So what, she stepped right in it. Sandy repeated, She didn’t know, and Karen said, reluctantly, You’re right, it isn’t fair.” The form of writing in which the author describes the dialogue is new and fresh. It is more interesting to see the narration and dialogue all in one fine sentence; for me, quotes break up the story a little bit.

“I backed up. I ran. I jumped. I landed.” When describing her obviously very important ceremony back to claiming her dignity, the author uses short, simple sentences. By using this effect, it almost seems that the scene is happening all in slow motion, a little like a climatic final scene in a movie about a kid and his below-the-bar baseball team.

I discovered another experience I had when I was a kid when I read the following lines: “Debbi said my heel touched the line. Karen said she wasn’t sure. Sandy said I mad it without touching, and besides, I hadn’t known about it in the first place. A thing was fair, or it was not fair. A thing was wrong or it was right. Your foot was in or it was out. Or it was on the line. You could take it over sometimes, if the judges were merciful.” These rules were parts of the games we played when I was little. I think children make rules where they can make them, since parents make all the boundaries, and sometimes kids need to feel they have a little power too (the “judge” remark proves it in this situation), even if it is only over a couple of their classmates.

The first sentence of the last stanza mimics the storyline while setting the story up for closure. “Three years later I jumped ahead of them into the class of Sandy and Karen’s older sisters, skipping fourth grade.” By using the key word “jumped”, the sentence could be insinuating the fact that by skipping fourth grade, she skipped a silly, non-important part of her life, kind of like jumping the box, to avoid being a monkey. “My fingers still smelled of crayon, my left hand still smeared with pencil lead.” The author relates that even though she skipped ahead to her peer’s sister’s classes, she still felt young and naive,
like she did when the monkey box incident happened; she still had crayon and pencil lead on her hands. “Sandy and Karen forgot about me. Debbi forgot about me. But every time I step around a monkey box, I remember them. Everything straight-edged, the letters cut just so into the concrete.” The last sentence of the essay ends with a vivid memory of the letters pressed into the concrete box, which mimics the very beginning of the story, which started with the memory of her red shoes.

I thought the author relayed a very true account of what happens when we are all in the elementary-school years, and experience things that we remember our whole life, even though it is just part of a childish game. I find the mimicry in this story to be very interesting. Monkeys are natural mimics, and I can’t help but wonder if the author meant to hint that “monkey-ness”, if you will, is something we must all wrestle with to become individuals.
Innocence Devoured
Gretchen Thesman

With only a surface read one might perceive “Pears,” by Barbara Leon, to be a poem about fruit and the childhood memories the author has of the pears. However, the poem is much more complex once we look beneath its surface. “Pears” deals more with memories of a betrayed trust between a young girl and a neighbor than it does with fruit. This betrayed trust is the result of the young girl being raped, and this violation destroys everything that was once pure in her life.

Safe, secure, carefree, this is the innocence of the fifties, which is the setting of the poem. At least this is what I believe; I always felt that I was born in the wrong decade. The fifties have always been the decade I wanted to grow up in. I thought the era had it all, with its great music and big band sound with artists like Chuck Berry with his release of Maybellene, and Tutti-Frutti energetically performed by Little Richard. Along with the big band sound was also a lot of dancing and friends hung out at one of the many soda fountains. It was the time of true family unity and there was a sense of security. There was also a joy for the simple things in life.

In the first and second stanzas of “Pears,” Leon portrays a vivid picture of the carefree and trusting fifties. She takes the reader and puts them there with her character in “…short shorts and flowery halter…” looking at “…zinnias flamed crimson against a whitewashed fence.” The author makes the reader picture the childhood innocence and the homey, cozy, and comfortable life of the era. This time period works perfectly with the layout of the poem and is relevant to the character’s mind frame.

The author drew me in with the fifties analogy because I perceive the sixties to be free love, drugs, communes, and hippies. This time frame clearly would not have worked to the poem’s advantage. Then came the seventies, which to me was the decade that was recovering from the sixties. The war in Vietnam was over, and nobody knew what to do or where they were headed. The eighties, when I was born, was the beginning of hatred and violence and toleration disappeared. Prejudices reached an all time high and the music was just noise from punk rock groups that had nothing really important to say. However, the fifties give the reader a sense of warmth and the feeling of a safe world. The girl in the poem is a young, cute girl running around with hardly anything on and enjoying summer’s end.

It is family time in the second stanza where “…folks gossiping in metal lawn chairs…” sit around and enjoy evening. This particular part of the poem took me back to the memories of visiting my grandparents and sitting out on the front porch enjoying fresh air instead of being locked up inside the house stuck in front of the television set. This poem depicts a society that my generation of children only see glimpses of.

Now that the author has me hooked, she reels me in with the fruit. One of my sweetest memories of visiting my aunt was the sweet, fresh, and pure fruit that she always had sitting on the table. There is great significance in the pear being chosen to represent the innocence of the young girl. A pear is the most delicate fruit, bruises easily, and tears with the slightest touch, and once inside is full of a mouthwatering ecstasy of sweet juices. This only evoked further trust in the author and helped me believe in the innocence of the poem. To me the pear is a perfect analogy of a child. A
child’s protective coating is thin and emotions bruise easily. Once you really get inside of the child they are fresh, pure, and sweet just like a pear.

The type of fruit chosen for the significance of the poem could not have been more perfect. The poem’s core would not have been as symbolic if, for instance, a lemon would have been chosen in place of the pear. A lemon has thick, tough skin that must be peeled away before any of the juices can be reached. Once opened, the juices are bitter and sour, unlike that of a lush pear.

The third stanza evoked in me a thought that was first of a young neighbor boy who was playing with a stick knocking down pears from a “wild and unkempt” tree which appears does not even belong to anyone. This stanza is the first to transition into a foggy and unclear interpretation of the poem.

The next thing I read is about the violation that devoured the young girl’s innocence. I suddenly felt violated myself. I had been duped. When “callused thumbs” are introduced in the first sentence of the forth stanza I, as a reader, am shocked and ask myself who is this neighbor who I thought was just a boy? However, the young girl is quite obviously still feeling safe with this older person and not worrying about her appearance “…as he fed her the halves / pulp soft, juice dripping / sweet and sticky…”

When the fifth stanza rolls around, the author does not mince any words and strips the innocence out of the poem as fast as it was stripped from the girl, and me. No longer a child she is now a young woman. This appears to be the turning point for the neighbor. It is not my belief that the neighbor was setting the young girl up or acting as a pedophile. This budding young virgin has now become his lush, fresh fruit- his pear. Should this come as such a surprise? I feel bombarded by society with the importance of virginity. The responsibility always seems to be placed on the woman. However, the loss of virginity is not always one’s choice. This poem is one such example. This violation has forever changed my fantasy of the fifties.

The poem ends rather abruptly with the young girl feeling dirty like the “…pears / left to molder / in the field.” She feels dirty inside, she is no longer a fresh fruit full of life anymore. The young girl feels discarded just like the rotting pears. The abruptness of the poem coincides with the abruptness of the violation.

With this kind of analogy and contrast, it becomes clear that sex was not consensual. The author paints the picture of pain when “…the neighbor / thrust his hand between her legs, those same / workman’s fingers parting her flesh, as though tearing open a fruit.” From this point on, the poem loses its light and becomes very dark. If the girl had been willing to have sex and enjoyed it then she would have probably continued to dance with beautiful imagery, such as the sunset, instead of the swallowing of the dusk full of rotting pears.

Overall, Barbara Leon wrote a captivating poem full of great imagery and had a powerful layout written to bring the reader in and suddenly strike them with a dramatic turn of events. The author also touches on the subject of rape that is uncomfortable and not talked about as often as it happens. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, “one in eight females in the United States is a victim of forcible rape. Every year approximately 1.2 million women are raped and only 132,000 women report that they have been victims of rape or attempted rape. In addition, more than half of the women knew their attackers” (1). This poem does a great job in bringing attention to the matter and showing readers the life altering changes one goes through after their
trust and innocence are devoured.

**Works Cited**
http://www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html
The Grass Isn’t Always Greener
by Shawn Osborn

“Little Rich White Girl,” a first and only poem by 19 year old Chloe LaFortune, speaks of a sad truth; one that is distressing to an entire generation. She narrates with an important voice—a tired voice—of a young woman, speaking for generation x. Some may not like how she says it, or what is said in her poem, but it does express an opinion shared with millions—a generation battling with the confusing reality that a whole lot of people dislike them. Our society is pressuring us to be what others say we should be, pressuring us to do things their way, pressuring us to perfection. We’re fighting for our own identity and losing. We can’t escape from the hatred produced by previous generations, so we struggle our way through life. With no illusion that anyone is perfect, we “mask” ourselves with “painted rose lips and costly streaked hair” (24). We know that everyone has challenges, and everyone has pain, but obviously that isn’t common knowledge. “Surely you have/never heard [our story]” (22-23). The grass isn’t always greener you know!

Unjust prejudice of Gen. X has Chloe reeling, and she tries to understand her situation deferentially. Her situation is ours. Generally speaking, people of my generation don’t link themselves directly to the world’s problems. For the most part we just want to get along and enjoy life. We aren’t on a holy crusade, and we certainly aren’t willing to pick up and take off with our parent’s ill-conceived crusades. We understand suffering enough to know that we don’t want it. Slavery, regretful as it was, needs to stop haunting us. Prejudice, like an evil poltergeist, just needs to be exercised right out of existence. I’m tired of the craca versus nigga element coming out in music and movies all the time. I feel like—“wake-up Hollywood, that homily is old school. It’s self-perpetuating crap and its got nowhere left to go.” Most white folks my age don’t care if you’re white, black, pink, or purple, as long as you’re a good person and respect others. Minority projection or whatever, Gen. X has plenty of challenges to overcome already without carrying on this fight for another lifetime. Rodney King created this generation’s intone when saying; “Can’t we all just get along?” Just think about it! Look at the historical damage to society; slavery, wars, riots, every good black leader—killed, every good white leader…wait a minute. What am I saying?—there haven’t been any good white leaders. Anyway, this isn’t our mess; the lies, the deceit, the hatred. Yet, the focus is on us, and the hate. I’m tired of it, and in reading this poem, I’m realizing I’m not alone. This isn’t a case of—“oh, I don’t care about the past,” this is a case of—“come on, let’s stops fighting about it. Let’s all grow up!”

Chloe told me that this poem was “a blossoming of awareness.” And in line 9 she iterates, “My upper-middle-class living-on-the-right-side-of-town family never told me/about all that jazz.” Specifically referring to the “hate” and “discrimination” created in our society, based on the “color of [your] skin,” and that the indiscretions of our elders was actually hidden from her, and from us all (2, 7). She’s humbled by the truth—admitting that she is “naive” and “ignorant” (11). She also logically adds that as an innocent child, “who wears ribbons in her hair,/who writes fanciful hearts after her name,” she “doesn’t know [the] story and can’t relate” (13, 14, 16)—admitting that children perceive the world differently, and that learning to get along takes both sides. You must know adult logic takes time to understand. And that’s if you’ve deciphered the truth already.

Chloe’s poem matures as she moves toward a more defensive tone, likely tired of being mistreated herself, she says “[she] hasn’t the time to listen” (21).
Which brings up a common social question; who stops complaining and starts listening first? The speaker directly addresses this; "If all of this is true, and I have never heard your story, then surely you have/never heard mine" (22, 23). It seems both sides suffer equally with discrimination. Clearly, ignorance is a greater evil with apathy along its side. That is; if no one cares, or if no one takes the time to find out about you, then no one “can relate to your pain” (16). This is a very important, very deep message the speaker is courageously illuminating. It’s ubiquitous. And the suffering will continue until everyone gets informed, and everyone cares.

The speaker is rich, and white, and not liked. She easily could have been poor, and black, and not liked. Gen. X is definitely becoming aware of this irony, that’s our advantage. We see things differently. Chloe, like so many others, has been sheltered from the truth—by color, or money (it doesn’t matter). She’s trying to make sense of the world she’s discovering. She’s grappling with the reality that she is to inherit it all, and all its problems. Make no mistake; she, like so many others, is ill-prepared for that reality. Chloe will be the first one to admit she doesn’t have the answers, but she is positive and shares her prophecy in the conclusion by simply scribing “from pain comes hope, through hope, faith is realized/this is what I wish to share with you” (31, 32)—remarkably wise words from “A Little Rich White Girl.”
The Aftermath of War
By Lana Beardslee

From the Balcony, written by Jenna Otto, is the story of a war veteran struggling to fit in with modern society and reacquaint himself with his wife and two daughters. The family is on vacation in Mexico, perhaps in an attempt to bring the family closer together. One night, the eldest daughter joins her father on the hotel balcony, and is granted a rare display of insight from her father. He uses people from the street below as examples of the harsh, and unforgiving society he witnessed in the war. From him she learns how the horrible experiences of war, changes a person, as it has changed him. He now knows what it’s like to kill men, women and children. He has seen society at its most monstrous and desperate times. Then he was asked to return to normal life as if nothing had ever happened. I don’t think there is anyone on this planet that could so casually resume life after going through what the father did.

The two main characters, the father and the daughter, are interesting and complex. The father seems to be a very intelligent man. This is shown in his speech and when the daughter compares her father’s prediction for the buffet workers to when they watch movies, “It was like when they watched movies and the dad always knew the ending before it happened” (1). It seems like the father was a well-functioning and educated member of society before the war. This is also supported by the fact that this family is on a vacation, which suggests that the family possesses some money. The father is a man deeply changed by his time served in the war. The intense and frightening world he experienced has caused him to withdraw into himself rather then face reality and his family. This is shown in many ways. When he is talking about the two buffet workers, the author notes his tone of voice, “The dad spoke low and calm, he always spoke low and calm even when he was angry” (1). This shows his repression of emotion. Maybe he feels if he lets any emotion in it would bring back memories and feelings of the war. This is also shown more obviously when the father directly references the war in his description of a jungle trip, “The green reminds Daddy of the war, in the war we used to walk through jungles like that. Sometimes Daddy thinks of the war and it makes him quiet.” (1). The father seems to want to regain his relationship with the daughter. He is trying to connect with her again by telling her about some of his experiences.

The chasm between the father and the daughter is very hurtful for both. The opening line of the story perceives this painful break; “ He didn’t call her by name. He did not even have a nickname for her, not princess, or daddy’s little girl, nothing like that” (1). The father seems to have left for war when the girl was little and returned to find a young woman. He still deals with her as a little girl because that’s all he knows, an example of this is when he refers to himself as Daddy when she calls him Dad, “ He said Daddy but the girl always called him Dad” (1). The girl also sees him as the man he once was and still craves his attention and approval. When her father is talking to her, she realizes it is an uncommon glimpse of her father, and wants to make sure she is deserv-
ing of his attention. “And she could feel it coming again; the dad was going to say more. She folded her hands in her lap and waited. She was very still, and concentrated to look serious and capable” (1).

In their conversation the father points out four people and uses them to show his daughter the darker side of society. The first person he uses is an old beggar man pretending to be blind. This is representational of the father, who is also pretending to be fine and leading a normal life. The next example is two buffet workers. They are stealing food from the hotel and taking it to sell across the street. The father explains their progress methodically, explaining the illegal act without judgment, letting his daughter come up with her own opinion. He knows what people have to do to survive, including what he had to do after the war.

The third example struck me as the most important. The father points out a woman standing with her baby,

There were shadows but the girl could still see her face, it was round and brown and smooth. She was wearing a pink apron and holding her baby. She wasn’t going anywhere like the rest of the people in the night, she was just standing there. ‘In the war soldiers shoot people just like her’ (1).

The author’s use of language is very important in this section. By using words like pink, round, smooth, giving her a baby, and by having the woman standing still amid the chaos, the author makes her character very innocent and vulnerable. This makes the next sentence about soldiers shooting people like her all the more jarring. The reader also could interpret that the Father might have once killed this woman. This shows how awful war can be; that a good person, as we assume the father to be, can kill innocent people as his duty or in order to guard his own life. He shows the daughter that innocence and guilt can be subjective in such an extreme situation as war.

The closing of this story has the girl leaving her father on the balcony to return to her room. When she enters the room she spies a box of cereal on the floor, “the cartoon picture of the toucan and his multicolored striped beak” (2). The image of the well recognizable cereal box seems disrespectful to the moments between father and daughter. Both the mention of Fruit Loops and the last line of the poem, “There were little black ants crawling in a line across the floor” (2), are representational of modern society. The cereal box, with it’s garish colors, represent the frivolity and shallowness society can have, which is the opposite of the darker society discussed by the father. The ants show the mindless conformity society can have. Ants follow in a line just as soldiers fall in line to battle.

Experiencing war can do a lot to a person. You are taken from home and placed in a foreign land, where normal social rules cease to apply. If you are lucky enough to return home, you find you have missed an entire chunk of your life, such as college, a steady job, or family. In this day and age you need education or at least specialized job training to keep afloat in the world. A lot of ex-military miss out on that, and where does that leave them? War veterans
have witnessed and done terrible things. The most damaging is probably killing others, both the innocent and the guilty. Murder is not something society takes lightly. Life sentences or death penalties are usually the consequences. Yet murder in war is not only condoned, it’s celebrated and rewarded.

War veterans are struggling to survive right this very minute. 250,000 war veterans are homeless today. That is almost 40% of all homeless people in America. Along with alarming rates in homelessness and alcoholism, suicide is becoming a very real threat among war veterans. Suicide rates for the first Gulf War are 5 times higher than the number of deaths in combat. In our most recent war, Operation Iraqi Freedom, the suicide rate rose from 10 or 11 to 15.8 suicides per 100,000 soldiers. The affect of war on a person is usually overlooked, when it can damage a person beyond repair.

Veterans of war are struggling to survive in today’s society, without any help from the people they went to war for in the first place, the government. 28 million veterans are currently using Veterans Administration Benefits. Another 70 million are potential candidates for it. This is almost a quarter of the country’s population. We need to create more and maintain current rehabilitation programs for War Veterans. Recently, the House of Representatives dramatically cut the 2004 budget for many programs. One of them was a cut to the Veterans’ Administration Benefit program. This cuts funding for health care and other benefits for Veterans by nearly 25 billion dollars over the next ten years. The ironic thing is that the vote was passed just a day after Congress passed a resolution to “Support our Troops”. Does it seem like the government is supporting our troops?

Works Cited

http://www.cdva.ca.org
http://www.commondreams.org
http://www.gulfwarvets.com
http://www.psychminded.co.uk.com
Salfiti, Wasim. “Midnight Passage,” Mother Jones May-June, 2004: 18
What Happens When You Have Other Things To Think About
by Miguelanjel Acosta

**Memento mori.** 1. *A reminder of death or mortality.* 2. A Reminder of human failures or errors.
*The American Heritage College Dictionary*

Our capacity to remember things that happened to us is what shapes the direction of our decisions and thoughts through our existence. When we get involved in the process of writing, each word can be seen as a graphic reflection of our memory. An organized group of images—or what we make out of them—is what gives birth to the art of telling stories. Memory is generally understood as “the faculty of retaining and reviving impressions or recalling past experiences” (American Heritage). But how are those memories being stored in our brain? What makes us remember what we remember? Is it chronological or thematic? We tend to think that our memories are a collection of the most important moments in our life; nevertheless, we don’t have much control over this process, and our memories are often pieces of larger, insignificant events.

Every once in a while some memories from our past come back to remind us of something that we have forgotten, something that a long time ago had a meaning that is now lost in the labyrinths of our mind. As Neale Jones, the author of “The Stories I’m not Supposed to Tell,” mentions at the end of his story, “An old man may look back on his life as a collage of the briefest instants, reduced to insignificance. Where once one second stretched to infinity, now only a sea of minute, meaningless instances remain” (38). The story of Jones is written around the kind of memory that I always want to erase from my brain. The kind of memory that sits in a corner staring at me asking for a second chance, the nostalgia of things that I didn’t do or say wishing for an opportunity to start everything all over again. The kind of memory that reminds me that everything I know—including myself—is going to perish.

Presented in first person, we follow the reflections of Michael, a college professor who stumbles through life with the insecurity of a night of alcohol overdose. He has a wife and three kids who fulfill his existence. But the first line of the story reveals something else, something very intimate: “I don’t think about my friend” (34). A hook that captures the voyeuristic curiosity of the reader from the beginning. Who is this friend? What role did he play in the life of the narrator? Why did the protagonist stop thinking about him?

After a brief presentation of the things that he likes and the things that he worries about, the presence of the friend reappears in the third paragraph, “I don’t talk about my friend with anyone” (34). This phrase leads us to think of something hidden, something that nobody should know about it. The
protagonist, who appears as a very simple man at the beginning of the story, starts to show the complexities that characterize contemporary life.

The corpus of the main character keeps growing with the introduction of his family. First, a seventeen-year-old daughter who just bought a motorcycle is used to show the insecurities, fears and the little control that Michael has over the world around him.

However, the tension of the story rises significantly with the introduction of his wife. The woman shows him a couple of gay magazines that she found in their son’s room. When I first read the story I thought that Michael’s reaction, “Put them back...Make sure he doesn’t know you found them” (35), was based on respecting his son’s sexual preferences and privacy. But a second read reveals something more.

“Some things you can’t talk about...some things you just let slide by and you don’t think about them. That’s the way it has to be” (35). If we take a closer look at the language utilized, we notice that Michael uses the same expressions that he used before when he briefly mentioned his friend. This connection leads me to think of the existence of a homosexual relationship between Michael and his friend in a remote past. The scene ends with an upset wife leaving the room. The last phrase of the paragraph is also the title of the story, which confirms my suspicions.

According to Freud the unconscious region of a person’s mind is a collection of “thoughts, wishes, feelings and memories of which we are largely unaware” (Freud 23). Into that category there is an important group of thoughts that are being repressed to avoid the pain that they can generate if they are released.

Using a flashback, the author introduces the missing link of this puzzle. Michael’s friend is dying in a hospital when the two characters see each other for the last time.

Until this point I had some apprehensions about the plot and the style, but it is here where the author reaches his peak, where his reflection about Eros and Thanatos overpower the accessories that compose the story. The dialogue is so intense that it filled me with sadness. “Someday, you’ll go to,” he said quietly. “You’re going to have to think about that. Someday, everyone’s going to go. But the thing is, you’re alone when you do. No one’s there, really right there with you. No one can experience what you’re experiencing” (36). A powerful reflection in regards to the way human knowledge is built. Beginning at birth, a human being is learning from the experience of others. Almost everything he/she learns is the legacy that others left for him/her. A human can learn almost anything from collective experience—how to write, read, mathematics, running, the use of drugs. However, there is one thing we cannot learn from somebody else and that is our meeting with death.

Michael forces himself to think about anything that can distract him. He has built a life full of distractions—a wife, children, and a job—that prevents him from facing his homosexuality and his fear of death. This negation of himself as the individual that he wants to be is what makes him look at the world in such a pessimistic way, “I could have told him that as
time goes on, each experience will be worth less and less until he doesn’t know why he lived at all” (38).

Death is so powerful that after being close to it, you’ll never forget the events that surrounded it. There are so many important things that have happened in my life of which I cannot remember a single second. My birth for example, or my first goal playing soccer, the birth of my sisters, the day I decided to be a writer, my first kiss, the day I discovered that god wasn’t there anymore, or even my first love. No matter how hard I try, only empty memories appear in the screen of my brain. But every time I think about death, a conjunction of powerful images crash my mind. I can remember every death of a friend. Why, when, where and who are easy questions to answer. And I can’t avoid the enormous amount of sadness that those memories contain. Years ago, I fell in love for the first time. Almost at the same time, my best friend died. I stayed with my girlfriend for a long time, but for some reason I can’t remember much about her. I am sure that we had great moments, but all that happiness has faded away. I can’t feel a thing when I think about her. But when I think of my dead friend it feels like he died yesterday, and I am still mourning his departure.

The thing that makes “The Stories I’m not Supposed to Tell” become better with each read is the level of deepness that offers. It allows the reader to dig deep and always return with something new. This piece of writing challenges the direction of the reader’s ideas and forces one to think about something new, something not thought about before. A story that uses recognizable characters without falling into the abyss of cliches. A story that reflects upon death, love and the mortality of humans, and provokes powerful feelings in the reader in regards to them.

Works Cited


Maintaining the Fountain of Youth:  
My Last Pair of High Heeled Shoes  
By Troy Bookout

I think everyone holds onto something from their youth that represents a goal.  Whether this goal is completed, in process or unfinished, it remains an important part of life.  This poem moved me because I myself did the same thing as the author (Evie Alloy), only instead of high heeled shoes, I keep an old baseball uniform from Little League.  Being young is the easiest and most fun time of a person’s life, and things that are kept to symbolize those times are the most important things a person owns.  My hole stricken, grass-stained jersey is a symbol of a dream and the past.  A person needs personal items to survive, to give life meaning, to remember the past and to give a person a self identity.

The author, Alloy, does a great job of making her high heeled shoes symbolize an item she wore when she was courting boys.  The shoes represent the best time of her life, or at least one of the most fun and memorable times.  When I picture the shoes, I think of a young woman (maybe my age) who has all the attention of the male world.  It is a time when the goals in life are laid out for a person, and just by completing them society and family will be pleased.  Going to high school and then college is the barrier at hand, with no other ‘real’ goals in mind, just dreams.  Alloy remembers times “Of innocent youth, school days, love on my mind/When life was simple.”  At this age, everything is straightforward and relatively easy, when the question of the week is ‘What are we doing this weekend?’

Then reality hits.  School is over, and the decision of what a person is going to do in life is left to them and them alone.  It is the time when a person is figuring out who he or she is, and many people never define themselves clearly.  The days of sleeping in and getting your mom to call in sick to school for you are long gone, with the pressures of finding and keeping a job, along with maintaining everything else in life, on the front, back and middle burners.  Then Alloy recounts, “The 30’s follow/A failed engagement/Time clock calling out for babies/Body still beautiful/Mind still hopeful/Career, marriage and baby still realistic goals.”  During this phase, a person first encounters the real meaning of stress.  It is a time to act, no more sitting back and watching the show; it is time to get up and make things happen for oneself.  With the dreams of youth still vivid, with the high heeled shoes still a part of one’s wardrobe, it is time to make those dreams into reality.  For many people, like the Alloy and myself, those dreams may never come true, but they will never be forgotten completely.  Through youthful dreams, people define themselves as they grow.  Throughout a lifetime, one of the hardest things to do is to come up with a new definition of oneself.

For many, the window of opportunity to fulfill childhood goals passes before one knows it.  Alloy realizes, “The 40’s arrive with a second marriage/The body starts to change/To sag, to flab/Work harder, see less results/Go on a diet, gain weight/Still no baby, only a husband.”  The things that came so easy in youth now are things that a person has to try hard to keep.  Youthful looks start to fade, but the pictures in magazines remain young and beautiful.  Looking in the mirror becomes something of a chore, with fear that more wrinkles and less hair might be reflected.  The easiness of life disappears and is replaced by hard work.  No longer can a person finish the 20-page term paper in one night, more time and energy must be spent to get that TPS report in on time, just to keep a job.  The luxury of an ‘open’ diet also fades with age.  Words like “fast food” and dessert are out of the picture unless a person is ready to throw out their high heeled shoes, and we know that won’t happen.  The dreams that seemed so easy as a youth are now diminished to a pair of high heeled shoes or an old baseball uniform that doesn’t fit.  Holding onto them is a person’s only choice.  Keeping them hidden away in the attic or in a closet makes sense, because if ever the chance of fulfilling those dreams of youth arises, the symbol of
the dream is still available.

As a kid, I was convinced that I would become a professional baseball player. All I had to do was try hard, and I would succeed. Then, like the author, my personal list of setbacks occurred. Puberty started late, school took up a lot of my time; maybe I was not as good at baseball as I thought I was. Still I tried. I practiced hard, but still was not in the starting lineup. The competitiveness of the game increased, and I was left to question whether it was fun. As I got older, hormones took over all of my thoughts; going 4 for 5 in a baseball game was no match for Cindy or Erica. I am told that very few who try hard to become professional baseball players succeed, but I look at my old Dodgers uniform from Little League and do not believe them. Then all of a sudden, I have pulled a muscle, and my arm hurts from all those curve balls as a kid. I cannot become a pro baseball player. But wait: all I have to do is try hard and I will succeed, right?

Retired from baseball at age 20, I have accepted my fate of not becoming a professional baseball player. I realize that other dreams in life are there to replace old ones. Sure, life is hard, but if it wasn’t it would be too easy. It is like having sweet without sour, a person needs one to complement the other. I think Alloy would agree that youth is the best time in a person’s life, but this does not mean that the rest of life sucks. It is more of a message to enjoy life as a youth, because life will not always be the way it is then. External factors come into play, life becomes a balancing act between hard and easy. Keeping an item from youth to symbolize the easy makes it possible for a person to keep going when times are hard. The high heeled shoes and my baseball uniform are reminders that things will get better. I now play softball and I’m having close to if not as much fun as those days of Little League and the Dodgers, when life was so carefree and easy. I can still get out the old ball and glove and play a game of catch with my pops. But I still hold onto my old Dodgers uniform because, like Alloy, “As long as I keep them/There is still hope.”
Survival in the Wasteland: 
A Desert Tale’s Beauty and Grit
Dana Keating

“WATER WEALTH CONTENTMENT HEALTH” is written on the archway straddling the road entering the city of Modesto. The lettering resembles the iconic precision of the “HOLLYWOOD” sign and its message evokes an image of an utopian marriage between natural preservation and technological sensibility. As a child on semi-annual family visits I wondered where the water was. The archway was neighbored by a KFC, a Kragen, and a dried up field; the only bodies of water were stagnant reservoirs and turquoise swimming pools. The Modesto archway proclaims humans’ ability to bounce back. Civilizations can pop up anywhere, import water, establish wealth, and manufacture contentment and health. The City of Lights can be built on the desert and humans can thrive hundreds of miles from a functioning ecosystem. Our resilience is limited, though, our conquest for land paradoxes our disability to coexist. A Desert Tale, by Vivian Vargas, uses these civilizations-turned-ghost-town to convey a struggle for resilience on a domestic scale.

These ghost towns were Vargas’ inspiration to write A Desert Tale to tell of unstable family dynamics. “In the Winter of 1990, I was on a road trip with my sons and their father.” says Vargas, “This was when the effects of President Reagan’s ‘Reaganomics’ were still visible. We stopped in Needles, California and stayed in a small, semi-seedy motel off of the freeway at the edge of town. At ten o’clock at night I could hear a woman yelling at her kids, ‘One times one is one. get it! Two times two is four. Get it!’ Later, in the morning I saw her leaving the room with her kids. The door was open. Inside the room were their bikes. It made me start thinking of people living on the edge of the desert.” (Vargas, Personal interview)

The effectiveness of A Desert Tale comes from the detached writing style within the dialogue, its use of the environment and atmosphere to convey emotion, and its slightly uncomfortable slow pace. Rather than desensitizing us to the family’s grief with bleeding-heart dialogue and overt commentary on child abuse the author uses subtle cues to the character’s thoughts, reactions to each other and their surroundings, and the omitted information that we are left guessing on. A Desert Tale leaves the reader with a feeling of haunting emptiness and surreal awe that is not attributed to a judgment forced by well-meant rhetoric, but by well-written third person prose that presents the complexity of the problems it raises and promotes further thought.

The story gives no background on the family; the only mention of either of the children’s fathers is that Simon, the youngest of the brothers, was the son of a dentist who had given him his passion for insects (a connection never explained) and the mother’s first name is never mentioned, nor is the history of her master’s thesis. The sketchy past and the precarious future create a feeling of urgency and discomfort for the reader that urges further examination and an emotional investment in the outcome of the story. In the eye of the reader, the
family dynamic is much like a controlled science experiment; isolated from any reality other than the present with ominous uncertainty, a controlled environment yet with no stability in the family’s reactions. This writing technique makes the family’s interactions the crucial focus of the story.

Vargas chooses not to outwardly analyze the mother’s behavior and the impartial narration treats her irrational actions as normal. It is up to the reader to pick out fact from fiction and judge whether she acts out of insanity or desperation. Her most noted characteristic is inconsistency; her rules are ever-changing and her children are unable to predict her reactions to the simplest of simple situations, for example, sending her son out to retrieve his brother, then locking them both out of the house. Interestingly, she is fascinated with patterns in human behavior, while she herself is incredibly unpredictable. Her alleged master’s thesis and the notes she takes on mini-mart customers and slime-ball lovers are both signs of her trying to bring meaning to the complexity of her interactions with her children and the men in her life. Perhaps her notes—a search for order in her chaotic relationships—are her method of coping with the stress of her life-style, a false security of a science of human behavior.

The mother’s summation of her elusive masters thesis—"The impact of environmental factors on peripheral societies like this one—ugly barren mountains, thorny cacti, god-awful dust storms and cheap motels. Societies either adapt or disappear.” (Vargas, 20)—also applies to the lifestyle the family has adopted: surviving day-to-day in an unwelcoming and emotionally hostile environment with only the resources for bare bones living. Though the mother vocalizes her aversion for the desert it seems that she has gravitated to it. As a disenfranchised character who feels washed up and withered, she seems to see the desert as the deathbed of her youth and a reflection of who she is becoming. The desert landscape of the story mirrors the children’s relationship with their mother and the freedom they find in their undesirable home environment parallels their desensitization to their mother’s unpredictable moods and the uprooting of their previous life. While the children adapt to their environment the mother resists adaptation, refusing to accept the reality of her surroundings. As she muses:"[this is just] a place to stop, rest and then move on to the big cities. Only they took the wheels off this trailer. So how am I going to get home?” (Vargas, 18) she conveys her view of the desert as an undesirable force to conquer. "Humans in the desert don’t do very well in general”, says Vargas, “they either have to transplant, at great cost, the green grass and trappings of a home in the suburbs or they give up and trash piles up around a defeated garden. [] I want to show someone who kept moving until they couldn’t move any more.” (Personal interview) Vargas uses the location of the story to convey the family’s stir crazy tensions and to show their power to adapt as well as their weakness to coexist.

The family’s interactions are pained with indifference. In the opening scene the mother has locked her sons out of the house in the middle of the night and pretends not to hear them knocking on the door and windows of their trailer. This is followed by the park manager speaking with the mother about the incident without response. This opening sets a pattern for communication
throughout the story. Little emotion is conveyed through the dialogue and the only access to the mother’s motives is through her unspoken thoughts. The son’s communications with each other are sparse and their camaraderie is non-verbal. The dialogues between the two children are unaffected and show no signs of a reaction to their mother or their living conditions. These dialogues show the empty verbal communication prompted by the mother’s indifference to her sons.

_**A Desert Tale**’s beauty comes from it’s grit. Its impact is attributed more to honesty than comfort. The vivid imagery of the family’s wasteland paired with the their nonchalant indifference to survival and to one another gives the reader access to their habitual instability and compassion for their life on the verge of disaster. The intensity of the writing and the strange, distant bond it forms between the reader and the characters tells a sad story of childhood, parenting, and isolation in an unfamiliar yet accessible way. Reflecting on her motivation to write _**A Desert Tale**_, Vargas mentions an interview with a British writer: “[the writer] said that writing takes him to a country where he has never been. I feel this is what drives the story. I’m trying to put out a country where you may have never been” (Personal interview)

**Works Cited**

Vargas, Vivien.” _**A Desert Tale**” _Porter Gulch Review_ Spring 2004: 16-21
Save the Next Generation  
By Lauren Cyr

It’s everywhere you look: on T.V., billboards, and magazines. They come in a variety of skin tones and hair colors. The three things that they all have in common are youth, beauty, 5’11 and a 117 pounds (Body Image Statistics). These are the women that other American women strive to be. Many women go to great lengths trying to strive for this unattainable body image, that the media tells women that they should have in order to be sexy and attractive. Many women turn to diet pills, bulimia and other unhealthy ways to try and obtain this image. The major problem with this is these women are passing on this unhealthy image to girls as young as five. The poem From the back row of Jazzercise I can see by Molly B. Tierney, shows the reader first hand what effects these society pressures had on her, and how she found a way to love her body, even though it wasn’t the average American models body. Tierney broke the cycle of the unhealthy body image of women today.

The poem From the back row of Jazzercise I can see, starts out with Tierney at the gym goggling over the same woman that she sees every time she goes to the gym. Tierney expresses envy of the other woman’s body: “Today she wore tiny tight pink shorts over her black spandex leotard”(4-5). She continues to comment on how this lady makes her “lunges look easy”(8).

According to Mediascope 47% of girls thought that they were overweight but, in actuality, only 29% were actually overweight. For some reason no matter how perfect a woman’s body, no matter how beautiful they may be they feel that there is always someone better. Like the comparison to the woman in the pink shorts, women are constantly measuring themselves against other women, all are trying to strive for the unattainable image that the media says is what a real woman should be. All are wondering how to obtain this image in order to become a “real woman.” Young girls are watching their mothers and older sisters trying to obtain this image, soon they will follow in their footsteps.

In the poem From the back row of Jazzercise I can see Tierney obsesses about what a nice rear end the lady at the gym has and starts to wonder about what it would be like if she had a rear end like that. Shortly after obsessing over the lady’s body she claims not to want a body like hers. She doesn’t want “…someone like me watching from the back row and then writing a poem about it”(15-16). Tierney does not want other women gawking at her body like its some kind of god. She knows that the women in the back feel almost inadequate for not having the unattainable body that they all strive for.

Women know what it is like to wish that their abs were as flat as the woman’s in shape magazine, wishing that they had a smaller butt, thighs. You ask any woman and they all say they would like something else, when in reality there is nothing wrong. Woman all wish they could look just as good as the next in a bathing suit, but if all woman looked the same, were would variety fall? Some men like this, some men like that; all they really want is a woman who is not ashamed of their body. What men really want is a woman who is self confident.
in themselves, what ever weight they are. Unfortunately, little girls are watching and learning form their elders to hate their bodies.

Through writing the poem From the back row of Jazzercise I can see Tierney finds that having the stereotypical body doesn’t make one any more of a woman, it’s about how comfortable you are in your own body. She talks about how her husband had come home one day, the kids where gone and with the baby napping she “..Chased him down, and we ended up in bed”(23). As they were lying in bed together in broad daylight, her husband said “Nice body you’ve got there” (27). Right then she realized that having a stereotypical body wasn’t what she was missing at all. Her husband still found her attractive, it didn’t make any difference to him weather she had a model’s body or not. All that he cared about was that he was with her and that he loved her body just the way that it was. All any woman really needs, is some reassurance that they are attractive from someone they love. American women are programmed by the media to think that if they do not look like a model they are not attractive, which is absolutely outrageous considering that the average American woman is 5’4 and 140 pounds (Body Image Statistics). If women saw these type of women in the media day in and day out, women would probably find it easier to love their bodies, and would stop teaching their children to hate their bodies.

The whole time that Tierney compared herself to the other woman she was forgetting that she has a beautiful figure herself. Sometimes women just need to be reminded of how gorgeous and beautiful their bodies really are. The extra cushion on their tush is actually quit sexy, and maybe that extra bit of fat on a tummy is not as terrible as the woman who has it makes it out to be in her mind.

Tierney realized that its not having a stereotypical body that makes a person better or worse from one another. It’s just how comfortable you feel inside your own skin. It’s extremely important to love yourself, whatever body size or type you are because you are the one living in your own body. Trying to become the stereotypical woman is exhausting; an endless battle. Women need someone like Tierney’s husband to help reassure them that they are beautiful just the way we are. A woman could save a lot of time and energy trying to love her own body than trying to make enemies with it. Women need to realize that the Americans image of what a woman is supposed to be is not healthy physically and mentally. Women need to see normal healthy women in the media. Body Image Statistical information claims that 80% of children ten years old are afraid of being fat. Forty-two percent of elementary school children between 1st and 3rd grade want to be thinner! (Body Image Statistics) Eighty percent of 10-year-old girls have all ready dieted (Mediascope). This is a big problem that continues to affect our kids. You can help save the next generation of kids by writing to different media corporations and asking them to start using normal healthy women. Women need to stop supporting today unattainable body image. Children are at stake and we need to help stop another generation of children becoming programmed to this unrealistic image of what women are supposed to be in order to look attractive.
Work Cited


In life we often keep our sorrows, our fears and our remorse well hidden from the world. We stash them away in a place deep inside, where they are safely concealed. Yet, most of us are still in touch with those hidden emotions, and with the trials and tribulations that cultivated them in our lives. “The Stories I’m Not Supposed to Tell”, by Neale Jones, is a short story about one man’s relationship with his own hidden memories, worries and regrets, his acceptance of mortality, and even his repression and lack of acceptance of his possible homosexuality.

The story is a first-person narrative, told from the perspective of a middle-aged college English instructor named Michael. Our narrator is a husband and a father of three, with all of the duties and dramas that accompany such things. However, Michael makes it clear from the start that he is suppressing something.

I don’t think about my friend.

I have other things to think about. The wife and kids. My teaching gig in the Lit. department at the University. All the term papers that come with it. The mortgage. Mowing the lawn and picking up the dog crap, which my sixteen-year-old refuses to do. The bad dreams I have.

With these relatively simple opening paragraphs, the author has given us deep insights into Michael’s state of mind. The author’s usage of a single sentence paragraph lends a certain emphasis to the opening, immediately bringing the reader into the narrator’s state of denial and obsession. We find out, in the following paragraph, that Mike is a regular guy, with your average set of troubles. However, Mike has something on his mind, something he would prefer not to think about, something he is unable to forget.

The narrator would have us believe that his life is too busy, to full of students and football and dreams to think about his friend. He dances a verbal two-step, in which he spins precariously around the delicate, forbidden subject. But as we, the readers, soon discover, each yarn of Mike’s tale seems to be tied firmly to his mysterious friend.

Mike precedes a couple tales of parental horror regarding his teenage son and daughter, by assuring us he doesn’t speak of his friend with anyone.

There was a time when I did, but then I started thinking less and less about him. Now I hardly give any thought to him at all. I really have too much to think about. I worry a lot. I worry about my children.

Mike’s first story is about his seventeen-year-old daughter Rachel, who to his vexation has purchased a dilapidated old motorcycle. Now, like
most parents, Mike and his wife Judy are disturbed by the notion that Rachel might hurt herself on this new “Death Machine.” However, it seems as though Mike’s reaction is unconsciously connected to his experience with his friend, as he tells us that he cannot bear “to be the one to hear whatever doctors say when something awful happens.”

Mike then goes on to describe a particularly awkward discovery, by his wife, of homosexual pornography in their son’s room. This is the author’s first clue to the readers that Mike might be suppressing his homosexual leanings. We gain deep insights into the repressive nature of Mike’s soul as he responds to his wife’s insistence that they confront their son about the implications of the gay porn, something Mike obviously wants to avoid.

“Some things you can’t talk about,” I replied with weary surety. “Some things you just let slide by and you don’t think about them. That’s the way it has to be.” A heat had begun to build in my face. “You can’t go around thinking about everything!” My voice rose like a Doppler effect, as though I were approaching an intersection of feeling, after which I would fade into the distance.

The topic had brought to the surface emotions Mike has tried to keep buried deep within his psyche. The author seems to make the subtle suggestion that there may have been more between Mike and his friend than simple friendship, that possibly the two friends shared a romantic interest in one another.

The author commented on the notion of a deeper connection between the narrator and his deceased friend. “Part of my intention was that it be implied that Michael and his friend had a homosexual relationship,” Jones said. “It is ambiguous (purposefully) and not overt. The implication then would be that his life with his wife and kids is in a certain respect false, and a way by which he is avoiding the pain of the memory of his friend. This shows up in a variety of situations with his family.”

Jones’ remarks highlight the underlying effect that the narrator’s repression has had on his life, and how he is, in a sense, deceiving his current family. Knowing that this underlying theme of repressed homosexuality was intended by the author has a profound affect upon one’s interpretation of the story.

Following the emotional debate over how to handle the gay pornography, Mike’s wife leaves him alone with his thoughts. It is only then that Mike begins to let his guard down and he begins to think again of his lost friend. His most disturbing memory washes over him like a tidal wave of grief, regret, and longing for a friendship long past.

Mike painfully recalls a visit to his friend’s deathbed, a day twenty years in the past, when he was confronted with the reality of
impermanence. This specter from the past, which Mike tried so very hard to suppress, had come again to remind him of man’s mortality and ultimate insignificance.

“Someday you’ll go too,” he said quietly. “You’re going to have to think about that. Someday everyone’s going to go... In a way it’s very sad and very beautiful,” he said, his voice moist, “how long we believe that we can change things.”

Mike’s friend was apparently dying of cancer (though one might assume that this is a coded way of saying AIDS), and had predicted that his end was near. But Mike seemed unable to accept his friend’s, let alone his own, mortality. He was bitter, scared and unable to show his emotion toward his dying friend. A heart-wrenching moment occurs as Mike tries to flee from the hospital room. As Mike moved past his friend’s bed, his friend grabbed his hand and pulled him close. Though Mike knew instinctively that his friend was asking for a farewell hug, he could not bring himself to do it. Instead Mike fled the room, carrying with him the haunting memory.

Twenty years later Mike still found himself thinking of his friend’s early death. He contemplates how his six-year-old son Brian has no understanding of mortality. Mike longs for that innocence and naïveté.

A child first awakening to consciousness sees only a tiny moment of experience as the entire breadth of his life... An old man may look back on his life as a collage of the briefest instants, reduced to insignificance. Where once one second stretched to infinity, now only a sea of minute, meaningless instances remain. Utter impermanence.

The author effectively draws the reader into the mindset of the narrator. A full range of emotion is explored as we are led through Mike’s life. It is easy to relate to Mike’s pain, longing and even his penchant for denial. The story illustrates how even though our fears and regrets may be well hidden- they often shape our state of mind and our perception of the world around us. The language used, while not fanciful or particularly ornate, is quite effective. Though there is not a full resolution to Mike’s story- at least not in the classic sense- there is a feeling that the author’s sentiment is fully developed by the end of the story.

“Stories I’m Not Supposed to Tell” is an engaging tale of common everyday repression, which is defined by The American Heritage® Dictionary as: the unconscious exclusion of painful impulses, desires, or fears from the conscious mind. The theory of repression is attributed to the celebrated founder of psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud, who said, “The essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious.”

Mike makes it clear that he does not want to think of his friend or his
early departure from life, and that he uses his family to block out those thoughts. Though Mike makes every effort to suppress the painful memory, we see that it is with him always. The memory serves as reminder that life, and therefore love, is utterly impermanent. So long as Mike continues to repress the memory of his friend, and the love he had for him, he will be unable to appreciate his life with his family.

Works Cited
Jones, Neale. Personal Interview. 14 April 2004
<http://loc.gov/exhibitsa/freud/ex/70.html>

By Adam Long

So often in our daily lives we become intensely trapped in routines that cause us to ignore the objects and events that surround us, as if they do not even exist. Our everyday routines can seem to drown out much of what is around us as we become extremely focused on what we must accomplish for the day. The objects that make up the essence of life can easily be avoided or missed out of habit. The poem Dust Art by Patricia Zilius, contrasts this by looking at what may seem like an insignificant part of life, in this case the author looks at dust and finds beauty in its varied forms. From this poem I see the idea that everything is beautiful in its own way. And that stepping away from our routine and being mindful of what is around us is just as important as anything in our daily lives.

Patricia Zilius has created a poem that is very rich with images that dance across the page with an incredible ease. On my first read I was amazed at how easy it was to maintain my attention on the poem. Many other poems have lost my attention due to hard a hard to decipher point or hidden metaphors, but Dust Art gains its strength from simplicity. The author uses images of a very overlooked part of life to present an important message to the reader. It is about everything that is around us, and just being aware and mindful of everything around us. It reminds me to stop and look around me, and to just observe and be aware of everything.

The first stanza of Dust Art is packed with analogies to create a beautiful and meaningful sequence. Every word seems well thought out yet the stanza never has the feeling of being over done. Here is one example, ”countless floating particles / that wander in an aimless mass / like a crowd of dancers / waiting for their choreographer. / I wade through the drifting motes. / They eddy into paisley swirls / then settle back into simple chaotic milling.” The voice of the poet is very clear and fluid, which helps the reader visualize how her movements affect the dust in the room. The analogy that Patricia uses of her self-choreographing of dust, reminds me of the effects we have upon what is around us. In conjunction with the objects that surround us, we can create beautiful moments of matter in space. Many beautiful things in life are a matter of perspective, if you look at dust in a different way then you did before, you may find enjoyment in what was before a pest. Just like the poet created a dance with dust.

The second stanza describes how the author enjoys creating images in the dust that has settled upon everything in the room. Patricia uses her fingers to sketch images, and write a haiku in the dust. She also describes how after removing her book from a table a non-dusty area is left behind in the shape of a rectangle. This passage implies how time slowly deposits dust over time on the surfaces around us. This makes me think of how sediment is deposited in layers on a landscape over time, and how you can tell how long its has been since an area has been cleaned. But, this layer of dust does have utility; it can be used for drawings or to write messages for others. I have definitely written my share of messages in dusty car windows. This passage has inspired me to think of new ways to use things I previ-
ously thought were useless.

Another passage that meant a lot to me says, “To rant against the dust is to show a lack of gratitude for a palette that grows more abundant as it ages.” I was affected very much by this passage because it reminds me of Zen teachings that say to give respect to all aspects of the world. It seems as if the author is doing the same by giving the dust respect and not brushing it away. This reminds me that we are apart of this world just as much as everything else is a part of this world. I now look at dust and realize I don’t need to clean it up; I can now appreciate what I can do with the dust—I can make art.

The last stanza says,” We rose from dust, / it’s said, and as I settle in / I merge with the ancient source, / soft particles slowly falling from the air to blanket me—/ material for the next performance.” This sequence was incredibly powerful for me. I was again reminded that Human Beings are no more special than anything else that is around us. We are just as important and special as dust or weeds in the garden. I feel that humans look at themselves as the flowers of the garden, while we try to pick and destroy the weeds of the world. Everything that surrounds and blankets us has just as much right to be here, because the processes that created us also created the rest of the world and universe. Also that everything else was created by just as much of a chance as we were.

This poem reminds of the words of Ilana Rabinowitz who says, “If we only pay attention when we think something special is happening, a large portion of our lives will pass unnoticed.” The author has recognized dust as beautiful instead of a nuisance to cleanliness, where many people would see dust as a problem she sees art. The routine of cleanliness makes people believe that dust is a problem when it may actually hold benefits. Another teaching in Zen is called the beginners mind. In the beginners mind everything is looked at in a fresh way with no preconceptions or ideas of how things work or exist. In contrast is the experts mind, where there is no potential for learning because that mind believes it knows the nature of things, and it judges and predicts before observing for itself. The expert mind is a state that many of us get trapped in during the monotony of daily routine. This closed mind may never discover anything that it didn’t already know. I see the author in the state of beginners mind, observing and discovering moment by moment like a child—willing to discover. Sounds easy but breaking the habits of experts mind is very hard.

I had a similar experience to this poem during a recent trip to Big Basin State Park, while walking atrail that I had hiked at least ten times. All the past times I had walked very fast through a particular section, but this time I slowed down and discovered many incredible things that I had never seen before. Walking slower allowed me to see the place in a much different way then the previous hikes. I had so much more time to stop, sit, and observe where I was. In contrast, on the previous hikes I was concentrating on; where my next three steps would be, how long it would take me to get back to the, would I make it to school on time, theorizing a paper, or when can I do my reading for class. My mind was racing blocking out what around me. In dust art the author takes time during his daily routine to notice what else is around her, in her case there is lots of dust. This walk was very similar to Dust Art by slowing me down and observing what was around me instead of being objective.
and fast. It was not easy to do slow down, Because I was so used to going fast that I had to fight myself to slow down and soak it all in. Even after I had stopped to look around I still felt the urge to get up and go, but I kept telling myself to just be conscious of everything around me and my thoughts, yet to not act on them. I was able to look at a familiar place in a new way, by not thinking that I already knew what the place contained.

Dust Art is a successful poem because it goes beyond the easily accessible world and looks at what is all around with a fresh view. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so if you look at ordinary things with a different view you can see that everything is special, not just the grand spots and precious objects and events that our society holds so dear. Patricia Zilius’s poem gives the important message to be aware of what is actually around you not just what you think is around you.

Works Cited
Rabinowitz, Ilana; Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers; New York, Hyperion, 1999.
What’s in a God?
by Sara Twitty

I live across the street from a church. Just one of those coincidental things in life. I walk past it every day but have never been inside. I’ve never gone through their doors or listened to their sermons. The only time I’ve gazed in their windows was when I passed through the churchyard one Halloween night and saw the eerie red light of an exit sign. My only interaction with the Christians across the street has been getting accosted by bible salesman. I was fourteen; I didn’t know what to do or say. So I took the bible they shoved in my hands and ran home, throwing the text into the garage as soon as I got in. as far as I know it’s still there; probably being eaten by mice. I find it funny how much the physical situation mimics my feelings on Religion. Religion for me is very much something on the side, like a house on a neighboring street I never bother to enter.

Religion and faith have always been heavy topics, people get so defensive about them, and “Gods and Machines” (a poem by Barbara Leon) is no less hefty. Leon’s poem is about personal faith, finding it and the need for it. But she looks at faith personally, instead of objectively like some logic-inverting, long-winded philosopher. The poem is all about discovering faith for yourself.

I feel I must distinguish faith from religion here. The two are very different and one needs to understand the difference to understand the theme of her poem. Religion is some set of beliefs that’s already pre set up for you. A brief description by Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary as “(a) any specific system of belief, worship, conduct, etc., often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy; as, the Christian religion, the Buddhist religion, etc.” Faith is different, “ an unquestioning belief, in god, religion, etc… complete trust, confidence, or reliance; as, children usually have faith in their parents.”

Religion is more structured, faith is more vague, and personal. What one puts there faith in is up to them, you can put your faith in religion and what the religion represents, but it is not itself faith. It can get confusing since religion is often described as a faith, but that is more saying ‘this is something to put faith in, then it becomes your faith because you believe in it. But the choice is still there. I think everyone must answer for themselves, in their own hearts, what they put faith in.

So, religion and faith are no longer inextricably entwined. Many people no longer go to church, or follow any form. Maybe we were raised atheists, or maybe none of the religions circling the globe appeal to us. But either way we still find faith, and question it on it’s own terms, and that is the question Leon’s poem is all about. What is faith to her anyway?

The woman in the poem (I assume Ms. Leon) starts out having no idea of where to find faith. It doesn’t seem like subject she’s spent much time or thought
on. But her husband is going in for heart surgery and she is brutally confronted with the idea, in a situation where she finds she suddenly needs it. The hospital clerk is checking them in, “Religious belief?” She continued/ My Husband said none/ and I wondered where/ I might find faith.” This line ends the first stanza and pushes us right into that question, what do I believe in?

The first verse starts out with the orderly saying “Gaudiani’s opening? Hey-/ we call him God for short.”” Then in the second verse we meet this mysterious doctor and she thinks, “He’d never call himself God/ This tall guy with classic Roman nose/.” The mention of God starts off the poem, giving it a funny twist by calling a man god. It implies that he’s so good at what he does, saving peoples lives, that he must be godlike, or near god to be so successful in the operating room. She paints the picture of their doctor as god in her mind using the phrase “classic Roman nose” to describe him. Something roman is considered beautiful, godlike, the notion of roman as being close to the pope being played on. The women latches onto him as a place to put her faith, even before she knows she’s done it. This tall, Roman nose Doctor will be her god, the god who (quite literally) holds her loves life in his hands. Like the healing hands of Jesus of Nazareth, only he uses scalpels, stitches and anesthesia.

Her reflections turn to the other people moving through the hospital, in third stanza, and her imagination starts running with the idea presented by the Doctor. “… They’d never call themselves angels. / The orderly in blue scrubs/ …The 6-foot blond nurse, gold earring in his left lobe/ bearing potions for the cleansing bath/ The masked attendant in floor-length gown/ who wheeled me mate off/ into the ether.” Although she says that they would never call themselves by such lofty names, there is the acknowledgement that they are angels, even so. It’s almost as if she’s having double vision, what her physical eye sees and what her mental eye does. Her religious descriptions of the rituals needed before the dangerous operation are so apt. “Wheeling her mate off into the ether,” past those mysterious double doors through which you’re never allowed to follow, into a place unseen where they will either save her mate’s life, or kill him.

Modern thought is so convinced of the power of science that any belief in gods takes a back stage seat. She combines science and faith in an interesting way, by putting her faith in science and melding the two into a mythical picture. She creates for herself something she can believe in, something she can pray to for her husband’s life.

In the fourth verse the doctors have begun the surgery. “And after they’d split his breastbone/ and bared his heart/ I caught myself praying.” She’s surprised, in the lines. That she uses the word “caught” to describe herself praying, caught in the act maybe, says a great deal. She doesn’t know why praying helps, or even why she does it yet here she is. We still have this desperate human need to believe in something, anything. When everything we love is in peril of being lost, we can’t stand the thought that it may all be chaos. We need something
more than statistics of chance to rely on.

So we pray; to feel that somehow, someway we can make a difference. And maybe, if we plead hard enough, our gods will feel compassion and save us. It’s better than praying to Chance, who cares for no one. We make our own faiths, inevitably. Even people who’ve been raised into a religion must find for themselves what to put their faith in, decide who will come to their aid when they need it most. For those of us without bible pockets, we place hope in what forms we can find. Perhaps you have near-death, or out-of-body, or some other experience that you can’t explain but gives you a glimpse of something else and you put your faith in that. Or maybe a Doctor in a white coat and stethoscope will be what you fasten onto. She chooses to place her faith in the doctors, perhaps because, in a way, she doesn’t have a choice.

So she prays. “Praised be/ the mind that guides the hands/ their artful splicing, painstaking stitching/ altering life lines.” Please, these lines pray, be gentle. Be sure and swift and oh so very, very careful in your handling. Powerless to save her own love, she prays her gods will do it for her. It makes a beautiful kind of sense that she chooses these surgeons as her faith, their work as her Dogma. Our doctors really do hold the power of our lives and deaths in their hands. Many either think of them as playing God, or doing God’s work.

But the poem’s answer to everything, I think in the end, is people. In the lines “Bless the body/ new cells that multiply from first insult/” and then “Sacred the consciousness, suspended/ that stirs, flows into his open eyes”. These lines are referring to the miracle of the body, of mind and of people. The wonder of how her husband’s body recovers itself and how the doctors pieced him back together. Her prayer is not only for the doctors, but also for the processes of growth and decay themselves. How amazing is it to watch a cut heal over itself, without scar or blemish, one has to wonder how is that possible? It must be a miracle. It certainly seems as much a miracle to us mere mortals as somebody walking on water, or parting oceans; and she surrenders her husband into the hands of her gods, putting her faith in them, in what can be done, and can’t.

But also, her final answer to the question of faith, is people. It’s not just the doctors that the poem puts faith in, but people, since in the end doctors are only human too. Humans with special, even magical like abilities and seemingly omnipotent knowledge, but still human. People are what we can ultimately believe in (the poem seems to say), people who create their own hells, and heavens. People who act as angels, or devils in the world people have created. Though it took us considerably more than seven days.

Works Cited
Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 2nd ed. Noah Webster, Jean L. McKechnie. New World Dictionaries, Cleveland, Ohio.
Porter Gulch Review. Barbara Leon
The Elusive Truth
by Mike Baldwin

Sometimes a poem can be baffling. Usually allusions are just a matter of research to understand, but in the case of “The Four Noble Truths”, the poet goes a step further and challenges the reader to dig deeply for the connection between the subject and the allusions. There is, of course, the possibility that this was not the poet’s intention and that the elusive connection is a weakness of the writing; I’m left with the feeling that there is more to it than that.

The title and the four subtitles refer to one of the core principles of Buddhist teaching. The “Four Noble Truths” state that:
1. The nature of life is suffering.
2. The origin of suffering is desire.
3. To end suffering one must let go of one’s attachments.
4. The key to letting go is the 8-fold path to enlightenment.

If I understand it correctly, The second Noble Truth is referring to the common desire for spiritual growth and fulfillment. The teachings of Buddhism say that the enlightened mind must be freed from duality; that it is unified. To be desirous of anything is to be dualistic. The third Noble Truth takes this idea and says that for one to eliminate suffering from one’s life, one must consciously let go of the attachment to one’s desires. Buddhism uses its “8-fold path” of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration to facilitate the process of removing attachments.

Within the poem, the Buddhist allusions make sense in a very general way, however I have a difficult time connecting them to the content on a deeper level. The framework of the Truths provides a strong sense of personal growth that the piece would have likely lacked otherwise. Without the framework the piece would be very little more than a recollection of a past trauma—the truths establish that Jana (the subject) is recalling the event and reflecting on her life and how she has changed since then.

I don’t think the poem is actually about the boys, there is little coherency in their story, so I think that the reader cannot take the words too literally as a narrative, but rather that the photos should be received individually, mostly out of context from one another. It’s possible that the author chose to use these photos as an illustration of the emotional process that occurs when one experiences each stage of the Truths. The photos are not a metaphor of the evolutionary progress, but they express the feeling of the truths very well.

“In the first photo/the young men play basketball at midnight.” They are engaged in their lives, living within a matrix of enforced rules of interaction.

“In the second photo/the boys are all spin and elbow/…The one with the ‘14’ on his shirt/has gone to stand away from the group,/back turned.” He perfectly embodies the feeling of isolation within the chaos of society that comes with the desire for self-actuation. I speak from personal experience in saying that the desire for evolution is one of the loneliest feelings one can experience. “He is either in dismay or in the midst/
some physical regrouping/that demands he be alone and apart.”

“In the third photo the boys circle/one young man who has been thrown/down to
the ground./...But two more hold his legs and one bends over him/Pulling his pants
down around his shoes.” The removal of attachments is often a very painful process and
demands a good deal of energy. Mevlanna Jelaleddin Rumi described the process like
so, “When someone beats a rug with a stick, he is not beating the rug—his aim is to get
rid of the dust.”

“There is one more photo./It is overexposed./Nothing but white light.” The Author
could be describing enlightenment, though it sounds a little romanticized.

This is a complicated poem, and I enjoyed it. I have noticed in reading the submis-
sions for this years Porter Gulch Review that many writers are afraid their readers will
not understand their work. They compensate by telling a little too much, making their
work a little too obvious. The Four Noble Truths avoided this trap; its author seems
confident enough in her words to leave the reader guessing, while successfully generat-
ing a very strong sense of what the piece could be.
Death and Public Transportation:

e·piph·a·ny n. pl. - A sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something.
By Jordan Kreyche

Life’s small lessons can be learned in the most bizarre locations. The events that change our lives are often something small, but the changes are always something larger then life. Small things trigger these changes, be it a sarcastic remark from someone you’ve never met, that digs deep, or reading a book. When the sarcastic little kid says, “Man, you really need to get out more,” you will reflect on that and most likely make some sort of effort—conscious or unconscious—to change your life to combat what the kid said. These epiphanies change your lives forever.

In “Lists,” the author paints the picture of a man that has just had deep thoughts involving suicide, then at the last moment hesitated and thought about it differently. He then gets on a bus where upon inward thinking, and a little help from some strangers a new passion for life is rekindled. These everyday people on a bus, telling their own stories allow the main character to rethink his actions and take an entirely new outlook on life.

The main character explains his story to the bus driver and the people on the bus, attempting to try and get some help:

“...I decided fuck it and just swerved off the road. But when I hit that water, everything changed.” The driver slows the bus in the growing traffic of the expressway. The brakes squeal like whiny children. “An epiphany” he said.

“Who?” I envision Epiphany, the Greek Goddess of failed suicides.

“An epiphany,” he repeats. “A revelation. Finding God or something like that...”

“I just decided I wasn’t ready to die”

The bus driver is a sort of guide character, someone who tells the main character what he needs to hear to figure out the next step of his life, or at least for his time on the bus. The character’s sarcastic nature saves the main character, and the story. The bus is full of people to help guide and show the protagonist what he is missing in life that lead to
him attempting suicide.

Suicide will kill approximately 30,000 Americans a year (American society of suicidology). The numbers of suicides have been slightly increasing annually. Males are much more common to go through with the suicide. More males commit suicide in America, but many more females attempt suicide. Any time one is dealing with suicide its almost always (90%) involving depression or some sort of substance abuse. In this story it’s obvious that the main character is going through some sort of relationship problems.

I had an epiphany caused by a t-shirt once. One day I was absolutely hating my crappy weekend/summer job. I was actually contemplating walking in and either quitting or putting in my two week notice that day. Then this man walked up to me with this t-shirt from some video game design company. I proceeded to spill his popcorn and apologize, he then said, “It’s alright man, I used to work at a theater, I know how much its sucks.” At this time in my life I was on track towards a computer science degree with a minor in digital media. Targeting a job in the video game industry. Since then I’ve reconsidered what I want to do; that that day a t-shirt kept me from quitting my job.

I think everyone can find a story similar to the one I discussed above. Life has a way of guiding us through the tough times and helping us make some difficult decisions. That day on the bus, the towel that was given to the protagonist was that small life-changing event that guided the protagonist towards a whole new life, or in actuality life itself. The lists that the protagonist then created were his way of moving on a planning a future. They were the byproduct of his epiphany, what lead to his new life, the life of:

Things I want to do before I die
1. Go to Vashon Island
2. Forgive Janna
3. Kill Janna
4.

The protagonist realizes that there are things he wants to do before he dies, and makes a list. Although the bus driver says that he should go to Vegas, the protagonist decides that he needs to go where he wants to go, and see the real beauty, not just the artificial pleasure. He also decides that he first needs to forgive Janna for what she did, and then of course kill her. Kill Janna is included I think because of current affairs, and initial shock value, I don’t think that he will actually end up killing his ex-girlfriend. I believe that number four is left empty for a reason
leaving him with something else that he needs to do before he dies that he’s yet to discover, maybe an additional epiphany will guide him to and unveil what number four should be on his list or maybe he’ll just find out in time.

We all hope that we can find our next epiphany and find the meaning of life or our next step towards finding our meaning in life. Sometimes though its not some life shattering event that causes this, sometimes it’s a t-shirt, or a towel.

Works Cited

America: The Land of the Free?
By Kyra Brown

Does society reward people for their individuality, or for their adherence to the norms? The answer is of course that society rewards those who comply with the norms, and punishes those who do not by labeling them deviant. “Lost in the Department Store”, by Jaime S. Uyematsu, is a poem that explores the idea of how society judges people. In the process of complying to the norms, we often forget that we, as individuals, bring meaning to this world.

In the title of this poem, “Lost in a Department Store”, the author is using the department store as a metaphor for life. At first glance, I thought that the escalator was the path up to heaven or down to hell, but after reading further in the poem the author says, “And no, I’m not religious,” which leads me to believe that my initial idea was wrong. Perhaps the elevator represents the choice between being an individual or being a member of the herd. We all have to decide whether it is more important to be the person that we want to be, or the person that we are told to be. We are told that we will not have any worth in this world unless we have wealth, power and prestige.

According to The Essentials of Sociology, the social class that we occupy is determined by our level of education and the amount of money that we make (page 210). For example, the lower class is made up of people who have low levels of education (high school diplomas) and make barely enough money to survive. The author says, “So what is it that is gonna move this world? / Will it be a degree with my name on it, or a mountain of gold?” She realizes that we are judged based on these criteria. But, in the next stanza she brings up an important point; just because you have a high IQ doesn’t mean that you have the street smarts that it takes to get by in this world. Your intelligence can only take you so far; you need common sense and knowledge of how the world works to get all the way.

The author says, “This globe is full of smart people and we’re still here, fighting our wars.” This can be read in two different ways. It could mean that everyone has problems that they have to deal with—demons that they have to face—because no one’s life is perfect. The important thing is how you deal with your problems; do you face your problems and try to solve them, or do you ignore them in hopes that they will disappear? Those people who possess street smarts are much more capable of solving life’s little dilemmas. But, this line could also be saying that if we are all so smart, why are we killing each other in wars? You would think that with all of the intelligence that human beings possess, we could find a better way to solve our differences than by blowing people up. As children we are told to solve our problems with our words instead of our fists; unfortunately, this idea does not seem to stick with us for our entire lives.

One of the most important ideas of the poem is whether or not we are all truly equal. The author asks, “Are we meeting on level or is there some kind of protocol that I’m refusing to notice? / Cause we may come in all 12 fruity flavors, but that don’t make you any sweeter than the rest.” Although people come in different colors, shapes, and sizes, no one type of person is better than the others. The author asks us if we are
all viewed as equals, or are we being judged on our socioeconomic background and ethnicity. It is common knowledge that although we are told that everyone is given equal opportunities, minorities are presented with fewer opportunities that the majority. Plus, money may not buy everything, but it will take you a long way in this world. Money also allows us the ability to follow popular culture; it enables us to afford the constantly upgraded technologies, changing fashions, and cool new cars. This is why I view individualism as such a virtue; truly individual minded people are not preoccupied with pop culture. They can find happiness in life without owning overpriced material goods.

People spend their lives trying to accomplish things that make them look good on paper. For example, it is very important to have a good resume if you ever want to get a job that pays better than minimum wage. But, no matter how good you may look on a piece of paper, it doesn’t mean that you are a good person or that you are happy. The author says, “Well shit, it doesn’t take a diploma to have morals. / You sure as fuck won’t find love on a transcript, / Or generosity on a resume.” We have to look past a person’s accomplishments, and look deep into their souls to see who they really are. Someone who has never graduated from high school or had a job may be one of the kindest, most generous people in the world, but you would never know it by looking at their resume.

In the fifth stanza the author talks about why she is not a religious person, “I find that it ends to get in the way, / Of how I value human life. / I do not worship a particular context, / Because these circumstances that we live are beyond prediction.” She does not believe that there is an all-powerful being controlling our lives like a puppeteer. Life is simply a random series of events, anything can happen. Furthermore, people tend to use religion as an excuse for their actions. I have heard people say that according to the bible, homosexuality is wrong and all homosexuals are going to burn in hell. I think that this is an absurd translation of the bible, and a perfect example of how people use religion to justify hatred.

Towards the end of the poem, the author gives a very colorful description of herself, ending with, “…please come to the perfume counter to claim her soul.” Have our souls been lost in out attempts to conform? I see her lip ring as a symbol of her nonconformity to the norms; she is not afraid to stand out and be different. Also, she mentions that she is not married, which defies the status quo. I think that the purpose of giving this description was so that the readers would stereotype the author in their minds. She then says, “Close you eyes and look at me again. / Now, tell me what you see.” I see an independent individual who is not obsessed with being a part of the popular culture.

After reading this poem I realized that we should not make judgements about people because our judgements are often wrong. We often make quick judgements about people that are based on stereotypes, and we never get to know the real person. I think that this is a powerful piece of poetry, and I could hear the author’s voice very clearly. I always thought that the United Stated was a country that highly valued individualism; this poem made me reconsider what is valued by our society. If we truly valued individualism, people wouldn’t spend a fortune trying to buy the right clothes, or the right car. Consider high school kids for example, if they don’t have a certain brand of shoes, they are considered “losers.” It is complete herd mentality; no
one wants to be different. Uyematsu leaves us with the question: What kind of person do you want to be?
The Taking Tree
by Davis Banta

For better or for worse, familial relationships have long been the fodder of bards and poets. “Killer” is a first-person narrative of the memory of an abusive father. Although treading familiar territory, the poem distinguishes itself through distinctive use of language and symbolism.

My Father may be ashes
But still struts across my chest

According to this opening passage, the narration takes place after the father is dead and cremated, yet he is still very much alive in memory.

In his weed-oiling boots, steel-plated
And thick like elephant hide, with soles
Like corrugated tin, slicing open
Old oozing wounds:

The image of the narrator’s father is permanently fixed as a hard figure, clad in gardening “war gear” and heavy boots. The boots are the most significant feature, the phrase “elephant hide” linking the boots as an organic part of his father’s ‘thick-skinned’, insensitive persona. The wounds of the narrator’s childhood still bleed afresh whenever he thinks back or sees a reminder like an old family photo, bringing back traumatic memories.

When I was ten, shaking my shoulders, shoving
Me against cold plaster, shouting
I wish you’d never been born; then

The relationship between the boy and his father comes to a head here. Most people have lapses of self-confidence, where they harbor doubts of their self-worth, but nothing quite hurts like a parent assaulting it directly. His father denounces his son as unwanted.

Marching through avocado groves
In his combat boots, his weapon
A weed-oiling can and spray-arm
Blasting yellow poison,

The only memories of the father involve conflict of some sort; whether physically or verbally abusing his son or going to war against pesky weeds, plants, kids, etc. He seems most at home marching through his orchard attacking pests, very much the warrior at heart (if he indeed has one). The recurrence of the “war” and “combat” metaphors may be subtle hints that the father is a psychologically scarred veteran. The “yellow poison” is sounds eerily reminiscent of Agent Orange. One wonders if, in his head, the father is truly gardening or reliving battles.

…smiling as he shoots
At wild roses and poppies, dandelions
And oats, stray cats
And me.

So the child is grouped together with the other garden-variety pests and weeds. The sparseness of the final line indicates how very small and insignificant he feels, even in comparison to dandelions, oats, and poppies. It seems a small step from herbicide to infanticide.

He points the nozzle at my face
And pretends to squeeze the trigger, laughing
As I scream and run…
So here’s the closest the father gets to male bonding: pretending to shoot the poison at his son. It’s all fun and games with this guy, as the screaming, fleeing kid can attest.

...I wait
Till his back is turned
Then climb to the top of an avocado tree
And watch my father kill, exulting in green
Wilting to brown.

Fearing for his safety, the boy climbs up in a tree, to see his father without being seen. There he watches, above the fray, safe in an omniscient, narrator-like, vantage point.

From my perch
Camouflaged by glossy, veined leaves
And dangling fruit, I don’t want to wait forty years
For him to shrivel...

Waiting in his tree limb, the son sits with the rest of his father’s fruit, hiding behind a shroud of leaves. He’s sick of the constant taunting and abuse, and doesn’t want to wait almost a half-century for the father to die.

...I want to rip
Green grenades from their stems
And heave them at my father, imagine
His skull breaking, blood coursing
From his ears and nose.

Responding to the pain and anger inside him, the child feels the urge to exact vengeance upon his father. Hiding in the avocado orchard like a sniper in a tree, he sees the fruit dangling from its branches and envisions it as a grenade. A sweet irony to slay one’s enemy with the very fruit he raises.

So far from the house, no one
Would hear him cry out; no one
Would ever find him, decaying
Under dead leaves
Buried by rotten fruit.

Inspired by his father’s cruelty, the boy dreams of killing him where he stands, right in the orchard. He will die an unheard death, far from home, left to decay where he lies beneath dead leaves. Like the child, unheard in his fear and pain, it is important that the father die unheard. In his fantasy, the boy, the “rotten fruit” of the family tree has buried his father.
The world has shrunk. New technology in transportation and communication has made us into national—even international beings—shrinking our perception of the world. Furthermore, the younger generations are not accustomed to living in the same place for lives at a time. Personally, moving from the French Alps to Santa Cruz when I was fourteen caused me to lose some of that sense of belonging to one particular place. I do feel that I belong to many localities at once (Santa Cruz and the French Alps) but nothing unique like described in the poem “Ponte de Barca, Portugal, 2000.” The piece tells of times when villages where isolated and the traditions strongly localized. People grew their own food, made their own wine, and attended the local churches and schools, generation after generation. This poem is a question mark on the old ways. It is asking us for answers to why we have given up such traditional lifestyles for a more universal, standardized and technological way of life. Through the rediscovery of old customs and values, the author is suggesting that we can still learn from them and use them to improve our modern lives.

Ironically, the title of the piece makes it a description of something that is happening now (in 2000), somewhere in Portugal, in a village untouched by recent events and high technology. For us it is a lifestyle of the past, but in some places, some cultures have not jumped on the bandwagon of modernity and are still living simple and equally productive existences. The general format of the poem: asking the question “what is it like...” and then developing it repeatedly with “to live in a village.../to wear stout black shoes.../to hear trucks rumble.../to drink your own white wine...” reinforces the description of the place in terms of this village’s life and its people. It suggests that we have lost that sense of being rooted somewhere. This model has a descending order of line lengths, leading to the last most powerful sentence: “To die in the same village where you were born.” This method makes the reader comfortable because of its repetitiveness and at the same time ends with a powerful climax.

The author works on this final effect right from the beginning, starting with a rather sad observation: “what is it like/to live in a village/where the widows/wear black the rest of their lives?” Such an isolated place must surely endure the weight of the years going by, with each death having a great impact on the community. The working widows, the ripe vineyards in autumn, the children playing at night, people sleeping every night with the sound of church bells, and finally dying in the same village where they were born, are all visual manifestations of time. We cannot claim to have such an acute awareness of time in modern societies. So many distractions prevent us from truly noticing it going by. In a way we are forced to attach importance to smaller time periods (because time is money, we overvalue time) but in the process lose track of lifetimes as wholes.

This concept is then interwoven with the self-sufficiency of such a community, the pleasures of a rustic, traditional and homemade way of life (food and wine): “wine so young and fresh it snaps in the throat;” and the importance of nightlife without screens (cinemas and TVs) or clubs: “men walk through the streets at night singing drunken songs in beautiful baritones.” All those perceptions support the simple, personally enriching aspects of this lifestyle, creating a sort of longing for those days.

Contrasting that village is how we live our lives today. What we have been witnessing is a massive exodus away from the little towns to the big cities. The new generations have no interest in living in isolation with very little entertainment directly available. In the words of Robert Pierre, a journalist talking about a little Kansas town:

There’s not much in this one-stoplight town to attract people enamored with the 24-hour convenience of urban life. The town café is closed on Mondays, the barber cuts hair from 8 a.m. to noon, and the nearest video store is a dozen miles away.
The concentration and availability of services are attractive to the newer generations familiar with modern technology and living more hectic lives. We have turned towards a more inclusive and standardized way of life. It is a choice we’ve made as a species, to unify on a global scale, thanks to communication and travel technology, at the expense of our diverse and ancient local traditions. Some strive to keep them alive and in a sense they will never completely disappear. But they have given way to what is inevitable given our evolution: a mixing of lifestyles enhanced by a strong sense of internationalism.

This poem presents an important dichotomy in the evolution of societies: should we reject the simplicity and minimalism of rural and isolated lifestyles for a synthesis of cultures and eventually the creation of one giant city where everything is instantly available? Or should we look at the past with new eyes, and take from it what was most enriching: roots; a local identity; a certain peace of mind? Growing up in a small village in France I had the chance to witness rural lifestyles, and I knew families who had lived there for many generations. I always had the feeling that I was witnessing a historical moment when a great divide would be created and the newer generations would all live together in big cities and the elderly in the traditional villages where they grew up. It must feel reassuring though, for older people to know that they belong somewhere, and that they have a place to spend the rest of their lives in, a place where they know everyone in their neighborhood, where they have a home to come back to, with no way to get lost. Maybe it helps to be settled in your space. Eventually you might feel so comfortable that you turn inside to search for a better state of mind, experiencing a sort of meditation. We need to consider our overly-stuffed extra-large distracting lives as obstacles to reaching a greater peace of mind and higher spiritual level.

Works Cited

When It All Falls Down

Guiangelo Famalaro

Of all the writings that have been submitted this year, *Beanpole* was the only play accepted. *Beanpole*’s status as the only play makes it stand out more than other submissions, but that is not the sole reason for it being chosen. It brings to life the child neglect by family that so many children are faced with in the fast paced, career oriented world that we all live in. It hits a chord inside me for its content, portrayal of characters, and for its ability to be both thought-provoking and entertaining in only one act.

From the beginning we are introduced to four out of the five characters: Boy, Father, Mother, and Grandma. The last three stand around Boy trying to rouse a word from his mouth, which he will have none of. Earlier during dinner, Boy had attempted to talk about a girl he knew who had recently died, but his family halted him, causing him to shut down and go to his room without saying a word. After several minutes of bickering and culinary seduction prove unsuccessful, the father asserts that, “We’ll have to send him to a psychiatrist, that’s all,”, followed by, “Hey BOY, you won’t talk to us, you want to talk to a psychiatrist? Is that what you want?” Holly Heath, licensed marriage and family therapist observes that these types of interactions from Father to Boy represent a shame-based parenting style (H. Heath, personal communication, April 16, 2004). This is the first time we see this manner of parenting that runs throughout the play. Father wants the quick fix and isn’t willing to invest any of his own time into helping his son cope with the death of a peer, while Mother and Grandma just want him to say a word for them so they can know that he’s all right.

Up to this point the writer uses short sentences to convey a sense of urgency and distress in the parents, giving them short choppy conversations followed by Grandma’s occasional attempts to quell the situation by means of pie and ice cream. I like that this play begins like that because there is a sense of familiarity with the situation and a connection with how the family is dealing with the situation without revealing the whole story to us all at one time. The writer does make clear that this family is a less than fully functional one.

Only after Father and Mother leave the boy’s room and leave him with Grandma do we hear his first words. Grandma tries to explain to Boy that “you should speak because that’s what people do. They talk to each other.” Boy retorts, “No one in this house talks to each other. They talk, but they don’t talk to each other.” All Grandma comes up with is “I don’t understand you.” This is a very important part of the play because we see where Boy’s anger resides. He’s so discouraged with his family and how they interact in such a superficial way that he has given up on speech all together. He was chastised for trying to speak openly and honestly to the only people he could, and because of that he feels alienated from them all. As a teenager, Boy feels alone, with no one to speak to openly, and so he goes inside of himself and decides not to speak to his parents anymore. This is where this play becomes personal to me. Boys’ dilemma echo’s much of my own feelings as a young teenager. I felt that I had nothing in common with the people around me and that nobody really understood me. Most of the time when I watched people interact it seemed like they would say what they thought the other wanted to hear instead of staying true to themselves. I felt like my family wouldn’t understand what I thought, luckily I had friends who did. The problem with this family however seems to be their concept of good parenting skills, if they have any at all.

It becomes apparent during the play that Father and Mother operate from a shame-based approach to dealing with family unrest. One quote that underlines this belief is when Father says to Boy, “All right. I’ve had it. I’m fixing myself a drink. See what you’re doing to me.” Father is indirectly making Boy responsible for his feelings, while also using him as an excuse to drink. Or when Grandma says, “Crazy people go to psychiatrists. Do you want to be
crazy? Is that what you want?” Shame based parenting does exactly what has happened in this situation by driving the child to internalize it all, causing him to block everything out and go into his own world where he isn’t ridiculed.

Boy sees himself as different than other people, accusing them of being “blanks”; individuals without substance or depth. When a girl from his school comes at his request to talk to him, she walks into the room wearing a blank, expressionless mask. We read his dialogue to her, which consists of several odd, but astonishingly sophisticated questions about sexuality and vestigial nubs. I believe the writer portrayed the girl as wearing a mask to give us some perspective on his view of people. She is blank because he sees nothing real in her, no true complexity. It also shows how foreign other people seem to him. Honestly, I’m surprised the writer didn’t have the whole family wear blank masks. Boy’s intelligence is obviously far beyond the grasp of his family, and so not only do the strains of commonality get pushed farther away, but he feels he has no use for them save his financial dependence.

The end of the play entails all of them back in Boy’s room; he has still said nothing to the parents. Father makes a remark in reference to the girl: “I never liked her anyway. She’s too skinny. Beanpole. That’s what she is. Beanpole.” Boy loves this statement, laughing hysterically and repeating the word beanpole over and over again. Father responds with, “Hey, that’s my BOY. I’m going to call and cancel that appointment.” Mom chimes in with, “Oh, honey! See. That’s all you need to do! Just talk a little. We’re so proud of you. You’ve made us so happy!”
The play ends with that statement, which to me is the perfect closing for this play. It shows just how oblivious the parents are to their son’s condition.

I believe that the underlying themes that run through this play are what give it its power. It takes what seems to be an average American home and brings its most dysfunctional aspects right to the surface. The scary part is that I have seen many families like this, with the parental ignorance just as vast as that of this play. Many parents that I see are too wrapped up in their own jobs, friends, egos, and alcohol to truly care about their children enough to connect with them on their level. Instead they make time just to sustain the minimum, but won’t put in the effort into helping their children grow into the people they could become. If parents were to set their priorities straight and show some responsibility by interacting with and nurturing the people they have brought into this world, I believe that many of the problems our society faces today would be abolished swiftly. Not only would this produce citizens with greater mental and emotional health and well-being, but it would set in motion a trend of healthy parenting to be passed down and instilled in a family for generations to come.
The Smile of Death
By M. Eugenia Ruiz

Night is related to death. Why? I don’t know. It could be because night is the end of the day and death is the end of the life. Death is the only person who comes without an invitation, and surely, one day she will come. In her wake death leaves us with sadness and distress. She is laughing while we are crying.

In the poem “Day of The Dead/Ciudad Juarez,” the author is opening a wide door to show the people about those women who have died by the hands of some serial killer who has been hunting in the City of Juarez, Mexico during the last few years. The author is trying to get everybody’s attention in order to help those families who have had dealt with the murder of these women.

It is easy to say, “I am sorry” during someone’s funeral, but do you really feel sorry? Or do you just say the word because it’s normal to say? I love the way the author describes the relationship between the dead and the living, trying to remember those who have forever left us, to go beyond “I’m sorry.”

Celebrate them with ofrendas.
On Claudia’s altar, a packet of letters home
Her childish scrawl on lined blue paper. Mama, Papa
I found a job in the maquila - $4.65 a day.
And all night in the city, lights like you’ve never seen!

Obviously, the author is describing the happiness of one of the victims when she finds her first job. Nobody knew that that job was the first and last one for Claudia. This is a poem that means a lot, especially if it’s from a poor family with no hope for a better future; I believe the author has a deep relationship with this kind of problem in the North of Mexico, because the feeling in her writing is very intense.

Even though this is a real problem, the author uses a lot of words that make the story into a beautiful dream, where we can imagine the dead people doing all those things that they always had dreamed of.

For Paloma, fastest hands in the auto parts assembly, a red toy convertible.
Let her clutch
The steering wheel in her skeleton fingers
Black hair lifted by the breeze, as she speeds
Miles from the factory, the colonial’s
Leaked sewage streets
The dreaded path to the midnight bus
Last place she was seen.

What a sweet dream, after life to pass away and be able to fulfill all your dreams! Don’t you think it is heartbreaking for somebody to die by the hands of someone that they didn’t even know? What an injustice! What a horrific end to a life, dying with pain and in circumstances totally disagreeable.

This poem is praise for those who had set off on the wrong road and at the wrong time, with the same destiny: being killed by one horrible monster. At one point the author invites us to be part of this sadness, letting the families create a link with each other and share their unhappiness, and yet pushing forward with their lives.

Gather families at the gravesites.
Let them scrub the stones clean, sweep away
Jagged amber glass, crushed cigarettes butts
Dried semen and rusty knives, then
Lay picnics on bright spreads.
Let the living and dead feast together
On their favorite moles, anise-scented bread
Tamarind drinks to refresh
Parched throats and swollen tongues.

Imagine having a party every time we have lost someone. What a great idea—and
together with families and friends to remember all the good things about that person that
we’ve loved and lost.

Moreover, I love the conclusion of this poem, how the author points out the desolate
loneliness of all the women whose bodies have not been found, nor had a proper buried.
And for the ones still wondering, body parts
Strewn through the desert, decomposed in plastic
Carried on coyotes’ teeth, give them sweets.
Mortal bones exchanged for sugar skulls
Marzipan coffins where they may sleep.

Meanwhile, there are many bad people who have killed others without compassion,
and I’m sad to say that the Mexican government doesn’t do anything about it. The “death of
Juarez” is the name that the media has given to these murders in which more than 365 women
have been killed. So how many women have to die in order for the authorities to listen?
Unfortunately, these kinds of situations always happen to the poor people who sadly are
nothing to the Mexico’s government. I hope we will have more poems like this in order to
make everyone aware, and help as many as we can without thinking of the reward.

On the other hand, not everything around death is just depressing. In Mexico we
have an old tradition that we call “Dia de los Muertos.” “Her face Death is unforgettable and
she goes by many names: La Catrina, la flaca, la huesuda, la pelona—Fancy lady, skinny,
ony, baldy. A fixture in Mexican society, she is not some trendy fashion model, but la muerte
death.” [website link]

In Mexico the Day of the Dead is a holiday that tends to be a subject of fascination
for visitors from abroad. Death held a significant place in the pantheons and ritual of
Mexico’s ancient civilizations. Among the Aztecs, for example, it was considered a blessing
to die in childbirth, battle or human sacrifice, for these assured the victim a desirable destination in the afterlife. The success of the Spaniard’s spiritual conquest in Mexico is due in part to their willingness to incorporate certain pre-Hispanic customs into Christian practice.
[website link]

November 1st, all saints Day, and November 2nd, all souls Day are marked throughout Mexico by a plethora of intriguing customs that vary widely according to the ethnic roots of each region. Common to all, however, are colorful adornments and lively reunions at family burial plots, the preparation of special foods, offerings laid out for those that have died. Departed on commemorative altars and religious rites that are likely to include noisy fireworks.

“In most localities November 1st is set aside for remembrance of deceased infants and children, often referred to as angelitos (little angels). Those who have died as adults are honored November 2nd.” [website link]

I remember in my childhood visiting the tombs on November 2nd, my mother carrying bouquets of flowers for all our family members that had passed away. My mother would say “All our ancestors come to visit us and we should bring some flowers to make their road beautiful, and light some candles to show them the road and their way back to their home.” At that time I didn’t know that what I was doing was part of my culture I just did it. Because my mother brought me along, at the time, I thought it was a ridiculous tradition.

However, my mind changed when my mother passed away, and now it was my turn to go the cemetery and bring flowers to her. I never believed that people would come back after they had died to eat the food that I made, until one day I prepared some food for my
mother. To my surprise the next day when I sampled it, the food was without flavor. This was when I began to believe what my mother had told me: the tradition started to make sense. I can see what the author’s of this poem is trying to point out the dead of these women in Juarez, which now are part of our Mexicans traditions.

Now, that I don’t have my mother I realize how much I loved her and I am grateful to her for show me many new things. I would like to learn more about my traditions, and I have realized that” The day of The Death” is not a stupid tradition, it is something that I have grown to believe in. I will keep this tradition forever.

Finally, I discovered the meaning of the phrase “I am sorry.” Every time that I say, “I am sorry” to anyone who has lost one of his family members I say it with my heart in my hands, because I know the feeling of losing somebody. There are two things in life that are sure, birth and death. We know when we are born, but we don’t know when we’ll die. For that same reason be happy, and like the dead laugh at your own life. And like the dead of Juarez try to believe that there is another life after this one.
“Little Rich White Girl” is told through the eyes of a rich white girl who grows up sheltered, spoiled and without any real concept of reality outside her own life. Throughout the poem the author shares with us how she thinks her life isn’t as perfect as the stereotype claims it to be and how being a little rich white girl also comes with its share of problems and complications.

The beginning of the poem starts out with the girl talking to a person that has lead me to believe that she is talking to a black person. I came to this conclusion from the first stanza the girl says, “I know the color of my skin makes you feel uncomfortable. No Sir, I don’t understand how a color so pure, so clean, so godly could possibly offend you,” while in the second stanza she says, “Because you say it is the color that has been stained by lifetimes of hate discrimination, murder and privilege.” This is the line that leads me to believe that the person she is talking to is a person of color. It makes me feel this way because our country has a history of racial discrimination and hatred toward black people which has led to there also being a history of brutality and murder towards black people and other races. Segregation was also a factor in society black people had fewer privileges and was looked down upon in among other people.

“This Little Rich White Girl/ who wears ribbons in her hair/ who writes fanciful hearts after her name/ who claims her favorite color is pink/ doesn’t know your story and can’t relate to your pain.” This stanza is how the typical rich white girl is viewed as; ribbons in the hair, fancy hearts after her name, likes the color pink, and is sheltered by their loving parents who keep them from being exposed to the world of suffer and pain and give her what could be thought of as a spoiled and sheltered little girl. Grandma’s college trust fun has never heard your story and hasn’t the time to listen.” This stanza is simply another example of how society thinks the little rich white girl lives her life. I think the author is trying to say here that the little rich white girl’s life is almost like a free ride. She get he dads credit card, her moms car, and has grandma’s college trust fun this just goes to show how things come a lot easier in her life and how she does not know what its like to have to work for what you get.

The following stanza reads, “If all of this is true, and I have never heard your story, then surely you have never heard mine.” This is where I think the poem is gets even more interesting. Up to this point in the poem I think the author is trying to say that maybe she hasn’t taken the time to listen to other people and maybe she does have more privileges, and more opportunities, but that doesn’t make her life perfect. Just because she has white skin and comes from a wealthy family doesn’t excuse her from facing day to day complications and problems in life.

“Masked by my painted rose lips and costly streaked hair/ is a sacred young women afraid to come in to her own/ I, like you, also have a story of pain/ mine involves a loss of innocence to a mans touch that was never wanted/ a struggle to a maintain grace and poise amid the turbulence of adolescence/ and a constant fight to meet the expectations of myself and of my family.” Here the girl tells her story of her the little rich white girls life isn’t so perfect. Even though her problems are less severe, weather she realizes it our not, she doesn’t understand what is going on outside her world and she tries to share how she thinks her life isn’t perfect like how we interpret it to be. She struggles and faces problems just like everybody else only she feels her problems are overlooked because she is the little rich white girl.

“Being the Little Rich White Girl that I am, ensures that I have privilege/ With
privilege comes pain, from pain comes hope, through hope, faith is realized.” Yes, the girl is in fact more privileged than others, but what people don’t understand is that there is a lot of bad things that come with privileges such as pain. When I person is feeling pain it causes them to feel a sense of hope because when your down and things aren’t the best all you can do is hope that things will soon become better. “Through hope, faith is realized.” When someone is hopeful for something then usually they have faith but just don’t realize it. What the author is trying to say I think is not a perfect life but if you have faith then things can get better.

My life is somewhat similar to the Little Rich White Girls. I come from a wealthy family which provide me with opportunities that others may not have. What people don’t understand is that in my life I have no freebees. Everything in my life I have to work for or have earned. People say because I drive a new car they assume that my parents bought it for me and I don’t know what it is like to have to get something on your own. Well I bought the car on my own I have bought everything I own and have worked hard for it. My parents are also very tough people to live with they have extremely high standards which is one of the things that the girl from the poem struggles with in her own life.

This great poem about this sheltered little girl can truly make a person think and learn to respect others life styles. It can help you realize to listen to other people and maybe even help you realize that no one’s life is perfect so be happy with what you have.