Sleepless in Connecticut

Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Fellows
1998
Sleepless in Connecticut

by

Members of the
Connecticut Writing Project
1998 Summer Institute

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Connecticut Writing Project
Storrs, CT
1998
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The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of the University of Connecticut Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 166 sites in this country and abroad.

In the project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. During subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further programs, please write or call the director:

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I thought everyone had her own towel. As kids, we always had a special space in the bathroom where we could safely hang our towels to dry. Mine went on the bar immediately opposite the window. My brothers had the double bars on the shower door. I always felt that I had the best space because my towel did not have to touch anyone else's. And, because their towels hung one over the other, they got that "musty" smell sooner than mine did. However, because mine was nearer to the sink, if my brothers were lazy, they would try to dry their half-washed hands on my towel. That really made me mad, so I monitored their hand-drying often. Whenever I heard the water running in the bathroom, I'd rush in and brush my teeth or something, watching them in the mirror as they finished until their hands were dried on the correct towel. And I didn't have to say anything; they knew I was watching.

This explains why, in my towel-policing mode, I carefully handed out fresh, clean towels to my brand-new mother-, father-, and sisters-in-law when they came to visit for John's graduation. Since we were all (six of us) going to be sharing one bathroom, I was a bit concerned about where all these wet towels were going to hang. I mean, there were only two towel bars in the bathroom. Perhaps we could hang two over the shower curtain rod, but where would those be put while someone was in the shower? There wasn't really anywhere to set them, and jamming them on top of another person's towel, even temporarily, was out of the question. My mother-in-law did not betray any confusion when I meticulously spelled out my plan. She and my new dad might have to hang their towels on a coat rack in the bedroom. Luckily, we had one; it was a gift from my own mother to help me encourage John to put his "in-between" clothes somewhere other than the floor—but that is another story. Mom-in-law just listened and nodded, never asking why it mattered which towel she used and where she hung it. This was her first visit to our home since we'd been married, so she politely acquiesced to my proposal.

Then, the "incident" happened. I went in to take a shower one morning, and my towel was soaked. Now, I don't mean that someone used it to dry off. It seemed like someone had thrown it in. I pulled it off the rack only to find that it was also full of wet hair and dirt, as though it had been used to mop up the floor. This thought sent my eyes darting to the floor, and sure enough, it seemed that the shower curtain must have come out during the morning rotation of John's sisters (who had already gone for the day). The floor was still soaked, as was half of the bath mat.

But my towel, I thought. How could they have used my towel to clean up the floor? This sent me into a flurry. We needed to do laundry. All the towels were going to have to be washed. We couldn't be sure whose towel was subject to misuse. I collected all the towels and promptly dumped them into the laundry basket. Fortunately, I had enough clean towels left so that the remaining four of us could dry off in peace. I made a point of handing out the new towels as each of us rotated into the bathroom. My mother-in-law smiled and thanked me, again revealing no signs of confusion about my methods.

Two weeks later, John and I spent the weekend in New York City with our friend, Dave, who is subletting a furnished place there for the summer. He brought only what his car could hold: essentials like his mountain bike, CD player, computer. Apparently, he didn't plan for guests because he brought only two towels for the summer. Because I had hastily packed for the trip, I had forgotten to ask what we might bring in the way of towels and bedding. I thought of it when we arrived. "Should we have brought anything like towels or sleeping bags?" I asked. "No, I have enough," was his response, and we departed for dinner. When we returned, I performed...
my usual nightly ritual: washing my face and brushing my teeth. Prior to washing my face, however, I scouted around for the towels. There were two towels hanging on the rack, both seemingly used. “Which towel did you use, John?” I asked, thinking that maybe we were sharing a towel. “I haven’t used a towel yet,” he replied. I assumed, then, that Dave had hung up a towel for us next to his. Knowing that his favorite color is purple, I chose the green and white towel. That must be the one for guests. He just didn’t fold it very well after he washed it.

Two days passed, and both days I was the last in the shower, so I had to use John’s wet towel. I tried to pretend it wasn’t happening, drying my face with the corner and then keeping my eyes closed while I finished the rest of my body. But, our friend Dave was so generous, I have to use John’s wet towel,” I triumphantly announced. “Which one is John’s?” asked Dave, seemingly confused.

“I always just used any old towel,” I explained.

“Me, too,” said John, “until I met Gina. She always likes to have her own towel.”

Suddenly I was self-conscious. Was I picky? Unusual? Petty? Didn’t everyone have their own towel? Who would use just anyone’s towel? I couldn’t complain about this one minor thing. On Sunday, though, I was going to claim a dry towel. After Dave emerged from the bathroom, I staked my claim. “I’m going next so I don’t have to use John’s wet towel,” I triumphantly announced. “Which one is John’s?” asked Dave, seemingly confused.

“I assumed that you used the purple towel, so I thought ours was the striped,” I rationally explained.


“I never thought about the fact that some people might like their own towel,” Dave said contemplatively. “I always just used any old towel.”

“Me, too,” said John, “until I met Gina. She always likes to have her own towel.”

Suddenly I was self-conscious. Was I picky? Unusual? Petty? Didn’t everyone have their own towel? Who would use just anyone’s towel?

John interrupted my questions, “I never had my own towel until I went to college; in fact, in our house growing up, the disadvantage of being the last one up meant that you had to use a wet towel. Nobody had their own.”

“Yeah,” said Dave, “our bathroom was far too small to have enough towels for everyone scattered all over. It was a battle to find the driest edge if you were the last in.”

I stood there trying to imagine their worlds. I guess if you always shared towels, it would seem natural. Suddenly my mind reeled back to John’s mother and their visit. Was I picky? Unusual? Petty? Didn’t everyone have her own towel? She probably thought that her son married a really neurotic girl. But I was just being a good hostess.

I mean, after all, shouldn’t everyone have her own towel?
"No, I haven't," Jessica said.

"Shit," Diane muttered.

"What's wrong?" Diane asked, turning around. She noticed a medium size mutt cowering in the corner of the room.

"John brought him in, and I need Tammy's help. Would you mind holding him?"

"No, of course not," Jessica replied.

"Are you sure?" Diane asked.

"No problem at all."

Jessica walked over to the dog cowering in the corner. "What's his name?"

"Rufus."

"Rufus, here Rufus," Jessica whispered. Rufus came over cautiously at first. They quickly became friends.

Jessica petted his head and spoke gently to him.

Diane spoke, interrupting her exchange with Rufus, "Are you ready?"

"Sure."

Diane took out a syringe and inserted the blue liquid. Jessica spoke quietly to Rufus.

Diane inserted the syringe. Jessica held his head and kept petting him. All of a sudden Rufus's body went limp. A puddle of urine trickled out of his body. Jessica looked up at Diane.

Diane said, "He's gone now."

"What?" Jessica asked.

"He's gone," Diane repeated. "You can let go."

Realization slowly began to sink in. She was filled with horror. Tears stung her eyes. She was still holding Rufus.

"Oh my God." Diane said. "I thought you knew."

Jessica couldn't speak. She just sat there sobbing uncontrollably holding Rufus's lifeless body. Diane quickly turned, but Jessica could see the tears beginning to form in Diane's eyes. She just kept mumbling, "I thought you knew. I thought you knew."

Much later when Jessica had composed herself, Diane sought her out. "You know what you did in there was very important. You gave Rufus love in his last few minutes. He wasn't afraid." Jessica nodded, unable to speak. Diane continued, "I watched you today. You have a special gift with animals. I hope you'll be back."

Jessica didn't want to think about it, at least not now. But when she got home and peeled death from her, she discovered that Diane was right.

Jessica returned the following day and the next. Her duties of washing the dogs evolved into playing with them and showing them off to perspective owners.

The days continued in much of the same way. Then one day Tammy wasn't there. It was obvious that Diane needed help. Jessica walked over silently and began muttering softly and cooing to the brown dog with the white spots. She didn't ask their names anymore. Diane looked into her eyes long and hard. "Are you sure, Jessica?"

Jessica nodded silently at first not trusting herself to speak. She began hesitantly, "I want him to know in his last few minutes that he's loved and cared for. I don't want him to be afraid."

The rest of Jessica's summer passed in much of the same way. More and more dogs entered the shelter every day; there was always something to do.

One early Monday, the tech. room burst open and in bounded Rocky, followed by Tammy. He broke free and ran to Jessica. Jessica knelt down, and Rocky began slobbering over her face. He looked up at her with those loving eyes, "Hey baby, are you ready for a bath? Are you going home today?"

Jessica cooed this to Rocky but looked at Tammy. Tammy didn't say anything. Jessica looked at Diane. Diane didn't say anything. Jessica stood up. "No," she half whispered, half screamed. Tears were pouring down her face. Jessica looked over at Diane.

"Please Diane, please—God—don't do it."

Diane managed to choke out, "Tammy, Rocky doesn't need a bath today. Bring him back to his kennel."

When Jessica left that day, Diane hugged her good-bye. They both knew she would never be back.
Proud Mama
By Barbara Bixby Putman

In this snapshot you are
So young, yet so old.
I recognize your shy smile and wistful blue eyes.
I could be looking at myself,
But I haven’t known your pain.

At only twenty-two you’d been through so much.
Birthing a baby two months early.
Loving a husband away in an unpopular war.
Singing his praises and defending his service to your pacifist friends.

Almost losing him upon his brief return.
Alternating time between neonatal and adult ICU.
Subsisting on strong coffee made for you by gruff Army nurses
And on stale donuts brought to you by awkward doctors, bearers of bad news.
“‘We’ll fix him up so he can go back. They need him on the lines.’”

Where did you get the strength to go on?
Didn’t you need him too?
Didn’t anyone notice you wasting away?
Size two dresses hung limply off your shoulders.
Your eyes were hollow and your cheeks grew gaunt.

But there you are posing by the baby with the
Bright yellow first birthday bow stuck cockeyed on her head.
You put on the face of the proud mama.
Covering the pain and tears with a layer of
Cheap make-up and a well-rehearsed smile.

“Yes, we are blessed.”
“Thank you for coming.”
“Yes, she is a beautiful baby.”
“Yes, she does have her daddy’s cheeks.”
“Yes, it is sad her daddy can’t be here.”

Wars don’t wait for birthdays.

Wooden Spoon
By Jennifer Blackwell Blue

Outside of such holidays like the dreaded occasions of Thanksgiving and Christmas, when we
were all forced to gather round, you rarely baked. Television told me; magazines illustrated for
me, that you were supposed to bake, happily, for your family. And I was supposed to watch you,
learn from you, and thus mimic you when I married.

I can only recollect a few times: cookies with chocolate chips and a bit of oatmeal mixed in;
brownies with chopped walnuts because Grandma demanded so; and yellow cake without the
chocolate icing that I cried for.

Those instances were as rare as true, genuine, happiness, or as rare as unconditional love, or as
rare as your heartfelt smile.

Baking episodes were never inclusive though I was there. Our eyes did not meet. Your floured
hand never brushed mine leaving speckles of white, flaky, mounds on my caramel hands. Your
words didn’t flow pressing domestic prints upon my mind.

I waited.
Lingerering on red linoleum
and found nothing happened.
My palate was moistened by saliva.
Taste buds dreamed of sweet satisfaction.
My heart yearned for spirit.
But
Momma can’t cook no cakes from scratch.
Boxes trash pile up in the corner.
“Mommy, I can read the words Betty Crocker”
and dat spoon,
tattered and worn
with splintered splints and splits
that I sneak my finger against
and lick
feeling sugar granules
and raw eggs lace my teeth,
dat spoon,
why it look like dat anyway?
Not from the beatings of Kevin’s butt
and surely not from intended use.
What have you done before
wit dat old wooden spoon Momma?
You supposed to tell me.
Last Call
By Megan Fogarty

“Last Call” on Halloween night at Elmer’s Bar. There was a mystical yet jovial feeling in the dimly lit room. The crowd of college students danced to loud music and shared laughs while trying to recognize the few faces disguised by masks and make-up. “Last Call!” the bartender shouted, as he raised his right hand and swiftly rang the bell on the wall three times.

Noise quickly filled the air as the lights flickered on. Everyone was anxiously contemplating which party to attend at the apartment complex down the street. After my roommate, Kim, and I decided to attend the party of a mutual friend, we turned and placed our empty beer bottles on the bar we had been leaning against. We slowly made our way towards the door, inevitably brushing against people and exchanging casual smiles with acquaintances along the way. As we neared the door, I felt someone bump my shoulder. I quickly turned to my right and saw a tall, slender boy. I immediately recognized him from my Art History class because he had seen the car speeding in his direction. Obviously, he hadn’t. His foot was in mid-air about to contact my chest and his head was leaning toward me. “I’ll have to think about it,” Kim said, as he turned to walk away. I felt the wind from his breath and the coldness of his foot as it brushed against my foot. It was as if he had never seen me before.

Parking lot, which was becoming cumbersome as people continued to stagger out of the bar. We continued our shuffle toward the crowded doorway until we eventually made our way into the parking lot, which was becoming cumbersome as people continued to stagger out of the bar. There was a much different feeling outside. The air felt cool and damp as if it were going to rain. “Have a good night!” a police officer said as he grinned, leaning against his car, while monitoring the parking lot. We felt carefree as we started down the street. Kim and I giggled, like little girls, at the prospect of whom we would see at the party. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a man taking two giant leaps toward the middle of the road. He landed on the yellow center lines and paused momentarily. As soon as I realized it was the boy who had bumped me in the bar, my head sharply jolted in his direction. His halt made it appear as though he had seen the car speeding in his direction. Obviously, he hadn’t. His foot was in mid-air about to touch the ground when the flying car lifted his feet out from under him. His limp body abruptly flew onto the hood and then the windshield, sounding like a cardboard box that had been trampled. The car continued to carry him several feet before it flipped off the right side, hitting the ground with a thump.

I covered my mouth as I stood motionless in disbelief. There was an eerie silence. The silence was suddenly broken by the sirens of the police car that had been idle in the Elmer’s parking lot. I had been so captivated by the accident that I hadn’t realized that the car sped away as quickly as it had appeared. Onlookers sobbed in disbelief as an officer began attempts to revive the lifeless body. The few minutes before the ambulance arrived felt like an eternity. They did not even wait for the car to come to a stop. As soon as the ambulance was in sight, they lifted the man into the ambulance. The vehicle was in no apparent hurry as it silently pulled away.

Revival efforts were evidently fruitless as the body was placed on a stretcher and cautiously lifted into the ambulance. The vehicle was in no apparent hurry as it silently pulled away.

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The body began to shake and my head spun like a tornado as a police officer gently shook his head. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t know what happened. I’m just as shocked as you.”

I understood. This is going to be too easy, I think to myself. Sarah and I will spend the next fifteen to twenty minutes touring the time share. We will say ‘No’ when the time comes and then go on about our business taking with us the two free passes to Planet Hollywood and Ripley’s Aquarium.

Jane must have known from the beginning that we are a “no sale.” She knows by now that I am a single mother of two children, both in college. She must realize that we are only here for the passes, but she plows on.

Surprise, she has two children also. “Do you want to see their pictures?” Of course we do. They are also in college, and she knows what I am going through financially. Her sales logic helps her avoid reminding me that she has a husband and I do not. Surprise, she owns a time share and says that at first she was also skeptical about the purchase, but she lets us know it has provided her family with years of fun and enjoyment. Surprise, she used to live in Massachusetts. Surprise, she was a teacher. Surprise, we are the same age. What a coincidence. I fully expect the next surprise will reveal the fact that we are long lost twins.

To Sarah’s credit, she patiently hangs in there while we answer the questions, play the financial games, and tour the half-built facility. Jane is sweet and continues her seemingly non-stop sales pitch. I begin to admire her for being able to memorize all of that information. The only participation she requires is a polite smile or nod of the head to indicate that we are paying attention. We view the holes in the ground. “Visualize the pool and the hot tub,” Jane encourages.

“The club house will have a weight room and a fully equipped gym.” Sarah greets me with a warm, slightly nervous smile and a sincere handshake. She looks out of place among the young, confident sales people dressed in brightly colored polo shirts and khaki shorts milling around the crowded meeting room of the community house.

She directs us to a table in the center of the large room. We are surrounded by similar tables. Each has its own enthusiastic sales person busily enticing prospective buyers, most of whom appear to be white-haired and retired. Along with Jane, Sarah and I also look out of place here. As yet, I do not have white hair and am nowhere near retirement. Sarah is only nineteen.

Jane’s pitch begins. “How are you two doing today? Did you get caught in the rain? Oh my, Coastal Carolina, do you go to school there? Well, Mom, you must be visiting. How nice . . .”, and on she rambles in complete control of the conversation. She pauses only long enough for a yes, a no, or a nod of the head. She is a woman on a mission, and we are it.

“First,” she states firmly, pausing to make sure that she has our complete attention, “let me make one thing perfectly clear. If, for any reason, at the end of this presentation, you have any doubts about joining the hundreds of happy families that have already taken advantage of this five-star resort community and vacation complex, please just say, ‘No.’ Just so we understand one another,” she repeats, “No means no. Other responses such as ‘I’ll have to think about it’ and ‘I need to talk to my husband, banker, lawyer, priest, whatever’ mean no. Just so we understand one another.”

Sarah and I shake our heads. We understand. This is going to be too easy, I think to myself. Sarah and I will spend the next fifteen to twenty minutes touring the time share. We will say ‘No’ when the time comes and then go on about our business taking with us the two free passes to Planet Hollywood and Ripley’s Aquarium.

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“The club house will have a weight room and a fully equipped gym.” Sarah gives me an elbow in the ribs, cracks a smile, and manages to suppress the giggle. Jane does not notice.

Jane is a tall, slender woman with pale white skin and pale blond hair. The hair is thin and is worn in loose short curls in need of a perm. She is wearing a pale blue polyester dress with thin white design. She greets Sarah and me with a warm, slightly nervous smile and a sincere handshake. She looks out of place among the young, confident sales people dressed in brightly colored polo shirts and khaki shorts milling around the crowded meeting room of the community house.

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When we actually see the condo unit, Sarah becomes playful. “Oh, Mom, this could be my room. Won’t this be great for parties? What a view of the intercoastal waterway! How many
people will fit in the Jacuzzi?" Jane perks up.

At this point I feel that we have put enough time into this presentation to earn our free passes. I am ready to go, and I let Jane know that I have seen enough. Back at the community house where our adventure began, Jane chooses a secluded patio table on the verandah where we can close the deal she has worked so hard for. We sit, and she spreads out a huge loose-leaf notebook filled with brightly colored charts that outline the weeks we can choose from and the different payment options.

"Well," she says brightly as though she has no clue about what is coming next, "which weeks would you like to sign up for?"

I reply honestly, "I like your resort. It’s a beautiful place, but I am not interested." I firmly say, "No."

Jane’s face reflects at once surprise and hurt. Her eyes open wide, and her smile drops with the corners of her mouth. Her lower lip quivers slightly. I feel like I have just run over Bambi with my truck. She regroups quickly. "You must understand that I have invested a lot of time in this sale. It will mean my job if I don’t allow my boss to come out and offer you a budget payment plan that might allow you to say. ‘yes.‘"

I take the bait and allow her to bring out her boss, the closer. After his best pitch I again emphatically say, “No” and again the look of surprise, this time on his face. Evidently no one ever says “No” to these people. At this point he escorts Jane back into the community center. She is visibly shaken and appears to be barely hanging on to her composure. After they leave, Sarah and I hypothesize as to what her fate will be: three intensive weeks of sales training; the loss of points towards the salesperson of the year; the rack. We will never know.

As it turned out, the afternoon was not totally wasted. We did eventually get our free passes, and that afternoon with Jane taught me some very valuable lessons: I will never again be conned into looking at a time share; nothing is really free; and “No” doesn’t always mean “no”!

---

The Station Stop

By Joanne Gertler

Chattering, clackety, clacking,
On and on about Mommy, Daddy, Thomas the Tank Engine.
Singing “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad.”
to the darkened inside and outside empty audience.
Long, restless nights
Little Joshua, big adenoids.

Exhaustion rolls over into sleep.
Snoring as regular as the clackety clack of the train on the tracks
anticipating the station stop.

Where’s my pacifier?
I want some juice.
I want to watch a video.
Tickety tock, 3 o’clock.

All aboard the Snoring Express.
Thomas on the t.v.
Joshua in Daddy’s chair
Adenoids in Joshua’s head,
Anxiety in Mommy’s heart.

All aboard, last call.
The eyelids shut,
no more video allowed on board.
We’re off again, clackety clack.
A struggling breath
In, out, in, out.

Where is Dr. Sawyer?
He’ll be here soon.
Thomas clutched in one hand,
Gordon the Express Train in the other.
Through the tunnel,
Over the trestle bridge,
through the pasture,
to the operating room.
Dr. Sawyer unclogs Thomas’s smokestack.

He cradles in my arms yelping like a wounded puppy.
Croaking for Mommy.
Morphine, heavy, cozy,
Joshua nestles, protected.
Claire Ecole

By Chris Horton

Claire Ecole was an attractive woman. Almost everyone who knew her agreed. She worked well, too. As a matter of fact, people who knew her were starting to call her an institution. And that, Claire felt, was exactly the problem. She was beginning to feel old, tired around the edges. She sensed she could benefit from a little fine tuning. At first, this feeling had just been a minor thought, like a small itch needing to be scratched. Lately, though, it had become an obsession that consumed her every thought. So she had decided to visit Dr. Ed Yewcator, a plastic surgeon.

Dr. Ed Yewcator was well respected. He had worked with tens, hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of "Claire's." And yet, he still approached each new job as a challenge. He saw his patients as special and unique individuals and worked tirelessly to bring out the best qualities in each of them. He brought enthusiasm and freshness to his work each day. People who were especially fond of him, and there were many, just called him Dr. Ed.

Dr. Ed had indeed made many good suggestions. He'd explained to Claire that not only would a nip here or a tuck there give her a new look, but that it would not be too painful. Further, he'd noted she was right to be looking for a little tightening up. It would be much easier for him to do it now. Since she hadn't let the problems progress too far, he wouldn't have to do as much cutting.

Finally, the day of the surgery had arrived. Since Claire respected and trusted Dr. Ed, she wasn't the least bit nervous. In fact, she was exhilarated. Excitement crackled through the room as Claire was wheeled in for the operation. Many of the people in the room had known her for so long that she was almost like family to them. They couldn't wait to see the new and improved Claire. All of the necessary preliminaries were accomplished fairly quickly, and the gas that would put her under was quickly administered by Dr. Prince, the anesthesiologist.

Dr. Prince was a pal to Dr. Ed. Better than that, he was a very careful man, and so Dr. Trencher had chosen him especially for the job. There were no surprises when you worked with Dr. Prince. He kept very good track of the pulse of things and always gave you plenty of warning if vital signs started to signal a problem. People respected Dr. Prince. Many considered him to be even wiser than Dr. Ed.

Everyone gathered around the patient, ready to start. The assistant handed the scalpel to Dr. Ed. Without warning, the door suddenly flew open and all eyes turned to the doorway. Their mouths dropped in awe. For there, bigger than life, stood Dr. Theo Ree, head of the hospital, properly gloved and gowned.

Dr. Ree was a very smart man. They all knew this because that's what they'd been told. People all over the world had heard of him because he'd had many books published many times. The truth was that nobody had ever seen him. He stayed in his office way up on the top floor and rarely ventured out. Since he had moved up there, he had never actually come down to the basement operating rooms as far as anyone present could recollect. And some of them had been around a very long time. Nobody knew whether they liked him or not.

By now everyone in the room had assumed an air of deference. If Dr. Ree had come this far, surely he would have something of great importance to teach them. He must know some little tricks about nips and tucks that would make their lives easier and would benefit their patients. There was a subtle shift at the operating table to make room for him. Dr. Ed suddenly found himself pushed to the side of the table as Ree stepped to the center. Without even conferring with Dr. Ed about the case, he asked for a scalpel.
“Give me the #12 blade,” he said to the assistant, Mrs. Parente. “Both Niblet and Bolan seem to favor that in all the literature. They say the fine point gives a nice clean line that’s easy to stitch together later.”

The assistant gingerly picked up the blade. Just as she extended it to him, Dr. Ree spoke again. “Wait a second, Fiskar and Jones both suggest the #10 blade. They feel that since it’s heavier, it’s better for cutting away at some of the deeper tissue.”

With that, the assistant deftly slipped the #12 blade off of the scalp and replaced it with the #10 blade. Just as she placed it into Ree’s waiting hand, he seemed to pause.

“Wait a minute,” he mused aloud. “I seem to recall reading something by Dangle and Leech that favors the curved blade. Better switch that to a #15 blade.”

By now the assistant was starting to get confused. Although she wasn’t even sure what was going on, she dutifully tried to do what she was told. Meanwhile, blades were everywhere on her tray, and she was beginning to feel nervous. Fortunately Dr. Ed stepped in at that moment.

“Dr. Ree, I’ve never used a #15 blade for this procedure. I’m afraid the curve might be a little too dramatic a cut for what we’re trying to do here.”

“That’s the trouble with you guys, Yewcator,” boomed Dr. Ree. “You just don’t stay current with the literature. However, you brought up an excellent point. Why not conduct a study? We can set it up right here now. I’ll try each of the blades in a different location. First, I’ll need to get my assistant, Miss Graff, so she can do a detailed map of the patient.” With that, he turned to the head nurse and had her call up to Miss Graff.

Everyone stood around waiting until Miss Graff could come down from the high offices. There was a fair amount of shifting and sighing which Dr. Ree seemed unaware of. Dr. Prince was getting particularly nervous. His patient had already been under the anesthesia for almost an hour, and still they had not even been able to start the procedure. But her vital signs were strong, so he said nothing.

Finally, everything was in order. Dr. Ree asked for the marking pen so he could decide where to make the cuts.

“Whit, Knit and Flair all favor lateral cuts above the midline,” he mused aloud. “Or we could use the transactional cut. Trouble is, it’s a little old fashioned and consequently out of favor now. On the other hand, Fencing says the longitudinal cut is much better socially. You know, the bikini line and all that,” he finished up, giving a knowing wink to Dr. Trencher.

“Why curved?” the doctor raised his eyebrows in challenge to her choice.

“Gi ve me the #12 blade,” he said to the assistant, Mrs. Parente. “Both Niblet and Bolan seem to favor that in all the literature. They say the fine point gives a nice clean line that’s easy to suture the wounds. Mistakenly thinking this would be easy, she handed him the #12 blade.”

Ree glared at him. “That’s the trouble with you, Yewcator.”

Dr. Ree. Finally, he had given up and grown quieter and quieter, lost in self doubt, reevaluation and fear.

None of the rest of the people on the case knew where to turn. They had always looked to Dr. Ed as an expert in his field. Yet, over the years they’d heard so much about Theo Ree that they had expected to get clear answers and guidelines from him about the best ways to go about a nip and tuck. By now it had become apparent that this was not going to happen. People began to work in grim silence. Even Dr. Ed seemed to have lost his usual enthusiasm and confidence. That had them worried the most.

Dr. Prince sat at his monitors becoming more and more apprehensive. As the procedure stretched on, he had noticed several warning signs that meant his patient was weakening. Each time he had spoken up, Dr. Ree had made light of his concerns and had continued on in much the same manner. Worse, he could no longer count on reliable Dr. Ed. He seemed to have withdrawn from the whole procedure and was no longer actively offering suggestions or even questioning the overbearing Theo Ree. Furthermore, because of the extensive changes Ree had demanded, Dr. Prince was beginning to worry about blood loss. He had started to notice a drop in blood pressure, but he decided he would ride this out. From the looks of things, they would soon be able to close the wounds and get out of there. Only then would he breathe easier.

The poor assistant was by now worn to a frazzle. For one thing, Dr. Ree was more difficult to understand than a hundred Dr. Yewcatos would have been. He seemed to delight in using big words just for the sake of hearing himself speak. She’d had a hard time just trying to understand his point. The whole exercise was beginning to feel chaotic to her. Throughout the procedure a steady supply of instruments had been asked for and received only to be tossed back at her. She nervously eyed the pile of discarded instruments, wondering what was next.

She didn’t have long to wonder. Dr. Ree quickly snapped her back to attention by asking for a needle to suture the wounds. Mistakenly thinking this would be easy, she handed him the usual choice.

“Why curved?” the doctor raised his eyebrows in challenge to her choice.

This seemed to momentarily rouse Dr. Ed from his stupor. Here he at least felt on very solid ground. “Works gives support to it in his article in a recent copy of Lancet,” he replied, congratulating himself smugly for having found the time to sneak in some journal reading.

“Obviously, you did not read the most recent follow up by Debunk in Needles,” Dr. Ree shot back sarcastically.

Dr. Ed had to admit he hadn’t. So Dr. Ree once again usurped the position of power. Muttering to himself, he requested not only a curved and a straight needle but the ball-tipped Lancet, as well. Turning to Miss Graff in a leisurely manner, he proceeded to instruct her in a precise, detailed way how this should all be entered into the data.

Suddenly, Dr. Prince’s voice interrupted from behind the screen. “Can we hurry this along? I’m starting to worry about the patterns I’m seeing. The patient seems to be steadily losing ground.”

Annoyed, Dr. Ree turned to the assistant and asked her, in a languorous tone, to thread all three types of needles with catgut so that he could start to close the wounds.

“I’m sorry, Doctor,” she replied. “We don’t stock that type of suture routinely anymore. All of our surgeons ask for pre-threaded chromic needles now.”
Doctor Ed was just about to add how this was preferable because of the strength of the chronic and the speed of the pre-threading when Dr. Ree cut in venomously. "Obviously all of your surgeons have not read Esoter's treatise on suture strength."

No one argued. Instead the procedure was stopped once again so that an orderly could be sent to the far end of the hospital to ferret through some discarded cabinets in search of Ree's Holy Grail. Triumphant, he returned with the trophy. Taking all sterile precautions, this was transferred to the doctor, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief that the closure could now proceed.

"You've got to hurry," said Dr. Prince with an unmistakable edge to his voice that Dr. Ed could not recall having heard before. "We're starting to lose the patient."

Dr. Ree's only response was to frown his brow and stare thoughtfully at the gaping wounds.

"What are you doing?" Dr. Trencher questioned in near panic, his voice seeming to rise an octave with each word.

"I'm trying to recall what I've read in the literature about the advantages and disadvantages of each of the styles of stitching. I can't seem to remember whether a running stitch is more in favor now or the purse string stitch. I know there are obvious strengths and weaknesses to each one as indicated by Dawdle. I just wish I could be more precise."

"Please," coaxed a worried Dr. Prince from just behind the anesthesia screen, "do something and do it fast. Things are starting to get critical here."

"Take note, Miss Graff. We will try a different stitch on each of the first two wounds and a combination of both stitches on the third wound," Dr. Ree called over his shoulder.

The stitching, of course, took much longer than anyone would have anticipated. When the closure was completed, everyone did have to admit that the stitches looked especially fine. They were just starting to think that maybe Dr. Ree had given them some good pointers after all, when another and another. A steady stream of winged creatures emerged from their secret hiding places and disappeared into the air. At this point, all had given up hope and were just glad to have the closure finished. Incision 3 was drenched by a wave of self-doubt and confusion. A second ago she had felt like the one who had it all together, the one who knew what was important and what wasn't. The tension of her conflicting emotions cemented her feet to the ground, and she had only one option: to watch, to observe, to soak it all in.

Gradually the seeds disappeared and with them the birds, but the look of deep contentment never left the old man's face. She shook her head almost as if she needed to wake herself from a dream and turned to walk away. Her movements were slow and deliberate. Off to the side, she heard the soft call of a pigeon in the bushes and the voice of a vendor selling his goods. The faint aroma of roses drifted in the air, and she felt the breeze play with her hair. It even seemed to happen. Slowly at first a bird landed on his outstretched arm and nibbled at the seeds, then another and another. A steady stream of winged creatures emerged from their secret hiding places and congregated on his outstretched arm, dusty feet, disheveled coat, floppy hat, and drooping shoulders. It was as if he had sounded the dinner bell and every bird in the park had heard it. She was drenched by a wave of self-doubt and confusion. A second ago she had felt like the one who had it all together, the one who knew what was important and what wasn't. The tension of her conflicting emotions cemented her feet to the ground, and she had only one option: to watch, to observe, to soak it all in.

She stood frozen in place trying to comprehend this ridiculous scene when it began to happen. Slowly at first a bird landed on his outstretched arm and nibbled at the seeds, then another and another. A steady stream of winged creatures emerged from their secret hiding places and congregated on his outstretched arm, dusty feet, disheveled coat, floppy hat, and drooping shoulders. It was as if he had sounded the dinner bell and every bird in the park had heard it. She was drenched by a wave of self-doubt and confusion. A second ago she had felt like the one who had it all together, the one who knew what was important and what wasn't. The tension of her conflicting emotions cemented her feet to the ground, and she had only one option: to watch, to observe, to soak it all in.

The walkway wound through the park, cutting across sprawling lush green lawns and elegant gardens. This oasis held surprises tucked just out of sight, and she wanted to visit them all. She took a moment's break to pull out the map and plan her route. She was to meet Maggie, her traveling companion, by Queen's Gate at one o'clock so they could embark on their afternoon sight-seeing tour of London. She had one hour to see all of the important features of Hyde Park. First she'd stop at the Serpentine, and if time permitted, she might take a boat ride on the lake. Next, she would visit the Italian Gardens, then wind her way around to Peter Pan's statue. Feeling satisfied with her efficient and thorough plan-of-attack, she set out at her notorious power-walk pace. She rounded the corner, and there he was, standing under an enormous maple tree.

It was his clothes that she noticed first. A tied, baggy, woolen coat, which had lost several of its buttons, hung limply over his small frame. His untidy grey hair was partially covered by a soiled, brimmed hat. A thick stubble of grey hid his aging weather-beaten face. "Poverty, homelessness, drunkard" were the words that raced across her mind, but the one feature which distracted her from his shabby, pathetic appearance was his smile. "You don't have time for this diversion," she thought to herself. "He's just a beggar." His smile shone with such silent gentleness that it pulled her off course like a magnet. His wardrobe shouted a warning to her, but his smile invited lingering, and she couldn't resist this curious attraction. From a paper bag, he grabbed handfuls of seeds and evenly spread them out on the top of his shoes, brim of his hat, and the surface of his shoulders. After replenishing his supply of seeds, he tucked the bag in his left pocket and spread seeds along his outstretched arm. The last step of his ritual was to open the palm of his clenched fist upward toward the sky. Again her mind searched for an explanation, and she thought, "He's a lunatic, a madman; he's deranged."

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The park bench suddenly looked too inviting to resist and pangs of hunger registered, so she pulled her lunch from her hip back and began nibbling on a sandwich. Without thinking, she removed a slice of bread and crumbled it into tiny pieces; she placed a few on each shoe, a couple in her lap, and the rest she left in her outstretched palm which she lifted upward toward the sky.
Sleepless in a Campground
By Kristie Leonard

I pray her mind will be lulled by the nearby brook
(Finally...)

And then she gets out of bed to get—
A NOTEBOOK? WHAT FOR?
Forget it, this time she's on her own.

Gentle brook nearby
Mind teased with an idea
Of a poem.

But wait, now almost semiconscious
Body is relaxing
But mind suddenly wants to write.
Damn, where is that notebook?

Write? Now?
With no light?
Am I insane
Or merely too willing to bargain for unconsciousness?

Jotting this down
Feeling more relaxed
Let go mind—
Of snippets of songs, images of today.
Just One
By Sarah Malinoski

Driving along the winding, suburban streets, the young woman had wondered why the shelter worker felt the need to warn her. She kept hearing the words, “Don’t be discouraged,” “It’s low income,” and “The mother tries hard.” The young woman knew the whole adventure was to fulfill her own indulgence, but she couldn’t figure out what the big deal was. She had volunteered in college, all sorts of places, so such warnings were not necessary. She had worked in soup kitchens and prisons. She felt ready for anything.

Finding the dingy, white house was no problem; however, the shelter worker hadn’t quite captured its truth. The living conditions were deplorable! The six-family tenement had not been cared for in years. The yard, devoid of grass, showed no signs of a proper play area. Debris littered the yard as the only evidence of the occupants. In the backyard were abandoned cars, warning off any wanderings in their direction. Off to the side was a tattered old dog house with a rusted chain snaking out of its mouth. The young woman paused in respect for the size of the creature which at some time must have been attached to the loose end. Broken toys and shattered glass were all that remained of the childhood hopes and dreams.

The assigned apartment was on the third floor, and the young woman wondered if she had been transported to another part of the world. This was not what she had expected. Looking up toward her destination, she saw the young faces pressed against the panes. She really hadn’t been prepared for this. People couldn’t live like this, not in her town. As she reluctantly climbed the rickety exterior staircase, her apprehensions quickened. As a strong ammonia stench overwhelmed her, she was shocked into the realization that the people who lived here used the stairs as the dumping grounds for old cat litter. Disbelievingly, the young woman tried to imagine what type of person was naive or oblivious enough to simply toss the used box out her doorway. The stench stung her nose and clouded her mind...she was there to do something good? Would she really want to accept this responsibility? What had the care been like? Was there abuse? Neglect? Damage? Undernourishment? All the stereotypical fears flooded her mind, obscuring her judgment and reason. Cheering young voices spilling from the top floor window jolted her back. She remembered she was there to make just one life better.

Inside the apartment the activity was incessant. Little legs and bodies were everywhere. Some clung to her looking up with pleading blue eyes. An operation would be needed to straighten out those eyes. Others rambunctiously chased about the room, while still others stared at the young stranger blankly as they sat on top of the kitchen table. With her head spinning, the young woman let the flurry of activity blur her intent. Nothing made sense. How could she have any influence on this? Dirt and filth were everywhere. Children and animals were everywhere, stepping and sitting in soiled papers on the floor and table. None had been bathed, and the fleas played hopscotch along legs and backs. She wondered how her simple act could improve this.

But, her humanity woke her purpose. It was the least she could do. Looking more closely, she realized how cute they all were. There was potential beyond the filth. The mother of the children babbled anxiously about her attempts, because it was hard when she had to work each night until three or four in the morning. The mother confessed, “There’s only so much I can do. The little ones need so much. Please take one. You make the choice. I just can’t keep them all.”

Make a choice? Where to begin? This was a mission of the heart, her heart. The worker at the shelter said it was a big help, but how could she take only one? All of the young needed attention. They needed to know they shouldn’t sit or walk on top of a table. They needed to learn not to sleep in their own shit. Shit—that’s shit they’re stepping in—barefoot! Didn’t anybody care? The ugly green crusted to their noses; she hated to think what was embedded under their blackened fingernails and underwear. Blackened underwear was all they wore. They needed more than this. All of them, clinging, pleading and stepping in shit. And she was supposed to choose only one. How? Just one—one free puppy.
The staircase leading up into the attic was dark and musty. It was the type of attic that contained special items left behind by two people who valued passing on their heritage and much-loved belongings. The attic contained many different sized wooden pieces of furniture, old rifles, and baby furniture. Against the far wall stood a huge medieval-style oak armoire which looked as if it were guarding important treasures. It contained an intricately carved cedar hope chest that was nestled alongside with a couple of old, leather-bound Bibles written in German.

One look at the chest and I was immediately drawn to open the lid. Inside of this beautifully carved cedar wood chest was a stack of cotton cloth quilt tops. They had been specially embroidered with brilliantly colored thread. The collection was eclectic, and there wasn’t any system to the chaos of tops.

The first top in the collection had been made up from a gathering of squares. The familiar looking squares must have been painstakingly cut from unwanted or overly used clothing. Some pieces were thin and worn as if to represent a much loved pair of pants. Other pieces were stiff and firm to show how young the cloth was. In the center of the quilt top was an embroidered collection of yellow and red flowers. They looked much like the flowers growing in my garden. The most upsetting detail found on this top was a stain. It was a small stain. It looked like a piece of cotton cloth quilt tops. They had been specially embroidered with brilliantly colored thread. The collection was eclectic, and there wasn’t any system to the chaos of tops.

The most upsetting detail found on this top was a stain. It was a small stain. It looked like a brown snowflake shaped spot that forever stained the material. I could just make out the faint edges of the outline.

I could visualize my grandmother’s strong yet bony finger being pierced by the needle and her not feeling nor noticing the trickle of blood. She was a strong woman who had endured the pain and scarring of her hands from quilting throughout the years. I’m sure the stain went unnoticed until it was too late. Now, that stain would never be forgotten or go unnoticed because it was the first quilt top in the chest.

I could tell that each quilt top contained a story, and the quilter would help continue this story as she pieced together the artwork with fill and colorful fabric for the back. Each top had been creatively sewn and embroidered by grandma and her sister, Theresa.

I know about this hope chest quite intimately. This chest was fill with sweat, tears, hopes and dreams. I know this because every child, grandchild, and great grandchild received a wedding quilt made by Grandma.

Grandma would secretly find out what colors the child favored and choose the quilting designs that she felt defined that child’s personality. Her choices might have been curves and flowers or sharp lines and geometric shapes. She would then piece together the creation, quilt it, and tuck it away safely for the “sacred” event. She did this for every member of the family.

Each quilt originated from this cedar chest that had been tucked inside of the huge, oak armoire up in the dark, musty attic in Jasper, Indiana.
shed, removing the laundry from the drying line, securing the tether of the two water buffalo. There was little talking, but Ren Ming did not need to be told. A typhoon was coming. The angry, spiraling winds would destroy homes and farms, and the violent rains would flood the countryside. Ren Ming shivered and clutched the bamboo flute closer to his chest. He felt braver and ran to help his father gather the rest of his tools from the yard.

When the winds first began to blow, the rice paddy’s grasses only rippled. The winds increased, and the grasses began to sway. Ren Ming began to play his flute. The song mingled with the rain, and Ren Ming could feel the storm. The savage winds intermingled with the sweet, pure notes. The storm and song were joined. Ren Ming shivered as he felt the power of the weather and then quieted with the comfort of the song.

The storm and Ren Ming’s song lasted for hours. When the rice paddy’s grasses only rippled, Ren Ming’s song quieted, and Ren Ming fell asleep.

He awoke and through the window saw his parents on the mountainside. Every perfect, round cabbage had been ripped from the hillside by the winds and the rain and was strewn helter-skelter. There would be no produce to take to market this month. The two outside shelters had collapsed and lay in a pile of sticks and grasses. One water buffalo had broken loose and would need to be found.

The house was very quiet. Ren Ming again felt the strange emptiness begin to grow within him. He picked up his flute and blew. The song was first long and low. He continued to play, and the song changed. The notes began to quicken, climb higher, become louder and more joyous. Ren Ming felt no emptiness. He felt no hunger. He stood, tucked the flute in his belt and ran out to the mountainside to help replant the cabbage.

A year passed. Two crops of cabbage were planted and harvested. It was time once again for the Autumn Moon Festival. Ren Ming could not wait to return to the city and find the peddler. Ren Ming needed to share the magic of his flute.

He found the peddler in the same place as last year. There he stood with his pots and pans, lunch tins, straw brooms, children’s toys, sharp knives and incense burners, but no flutes. Ren Ming had bought the only flute. And now Ren Ming began to speak excitedly of its magic, of its friendship, of its teachings, of its beauty. The peddler raised a single finger to his lips and hushed Ren Ming’s words, Ren Ming fell silent. He understood. He lifted his flute to his lips and began to play. The song grew and encircled Ren Ming and the peddler. It circled in and out and around their space, filling the emptiness. The peddler smiled wide and deep, and Ren Ming had found his song.

Winter Warmth
By Marybeth Sposito

At 5 a.m. the sun awakens the old farm in Vermont. Peter steps onto the porch to get wood for the fire, and the crisp air blasts through the door. Eventually the sun will warm up the yard, but for now the light simply glistens on the glass covered snow and bounces back into the sky. Birds chirp faintly as if to save their voices for when the air is not so cold. The cows amble about in the snow covered field puffing steam through their noses. As my husband walks down the driveway to the mailbox for the newspaper, I hear the snow crunching under his feet.

Having slept in my socks, I slide from under the plush down comforter on the bed. I wrap the flannel robe around my shoulders and shuffle down to the kitchen while the kids are sleeping. The coffee pot has just begun to rumble and hiccup, and the dense aroma of Maxwell House permeates the room. Frost frames each pane of the window, and snowflakes, frozen on the glass, paint a picturesque landscape. Through the larger window I can see Pete scattering seeds for the birds, but he is far in the distance. The house is warm in contrast to the bitterness outside, and it is silent. There are no muffled sounds of voices or footsteps from our sons’ room just yet, and for a moment I sense utter peace and contentment.
My son, Jonathan, usually comes to dinner once a week. He has been living in an off-campus apartment with three roommates for a year now, and I know that they do not keep their refrigerator stocked with food although it's usually filled with plenty of beer. Because he has been in culinary school and presently works as a cook, he seems to like visiting us to prepare food and certainly to use the time to do mounds of laundry.

Every time I see him, it becomes increasingly harder to remember the eager baby in the picture in our living room—the one with rosy cheeks, soft yellow ringlets, wide questioning blue eyes, and chubby knees with little creases. Today, he is a lanky twenty-two-year-old who is over six feet tall and who probably forgets he used to grab me and call me his "love heart." He definitely knows his own mind, and I'm sure he doesn't remember following his sister around so faithfully saying, "I just wait 'til Katie tells me what to do, then I do it." He also bears little resemblance to the "preppy" but rebellious teenager who grew six inches between his freshman and sophomore year and who had chosen an assortment of questionable friends. Today, he is more focused, actually having completed a college semester successfully. I have to remind myself of that accomplishment when I cringe at his appearance which reflects that of a throwback to the Grateful Dead era. To me, he looks scruffy, wearing a rope necklace, disintegrating sandals and, on his chin, the wisp of fringe, his thick curls slicked into a ponytail. The restaurants who have hired him do not appear to stress specific attire. Fortunately, my parents visit us rarely, and I'm glad because most of the time, I try not to think about how my father's critical eye would peruse him. They do not think I have done the best job raising my son.

Oddly enough, twenty years ago being a mother was definitely a full-time job for me. I took it seriously, I stayed home, I read lots of books on child caring. I found developmental play groups and the best pediatrician for my children. I researched nursery schools, planned elaborate birthday parties, and cleaned extensively. I did everything I was supposed to do. And it wasn't ever enough.

I can still remember the effort I made to make holidays significant and memorable for my children. It was always so important, too important to me, to have everything perfect and not to forget any components of the rituals associated with the holidays. Easter, for example, included big baskets of jelly beans and marshmallow chicks, and plastic egg containers filled with promised secrets and treasure. We took early morning photos of new Easter outfits—crisp linen coats, straw hats with daisies, checkered suits with short pants and knee socks. We went to Valles for Easter dinner the year my son was two, and I put "Big Boy Underoos" on him instead of the bulky diaper which would definitely detract from the neat effect of his suit pants. It was supposed to be a great privilege for him, but Jonathan didn't quite grasp the "big boy" concept. He promptly wet the pants, leaving a wide puddle under his booster seat which continued to drip over the naugahyde bench onto the floor. Desperately, I dumped a glass of water over the table hoping to camouflage the "mistake" into a legitimate spill. How could I have tried to make him ready to be toilet trained just because I was ready?

Yesterday, my son left a bumper sticker on my kitchen table with the following note: "Mom, I thought you would like this. Love, Jon." The bumper sticker was an animal rights one that he probably bought at the Grateful Dead Revival Concert he attended. It was a little gesture, but I could picture him leaving his safe circle of friends to purchase something for his mother that he thought she would like. And, the bumper sticker slogan represents something that he does not necessarily believe in, but he knows I do. I need to remind myself that Jonathan has to make his own way, that his choices do not necessarily reflect on me. He is who he is, and he has to pursue his own goals when he is ready.
Steam tantalizingly dances, understanding the seductive power of each gyration.

Thick zucchini cooks in tomatoes' oozing juicing.
Peppers and potato close their eyes and bump and grind to a slow rhythmic boil, while a hungry husband waits.

Will he sip savor swallow your complexities?

Mangia mi amore

Giambrotti
By Chester Washburn

Flickers of light glimmered from the dangling diamonds on her ears. Her silken skin exuded the sweet aroma of Tresore perfume. Glistening eyes revealed fanciful hopes of an enjoyable evening out. She was almost ready. She reached for her hairbrush and began to smooth out her silken strands with long, gentle strokes. As the white bristles massaged downwards, a sense of peace and security flooded her soul. She remembered feeling this way before. Her hand lowered the brush away from her head, and the memory of days long gone took over.

She remembered him gently stroking her soft blonde hair with the soft bristles of the blue brush gripped firmly in his callused hand. It was just as he had the last time, caressing downward from the roots to the ends. The longer it took, the greater the shine and smoother the touch. She sat in his lap on the recliner picking at the tearing vinyl arm while he continued his task. Oh, how special she felt. It was her grandfather's loving touch that made her feel loved: the warmth of his touch, the love in his kiss, the warmth in his embrace.

Each time was always the same. Part of the weekend trip to Fall River was the Saturday dinner at Tamarack's. The hustle and bustle of the family members scurrying to get ready was chaotic. There was always yelling. "Where is my belt?" "I can't find my other shoe!" "Can someone please zip me up?" "What time is it?" "I need the bathroom!" The excitement permeated through the house, and yet unmindful of the chaos, he continued to brush, and she cuddled closer. His love blanketed in her tranquility.

A knock at the door interrupted the woman's thoughts. Sorrowfully, she put the brush down with the memory of the serene oasis encountered only in her grandfather's lap.

An Oasis
By Melanie Widman

"Mangia mi amore"