

The Metropolitan



First Meeting Digital photograph Kayla Swain

A Magazine of Writing
by Students
at Metropolitan Community College

2013

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by Students
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“Anger was washed away in the river along with any
obligation.”

Ernest Hemingway

The Metropolitan 2013

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The Metropolitan publishes all types of academic and literary writing, including descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive works, as well as creative prose and poetry. We encourage writings from across the disciplines and also welcome visual art. Our goal is to showcase the best of the many voices, styles, and subjects MCC writers and readers find meaningful and to support critical thinking, creativity, and expression at Metropolitan Community College.

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2013 Writing Awards

For her short story “The Power of Belief,” Malissa Thomas is the winner of The Metropolitan 2013 Prize for Student Writing, a 13.5-credit-hour tuition remission. The first runner-up, Sarah Buettenback, is awarded 9 credit hours tuition remission for her poem “One Summer Day.” The second runner-up, James DeSoe, receives 4.5 credit hours tuition remission for his essay “Reflections from a Rearview Mirror.”

The Power of Belief

Malissa Thomas

Marta Davis woke up dead on a crisp Friday morning in September. She wasn’t aware of her passing until she opened the morning paper. The obituary was so small that, had she not habitually read every word of the local newspaper daily, she might have missed it. As it was, she had to read it twice before she believed it.

Davis, Marta L. (nee Wilson)

Ms. Davis died unexpectedly yesterday evening. She was predeceased by her husband Stanley, a longtime pillar of the town community and dedicated doctor of orthopedics. She was 54. Services for Ms. Davis will be held on Saturday at 3pm at Greater Memorial Cemetery. No reception will follow.

Immediately, she concluded someone had made a terrible mistake, and even though it cut into her carefully arranged day, Marta decided that a visit to the paper’s office was in order. It was only just across town, after all, and a personal visit was much more impactful than a call or a letter. She had a natural charisma—*grit*, her daddy called it—that people found difficult to ignore.

Dressed in her Sunday best right down to the hat and gloves, Marta stepped outside, carefully locked her front door, double-checked the lock, and then headed down her porch steps. Her tightly rolled, silver curls were arranged tastefully and neatly under the hat’s wide brim, and her makeup was dabbed on perfectly. An emergency was no cause to go running out of the house without first being put together. Her mother always used to say that steady eyeliner was a sign of a steady mind.

A September cold snap was passing through, and the flower beds so carefully planted around her porch and along the length of the walk from her house to the street were withering. Even so, her little manicured lawn and perfectly planned landscaping still shone out among the rather lackluster offerings of her close neighbors. In spite of ample advice she’d given them, the Howards on her left and the Martins on her right still had

skimpy flower beds and poorly placed trees, to say nothing of their diagonally cut lawns. Dreadful.

In a town as small as Evans, the local paper—if one could even call it that—ran mistakes so frequently Marta marveled that anyone took the paper seriously at all. She wrote the staff letters frequently, pointing out their errors and inconsistencies. They never replied, but the lack of response didn't deter her. She considered it her civic duty to provide corrections when corrections were necessary.

The office of the *Evans Gazette* was located in the center of town about five minutes' walk from Marta's house. The building it now occupied was once a barn that had later been converted into a meeting hall before it found its final calling as a newspaper office. Marta remembered every iteration except the original. That was before her time. Somehow, she imagined she could still smell livestock whenever she approached it. She wrinkled her nose slightly.

The reception area for the *Gazette* was no more than a young woman sitting behind a small desk with a phone and a few sets of filing cabinets behind her. A couple of mismatched, wicker chairs were set back against the wall opposite the desk, and a small table was wedged in between them with a copy of the day's paper sitting on it. Any visitors kept waiting longer than five or ten minutes were going to be terribly uncomfortable, Marta thought.

She didn't take a seat; she walked right up to the desk and waited patiently for the girl to acknowledge her. The receptionist was a slim brunette in her late twenties. She held the phone to her ear with one hand while the other hand tapped a pen against the desktop in an annoying rhythm. After a moment, when it seemed that she had not been noticed, Marta primly cleared her throat. The girl on the phone kept right on chatting, apparently having a lively discussion about weekend plans.

"I'd like to speak to your employer, please," Marta said finally, raising her voice just slightly to be heard over the endless prattle. The girl never even looked her way. "Excuse me," she tried again, louder still. The receptionist went right on chattering, and she swiveled her chair to turn herself away from Marta entirely,

her attention focused on the call and now the contents of her purse.

The door to the back production area opened, and the paper's editor came through the door to the reception desk. At last! A responsible adult she could talk to. Arthur was a slight man with a receding hairline and round-lensed glasses that slipped down his nose at every turn. He had terrible taste in receptionists and no sense whatsoever of what news was fit to print, but she had always considered him to be a reasonable sort in spite of his obvious flaws.

"Arthur, thank goodness! I've been standing here asking to speak to someone for ages," she told him, frowning pointedly in the direction of the receptionist who promptly put her phone conversation on hold the moment she saw the editor appear.

"Lizzie, has Reverend Edwards called back yet?" Arthur asked the girl, reaching up to push his glasses back with a fingertip.

"Not yet, boss. Sorry," the girl told him.

"Arthur," Marta started again. She stepped closer and thumped one small, gloved hand down on the reception desk. The thump rattled the smaller objects on the desk and sent one of the receptionist's pens rolling off onto the floor. Neither one turned their head. "Arthur, did you hear me? I have a very serious issue I need to discuss with you."

The conversation between the editor and the young receptionist never faltered. They went on just as easily as if Marta weren't even there. Bewildered, Marta watched Arthur finish speaking with the receptionist and then retreat back into the production area. The toe of his shoe bumped the pen on the floor and sent it skittering across the hardwood as he closed the door behind him. After she stood there for several minutes, Marta shook herself, carefully straightened her hat, and turned around to walk out in a huff. It was obvious that she would find no help there. Well, she'd just see how the *Gazette* liked it when she involved the law.

The sheriff's office was minutes from the *Gazette* building. Sheriff Charles Daniels had been one of her husband's oldest friends. He'd become somewhat less reliable about visits and

returning phone calls in the last few years, but there had been a time when he was over once a week for dinner and a game of gin rummy with Marta and Stanley. She remembered those evenings fondly, not just because she missed her dear, departed husband, but because of how enjoyable it was to have those lengthy chats with Charles and Stanley about so many interesting topics: religion, politics, finance. Marta had opinions on them all and could expound—at length—when given half a chance.

At the sheriff's office, Marta marched up and demanded to speak to the sheriff himself. Not that there were many levels of command to work through to get to him. The town of Evans was small enough that the entire complement of currently employed police officers and staff could comfortably fit in the foyer of Marta's house and still have room left over. The sheriff had two deputies working under him and a young man who answered phones and filed paperwork for them. In the rare event that they needed additional manpower for anything, they had to call out to larger cities for assistance. Fortunately, in the many years Marta lived in Evans, no such emergency had ever arisen.

It was the young man behind the desk right now. Marta couldn't remember his name, either, but she knew him by sight. The poor boy had such an unfortunate case of acne. She kept an eye out when reading her women's magazines for suggested treatments, and every time she saw him, she offered him the suggestions. Perhaps it wasn't Christian of her to be so suspicious, but she didn't think he'd tried even one of them.

Marta tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear and announced herself. It shocked her to once again be on the receiving end of silence. His head stayed bent over the files he was sorting, apparently oblivious to her presence. She knew perfectly well that that boy didn't have any sort of hearing problem. It was he who'd listened to her pour out every detail of her battle with her previous neighbors to the right before the Martins moved in. The gnarly, old crab apple tree in their yard grew so unruly that it completely overshadowed Marta's begonias planted along the fence. The ensuing argument over the tree lasted for nearly a year and only ended when the neighbors abruptly moved away and Marta quietly had the tree removed before the Martins moved in.

"Young man," she said in short, clipped words, "I insist you stop at once and tell Sheriff Daniels that I'm here to see him."

It was no use. No matter how she insisted or threatened, she received no response. Nervous now, and growing increasingly agitated, Marta left the police station and headed for the most reliable source of information she knew: the ladies at the checkout counters of the town's grocery store. She'd wiled away many hours over the last few years chatting up the checkout clerks.

It was after lunchtime, and her shadow fell long across the sidewalk when she arrived at the grocery store. Wisps of gray hair peeked out from under her hat, which sat slightly askew on top of her head. She pushed it back irritably, her gloves wrinkled and sliding down her palms.

"Linda!" she called to the woman she recognized behind the counter. "Linda, something bizarre is going on in town today. We may be under an attack."

Linda laughed lightly, and that startled Marta long enough to give her pause to take in the situation. It was as if she hadn't spoken at all. As if she wasn't even there. Linda continued her mechanical scanning of the grocery items on her counter, the electronic scanner making rhythmic, cheerful beeps with each pass. Anne Casey stood with her two small children as she waited to pay for her purchases. They were chatting about the children's school and the chilly weather without a care in the world and not a single indication that either of them saw or heard anything strange at all.

Marta was too firm in her Christian faith to believe in alien mind control, but something was clearly going wrong with her town. As she nervously tugged her gloves back up into place, her gaze fell on a stack of the day's newspapers sitting at the end of the checkout counter, and her hands froze. It was then that she remembered her obituary and original reason for coming into town today. A feeling of dread rolled over her. Could it be true? Had she somehow died and not noticed? She certainly felt like some woeful spirit flitting here and there around the town today. If that was the case, why was she still here? Why hadn't some angel come to carry her to her eternal reward?

Marta's heart raced, and her eyes were wide as she hurried out of the store and turned toward home. All these years she'd spent preparing herself, and she'd somehow managed to miss her call to Saint Peter. Surely, when she got home, Gabriel would still be waiting with his horn and his mighty, flaming sword to take her home. She just had to hurry.

She turned to hasten out and, behind her, had she chanced to look at the reflection in the storefront glass, she'd have seen the toddler in the shopping cart seat waving goodbye.

The people of Evans laid Marta Davis to rest on a chilly Saturday afternoon. The turnout for the funeral was remarkable; it was the largest number of people that the minister could remember attending a single service since Marta's husband passed. There wasn't an empty seat left, and some people stood back around the gravesite holding children on their shoulders to see over the crowd.

While Stanley was alive, it was easier to ignore the nagging and the bossing. He was so well loved by the community as a whole that he just made her seem somehow more tolerable.

The town minister was not informed of the town's little ruse, and the sheriff refused to have any part of the trick. He'd barricaded himself in his office with strict orders not to be disturbed unless there was some emergency he absolutely had to attend to. The rest of the town was all too eager to experience one day without Marta Davis.

The minister finished his sermon, and the groundskeeper lowered the casket into the grave, while the townspeople milled around trading furtive, guilty glances. Slowly, they filed out of the cemetery in low conversation; some were muttering quietly to themselves. No one thought, when they started, they'd actually find themselves standing over a casket in the cemetery. At first, when her neighbor called to report her passing, the sheriff wasn't sure what to believe. At her home, he found her sprawled among her prized begonias, arms outstretched and face tilted up to the sky as if waiting to be carried away.

One Summer Day

Sarah Buettenback

We impaled those frogs on that barbed wire fence.
We weren't mean kids as a general rule.
Even years later it doesn't make sense.

I can still see them squirming. It makes me tense.
Frog juice dripped down to form a pool.
We impaled those frogs on that barbed wire fence.

We'd tortured none before or since,
Not counting the worms dissected in school.
Even years later it doesn't make sense.

I should have come to their defense.
Would I have seemed too little? Uncool?
We impaled those frogs on that barbed wire fence.

Childhood fun at frogs' expense.
A lifetime of knowing I'd been so cruel.
Even years later it doesn't make sense.

Please tell me how to recompense.
We claimed to follow the Golden Rule.
Even years later it doesn't make sense.
We impaled those frogs on that barbed wire fence.

Reflections from a Rearview Mirror

James DeSoe

When I was seven years old, I was just beginning to become my own person with my own distinct personality. At the age of seven, I was already a seasoned veteran at dressing myself, brushing my teeth, and tying my shoes. I was also brave enough to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night by myself if I needed to. It was around this time that I started forming a set of values for what I thought was right and wrong.

A major influence on my newfound sense of civility was a cartoon that came on every Saturday morning called *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*. The cartoon featured a group of colorful characters with unique personalities and unusual names. There was Mush Mouth, Dumb Donald, Bucky, Weird Harold, Rudy, Russell, Bill, and of course, Fat Albert.

Each episode would start with the show's creator appearing on the television screen saying, "This is Bill Cosby coming at you with music and fun, and if you're not careful, you might learn something before it's done. So let's get ready, okay? Hey, hey, hey!"

I was fascinated with this cartoon as a child, mainly because it was a show about other kids. The music in the show was pleasing to my young ears, and the jokes were funny to this seven year old's sense of humor. For example, the character Rudy would say something self-centered or foolish, so then the character Bill would respond by saying, "Rudy, you're like school on Sundays. No class."

Along with the music and humor, each show focused on life lessons such as the consequences of lying, or why stealing and vandalism are wrong. There were also episodes about child abuse, gun violence, and drug use; however, these moral dilemmas were toned down so that a young person could comprehend the subject matter. Not only was this cartoon entertaining to my young heart, it was also educational and character building.

I loved this show so much that when I found out that the drugstore down the street from my house sold small plastic

figurines of Fat Albert and his gang of misfits, I persistently pestered my mom until she gave in and purchased the entire set for me. These small toys were no more than three inches in height. Each one of these figurines was small enough to fit into the front pockets of my jeans; therefore, I would always have one of them on me at all times. I carried them around in my front pocket like good luck charms. They made me feel safe and secure, like always having a good friend close by.

While watching each episode of this cartoon, I was reminded constantly to be a good kid. Whatever situation Fat Albert and his friends encountered, these African-American kids from the inner city of North Philadelphia would always do the right thing. The show continually instilled the virtues of decency and integrity, and I wanted to be a better person because of this.

One Saturday afternoon in the summer, Mom told my younger brother and me that we needed to come in from playing outside and start getting cleaned up. We were going to my uncle's house for a barbeque. Uncle Roland was going to grill some hamburgers and hotdogs, so we needed to hurry up and get ready. I have always loved the taste of grilled hamburgers, so I was more than willing to run inside, wash my hands, comb my hair, and change my clothes. I decided that for this special occasion, I would take Fat Albert with me.

I was eager with anticipation when we finally arrived at my uncle's house. As we got out of the car, I could hear the inviting sounds of laughter coming from the backyard. I ran to see what was going on. There, I saw my cousins playing touch football. Before I even had a chance to join them, Aunt Verleen shouted out, "Time to eat!"

After filling my little belly with hamburgers, potato chips, and soda, I was ready to play with my cousins. We horsed around until it got dark. I was having such a good time that I did not realize how late it was getting. I could see Dad talking with my uncle right near the fence at the bottom of the yard. He looked my way and told me that we were going to be leaving soon. I started running up to my dad to ask if we could stay a little longer. As I was running up to him, the toy that I was carrying

all night started working its way out of my front right pocket. It eventually dropped onto the grass right in front of my dad and uncle.

Before I had a chance to pick it up, my dad walked up, bent down, and retrieved my sentimental treasure. As he held the toy in his hand, the look on his face expressed a disturbing disgust. He turned his attention towards me and asked, "Where did you get this little n***** from? Did your mom buy you this plastic piece of shit?" He then took the toy and threw it as far and hard as he could into the dark of night. At that instant, it felt like my heart had stopped and all of the air had left my lungs. It was as if my father had just kicked Santa Claus in the face, right in front of me.

Dad and Uncle Roland had been drinking for a couple of hours prior to this moment. As I got older, I would come to realize that intoxication was a daily occurrence for both men, and this was not the first time my father sucker punched me emotionally. There were several occasions during my childhood in which my father was sent home from his job because he was too drunk to work.

One night in particular, my father came home inebriated and started acting belligerently towards my mother. I could hear a lot of screaming and arguing coming from my parents' bedroom door. After some time, the door opened and I could see my mother crying. She had her hand over her left cheek. My father had smacked her pretty hard this time. As he stumbled towards our front door, my father turned to me and said, "Jimmy, I want you to remember one thing. The only good thing about a woman is what's between her legs." He stormed out the door and headed to the nearest bar to drink some more.

My uncle was not much different from my father. He would often make disparaging remarks about other ethnic groups. Along with having drinking and racism in common with my father, he was also quite the chauvinist. He despised feminism, even going as far as prohibiting my aunt from watching *Murder, She Wrote*. I guess he felt somehow emasculated by Angela Lansbury.

When Dad threw my toy into the dark abyss that night, my uncle asserted himself into this distressing situation by saying, "We don't associate with j*****s, Jimmy."

My father's and uncle's dysfunctional behavior was starting to tarnish the hope that was in my young heart. I was beginning to develop a deep resentment for both of them. I started to cry, so my father told me to quit acting like a baby and get in the car.

As we headed for home, I was looking at the reflection in the rearview mirror. Thinking about what just happened, I started wishing for a different dad. I wanted Bill Cosby to be my father, not the bastard that was driving us home.

A few years after this incident, my father abandoned our family, which brought more relief than sadness, to be honest. As I grew older, my mother faced many struggles to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. In spite of this, I feel our family was better off without my father's influences.

In many instances, a child does not have much control over his or her circumstances. Sometimes, good role models come from different places. At the same time my father was giving our family grief, Bill Cosby's cartoon creation was giving me the moral compass to live my life with love and understanding. It was as if Mr. Cosby knew that there were kids in this world, just like me, longing for his positive guidance.

Thinking back on this moment in my life, I was reminded of something that was told to me long ago. When looking at a reflection from the rearview mirror of your life, what you see might not always be pleasant. You must recognize and remember that the reflection from a rearview mirror shows you where you have been, not where you are going.

Where I'm From

Sue Maresch

I am from a town in the north of a kingdom, a town that means "castle" and dates back to the Roman era. I am from church bells and minarets, large stone houses with wide open terraces, olive trees and grape vines and prickly cactus fruit. I am from my grandfather's rooftop where I stood looking toward the West, beyond the horizon, beyond where the sky disappeared.

I am from the rainbow I thought I saw from the airplane window when we first arrived here, but it was only a trick of light.

I am from a Midwestern city and a house on the corner of a street, just yards from an elementary school, from a front yard so steep we had to tie a rope to the lawnmower to mow the top rows. I am from the garden, from the tomatoes and cucumbers, the eggplants and peppers that were pickled and stuffed.

I am from the front porch where I played with marbles and the evergreen bushes where I hid my mother's kitchen utensils. I am from silkworms and lightning bugs and headless Barbies and playing notes on my recorder. I am from Mrs. Pauly's Restaurant, seated on the counter, eating french fries while Momma took orders and cleaned tables. I am from the scab across my nose and left cheek still visible on school picture day.

I am from skateboards and hopscotch, drawings of stick figures on the sidewalk with colored chalk. I am from cardamom, clove, mint and sage. I am from rose water.

I am from the school yard where the boys called me "Big Blue Marble," "Suhairy!" and "camel jockey," and other names my memory has since forgotten. I am from that little girl who bribed them with money so they would stop bullying me. I was scared and timid then, but I grew up to be just as good as they are—stronger even.

I am from the kitchen table in front of the Brother typewriter where I typed Baba's college papers because he asked me to; he typed slowly, you see. I am from the bags of coffee, sugar and rice we bring to the families of the dead. I am from small, ornate coffee cups and the fortunes they tell. I am from the shoes that do not point their soles to God.

I am from Catholic school plaid skirts, Wednesday Mass, voice lessons, and play practice. I am from the voluptuous Anita in *Westside Story*. I am from Shakespeare and Dickens and Hawthorne and Poe, read by flashlight in the bedroom closet. I am from diaries and poems and wishing wells.

I am from the black and white TV where Baba and I watched Omar Sharif and Sammy Davis, Jr. and Frank Sinatra and the rest of the Rat Pack. I am from the lamb we slaughtered in the backyard shed as a sacrifice to God so Baba would recover from his stroke. I am from joys of laughter as Momma tries to pronounce "Connecticut" or "strawberry."

I am from watching planes taking off at Eppley with my children, sketching with them so many far-away places, lands, seas.

I am from tears as I see my sisters and daughters grow up to be women, and my son grows to become a man.

I am from birthday gifts two weeks before Christmas.

I am from the day, tender and pale, the tenuous mist, bathing everything in a soft radiance. The water is grey, rosy and green, grey like mother-of-pearl and green like the center of a yellow rose.

I am from the spring air—clean, fresh, crisp...

2013 Cinco de Mayo in Omaha

Max Douglas

Cinco de Mayo is one of the most significant holidays celebrated by Mexican Americans. Every year on Cinco de Mayo, which translated literally means the “fifth of May,” you will find Omaha Nebraska’s South 24th Street lined with proud Mexican Americans. As the dark sky lays flat against the background, there are knees dancing to a loud beat, tortillas being slapped and baked, carnival games lighting up like flashing stars, and people parading with smiles. I am a Caucasian American who has grown up just a few minutes west of South 24th Street, and, almost every May, I had wondered about the green, white, and red flag and the shouts of “Viva Mexico!”

During high school, I would squeeze my legs into my best pair of skinny jeans, loosely wear my best pair of Air Jordans, and slide my hands through my greasy mop-like curly hair as I headed to South 24th Street on the Fifth of May. I always stayed close to my pack of friends like space debris orbiting around the earth. I kept an eagle’s eye for any potential females, and I kept a raven’s eye for any bitter-breathed, hot-mouthed drunks. I always waited for someone to belch, “What’s the gringo doing up here?” because I already had an automatic response: “Just hanging out.” However, this year my experience was different—as different as the first rough lick of a Vero Mango chili sucker.

The population of Hispanics in Omaha is like fire to a wick of dynamite, and so I was embracing the boom by attempting to study abroad. After expressing my interest to Metropolitan Community College’s Study Abroad Counselor, I was cordially invited to a luncheon where I would meet the instructor. My initial reaction was, no, I want to learn Spanish and act Spanish, but I don’t want to actually become Spanish. I sat looking at that same email with a blank stare until eventually I decided to attend the luncheon with an open mind in order to please my instructor. So there I sat with a mind about as open as a window, a plate of Mexican food (brownish gray beans which felt like mashed potatoes in my mouth, a burrito drizzled with thick red sauce, and fluffy orange rice), and a bunch of people I hardly knew. We

mostly talked about Maximon, a Guatemalan idol consisting of a wooden head, colorful scarves, and a carved mouthful of cigars and liquor.

While sitting there, I embraced these seemingly fairy tale stories and ate the Mexican food faster than I thought. Along with my professor, my classmate Elizabeth, and the entire audience, we were entertained by a live group of south of the border dancers. I savored the look of the women who danced with dresses which would resemble the inside of a candy store. I marveled at the ten-gallon hats that stood like huge mounds of brown clay on the foreheads of the guys. Heavy shoes clicked, clacked, and stomped across the stage as the dancers complied, no, united in a conversation of dance.

Two days later, I was on South 24th Street at the Cinco de Mayo celebration with my best friend from grade school. As we wandered without aim through the crowd, I looked and saw scarves wrapped tightly around tall faces, faces with mountains and peaks, and also squeezed tightly to round faces that bubbled out and dipped to the sides. All of these faces were a different color from mine, but we all felt the same unpredictable Nebraska wind blowing our lips chapped. My friend (who happens to be Hispanic) and I browsed in and out of the alleys as we passed by bakeries, pottery shops, and all of the carnival games with the constant background of “Viva Mexico!” We heard it, but we didn’t know why.

Eventually, I stood before a group of guys with shiny clothes and cowboy hats rocking out in Spanish. Men and women danced in front of the live band as they hurled their knees in the air like a football player chopping his legs through tires in a football drill. As time passed, I became more and more aware of the fact that I’m not like them. South Omaha is my home, but I felt the size-and-a-half too small pair of shoes of a minority. I have been the minority before, but this night it was amplified with the music. I thought, but this is good for me. I need to feel this diversity.

My Cinco de Mayo experience culminated with Omaha South High winning the state soccer championship. In a sport where most of the players are Hispanic, I saw why the students

are proud of their culture. To put it in other words, “Viva Mexico!” began to make a little more sense to me. After the championship clock had buzzed, and it showed South 1, Prep 0, one of the players went directly to grab the Mexican flag and wrapped it around his shoulders. At first I was shocked. Why would he do that? But then I remembered.

When I had been a student at Omaha South, opposing teams would dress up with mustaches and sombreros as a way to mock our players, and during my junior year when our team lost the championship in a close match, we were mocked with a shower of green cards. The opposing team’s student section rushed the field where our defeated team stood and threw the cards in the air as if they were confetti.

But in that moment, as the South Soccer team paraded the field, the players made it clear that this championship wasn’t for themselves, for their coach, for revenge, or even for their school, but for the community of South Omaha. The team lifted the Class A Nebraska State Trophy, and it gleamed in the sun and penetrated into the eyes of the crowd. I saw clearer into the flag, and marveled how the eagle crushed the snake. “Si se puede!”

The Loop

Shirlee Tourek

Lights up to reveal the mother, an 80-year-old woman who has been moved to a facility. With all her belongings packed, she waits in the lobby to be picked up. The daughter, a woman in her fifties, enters the room and walks over to her mother.

DAUGHTER: Hi, Mom.

MOTHER: Well, look who’s here. I was starting to think you forgot me.

DAUGHTER: I wouldn’t forget you; I stop by at the same time every day, just like clockwork. Here, I brought you some cookies.

MOTHER: Ooh, these look good. What kind are they?

DAUGHTER: Oatmeal-raisin, your favorite.

MOTHER: I’m going to have to hide these from your father; he will eat them all in one sitting if I don’t stash them away. *(Pause.)* Well, we’d better get going. If I don’t get supper on the table, your father will have a fit.

DAUGHTER: Oh, um... I don’t think we need to worry about that; we’ve got plenty of time. Let’s go for a walk. It’s beautiful outside.

MOTHER: Oh no, we need to get going. If I don’t get supper on the table, your dad will have a fit.

DAUGHTER: Let’s just go for a short walk. All the spring flowers are blooming. I’ll get your sweater.

MOTHER: Oh, I don’t want to go outside. I’ve been working in the yard all day. Seems like every time I pull a weed, two more pop up. Dear Lord, I didn’t think I was ever going to get done.

DAUGHTER: Let's just go for a short walk. I'll get your sweater.

MOTHER: Why do I need a sweater?

DAUGHTER: Well, it's nice outside, but in the shade it's a little cool. So let's put your sweater on and go for a little walk. (*The daughter looks through her mother's packed bags to find a sweater.*) Any idea which one of these bags you packed your sweater in?

MOTHER: Why do I need a sweater?

DAUGHTER: Well, I thought we would go for a walk. All the spring flowers are blooming. You know how much you love the spring flowers.

MOTHER: Oh no, we need to get going. If I don't get supper on the table, your dad will have a fit.

Daughter takes a deep breath and pulls a puzzle out of a bag she carried in with her.

DAUGHTER: I brought you a new puzzle. The pieces are bigger than the last one. Let's clear off this table and put it together.

MOTHER: Oh, I don't have time. I need to get home. I have so much work to do.

DAUGHTER: Let's just put this puzzle together first.

MOTHER: Let me see the box—I think I've done this one before. (*Pause.*) Yeah, I've done this one already.

DAUGHTER: Well, I'm going to put it together, and you can help me when I get stuck, okay?

MOTHER: I really can't. I got to get going. I want to get out of here before they close this place up. I got stuck here one summer; the doors were locked, I was all by myself, and I couldn't get out. I was scared to death.

DAUGHTER: Don't worry, Mom. They're not going to close this place. They just lock the doors so no one wanders off and gets lost.

MOTHER: The hell they don't. I got locked in here after they closed. Couldn't find anyone to let me out.

DAUGHTER: Let's get some ice cream. Let's go for a walk and get some ice cream.

MOTHER: Oh, I don't need any ice cream. I just need to get home.

DAUGHTER: You feeling okay? You look a little tired.

MOTHER: I am tired. I've been working in the yard, pulling weeds all day.

DAUGHTER: I talked to my friend Julie yesterday. She said her mom is going to be moving in here, too. Do you remember Berdene? The two of you were 4-H leaders together.

MOTHER: I can't think of who you're talking about.

DAUGHTER: Berdene. She lived in the farmhouse next to ours. Looks like you're going to be neighbors with her again. It will be nice to have someone you know living here.

MOTHER: Why would she live here?

DAUGHTER: Her husband died, and she is having a hard time remembering things.

MOTHER: Poor old soul. I'm so glad I'm still able to live on my own.

DAUGHTER: Mom, you live here. Remember?

MOTHER: Why would I live here? Working here is bad enough; I don't need to live here, too. Where are my car keys? I need to get going.

DAUGHTER: Mom, you don't have a car. You sold it two years ago.

MOTHER: Well, how did I get here?

DAUGHTER: I drove you here, two years ago.

MOTHER: I need to get home. I got to get supper on the table. You know how your dad gets when supper's not ready.

DAUGHTER: Mom, this IS your home. Dad...Dad passed away several years ago.

The mother is shocked—in her mind, this is the first time she has heard about her husband dying. Her lips quiver and her eyes water up with tears.

MOTHER: Oh my God, how? When? How can this be?

DAUGHTER: He had an aneurysm. It happened very fast.

MOTHER: When?

DAUGHTER: Five years ago.

MOTHER: Why can't I remember that? Did I go to the funeral?

DAUGHTER: Of course you went to the funeral.

MOTHER: I got to get home. There's so much to do. I got to gather the eggs before it gets dark.

DAUGHTER: Jim will gather the eggs. He lives there now.

MOTHER: Who is Jim?

DAUGHTER: Jim's your son. He bought the farm.

MOTHER: Where do I live?

DAUGHTER: You live here.

MOTHER: Here! Why in the hell would I live here?

DAUGHTER: Well, after Dad died, you lived with me for a while.

MOTHER: Dad died? When? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, my God.

DAUGHTER: I did tell you, Mom. I tell you every day. Well, almost every day. Sometimes you are so happy, I don't want to tell you because you forget, and then when I tell you, it's like you are hearing it for the first time.

MOTHER: I always want you to tell me the truth. I get so confused sometimes because everyone around here lies. All of them, they are just a bunch of liars. (*She cries for a while.*) Did Dad pass away?

DAUGHTER: Yes, he passed away a few years ago.

MOTHER: I know I can't remember things like I used to, but you would think I could remember that. This darn old head of mine. (*She knocks on her head with her fist several times.*)

DAUGHTER: Alzheimer's is a terrible disease, Mom. Do you remember taking care of Grandma when she had it?

MOTHER: I remember telling you to shoot me if I ever ended up like that.

DAUGHTER (*chuckles*): Well, I'm sorry, Mom, but I'm not going to shoot you.

MOTHER: Am I goofy?

DAUGHTER: No! You are not goofy; you are one of the smartest people I know. You just can't remember some things because you have Alzheimer's.

MOTHER: How long have I had it?

DAUGHTER: About ten years.

MOTHER: Ten years. (*Pause.*) Well, I guess I'm not going to live to be 100, am I?

DAUGHTER: I don't see why not. You're as healthy as a horse.

MOTHER: What time is it?

DAUGHTER: Around one.

MOTHER: What are you doing out so late?

DAUGHTER: It's not late. You just finished eating your lunch before I got here.

MOTHER: I got to get going. Your dad is waiting for his supper. You know what a temper your dad has. Remember how he would sit in the car and honk that damn horn when I was trying to get you kids ready for church?

DAUGHTER: I remember, and then you would send us out to the car while you got ready. Dad was so angry about being late for church, but as soon as you came out of the house he would always say, "Oh, look, kids, doesn't Momma look pretty?"

MOTHER (*smiling*): I never knew that. I never knew he said that. (*She is very pleased to hear that her husband thought she looked pretty.*)

DAUGHTER: I guess you were worth the wait.

MOTHER: Those were the days, weren't they?

DAUGHTER: Yes, they were. Remember how Dad always forgot about birthdays and never bought a single Christmas present. But on Valentine's Day, he would always come home with a giant heart for you and five small hearts filled with candy for us kids.

MOTHER: And a Valentine's Day card. He always signed it, from Jim Schurman, as if I didn't know his last name. What a knucklehead. Oh, those were the days, weren't they?

DAUGHTER: Yes, they were.

MOTHER: You know, you are the only one that ever comes to see me.

DAUGHTER: Oh, that's not true, Mom. Sheryl was here yesterday, and Sheila was here the day before that.

MOTHER: How would you know that?

DAUGHTER: I checked the sign-in sheet. When people come to visit, they have to sign in.

MOTHER: I'm not talking about work; I'm talking about coming to see me.

DAUGHTER: I know. You have several visitors every day. I check every time I sign in.

MOTHER: What time is it? Your Dad is going to wonder where his supper is.

DAUGHTER: Did I tell you that Mark and Maua are getting married?

MOTHER: I need to write that down so I don't forget.

DAUGHTER: I will write it on your calendar before I leave. Just remind me.

MOTHER: You want me to remind you? That's not a good idea.

DAUGHTER: Boy, we're quite a pair, aren't we? Neither one of us can remember anything.

MOTHER: What time is it?

DAUGHTER: Time for a joke. What do you get if a baby swallows a penny?

MOTHER: I don't know. What?

DAUGHTER: Diaper change.

MOTHER: That's silly. That's not even funny. *(Pause.)* Okay, I got one: Knock, knock.

DAUGHTER: Who's there?

MOTHER: Um, gosh I just heard this joke earlier today. It will come to me. *(Pause.)* Damn, I can't remember the punch line.

DAUGHTER *(laughing)*: Or the joke, we never got past 'knock knock.'

MOTHER: I can't remember it either. Boy, we are quite a pair, aren't we?

DAUGHTER: Yes, we are. Okay, here's one. What did the fish say when he swam into the wall?

MOTHER: What did the fish say?

DAUGHTER: What did the fish say when he swam into the wall? *(Pause.)* Dam!

Mother shakes her head like it's not that funny.

DAUGHTER: Why did the tomato turn red? He saw the salad dressing.

MOTHER: Don't quit your day job.

DAUGHTER: Okay, your turn.

MOTHER: Boy, I used to know so many jokes. Can't think of a single one.

DAUGHTER: Tell the one about the cow. Do you remember it?

MOTHER: Oh yeah, what do you get from a spoiled cow?

DAUGHTER: I don't know, what?

MOTHER *(laughing so hard she can hardly talk)*: Spoiled milk.

DAUGHTER: That's a new one. Did you make that up?

MOTHER: Hell, I don't know. *(Pause.)* What's brown and sticky?

DAUGHTER: I don't think I want to know.

MOTHER: A stick.

DAUGHTER (*laughing*): Oh my goodness, you better keep your day job, too. You are the worst joke teller in the whole world.

MOTHER: You mean second worst joke teller.

DAUGHTER: Are you referring to me?

MOTHER: Boy, you are quick.

DAUGHTER: Remember that guy that used to buy eggs from us? He had a new joke every week. Except his were funny.

MOTHER: I don't remember his name, but I remember him. He was so fat he had to wear overalls. Couldn't find any pants to go around his big belly.

DAUGHTER: He must have liked to eat.

MOTHER: His wife was a baker; she made pies and cakes for all the restaurants. Don't know how she made a profit with him eating all her goods. (*Pause.*) He still buys eggs from me. Shows up every day, just like clockwork.

DAUGHTER: Hmm....

MOTHER: What time is it? Your dad is going to wonder where his supper is.

DAUGHTER: Mom, you don't have to get home. Dad... (*Long pause.*) Dad is out of town, remember? He is looking at land to buy with Uncle Arnold.

MOTHER (*pause*): That's right, that's right. I remember that now. Hot damn, looks like I got the night off.

DAUGHTER: We should do something fun.

MOTHER: Oh honey, I got to get back to work here before they fire me.

DAUGHTER: Okay. (*Pause.*) Okay, I should get going. I need to get to work, too. I'll see you tomorrow, Mom.

MOTHER: Oh wait, I baked you some cookies. Here, take them home to your family.

DAUGHTER: Oatmeal-raisin, my favorite.

MOTHER: Is that what they are? I can't remember. I baked so many today, I didn't think I was ever going to get done.

DAUGHTER: Bye, Mom. Love you. Thanks for the cookies.

MOTHER: Bye, honey.

Contributors' Notes

Sarah Buettenback writes to save her sanity while juggling life as a wife of one sports-crazy husband, the mom of two sports-crazy boys and the assistant to three plain-old-crazy pastors at Citylight Church. In her spare time, she runs a non-profit basketball league, SCORE 4 Sports, that aims to teach leadership and positive character to over 300 kids in the metro area. She hopes these kids will be kind enough to choose not to impale any frogs on a barbed wire fence.

James DeSoe is currently a student at MCC where he is earning an associate degree in HVAC. English Composition I was one of his favorite classes. He feels very fortunate for all of the opportunities MCC has given to him. As he continues his education, he has a lot of appreciation for the instructors at the school and their commitment to the students. He thanks everyone involved in allowing him to share his story.

Max Douglas is a South Omaha Boy (SOB). He currently attends the University of Nebraska at Omaha as an undergraduate in English. Max is a changing human being, so for now he enjoys learning new languages, rock climbing, reading, and writing. He is loved by an eternal God and knows everyone else is as well. Max enjoys trying (and sometimes failing) different styles of creative non-fiction, which is exhibited in the piece, "2013 Cinco de Mayo in Omaha."

Sue Maresch was born in the northern Kingdom of Jordan and immigrated to America as a child. She was educated in Catholic schools and enjoyed English, journalism, theatre, and debate classes the most. During her free time, she wrote poems and short stories and read countless books. She remains an avid reader and writer to this day. After raising a family, Sue returned to MCC to earn her associate degree in liberal arts, which will transfer to the University of Illinois. When she completes her BA in English there, Sue hopes to earn her master's in creative writing. Sue has written a manuscript of her life in America, which she wishes to publish. She enjoys art, music, travel, documentaries, fine dining, and spending time with her family.

Kayla Swain is a professional illustrator with a passion for making graphic novels. She's been drawing since she was a tot, and art is an intrinsic part of her life. She works for SkyVu Entertainment and has had artwork on the t-shirts and programs of Anime NebrasKon. She graduated from MCC in 2013 with an associate degree in electronic imaging and media arts. Kayla is creating her own manga, "Midwinter," an urban fantasy story.

Malissa Thomas was born and raised in Gainesville, Florida, then moved to Omaha in 2008. A recent graduate of MCC, she now works as a title analyst and spends her free time training to run a 5k marathon, baking, exploring local wineries, and writing. Existing in a constant state of self-reinvention, she hopes to someday find the self that fits best.

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