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Fall 1990

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Bayou Review is published biannually by UH-Downtown. The magazine welcomes essay, poetry, short story, art and photography submissions from the UH-

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Bayou Review

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Bayou Review Contest

Bayou Review awards four \$50 prizes for winning submissions in the categories of essay, poetry, short story, and cover illustration. All student submissions are considered for the contests.

The winners for the Fall 1990 contests are:

Essay Diana Hornick On Maine's Coast
Poetry Jun Juguilon A Solo
Short Story Veronica Alker The Drought

The cover contest did not receive a winning illustration; therefore, the prize money will be used for the *Bayou Review* Spring 1991 cover contest.

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Gloria Milton

Tower of Babel

Ham's people were the first to try to reach the top, but the Lord said, "No way!" Thus He sent down a spirit of confusion

Shaka's people also tried to reach the top.
The strangers showed them the way.

amongst the people.

They brought them to the great big ships.

Nat's people searched valiantly for a way to reach the top, but the declarers said they were 3/5 human and could never be equal to white men.

Ella Baker's people said,
"One more time ..."
as they struggled in a
new free state,

but Jim Crow said,
"No way, nigger!"

Martin's people said,
"It's time for a change!"
Intelligent people
killed
our Moses.

Louis' people said,

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"NO MORE!"

Today we are still
fighting for
freedom, equality, and security
in a society
of cave dwellers.

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On Knowing Julian

When Julian and I first met we were introduced at a party. At least that's what he told me. I remember meeting him at the beach, but wherever we first met we didn't actually carry on a conversation until last year; he showed up at my birthday party with some friends of mine.

For weeks I thought he had a crush on me because he would call all the time. We met a few times for drinks, and I was surprised he never tried to kiss me. The funny thing is, he was really interested in being just my friend. He really liked my company because we shared a common interest—writing. He was a very talented writer.

One day I went to his apartment and I was thoroughly impressed with his extensive book collection and the fact that he had read each one and enjoyed telling me about them. Julian worked for a large theater company, so we saw every play for free. We loved dressing up and going to the parties after the show, especially since we knew we would never have been invited if he hadn't worked there.

One thing I remember most about Julian is that we never fought. We disagreed a few times but we never yelled at each other. He had a very quiet and sensual voice and a wonderful flair for making you see his point of view. I could tell him everything and I did. He knew all my secrets and never held them against me.

Julian also had a wonderful sense of humor. He told me about a party he wanted to take me to after the opera and said that everyone was supposed to dress like their favorite character. We took our costumes and changed after the opera, arriving late because Julian said

Jeanette Caven

our entrance should be special. When we arrived, everyone was dressed as they normally would at a black tie occasion. I was so embarrassed, but they loved it and thought we did it as a compliment. I now think it was very funny.

One day Julian wasn't feeling well. As the days went by he began to feel worse until he finally went to the hospital. His kidney was malfunctioning. I spent every minute I could next to him since I knew how scary a hospital and an operation could be. I read to him and told him stories. He didn't respond well because of the heavy medication but I knew he wanted me there. He was soon released and he began to feel better quickly. The doctors were very surprised at how well he was recovering.

A couple of weeks later I called Julian to tell him I had finished the book he had given me to read and I wanted him to recommend another one. He gave me his

copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger. I began reading it and called to tell him my progress and how much I liked it. He said it was one of his favorites and mentioned that he wasn't feeling well again.

A week went by and his condition worsened. Eventually, he wasn't able to get out of bed. His parents and doctors believed that his body was rejecting the donated kidney. The doctors were right, but they didn't know why. After multiple tests they realized that Julian had received the AIDS virus through his blood transfusion.

We were devastated. Julian never went into remission. He lost weight rapidly and was confined to his hospital bed. Again, I stayed at his side. At times he wouldn't recognize me, but I knew he was always glad I was there.

Julian died two months later. I had never been to

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a funeral before. Everyone cried the whole time, and my brother pulled me away because I was so upset.

Months went by before I could accept Julian's death. I have often thought about the times we spent together, and I'm reminded of his bravery whenever the Names Project comes to Houston. The project consists of hand-made quilt patches about people who have died of AIDS. The quilt is displayed throughout the United States at various times of the year. His name isn't part of the quilt, but I know one day his parents and friends will include him.

I never finished reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. One day I'll pick it up again, but for now I want to save it.

A Solo

There is a freedom in being alone At first the world may smack you in the face But if you stand, unmoved You see ...

the Beauty ... the Wonder...

of solitude

The waves of newness sting your skin With the salty foam of uncertainty

The saline grit, at first unpleasant soon becomes the healing swell And gradually becomes bearable ...

Comfortable ... Enjoyable ... Stimulating ... a solo

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A Solution to the Problem

"OK, so I was a junky. I got turned on to smack in San Francisco. Oh sure, there are thousands who poison their bodies throughout the concrete jungles of the country, but here is my story." This is Elaine. She is 23 now and is a former heroin addict. She has been sober for a couple of years. Her story is typical in that she suffers from a disease called drug addiction. She is unique in that she is alive and sober today. Thousands of people die yearly from drug and alcohol abuse, and the numbers are rising steadily. According to the Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1989, 3,621 people died from drug use in 1985, and drugs were the cause of 4,187 deaths in 1986.

"I started doing drugs when I was thirteen. I was at a new school and I wanted to fit in somewhere, so I started hanging out with the 'druggies' and started doing drugs. I was lonely; I didn't have many friends,

and my parents didn't get home until late in the afternoon every day. I discovered that if I got drunk or smoked some pot, even if I was alone, I didn't feel so bad." According to professionals who deal with drug and alcohol abuse this is typical. People who are lonely or unhappy and end up turning to drugs and alcohol will continue to use them to avoid dealing with their feelings. "Not only did the drugs make me feel better and I made friends by using drugs, but it was fun. It was exciting to do something I knew I shouldn't be doing, you know, to break the rules. I kept doing drugs and the longer I did them the more I did. I started to try different types of drugs and through trial and error was able to discover the ones I liked the best. It was the only way I could continue to function. I mean it got to the point where I felt weird if I wasn't high." Drug addition is a progressive

Caroline Cole

disease. Those who use drugs and alcohol and have the disease of addiction will find themselves using more and more until they get help or until it kills them.

"Anyway, I made it through high school in one piece. After I graduated, I moved to San Francisco with my boyfriend. I was 18 and believed I was in love; we had only been dating for two months. Also, I thought I was fearless. I look back now and realize how scared I was; my fear was what got me into the whole mess in the first place. I was living with my boyfriend and his rock'n'roll band. I didn't know any of these people. I knew no one else in the city; I felt very scared and alone, and the drugs weren't making me feel better any more. I needed something stronger. Some of the people we lived with shot heroin, and my boyfriend started to do it, too. I stayed away from it for about three weeks, but I sure was curious. I never passed up the opportunity to

try something new. Whenever my boyfriend pushed the plunger into the syringe that was in his arm his eyes would roll back in his head and he'd get this peaceful little grin on his face. I decided to try it, but told myself I would only do it once 'because everybody knows how bad heroin is.'

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"I'll never forget the first time I did it. David went out and scored for us. When he came back he had the works with him. You know, he had the dope, a couple of rigs, the cotton, a spoon, some water, a lighter, and a belt. He set the spoon down and emptied some of the contents of the balloon into the spoon. You see, the heroin came in a little uninflated red balloon. It was a brownish powder; it kind of looked like dirt. I was so nervous, but I was also fascinated; I watched his every move. He drew 20 ccs of water into the syringe and gently squirted it into the spoon. He picked up the spoon and lighted the

Caroline Cole

lighter underneath it until it bubbled and all the powder dissolved, making the liquid look like muddy water. He set the spoon down, tore off a small piece of cotton, rolled it into a little ball, and dropped it into the spoon. He put the tip of the needle into the cotton and drew the brown fluid through it. Then he said, 'OK Elaine, take the belt and tie yourself off.' I was so scared, but I couldn't back out; it had gone too far. 'Hold the belt tight, but let go as soon as I shoot it in, OK?' He told me to pump up my arm so that a vein in the crook of my arm would stand out, then he stuck the needle in my arm.

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"I don't remember it hurting at all. He pulled the plunger out a little to make sure he was on a vein, and I saw my dark red blood sucked into the syringe; yep, he was on. He slowly pushed the plunger in, and I let go of the belt and reeled. I felt like a huge wave of warm muddy water bowled me over. After the wave retreated,

Ifelt this warmth seeping all through my body, then I got hot, and then I felt nauseous. I staggered up and made it into the bathroom just in time to vomit again and again until my stomach was empty.

"After I was finished getting sick, I couldn't think of anything but how good I felt, and how happy I was that I had found the drug that was going to make me feel not so scared and alone, the drug that was going to help me through the rough times. What I didn't realize was that drug would become my lover, my best friend, my savior, and once it had me in its relentless clutch it would try to kill me before it would let me go. But I didn't think that it could hurt me. I was 18; I could not conceive of mortality. I was an addict and I was scared and hurting and I found something that made me feel safe — something that took away the pain — I believed that I had found a life saver — that I finally possessed salvation."

Second Chance

"Come on in! The water's great!" Dave yelled from beneath the pier. Without hesitation, I dove into the dark brown abyss of Mississippi mud-water that we knew as the Ross Barnett Reservoir. Dave was right. The water did feel great — warm, but better than the hot and sticky, ninety degree weather typical of Jackson summers. As I stood up, the thick, gummy mud on the floor of the reservoir crept up past my ankles. I panicked for a moment, not quite sure if I could get loose. The goo around my feet had formed a suction, as if it were trying to hold me to the bottom and suck me under. Frightened, I jerked my legs away quickly, and to my relief, broke free without much effort.

"Damn, I think there's something alive down there!" I said, still half startled.

"What's the matter? Afraid of a little mud?" Dave said with a grin.

I looked up at the pier. "Come on in, Debbie," I said tauntingly.

"Hell no!" she replied bluntly. "That water's too nasty, and I can't stand that m-u-u-d. Come carry me."

I swam to the pier and lowered her into the water. She wrapped her legs around my waist and her arms around my neck. That was my Debbie! Good thing that we were the only people at the reservoir that morning, not that she would have cared if the whole world had been watching.

Debbie was my first real girlfriend. She was a cute little redhead; extremely dingey and, though I never would have admitted it, cheap. We had been dating for

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about eight months against the advice of all of my friends, family, and generally anyone who knew her. She was fifteen and wild for her age. Hell! She was wild for any age! It broke my mother's heart to see me dating her, but I didn't give a damn. I basically did what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it, regardless of what she thought or who I hurt. Debbie was no exception to the rule. I was fourteen, and in my eyes, going on twentyone. I had every reason and excuse to be angry and rebellious, and I DAMN SURE was gonna be!

The wind began to pick up and the water grew turbulent. I gazed up into the sky. "Just great," I mumbled. The sun had vanished and dark, black clouds had rolled over the reservoir. What a bummer! It was supposed to have been a nice day. At least it had been a nice day when we left that morning.

Dave was my best friend. He was three years

older than I, but the age difference never crossed our minds. We had first met in Atlanta at a rehabilitation center where parents sent their screwed-up, problem children. We were from the same small town in Mississippi, but had never met before. Funny how strange situations bring people together. When we both were released and went back home, Dave and I formed a friendship that has proven inseparable to this day. We could relate to one another and were able to understand each others' problems. After being locked up for a year at age thirteen, it's kinda hard to relate to kids your own age. So, if the truth is to be told, Dave was my only "true friend" and I was his. We understood each other; hell, we were the only people who could understand each other.

Dave had picked me up in his parents' light blue, late model Impala. They let him use the car to go to school, but we had better plans. Whenever Dave and I got together, we generally found some way to get into trouble.

That morning, we decided to skip school and go to the reservoir. It was too hot and summer-school sucked, anyway. On the way out, we stopped and picked up Debbie, though Dave didn't care too much for the idea. Even my best friend wasn't too crazy about the "love of my life."

"Looks like it's gonna rain," I said. Dave looked up casually. "Yep," he grunted.

Debbie gave me a rather sloppy kiss and told me not to worry, that we were all wet anyway. "Ya'll cut that shit out!" Dave said jokingly, "Not in front of the children. Come on, Marc. Let's go out to the pole."

The pole. It was a monument at the center of Camillia Bay. It was not simply a pole made of wood, it was a pole of character. On weekends, all of the "guys"

would swim to the pole, leaving their girlfriends behind on the pier to marvel at their feats of acrobatics as they leaped from the top into the water. It was far more than a pole. It represented a test of strength and courage. I had never swam to it before, but I wasn't about to stay behind and look like a wimp. Anyway, it didn't look like that far of a swim. So, I fell in behind Dave, leaving Debbie on the pier.

Nearly three quarters of the way there, I began to tire. It definitely felt a lot longer than it looked. My breath grew short, and I could feel my arms and legs weakening. With my last bit of strength, I made it to the pole. Oddly enough, the pole was just a slimy, algaecovered, rotting piece of wood, not quite the monument it had seemed from the pier. "That about killed me, man," I said to Dave in-between gasps for breath.

"Yeah, me too. We gotta' quit smokin' before we

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try this again," Dave gasped.

I took a deep breath and let out a short, "No doubt."

With that, it began; it had been threatening all morning and now it had started — the rain! "Come on, we had better head back," Dave said. He had a worried look on his face. He knew I was worn out, but what could we do? We had to get back before the storm got worse.

"Go on," Isaid, "I'm gonna try to catch my breath.

I'll be right behind you." As I watched Dave swim off, I realized that I was in over my head. I had barely been able to make it out, and now I had to turn around and go all the way back. I hesitated for a moment, but after realizing the rain and wind would probably just get worse, I forced myself to release the pole and push on.

About twenty feet out I began to lose momentum. I was already out of breath and my arms felt like rubber

bands. I rolled over on my back to catch my wind, but the waves splashed my face every few seconds causing me to suck in more and more of the dark, brown water with each gasp for air. I began to realize that if I didn't begin swimming immediately, I was going to drown. With a last burst of energy I took off in a pure panic. Adrenaline pumping and my heart pounding in my ears, I wasn't even sure if I was heading in the right direction. Suddenly, I froze. All of the energy I had was gone. This was it! I was going to die.

Strange, the life that I had always viewed as a joke, the life towards which I had always felt such anger and contempt suddenly grew very precious to me. "God help me," I thought, but I felt no comfort in my plea. Why should He save me now, when I had taken so little notice of Him in my entire life? In a flash, I became the audience at a viewing of my own life. It all passed before me in

seconds. I thought of everyone I loved. Had I done anything recently to let them know how much I loved them?

I had always thought I would have time to change later in life. So I hadn't lived the best life, but I would change when I was older. Now it was too late. This wasn't how I wanted to leave my life; this wasn't how I wanted to be remembered. "Dear God," I thought, "I haven't spoken to my father in a year. I fought with my mother last night. When was the last time I did anything worthwhile?" As I went under, a bitter feeling of emptiness took hold of me at the same moment Dave's hand did.

Dave dragged me to the pier and laid me down. I was disoriented and only about half conscious, but I was alive. "What happened?" I heard Debbie's high pitched voice, sounding almost amused. I didn't answer her. I

wasn't sure if I could. I realized that during the experience I just had, she never crossed my mind. I couldn't really explain the revelations I had just experienced as I was going under and, even if I could have done so, I don't think I would have told her.

I leaned over the pier and threw up. After a few moments I sat up, feeling quite embarrassed. I looked at Dave. "Thanks, man," I said in as serious a tone of voice as I could muster up.

"No problem, Dude, any time," he said casually. I smiled and reached out my hand, "Give me a smoke, man."

We both began to laugh. I'm not sure what the Hell was so funny, but at the moment it was hilarious. Everything that had just happened seemed so unreal. Laughing seemed to ease my shaking nerves and my racing mind, so whatever it was became funnier. I

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laughed so hard I thought my head would split open. Suddenly, we were disturbed by footsteps coming down the pier.

An old man walked up and stood next to us. "Good thing that storm blew over, ain't it boys? That would have ruined the whole afternoon. So, what's so funny, anyway?" he asked.

I just looked at him blankly, unable to answer his question. Dave quickly summarized the events that had just taken place as I felt myself shrink to the size of a mouse?

"Well," said the old man, "You're darn lucky to be alive." I saw 'em pull a young fella outta that there bay who had been doin' the same thing you were. About two months ago. They carried him away in a bag."

Nothing seemed quite so funny any more. I couldn't ignore the fact that I had nearly died. Life really

wasn't a joke any more. It was a gift, one to be valued and cherished.

As the sun began to penetrate the sky, we sat in complete silence and watched as the clouds disappeared into the horizon. I looked up. Debbie sat there, still with her silly, little girl smirk. She had no idea of how I felt; I wondered if she ever could. As I looked into Dave's eyes, I knew he saw my fear; I knew he felt it.

I never swam to the pole again, maybe out of fear, maybe I just outgrew it. Shortly afterwards, I quit seeing Debbie. I guess I outgrew her, too.

But Dave? Dave is still my best friend, probably always will be.

On a rainy summer's afternoon four years ago, I left a lot of anger, confusion, and unanswered questions in the middle of a murky bay near an old rotting pole.

My Apology

I was so selfish back then.
When I was made to feel like an outcast,
I blamed you both for it.
Each of my inadequacies was highlighted in class
In front of all my peers.
I remember so vividly
My language seemed to be the root
Of my problems, so I blamed you.

Please forgive me, Padresitos míos. I did not understand The monumental sacrifices You were making for us, your children. To offer us the Land of Opportunity,
You left behind all that was familiar:
Your Motherland, your relatives, your knowledge of
The system, your place in society.
You ventured into unknown territory
To find a place in America
For the Mexican Dream.

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Cathrine 1970 - 1989

Cathrine is dead. Not asleep. Not in peace. Wrapped in absolute stillness that is a fitting end to futility. Housed in a box planed and tacked by loveless days and men she pined over. Icy fingers grip nothing, a familiar position for hands warmed by illusion and misguided passion.

An alabaster slab stands above, name, dates, and bird shit epitaph mirroring the reality of her life; below, her rotting body swells and tears, The only change she has ever known. Lenora Laverpool

An Illusion of Love

As I see your face I fall in love With what is to be an illusion

As the stars up above

Within my grasp Yet far away

The dream I possess That we'll be together someday

Because of our different worlds I know I will never have you Yet I feel in my heart

That no one can love you as I do

You brighten my days Yet make me sad

For I know your love is one That I will never have

You never notice

The tears in my eyes That wallow up

As you pass me by

No second look

No hesitation

Only a grave stare

Towards another destination

Lenora Laverpool

Yet we've never met You fascinate me Just by your motions And the person I see

A kiss on the cheek
I give you each day
As my dream for us to unite
Grows further and further away

So to you my friend I say you've missed out Simply by choosing The more attractive route An illusion of love You have brought to my life While the reality of the possibility Strikes as hard as a knife

Palmer Street at Night, New Orleans, 1982

This right turn swings my headlights from the Avenue onto Palmer Street. Freed from street lamps, the turgid darkness sluices in and washes a dozen New Orleans years around me like gravel. My Ford tacks in fitful zigzag between storm drains and gutters.

Dented memories from a rescinded decade flare ahead like sideswiped mailboxes. Pitt, Henry Clay, Plum Street, Pritchard Place, Nashville Avenue (twice). I am a circuit rider making regular stops at previous addresses of impersonation and pantomime.

Such wiry memories that surge and splay like roots under these buckled sidewalks. The blurred oaks above me fade to black under a lowering canopy of repetition. I am barely moving as misgivings disguised as headlights swerve toward me.

I yaw my Ford toward the curb, blinded by my double in the highbeams. There is menace in scattered pebbles. My rear-view mirror holds obscure correspondence with the accidental past. Bullet taillights form tracers across a nightscape drawn to vanishing point. stop. upon of her for so

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I mash the brake and shudder to a sidelong stop. I gulp the heavy air and prop my head upon the clouded glass. Against all odds of heat and damp, I scan the viscous sky for some rare stroke of lowland weather to rout the vapors from this crescent coast.

This is what you think about alone in a Ford at night on Palmer Street. It just goes to show the value of a liberal arts education.

To be able to take the back pages of an ordinary life and roach them up to resemble a passage you read in Proust is nothing to take for granted.

I ease my Ford from shoulder to centerstripe of accelerating asphalt. Whispered dynamics of road and motion steady my hands around the level wheel. A delta moon lifts through the mossy understory framing Palmer Street from here to Claiborne.

Sharon Holder

Somewhere

Somewhere
inside the tightly clenched fist
of the universe
beneath the shadow of the clouds
beyond the thunder
that preludes the storms
below the billowing fingers
of smoke and dusts
through their smoggy veils
is a beautiful thing called earth.

Somewhere
inside the tightly clenched fist
of human intellect
beneath the shadow of the clouds
beyond the thunder
that preludes the wars
between the free and the enslaved
of anger and lust
entangled in their captive webs
is a beautiful thing called man.

untitled

f♦♦♦ off

i have a problem for which there is no answer i have a problem for which there is no question

Can you help me, please?

i want to know why you are the way you are i want to know why your life should be worth living Can you help me, please?

you will forever fight the whole of your familiar you will forever extinguish the meaning of my truths

there is no pleasure in association

Clouds

Gigantic turtles cleave the sky blue waters of the heavens Swimming, swimming towards the endless horizons Leaving behind trails of snow white eggs To hatch into fanciful sky-creatures.

Stallions thunder across the panoramic skies Rearing, pawing at the command of their riders Answering the call of silver horns And silently barking dogs.

Rabbits leap from puffy hill to fluffy dale Splaying little clouds of dust in their haste As they hide behind silver birches And melt into the openings of their warrens. Mushrooms display their dark underside As they grow wild in white gardens. Their spores reach the earth as Dancing dust motes on spiralling sunlight.

Soft breezes blow away the blues As sleep chases me Under the cool canopy Of the oak tree.

Veronica Alker

The Drought

The day was hot, the kind of hot that made everything seem stagnant and still, except for the sound of the crickets. Nothing moved, not even the dry pale grass quivered or rustled — not even one little bit. I felt like I was the only one or thing alive, except for the crickets.

I had gone on a walk to clear my mind, but it wasn't working — the more I tried, the more I thought, and the more cluttered my thoughts became. I began to think things, the kind of things that only a person can think to oneself, the kind of things that make you think you could possibly be crazy, and you wonder if other people have these kinds of crazy thoughts — and maybe — just maybe the whole world's crazy and nobody knows it. As I walked and thought, my feet kicked up the dry dust which stuck to my skin and mixed with my sweat. It made me feel gritty, so I thought I might go

down to the creek and take a swim. But then I remembered the creek had dried up. The thought crossed my mind again, "Was I the only one or thing alive?" Even the creek was dead — or at least for the while. The dry grass continued to lay still and the trees bore no leaves. Everything was so quiet. Why was it so quiet? I knew, the birds were not singing. There was no sound except for the crickets and my feet, feet which heavily pounded the dusty, dry road. I kept walking and thinking. It was the worst drought these parts have had as far back as anyone could remember. Everything was dried and shriveled.

As I walked, I saw in the distance "the abandoned shack." I used to think it was haunted. As I approached it I realized there was someone on the porch, an old and wizened man sitting in a rocker, rocking back and forth, back and forth. I called out to him, "Hello."—no answer.

Veronica Alker

Again I called, "Hello there." - still no answer. Was he deaf? Possibly. He looked at me, or through me, with eyes of ice and I realized he had no pupils. Blind. He was blind and deaf and old and shriveled and dry. It was almost as if he were the drought itself. He himself, in one body, his body, summed up the surroundings. Why was he here and who was with this man? I stood and watched him. He didn't stir. I didn't stir. I continued to watch. He didn't even know I was there. Then he made a sound: it was a low gurgle; it rattled deep within his throat, and he coughed up phlegm and spat. I was so close to him that I could see the greenish-yellow phlegm hit the ground near my feet. I watched the dust quickly stick and cover it. I felt sick. I looked at the ugly, wizened, old man and thought, "even his insides are decaying and dying," He scared me. He represented death, and when he spat so close to me I felt death's hands brush, but miss me. I

walked away. I looked back, once, and only once. I saw the shack, "the abandoned shack," and I was sure my eyes did not deceive me. The old man was not there; the rocker he had sat upon lay in a broken crumble, and there was no one there — no one! Thoughts ran through my mind: Was that death? Had I missed its grip? Again I thought, am I the only one or thing alive? Except of course for the crickets?

always after

for a fleeting moment life is as it was

before

then I remember it will never be

before

it will always be

after

All in a Day's Ride

- 8:45- This morning I board the #68 bus in front of my apartment complex. Most of these people are on their way to work or to school. They're mostly clean, quiet, and serene.
- 8:55- I hate sitting by fat people because they take up all the seat. The bus driver just got off the bus to do no telling what. They always do that, taking a break in the middle of the bus route. I hate riding the bus.
- 9:00- Everybody is quiet. Most of the people are reading their newspapers. Nothing is really exciting right now. Mornings are usually boring unless you run across a lunatic. Lunatics are crazy no matter what time of day. The seats are all taken, and people are standing in the aisles. I have to write sideways because I can barely move my arm. Move over! I think to myself.

- 9:05- I just found out where she's getting off the bus. That means that I have to continue being crushed. It's boring on this bus, but I change buses soon anyway.
- 9:10- It's funny, but some people stand even though there are empty seats. I wonder why they would rather stand instead of sit. Someone else gets on, and he passes the seat, too. The bus driver just stopped the bus again. He takes his black, leather bag with him every time because he doesn't trust anybody. It looks like a nice bag, too. He goes in Circle K, but he just went into a store 15 minutes ago and came out empty-handed. He doesn't have to use the bathroom again, does he? He's making me late; I know that. This is the reason why some students who ride Metro are sometimes late to class. We

can't control the buses; we just ride them. I don't care what time I catch the bus, something unexpected always happens.

9:15- The bus driver is still in the store. I hear someone behind me say that he must be doing drugs since he keeps dragging that bag behind him. He now comes out with a cup of coffee, and another bus just passes by. It's probably the one that I need to ride.

9:30- I just boarded the #2 bus. There are empty seats on this bus, and it's much colder. There are a lot of hispanics on this bus because there are many who live in the Bellaire area. These people on this bus don't look like they're going anywhere special, just downtown. There's a Mexican woman teaching a man Spanish. The man is black, but he's not American. I think he's from Africa or Jamaica because he doesn't have a Spanish or American accent. At first I thought he was Cuban.

The woman has him repeating certain words and saying vowel sounds. He's good though, because he can hold a conversation in Spanish. He probably knows three or four different languages.

9:45- There's no change except that the bus driver is driving so slow that I'm afraid that we might stop in the middle of the street. I think they sometimes start daydreaming. I hate bus drivers. They're rude, obnoxious, and they pretend to be important. Some stupid man is beating on the back of my seat, disturbing my thoughts. It's like he's doing it on purpose because I can't see the purpose. Maybe he's entertaining himself. Now other people are starting to look back there at him. I still have to catch another bus just to get up the hill to the university. It's already 9:50, and I'm not even off this bus yet. If Dr. Worsham has a problem with my being late, this log should explain everything clearly.

Desiree Y. Verble

9:55- The man's not hitting the back of the seat; he's stomping on the floor. I finally get tired of hearing the noise so I look back at him, too. I ring the bell, signaling that I want to get off the bus, and the bus driver passes my stop. I stand up to get off, screaming at him that I rang the bell to get off at the last stop. He lets me off at the next stop. I don't want to get off there.

10:00- I'm now on the #5 bus, and I am disgusted. Why do funky, stinky, nasty people always have to sit directly in front of me? We just came to an abrupt stop because, as the light was turning yellow, some lady walked into the street, causing the bus driver to slam on his brakes. We almost hit her, too. This funky man is giving me a headache. You would think that some people have never heard of the word "water." A car tries to turn right from the far left lane and crosses in front of the bus. The light turns red, so the car just stops in the

middle of the street. We almost hit them, too. People play with buses too much. When I first got on this bus I was by myself. Now it's almost full.

10:05- I still haven't made it to school. I'm on my way up the hill though. Now you see what I have to go through every day just to get to school, not to mention the joys of school itself. Let me ring the bell ...

Metallic Mentality

They say in this land I'm guaranteed freedom and democracy I'm sorry to say that I disagree All I see is hypocrisy

Let's separate now from this masquerade Stand up, be counted, let's all be saved We're headed for destruction; we'll never be free Until we destroy this Metallic Mentality

This mentality runs rampant in cities near and far The damage is more powerful than any nuclear war Minds seemed to harden, transformed into steel Compassion is lost and the ability to feel We're becoming a nation of self-righteous clones We can't let indifference capture the throne

Metallic Mentality—don't let it stake its claim Achieve its victory, or walk away with fame Because the end result is loss, not gain

The time is now to take a stand Love thy neighbor, reach out your hand Start a dress rehearsal for the promised land

If equality is really what we seek Then we must not be afraid to speak And destroy this Metallic Mentality

On Maine's Coast

I have never felt so close to nature as I do right now, sitting here on the remote, quiet, rocky coast of Maine. This is my favorite place to be in the world. Hove to travel and I've seen a great deal of the United States, but there is no place else like Maine's coast.

The summers here are cool and mild; perfect, if you ask me. And the winters are bitterly frigid and full of snow and ice. But the coast never changes. It is always cold, distant, fierce, powerful; it is constant.

The sun is setting over my shoulders, yet the sky in front of me lights up brilliantly. The pale pink and gray sky contrasts the silky purple clouds. Any artist would be proud to have painted the masterpiece in front of me tonight. When visiting other coastlines like South Padre Island, San Diego, or Pensacola it is difficult to

distinguish the sunset from the sunrise. While sitting upon rocks as oversized as my sofa and studying the changing of the night's sky, I am certain that I'm here in Maine.

Some folks prefer the mountains and woods of Maine opposed to these rocky beaches lined with lighthouse after lighthouse. Henry David Thoreau, during August of 1846, went on his first of three excursions through the back woods of Maine and carefully documented his experiences. Dudley Cammett Lunt wrote of his adventures on the sea and in the woods throughout the state of Maine. Captain George Waymouth explored northern Maine and her northern rivers during the 17th century. As for myself, I prefer to sit comfortably on a "sea boulder" and watch the sky turn blacker than coal.

Diana Hornick

I gaze out towards the dark and endless horizon while waves rush in below my feet.

As high-tide rolls in, I feel fear combined with awe while I watch the waves crash into the rocks below. My feet are merely two or three yards above these forceful waves. A wave is defined as "a ridge or a swell moving to and fro along the surface of the ocean." Therefore, these are more than waves thrashing the coast of Maine. They are thunderous masses of fury colliding frantically into the coastline.

I have never observed anything else this powerful in nature. I have, however, witnessed hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and other powerful forces of nature. But the sea is so natural, not a "mutant" of nature like those storms. The sea rages into the rocks below me. It speaks to me through the winds it brings to the shore, "I am the strongest force in nature and I dare you to challenge me."

I cannot.

The rumbling mass slams itself onto the rocks below. Then, it abruptly, yet gracefully, glides back toward the open sea. It seems undecided which direction to take. Undecided or not, it is serious and I can feel its seriousness all around me. I know it can easily jump up, wrap its cold and salty arms around me, then drag me into its depths.

I realize how powerless and minute I am, as a human being, on this earth. There are too many unexplainable forces of power on the planet, and I am not one of them. But the sea is. This coastline is. Maine is.

It is getting colder and darker. The northern breezes off of the Atlantic Ocean frigidly blow in my face. I am glad I wore my denim jeans and jacket today. The summers are so pleasant, the winters so harsh. I'd live here if it weren't for the nasty, winter weather. Another

Diana Homick

reason to live here is because Bangor is nearby. Stephen King, my favorite author, was born, raised, and will probably die in Bangor, Maine. He centers most of his novels and short stories here in Maine. And to think, I am only 50 miles south of Bangor.

As I look to my left and right, I feel enveloped by the colossal rocks. The tall telephone poles that line US 1 rise unnaturally above my enclosed haven.

The coast of Maine is all that one imagines it is, and more. I can always see a lighthouse from anywhere on the beach. All of the beaches are lined with gargantuan to near-microscopic sized rocks. And the aroma of lobster dinners and salt breezes from the sea saturate the air.

While sitting upon these rocks and watching the seabelow, I enjoy thinking. Thinking of nothing. Thinking of everything. Large masses of water seem to have

that effect on me. All is peaceful; I feel too relaxed. In one breath I can describe the sea's overwhelming power, yet in the next breath I feel calmness all around me and throughout my body.

There is no place else on earth to think, feel, and be one with nature like on Maine's coast.

glass

it's winter through the glass the air seems crisp all is still the world a portrait cold and clear

winter skies

winter skies unequalled calm serenity of the soul

The Longest Week

It was late January of 1980 when everyone celebrated the Vietnamese New Year, "Tet." Usually on every Tet my family stayed home on the first day because of an ancient belief that it was bad luck to go outside, especially to someone's house. We went out on the second and third days of the celebration. I remembered my mother, early in the morning of the third day, telling my older brother and me not to go anywhere. Boy, I was furious. This was Tet and she expected me to stay home. I asked my mom what was the idea for me to stay home; she answered that it was bad luck to go out today, so I better stay home. It seemed like this Tet was the unluckiest year of my life. Even my sisters and little brothers weren't home; how unfair!

Around three o'clock that afternoon, I saw my father packing. Unusual. He seemed sad, which is weird

during the Tet celebration. My mother was acting the same way while packing some food together. I thought she was packing it for the next day. After packing, Father told us to eat dinner even though it was early.

Around four o'clock, Daddy told my brother and me that we were leaving to see some relatives. But somehow I did not believe him, and I started to cry. My body trembled, and all of a sudden I saw both of my parents crying.

Eventually I realized what was going on; we were going to escape from Vietnam. Never once in my life did I think that one day I would be separated from my mother. She hugged me and kissed me and told my brother and me to love and to take care of each other, especially to respect and to obey our father. I could not seem to stop crying nor let go of my mother's arms.

Before we left, my mother gave me her shirt that she was wearing, and I treasure it to this day.

As we departed the house, my heart began to pound faster and faster, harder and harder. Dad warned us not to look scared. We tried, but it was so difficult and even more difficult to stop crying. My mind went berserk; I missed Mom, yet I feared getting killed or stranded in the middle of the ocean. Most of all, I feared never getting to hold my mother ever again. At the age of ten, all the surprise and tension was killing me physically and mentally. I was scared, scared of everyone and everything I saw. I tried my best not to worry Father so much. For him, this no return journey was twice as hard on him than on me. If we were caught, Father would go to prison for a very long time. It was the most painful thing for him to leave his wife and children for the freedom of his two oldest boys. If we stayed in Vietnam, we would pack our bags and go to war in Cambodia when we turned fifteen. To me, my father was the bravest man in the world; I will always be proud of him.

Between six and seven o'clock we met two men in their late twenties at a strange coffee shop somewhere near the riverfront in Saigon. One of the men escorted my brother away. That was another painful blow because I felt the man had taken a part of me. I cried silently and tried very hard not to make a scene. As we went on with the plan, Father and I went with the other man. We traveled for two or three hours. The land around us was full of wild grass and uncultivated farm land. The man looked around alertly when we entered a small trail. After a little while, we got to this medium-sized barn. It did not look to me like this barn was functional. The night got dark and chilly. The man warned us not to look suspicious and absolutely not to make any noise. When

we got inside the barn, I could barely see, but when I focused I saw people lying on the ground. I estimated about fifty people, all who managed to get there using one plan or another. In the meantime, I thought about my older brother. I kept bugging my father about him. He assured me that everything would be all right. As I sat among this strange crowd, I began to think about my mother, older sisters, and younger brothers. When a person is far from home and surrounded by strangers, it is natural for family to be first on the mind. I felt so helpless.

After hours passed, sitting, thinking, hoping, wishing, and praying, I suddenly heard a noise from a distance. It sounded like someone was yelling. Father heard the noise, too. He pulled me up and moved to the door. Many people were sleeping, but some also heard the hollering. As the noise came closer and closer, the

words became clear. "Split up! The police are coming ... Run! Run!" Gunshots accompanied the voice.

Father and I hurried out the door with everyone else. Some of the sleeping people rushed out as though they were chased by a nightmare, leaving their belongings behind. At first, we ran straight towards anywhere. We tried to run on the narrow strips of land between the rice fields. It was dark, so we were extra careful not to fall into the rice fields. The land was very muddy. I began to lose ground; Father, a fast and strong runner, pulled me out of the mud. Many people screamed, especially the old women and girls. Some of them could not run on the narrow land strip which divided the rice fields, so they fell down in the deep mud. The mud could sometimes reach over the knees. The police were coming closer and closer. They were shooting everywhere. Father noticed that we were near a river; it was logical because we were waiting at the barn for the right time to get to the canoes. My father and I were in a state of shock, so panicked that the muddy strip seemed like concrete. We ran and ran, finally reaching the river. I heard cries of agony and voices screaming, "Go on ... just go on ... don't worry about me ... Save me ... Help me ... Help me!" At that moment I wished the world would just end.

My father, busy looking for the sampans, didn't pay attention to either the voices or the shooting. He was not about to be denied his family's freedom. Father spotted several sampans equipped with boat motors, and we just ran to the closest one. The majority of the group was also there. We all fought for seats. Father got me one fairly easily because of his strength. When young, lifting weights was his favorite hobby. The gunshots got louder. Father put my head down and told me he could see the police now. Our sampan was the first

to leave. We were not safe yet because we were still in Vietnam. We feared the police would shoot us if we were caught.

Our pilots managed to escape that place; we were lucky because the police were unprepared. By the time they could get a boat, we were well on our way to the secret hiding place of the boat we'd use to escape. I was so scared during the chase that I wet my pants without realizing it. Father kept his composure, having gained experience with gun fire during his Naval service, batteling against the communists, during which he witnessed the killings of his closest friends.

As soon as we got to the boat site, I was reunited with my brother. Rumors had flown around the canoe that the group waiting by the boat might panic and leave without us. However, Father was the navigator and captain of the boat we were heading for. No one else was

Phu T. Doan

experienced enough to handle the boat in the water for the several days it would take to get to Indonesia.

The boat was about twelve to fifteen meters and was loaded with seventy-eight passengers. Inside, odors of gas and vomit drifted. Women and children stayed inside the cabin, no room except to sit. The men stayed on deck to act as fishermen. The next morning, about seven o'clock, while we were moving, we saw a fishing boat. The people on the boat were curious to see who we were. They asked us several questions, but we brushed them off with a couple of answers to avoid them getting closer to us. I found out later that they were fishermen from Phu Quoc, a communist industrial town. That was bad news because most of them worked for the government. We were glad when they left, knowing they were still suspicious of us.

The danger was not over yet; we were still inside

Vietnamese water. As evening came along, my father spotted through his binoculars a boat in the far distance traveling at a great speed. Father, with his expertise, told us that the boat looked like one of the patrol boats equipped with weapons. The people once again grew terrified. Equipped with only a map and a compass, we didn't know if we had entered "freedom waters," international waters where the Vietnamese government had no authority over us.

After watching us for thirty intense minutes, the fearsome patrol boat turned around. Father figured we must have entered international waters. We all were in a state of joy and felt like we were free already.

The second night of the trip, we relaxed more, relaxed in a sense of being free from everything. Now, in the middle of the huge water, our tiny boat filled with passengers mourning. Each had his or her own sorrow,

which without exchanging, we understood. Later that night, a minor storm passed by; I prayed that it would not strengthen. We managed through it without any damage. I was surprised at how everyone kept so calm. I guess we knew we were sailing a thin line between life and death. As time progressed into the next day, Father mentioned that if we saw any ships, we would try to get their attention for food, water, gasoline, and maybe they would even rescue us.

During most of the trip, my brother and I sat close to our father. I suffered from sea sickness, throwing up the entire trip; my brother remained healthy, high-spirited the entire time. The third night Father sighted a ship and started to signal SOS. After a few flashes, they signaled back some code. Father translated that the ship wanted us to come to them; therefore, we did what they requested. After trying to reach them for thirty to forty-

five minutes, Father said we weren't getting any closer. Instead, we were headed back in the direction we escaped from, Vietnam. Naturally, we stopped and turned around. That ship tried to trick us. We all agreed that it was a Soviet ship.

The next day we noticed food, water and gasoline supplies dwindling, the major supplies of gas and water drastically low. Maybe the owner of the boat did not plan well or maybe there was not enough room to store more. Whatever the case might have been, our remaining gasoline probably would not last but one or two more days. The water had to be conserved. Everyone was to drink a smaller quantity and drink only twice a day. Among the group there was always disagreement and dissatisfaction, providing extra work for my father and crew members who tried to keep everyone calm.

Fortunately, at about five p.m. that night we

Phu T. Doan

spotted a humongous oil tanker from Taiwan heading towards Thailand. First we asked them to pick us up, but they were busy with their business. Instead, they gave us a couple barrels of gasoline, water, and food, more than our boat could store. We felt very grateful to them. After a short-lived excitement, we moved on.

The following day everyone looked weary. Most of the crewmen received bad sunburns, including my father. Even though their bodies were exhausted, their minds thought about the Thailand pirates. According to the map, we were nearing Thailand water where many pirates operated. We were aware of the horrible news about the sea robbers. They robbed, raped and killed innocent people who tried desperately to find freedom. The pirates knew the "boat people" brought everything of value that they owned with them. Pirates were the worst people on this planet. My father and the crew

directed the women and children to go inside the cabin; the men stayed up on deck like they did the first day on the boat. This time, though, instead of acting like fishermen, the men were armed and ready to defend. We would rather die than let these pirates walk on us. Through the day, practically everyone looked around alertly. We kept very quiet. We felt like they were about to creep upon us any time now. I could see the frightened look on everyone's face. This was probably the worst time of the whole journey. I prayed and hoped that whoever or whatever we were waiting for would never show up. The fifth night, we began feeling a little at ease. We traveled smoothly without sighting anything until nine or ten o'clock that night. We met a ship from East Germany. They were very kind to us; they gave us food, drinks, cigarettes and gasoline. We communicated in both English and French. They asked us why we left

Vietnam; we replied that we could no longer stand communism. Of course, we knew the answer offended them; after all, we were talking about them also. Today, to think back, the East Germans probably understood our feelings well because now they are no longer communist. After the long conversation, we moved on to our destination, Indonesia, which was oncoming.

Next morning, when I woke up, amazingly enough I saw land. My father, who had stayed up all night, informed me that it was Indonesia, and the only thing he could do now was to go parallel with the land to see if there were any habitats. During this period of time, we knew there were many refugee camps set up along these islands. Also, there were boats and ships patrolling these areas to help out the "boat people." We hoped to see these camps or ships. Our patience ran low as the day progressed. On the sixth night came the moment we

waited for, we saw little houses along the beach. Sure enough, it was a refugee camp. One boat came out and greeted us. Our long struggle had paid off.

Today, after ten years, the experiences of my father, brother and I are always on my mind. We were the lucky ones. Many unfortunate people died of starvation or were murdered either by the Vietnamese government or by the terrible sea robbers. My oldest sister died in 1986 of starvation and thirst after the boat's motor stopped operating. The boat drifted for thirty days. My father, sacrificing his happiness for the safety of myself and my brother, is responsible for saving seventy-five others.

He recently passed away from kidney failure.

Daddy

The roller coaster raced up and down the hills. I buried my head in your chest until the ride was over. I always knew I would be safe when you were around. You were so tall and strong as I looked up to you. I adored you so.

Learning was so difficult, not English or History, but Math. Oh, how I hated Math. You, with your engineer's mind, You made it seem so simple. I admired you.

Leaving home hurt so much, but I knew I had to; I needed to find out who I was. You understood, though your protest was loud. You sent me on my own, with a new car and a credit card to call home.
You told me you would never see your little girl again. I thought you were wrong.
I loved you so.

Returning was hard;
Each time I saw you, I thought it might be the last time.
The hospital became a common occurrence.
You fought so hard, your body just too tired.
I knew you were right when I saw you die;
I wasn't your little girl any more.
God, how I miss you.

My Family

My sister steps onto the bus proudly displaying high top sneakers, cut up denim shorts, and a tight, brilliant orange tank-top. Her hair is a mass of greasy curls limp with the weight of activator, on top of which sits the stainless steel half moon of her portable radio. My sister sits down in the back of the bus and promptly turns up the boom of her box.

My grandmother is sitting next to me. We are both sitting close to my sister. My grandmother slowly reaches out to touch my sister and asks her to please turn down the volume of her radio. My sister turns the sound up to an ear-shattering screech. My grandmother slowly brings her knotted hands up to her face and removes her glasses and hearing aid.

My brother does not wish to hear the be-bop music blaring from my sister's headphones either. He touches her arm and politely asks her to turn down the volume. He says the bass is disturbing the other passengers. My sisters turns down the music, removes her headphones from her ears, and kills my brother with her words:

"I don't care WHO my music disturbs! Ain't NOBODY gonna tell ME to turn down MY radio EX-CEPT the bus driver, so if YOU don't like it, just GET OFF the bus!"

She returns the steel to her slick head and turns up the sound full blast. I sit next to my grandmother, trying to shield her with my silence. My brother shakes his head in despair.

My sister suddenly notices my grandmother's sagging bosom sitting in her lap. She laughs at her, not knowing that my grandmother's stiff hands could no longer fasten the tiny hooks of a brassiere, nor could her sore shoulders support the weight of her stretched out, dried up breasts.

My grandmother pays little attention to my sister. Instead, she is looking out of the window, twisting and turning her already twisted and turned body, trying to realize where we are. My grandmother puts on her glasses/hearing aid and realizes she has passed her stop. Tears trace uneven pathways on her face as she begins to whimper and whisper to herself while struggling to raise her ancient arms to the bell. I push it for her, yearning to ease her confusion and I hear her whispered words.

My sister laughs at my grandmother's feeble slowness and at my brother's willingness to help. Her laughter resonates through the air as my grandmother stumbles off the bus, shuffling down the street on swollen, arthritic feet.

with me

born of heart gone of your body not of womb

loved by spirit angry of my loss not of blood not of your peace

not of my mind

learned by compassion sheltered from life not by pain not from death

touched by understanding stay with me ... not by the hand

in memory of her adopted mother

A Bay Fisherman's Dream

A man sat on the end of a dock and painted the sea.
With every brush stroke there was the rustle of reeds.
Seagulls hovered overhead and glided as the dew;
Then caught by a breeze, they found something else to do.

But one stayed behind and sat on a piling. He ruffled and preened, no sound the air filling. Yet, off in the distance, rose a soft melodic hum. And soon passed a boat with two fisherman, one napping.

The dock appeared sturdy
where the man sat, his feet dangling.
Weathered by sun and salt air,
the pier was missing some planking.
But deft feet and keen eyes,
and a love of the water,
Took the man to the end
where he sat and he painted.

The sun barely shone over the edge of the horizon. A soft and gentle light gradually awakened the senses.

Shimmers of gold danced in ripples of water,

Then bounced off salt grass and back into the sky.

White, green and orange,
the cork swayed in the water,
tethered to the man's brush
by a spider's silken thread.
For hours it seemed,
as the minutes would pass,
Nothing would move
but the creatures of nature.
Then suddenly the cork
would disappear under water.

The line becomes taught and the pole would bend.

Then the painter and tools would work as though one,

And on to the stringer one more speck or red drum.

From the live well beside him another shrimp he would offer; A stroke back with his brush, Then a gentle stroke forward, Take up the slack line and find that comfortable spot. The painter's feet dangling; he's at peace by the water.

There's No Place Like Home

"Boo, I think Mama's callin' ya." "Freda, no she ain't. I didn't hear her." "Girl, go see what she wants." "Alright, doggit." "Jenet, come here girl." "Okay, Grandma." "You have to crawl under the house and untangle that damn dog again. His leash is caught on something and make sure he don't run 'cause I'm gonna whip his stupid ass." "Grandma Ialways gotta go under the house, shoot. That dog make me sick, huh." "Girl, get under there."

I first set foot in my grandma's house when I was three months old. Whether I wanted to be there or not I had no choice for I was a victim of unfortunate circumstances. I was born in San Diego, California on July 18, 1969 to a young woman aged twenty. My mother, Glory Jean, and my father were never married. My mother is

a very independent woman who doesn't believe in either marriage or the idea of spending her life with one man who may try to become her dictator. However, my father was allowed to see me at my mother's discretion. One day while I was at my sitter's, my father came by to pick me up - but never returned me. My mother was frantic; she used everything she had to find me. Well, she found me with my father, who had no intentions of returning me to my mother. My father and his parents were going to take my mother to court to gain custody of me. My mother said there was no way in hell they were going to keep me. My mother and grandma flew me to Louisiana and to this day, September 10, 1990, twenty-one years later, my father still does not know where I am. Because of his love for me, he made a mistake which cost him the

he

in

la

be

be

chance to see his first born bloom.

The year was 1969, when integration had not fully taken place in Louisiana. My grandmother is not prejudiced, yet my white skin color as a baby truly aggravated her. She told me a story about an incident that remained in her memory. When I was about four months old, my grandmother and I went to the store. One has to keep in mind that I was an extremely bright baby with light brown curly hair and slanted eyes. However, she left me in the basket for a few seconds to go get an item. A white lady was standing by the basket adoring and playing with me when my grandmother returned. "What a beautiful baby. What couple are you babysitting for?"

"I ain't babysittin' for anyone; this is my grandchild."

My granny said the woman almost fell over dead because she had mistaken a black baby for a white baby.

After that incident, my grandmother went home and replied to my aunts, "When is this girl going to change colors 'cause she is too white?" My grandma prayed I would turn colors, but I think the gods were ignoring her prayers because until the age of five, I remained the same.

DeRidder is a small town approximately thirty miles west of Lake Charles. Even today, the blacks stay on one side of the town and whites on the other. But in some areas, the neighborhoods are mixed. I stayed with my granny for four years until my mother finished school in California. At the age of five, I moved to Houston but every summer I was back at my granny's house in DeRidder. My granny's house was located on 1523 Sunset Street. The house was green with white window sills, a gigantic front and back yard, and a gray concrete front porch. My grandma would plant orange

and yellow flowers all around the front yard. We had a garden in the back with an assortment of cucumbers, tomatoes, watermelons, squash and collard greens. It was as though we had a produce department in our backyard. Whatever vegetable we needed, we simply went to the back and picked it ripe from the vine.

Our house was the prettiest on the street. Our neighbors' homes were okay, but ours was a palace to me. The house had a living room, three bedrooms, one bathroom, a utility room and a kitchen as big as a restaurant's. The house had wooden floors with no central air or heating. We had air conditioners that were placed in the window of each room in the house and heaters for each room. I remember how the house would creak at night when it was "settling" down. Sometimes I wish that house had ears and a mouth so it could tell the many stories concerning that green house and the people

who lived there, for I love them all dearly.

"Jenet, it's time for you to go to bed." "But grandma, can't I stay up a litta longer?" "No, 'cause Santa won't come if he knows that you're not sleep." "Oh, all right."

Christmas Eve, 1972, will always remain a fond memory to me because it was the first time I saw Santa Claus. He and my granny were bringing my hoppy horse in through the door because we had no chimney. Incidentally, I remember the horse bumping my grandma's leg and bruising it. She still has that scar on her leg, but I dare not say I know how she got it because then she'll know that I saw what I shouldn't have seen. I saw a fat white man with white hair and a white beard. He had on a red suit with white fur trimming and black boots. I saw him, I saw him, I know I did because I was peeking around the corner when I was supposed to be

asleep. To this day I tell friends I saw Santa Claus, and I stand firm for my belief that that was Santa; it just had to be because I was a 3-year-old who believed in Santa, and I would thank each and every one of you very much if you let me go on believing it because that three-year-old is still inside me with big believing eyes.

We had so many pets at my granny's. Once we even had baby alligators, but they died before they became monstrous. We had chickies, hamsters and my favorite — doggies. My favorites were Muffin, Scooter, Measles, and Measles' babies, Jefferina and Jeff.

"Freda, where are you?" "Boo, what are you doing home so early?" "We only had half a day. Where are my chickies?" "I don't know." "I know they 'round here somewhere." "Don't go in the bathroom yet, okay?" "I gotta use the bathroom." Silence. "FREDA, WHAT HAPPENED TO MY CHICKIES? WHY THEY IN THE

TOILET?" "Muffin got to them, Boo, and we have to flush them down the toilet 'cause they're dead." "Where's Muffin 'cause I'm a gonna kill him. He ate my little chickies, huhhh. Here, Muffin, come here boy."

I loved my animals as though they were my own babies. Since I have been around animals since a young age, I have more compassion and sympathy for an animal than a human. It's true because animals can teach one about unconditional love. Sure they can make one mad; they aren't perfect either.

"Granny, you got any chicken necks?" "Look in the fridge. What are you using 'em for?" "Me and Kenyatta are goin' crawfishin'." "All right, don't stay out there long; it's too hot out there." "We won't, bye." "Bye, babies."

Crawfishing, crabbing and fishing have been my favorites of recreational activities. If I was bored in the

house, I simply found a string and tied it around a chicken neck for bait. There were many crawfish holes in my granny's yard and sometimes you could see a crawfish peeking out of its hole like a little kid hiding from its mama. Ihad to have been crazy to get up at 3:30 a.m. with my aunts, uncles and granny to go fishing at Cameron and Bundicks (about 1980, a cousin drowned in a whirlpool at Bundicks and another drowned when he fell out of his boat). We would sit in that hot boiling sun for hours. But man, I loved it. I wouldn't have had it any other way even if one paid me. We would bring fried chicken, sandwiches, cookies, chips, beer and cokes. We would stay until night, then head back home.

When I was young I did the most stupid things and my eyes sometimes played tricks on me (except for Santa Claus). One day my aunt Freda, her boyfriend, his brothers, sisters and I went to Bundicks. My aunt's boy-

friend and his brothers went to another part of Bundicks to fish while us girls went swimming (in our clothes, it was unexpected). Everyone was swimming and having a good time. I was being aquatic, swimming underwater with my eyes open trying to see through the murky water. Ever heard of "the boy who cried wolf"?

"Alligator, alligator! Freda, an ALLIGATOR!"

Everyone was screaming at the top of their lungs trying to get out of the water. Since I was little and couldn'tswimas fast, I expeditiously proceeded to climb onto my aunt's back, grabbing her neck too tightly to hang on, so that I almost cut off her air supply. I was in the process of climbing on her head with my legs tied around her neck before she stopped me. Well, everyone made it to the shore safely and Edgar and his brothers ran back when they heard the screaming.

"Boo saw an alligator." "It's right there, you see

it?" "I don't see no alligator, let me go closer. You guys stay back." "Boo, I don't see an alligator." "It's right there peeking out the water." "You mean right over there?" "Yeah." "GIRL, that's a LOG." "Ooh, ha,ha, I thought it was a alligator."

Believe me, my aunt didn't let me forget about our safari for awhile. She rubbed that story in heavily like a mother spreads Vicks on the sore throat of her child.

The holidays always brought a radiant glow to my heart. Family and friends filled the house. I can still smell the turkey and ham topped with brown sugar and pineapple, chitterlings, dressing, greens, candied yams, cornbread, green beans, blackeye peas, sweet potatoes, pecan pie, cheesecake and on and on and on. My granny is the best cook in the world to this day. Granny would be stirring and mixing and chopping while she gave me instructions on what to do to help her. I could see the

sweat falling down her brow and her glasses on the edge of her nose as she prepared a feast. The room would be full of laughter and talk while one could hear the TV and the music in the background. People were constantly in and out of the house to express greetings during the holiday season. My grandmother loved to feed people. I brought a friend of mine from Houston with me during one of my summer visits. My grandmother thought my friend was from Ethiopia because she was slim. According to my grandma, one is healthy if one has meat on his/her bones. I guess I can thank my grandma for my "excellent health" because I have plenty meat on my bones.

"Girl, what is that on the radio?" "Girl, that's the, uh, what's the name of that song?"

My aunts, Mary and Freda, a friend and I were in my granny's brown Chevrolet riding around DeRidder.

A man trying to make a light sped up and hit us broadside or should I say, my side. We were hit right in front of a furniture store and the manager saw it all.

"Oh, my god, what has happened out here? I can't believe he ran that light. Is everyone okay?" "Yeah, thanks, but call the police." "Look at the car, the side is destroyed." "WILL YOU CALL THE DAMN POLICE?"

My aunts are shall we say "trips." They were and still are women who take no crap. Mary, a.k.a. Mae Mae, is about 13 years older than I am, and Freda is 10 years older than me. We are more like sisters than niece and aunts. They taught me not to take crap from anyone. Unfortunately, my aunts would kick anybody's ass in a minute. For instance, we were at the state fair in DeRidder and a man, rushing through the line, pushed me. My aunt Freda grabbed his shirt from behind, pulled him back to her and turned him around. Well, I'm not going

to reiterate what she said, but it took on the effect of a eulogy. My aunts are very protective of me. They used to wipe my behind and rock me to sleep. Our relationship has sutures so tight that when it was time for me to go to Houston they didn't want me to go. We all must have cried for hours. The same night I returned to Houston from my summer vacations in DeRidder, my mother would have to call my grandma and aunts so they could talk to me and calm me down. I hated to leave DeRidder and each time I left I would cry hysterically.

The house has a new facade. The houses that were once adjacent are gone with the past. And yes, it's still the most beautiful house on the street. DeRidder is still the same except for a couple of new fast food places. Well, my granny is remarried and lives in Angleton, Texas, which is about fifty miles from Houston. A close friend of the family now lives in our home. I have to admit I was

furious when granny moved out of the house because it was our house. To me it meant no more family gatherings, holidays or one of the many happenings around the house. I grew up in that house. I must have cried because it felt as though someone was stealing from me.

But I realized no one can rob me of my many happy, sometime humorous memories of growing up in DeRidder on 1523 Sunset Street. My aunts are now married with kids. DeRidder is home to Mae Mae and Freda emigrated to Newton, Texas. It seems as though my childhood never ended because it stays in my mind forever through my family's never-ending stories. Places, people and things may change on the outside but things are better than ever on the inside. Moreover, I learned from my childhood that it doesn't take much to make one happy. As long as one has family and friends who love him/her dearly, one's wealth will always be plentiful. I

know because my wealth originated in a house on a dirt road on 1523 Sunset Street.

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