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A Coconino Community College Student Publication



2015

OnCourse Magazine

Acknowledgements

OnCourse would like to thank the following individuals for their generous support, hard work, and unyielding guidance:

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Apple Jelly
Barbara Tong

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Against Adversity

Andrew Giuliani

The shockwave pulsed through my body, followed by a deafening boom. I looked forward just in time to see fragments of Anderson's truck soaring out of a pillar of smoke and dust. "IED, IED, IED!" blared through our headsets. A 150-pound improvised explosive device had hit Anderson's RG-31. My stomach knotted up. I was afraid of what we'd find when the dust settled, but then Anderson's familiar voice came over the radio. When he mumbled out that everyone was alive, I felt like I could breathe again. But something was wrong; his speech was slurred, and he became more incoherent as he passed up a status report. The gunner had been knocked unconscious; the medic, who had been in the back, was puking; and his own alertness was dropping. They needed to be medevaced for unseen injuries, and hours later a Blackhawk landed and whisked them away for medical evaluation.

Almost one year later, Anderson and I sit in front of his desk. His purple heart, an award given to those wounded in combat, lies among his sci-fi books and Veterans Affairs letters. The light from a computer game on his desktop reflects off his bald head, which he claims is due to the depleted uranium ammo used in his M2 Bradley during his third deployment. Of average height and build, his well-defined facial features and pallor strongly indicate Nordic heritage. A lone tattoo reminiscent of a Roman legion symbol is emblazoned on his left arm – a tribute to his first company, Legion 1-508th. Anderson's hazel eyes are full of humor, but he's clearly tired. His years of rich experience as a noncommissioned officer give him a presence that commands people's attention. He is not, however, a typical soldier. He has an irreverence for military pomp and ceremony, and his flagrant disregard for what others think of him make him a brash and extremely effective leader.

When I ask Anderson why he enlisted in the Army as an infantryman twelve years ago, he replies casually, “To kill people.” Over the course of his enlistment, Anderson survived four combat tours to Iraq and Afghanistan, and although I’d been deployed to Afghanistan with him, I wanted to know more about his experiences during his other deployments. Anderson puts a fat wad of wintergreen chewing tobacco in his lip, and we begin.

“I was just a private. I didn’t know enough to be scared. I was just miserable,” he sighs when I ask him about his jump into northern Iraq during the 2003 invasion. Anderson’s unit, the infamous 173rd Airborne, nicknamed “Sky Soldiers,” had been ordered to secure Bashur airfield as a part of Operation Option North. The jump was Anderson’s sixth, or the “Cherry Popper,” as it’s known as in the airborne community since it’s the first jump done outside of airborne school and in a combat zone. On a frigid, moonless night in March, Anderson and 953 other sky-soldiers parachuted from a C-17 and descended silently to the drop zone, a cold, mud-covered, freshly-tilled farm field. Some paratroopers stuck fast in the soggy earth; others, like Anderson’s buddy, Private Stodomingo, a mortar man, twisted his ankle upon landing. Already burdened with over 120 pounds of his own equipment, Anderson picked up Stodomingo’s thirty-five-pound mortar base plate and slogged to the assembly area. With the Bashur airfield secured, troops and equipment flooded in on air transports; the 173rd was ordered south to take Kirkuk.

Even during an invasion, there can be humor. While burning a mixture of fecal matter and diesel fuel in a fifty-five-gallon barrel, a bubble formed, expanded and exploded on his buddy Mark. “Watching a man take a full frontal poo bubble, a flaming poo bubble, is probably the funniest fuckin’ thing I’ve ever seen,” he says, and I can’t help but laugh as Anderson continues to describe how Mark, enraged beyond words, gingerly took off his top, carefully folded it, and sulked away.

Some memories aren't so fond, however. Some are scars you bear for life. On March 2005, one year after returning from Iraq, Anderson was deployed with the 173rd Airborne, but this time to Afghanistan. Anderson's company was stationed at Forward Operating Base Orgun E. It was relatively slow until

"One of posts had a strategic vantage point but was still occupied by two very dead insurgents."

they went to Kandahar to augment a company that had incurred a platoon's worth of casualties. "That's when things started getting hairy for us," he says.

Anderson's platoon took most of their enemy contact in the Arghandab Valley. Called the Kings Valley by locals, the Soviet Graveyard by military historians, and Ambush Alley by Anderson's platoon, the lush, picturesque valley, surrounded by fortress-like mountains, was a dangerous place. At eleven in the morning on September 30, a torrent of rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire descended on Anderson's platoon. Sergeant First Class Williams, Anderson's platoon sergeant, was walking outside of the vehicle when the ambush started. "Hurry the fuck up!" Anderson yelled at him, but Sergeant Williams continued meandering, saying, "I'm tired." "Sergeant Williams was pretty much a badass," Anderson says with admiration.

During the course of the ambush, a steel-tipped bullet from a Chechen sniper severed the femoral artery of Anderson's friend, Sergeant Doles, taking his life. "You don't let things like that bother you at the moment," he says, "because it could happen again." The fighting lasted for seven hours, ending at six that evening. "It only felt like thirty minutes," Anderson says. After the skirmish, a squad from Anderson's platoon swept the enemy observation posts. One of posts had a strategic vantage point but was still

occupied by two very dead insurgents. The platoon burned the bodies so it could use the observation point. With the fighting over, the loss of Sergeant Doles began to sink in. Anderson was Sergeant Williams' gunner that night, and while pulling security duty, Anderson could hear him weeping.

In 2007, President George W. Bush ordered a troop surge in Iraq. Anderson, now in the Third Infantry Division, served in Iraq for fifteen months, even though his contract ended three months after arriving. This practice is what's known as stop-loss; it's a morale killer, and Anderson was no exception. Anderson sums up this deployment with a simple phrase: "That was a messy one." No coalition forces had been in the area, so the insurgents had had four years of uninterrupted planning and stockpiling. This advantage, coupled with the Third Infantry Division's bull-headed machismo, led to heavy coalition casualties. Anderson's friend Lancaster, and Lancaster's whole squad, died within a week of each other in IED strikes. A mortar that landed fifteen feet behind Anderson could have very well killed him except the mortar shell only half detonated. "I think I might have shit myself . . . no, wait . . . there was definitely shit involved." Anderson describes how he and his buddy Putnam skipped through a field, holding hands while mortar rounds fell nearby. "I think we may have lost it at that point," he chuckles, nodding his head and smirking.

Five years later: Afghanistan. By this time, Anderson had changed his occupational specialty, becoming a combat engineer in the 819th Sapper Company. Called the Firestarters for its inexplicable record of starting fires wherever it went, to various degrees of severity, the unit conducted counter-IED operations in eastern Afghanistan. This deployment was unlike Anderson's others, requiring more preparation and meticulous planning, since it was a meticulous job. Tasked with hunting for enemy devices, Anderson and his company outperformed nearly every other route clearance company in the region, earning accolades

from every chain of command they served, except Third Infantry Division. “But fuck them anyway,” growls Anderson.

On September 11, a week after Anderson’s birthday, Anderson’s platoon was clearing the way for a Combined Arms Task Force whose mission was to stabilize the region for upcoming elections. It wasn’t even dinnertime, but the platoon had already been ambushed and had discovered multiple IEDs. Anderson, the lead truck commander, was following a specially designed vehicle called a Husky, which searches the ground for anomalies using ground-penetrating radar, when the Husky’s left rear tire hit the pressure plate of an IED. The Husky’s innovative design deflected the blast, so the damage was minimal and the operator uninjured. The task force commander demanded that the platoon push onward to the objective before nightfall, so Anderson volunteered to take point. His truck hadn’t gone one hundred meters when suddenly, with a bright flash and a boom like a clap of thunder, his truck disappeared into that cloud of dust.

Anderson returned to Arizona on Christmas Eve of 2013. He was awarded the Purple Heart for injuries sustained in Afghanistan, including mild amnesia and a traumatic brain injury. Now, Anderson attends Northern Arizona University and is pursuing a degree in geography. He hopes to continue his career in the Army as a commissioned officer, a fitting position for him. Anderson pursues his goals with reckless abandon, letting nothing inhibit him, not his traumatic brain injury, not his liberal views in a sea of conservatism, not even the toxic leadership that cost the precious lives of his friends. Instead, Anderson harnesses his experiences. They harden his resolve, and they whet his determination to be a better leader. Anderson is a fighter, a leader, a patriot; he is the future of the Army.



Military Life

Photo by Joseph Kiefer

New Life

Rhonda Walker

The day my daughter arrived in this world, my life was fulfilled. Seeing her for the first time, hearing her cry for the first time, holding her for the first time, brought tears of joy to my eyes. I've never been so happy as to cry. It didn't make sense to me, to cry when overcome with joy. It was very overwhelming.

Having a newborn is exciting. Everyone surrounds you with laughter and well wishes. When my daughter was small, I loved having parties for her. She has a really caring and generous family that love her as much as I do.

After nine months, all of the anticipation of pregnancy is over, but it starts again with bringing the baby home. There is always a new adventure with parenthood. My happiest moments in life were being at home with Sharelle, all day, every day. There just was a presence about her. She had the biggest rosy cheeks, the biggest brown eyes, and the cutest little nose. I remember the smell of formula and baby powder, the taste of banana baby food.

My life changed the day I had Sharelle. The moment I found out I was pregnant should have been the day that changed my life, and it did, but not like this. For me, life was just starting when I had her. I was pregnant at eighteen, and high school had just ended. I wanted to continue my education right after, but that would be difficult. Seeing her was a wakeup call. I was a mother now. She needed me more than anything.

I get many comments on her name; people tell me it's beautiful. I'll always remember how I named her. I was driving with my mom, listening to the oldies, as usual, and the Shirelles were playing. I don't recall the exact song, but in my head I kept thinking, Sharelle.

Sharelle is my strength and my inspiration. She's the source of my ambition. Everything that I do is for her. I would do anything to make sure that she is happy, taken care of, safe, and loved. She is everything that I'm not, and I love her for it.

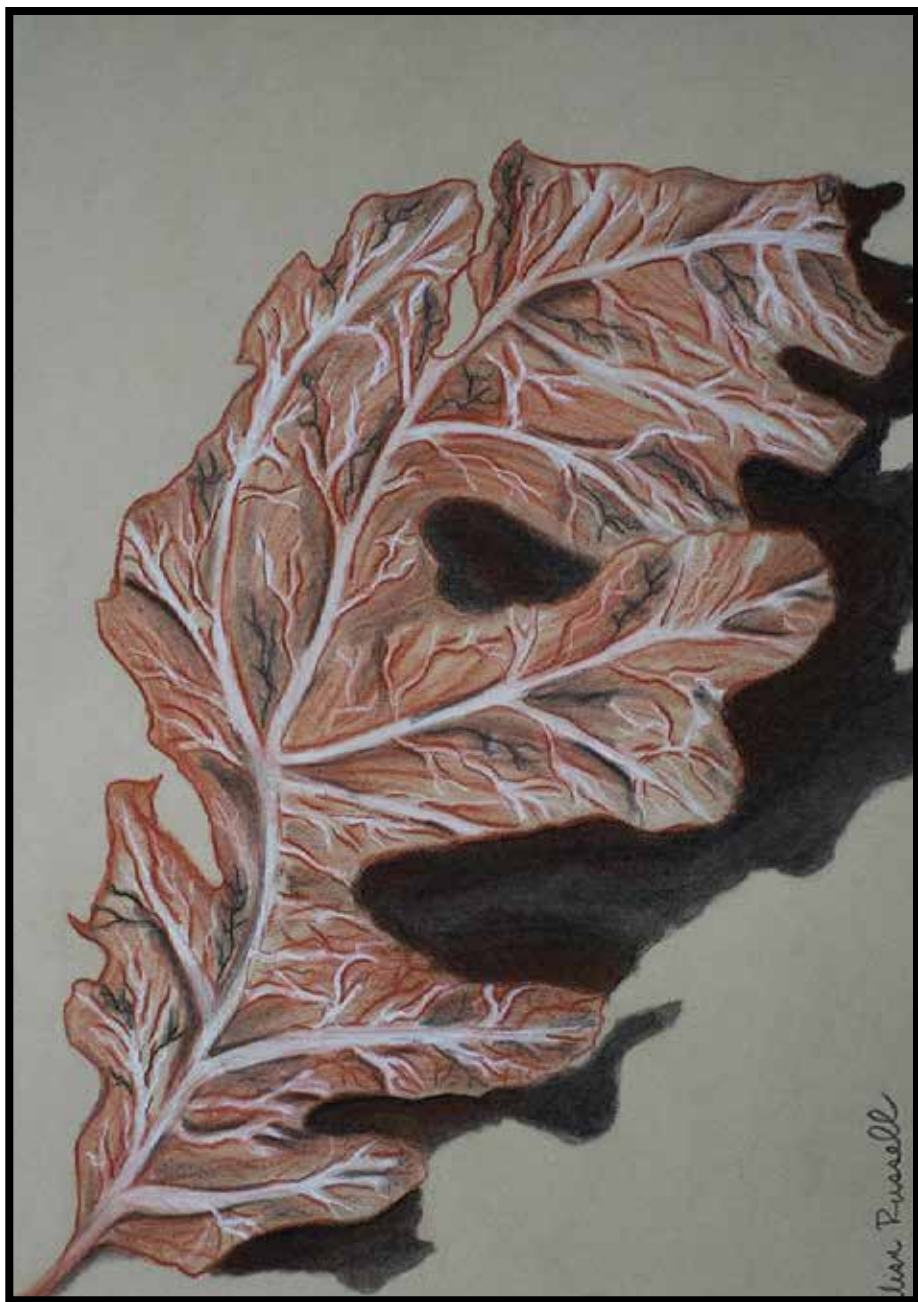
She is confident, smart, funny, talkative, eager to learn, and eager to make friends. She is the kindest person you could ever meet. She can make friends with anyone. I catch myself thinking, “How did I raise someone so good-hearted?” Sharelle makes me laugh; she makes me smile. She makes my heart full. Bringing her into this world was one of the most rewarding experiences. It’s not so much about the pain during childbirth. Pain is only temporary. The happiness feels endless.

A few weeks before my due date, I went to the hospital for a tour. I was told where to park and which elevator to take to get to the labor and delivery unit. I asked my mom to go with me, so that if my water broke I wouldn’t be lost by myself, but she couldn’t go. I was disappointed and ended up taking the tour by myself. I got lost in the parking lot. I did eventually make it to my appointment, and when they asked me if I had any problems finding the place, my answer was, “No.”

The morning my water broke was beautiful. My mother was nowhere to be found, and by the time I found her, I had already called my siblings to let them know the baby was on its way. At the hospital, we got very confused trying to park and find labor and delivery. We walked up and down stairs and into elevators that took us everywhere except where we wanted to go. All I could think was, “Am I going to have my baby in a staircase?” It frustrated me at the time, but now it’s a funny story to tell Sharelle about her grandmother.

Sharelle was born during the 2008 Olympics, and I watched them on TV once I was in the recovery unit. We had many visitors. I remember how tired I was, and how eager to take her home so we could have some privacy. I wanted more intimate moments with her.

She was only a few months old by the time of our first snowfall. I lugged in her carrier into a grocery store. White snow covered the ground, and it was cold. I had a pink baby blanket draped over her carrier to keep the cold out. The pink blanket looked so serene in that white snow.



Autumn's Veins

Unalisa Russell

Eleutheromania

Liz Thomas

There's something beautiful, new, and terrifying about finally graduating high school. It's beautiful because it marks a new beginning. Graduation brings delight to most students, because they are no longer confined by their parents or their high school. When I finally graduated high school I got a nauseous, excited feeling that made me want to throw up and blurt out laughing all at once.

I was different than most of my classmates. I graduated in a class of twenty-six, and I was the black sheep. Every other senior at Merino High School wanted to go to the community college in our town, or to go two hours away, tops. But there was no way in hell I was staying anywhere near Sterling, Colorado. I thought the other seniors were nuts for actually wanting stay anywhere near home. I guess that was my oriflamme. I wanted to be different so badly; I wanted to live out a new standard. I gained courage from this burning desire to follow my dreams instead of living in a box.

All through my senior year, I had planned my move to Phoenix, where I would attend Grand Canyon University. Even though my family kept telling me how unrealistic my plans were, I defended my deep desire to go. I swore that it was God's plan for me to attend the GCU nursing program. But when May rolled around, all my plans began to crumble. GCU called to inform me that I would have to take out \$10,000 in unsubsidized loans for my first year. It was a slap in the

face, and I felt nauseous and hopeless. I didn't know where to go or what to do with my life. My family was right. All my hard work to follow my intense desire to move far away and attend a private Christian college was for nothing.

Exactly one week later, I got a text from an old friend I'd met at Young Life camp a year earlier. He lived in Flagstaff and told me how wonderful it was. It was like living in the Colorado mountains. He told me about the town's history and about the beauty that was hard to miss. His words mesmerized me. This unknown, mysterious place was alluring, I'm sure partly because I wanted to be like a princess that runs away from home into a far off land to be independent, free of her family. I told him about how my huge plans for GCU had failed. I had nothing left and didn't know what to do. He told me he hoped that I would find a place and that I would be happy.

After that moment, I prayed continually for God to show me where I should be, and signs appeared that pointed me to Flagstaff. I made up my mind to move the instant I realized that this place had everything I needed. After the summer ended, I packed up my car and drove the twenty hours to Flagstaff. I only knew one person and was unsure how it would actually pan out, but I had faith.

My family was still skeptical of my decision.

"You'll miss your nieces and nephews growing up," they said. "You won't be able to make it on your own."

But their words didn't get me down. I may have questioned whether this plan was what God intended, but I



Schultz Pass

Susan Hepler

never gave up on it. I figured that if I wasn't supposed to do it, then something would stop me. I kept on listening to the Lord and letting Him govern my decisions. I was not disappointed in the end. In fact, I have never felt more free and alive in my entire life.

The first month of living in Flagstaff was bumpy. I was solivagant, and I loved it and hated it at the same time. I didn't necessarily miss my family, but I missed having a base of people I knew. Before I left Colorado, I had searched Craigslist for a house to share. Living in a house with a couple of girls who were the complete opposite of me was one of the most difficult, testing times of my entire life. My bedroom became my latibule. I didn't want constant contact with my roommates because I knew that they would lead me to a place that I didn't want to be. They would take me back to high school and persuade me to become the person I dreaded.

The amazing thing was, when I was alone and lost, I began to look for myself. I searched for a community that would help me become who I truly wanted to be. All of my life I was on the wrong path, surrounded by people who pushed their ideas of a happy and fun life onto me. I had been surrounded friends who only accepted me if I did what they wanted me to do. Finding new friends who pushed me to be better and live for myself is the greatest blessing I have ever received.

To find the person you have been striving to be all your life, you have to go where no one knows you. My decision, the right decision, came with pain and burden, but then what choice doesn't? Leaving home changed me, and I'll never forget what I had to give up to live this blissful life. I will better myself every day and push past those who put me down.

At 12:00 a.m., it will be a new day. Everything that I've done today – the lists I've made, the places I've visited, the things I've touched, the songs I've heard, the conversations I've had – will become a memory. If I hadn't left home, if I hadn't gone through all that I did to be here, and if I don't now live each day finding new meaning, then there is no story to tell. I would not have met all the amazing people I have or changed the few lives that I have. I delight in the hard decisions and the outcome of living recklessly. I have cured my eleutheromania.



Salute

Cora Dean

Fear

Laura Zimmermann

There are moments in your life that don't seem to have much importance. Boring days, where you sigh and wish something exciting would happen. Or days filled with so much fun and laughter, you wish they would never end. There are days that are so busy you don't think you'll ever find the time to complete everything you have to do, and days so long it feels as if it takes years for an hour to go by. Then there are the days you'll never forget. No matter how hard you try, they stick with you, haunt you, and never let you forget that they exist because they've followed you to your present. They are days you wish you could erase from your memory, forever. The day I had my very first panic attack is one of those days.

Panic attacks come from our own fight or flight response buried deep within the amygdala in our brain. Our Paleolithic ancestors relied on this inner radar to flee dangerous predators. While many people may have a panic attack or two, likely when making a huge decision or going through a major life change, these attacks come and go, a small hiccup, never to be heard from again. If only I had been so lucky.

Imagine being at a movie or in a store or driving your car when, suddenly, fear spreads over you like a heat wave. Your heart pounds, your breath begins to hitch, sharp pricks of pain poke through every pore on your arms as your muscles tighten and your back pools with sweat. All you can feel is danger; all you can sense is danger. You don't know where it's coming from, but it's close, so close. Adrenaline pumps through you, and you feel an enormous urge to run. Get out! Get away!

Logically, you know there is nothing to fear; there is no big, bad beastie about to pounce. Yet the physical feelings flooding through your body overpower logic. Dread washes over you, crashing like a wave on a beach during a storm. And all you can do is endure it, all the while hoping that people aren't looking, don't notice, are completely unaware that you are trapped in a hell you cannot escape. At least, this is my experience with panic attacks.

I feel I should say I am not a wimp. Before my panic attacks

began, I yearned for excitement, adventure, and fun. I was the life of the party, the girl who had no issue speaking before a room full of people, who would always try something new, who would go first when everyone else was afraid. I wasn't a thrill seeker or adrenalin junkie, but I definitely wasn't held back by fear. Instead, I was led by curiosity.

The night I had that first panic attack was absolutely average. I was twenty years old, living with my boyfriend. I had just ended my shift at work and was looking forward to relaxing after a long day. I brushed my teeth, changed into my pj's, and got into bed. Less than a minute later, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of urgency. I threw the covers off and got right back out of bed, trying to catch my breath. My heart was pounding so hard I could actually hear it, and my entire body felt like it was about to burst into flame. I started sweating and shaking and feeling as if I were about to vomit. I was so scared I was having a heart attack or about to have a seizure of some kind that I called my parents, who rushed over to take me to the hospital.

"I could actually hear it, and my entire body felt like it was about to burst into flame."

By the time we got there, the panic attack had ended. The doctor checked me over – my heart, lungs, etc. – and concluded that I was on drugs. Drugs! Seriously! I was not on drugs of any kind! But this was the early 90s, and no one had really heard of panic attacks before; I was probably a bit of a mystery. The doctor gave me a valium and sent me on my way, and, by the time I got back home, I was so relaxed I fell into bed thinking it was just some freak incident, never to happen again.

That was twenty years ago, and here I am, still facing my greatest foe, panic attacks. Panic and I have become great 'frenemies.' After that visit to the emergency room, I began to have attacks three to six times a day, every day. I went to several different doctors hoping for answers, begging for them to end this hell, but no one had any answers. They took my blood, checked my thyroid, heart, kidneys and liver. I had scans of my brain, my

chest, my entire body, only to be told I was incredibly healthy. Normally, this would have been fantastic news, but for me it only solidified the belief that I was secretly terrified to admit to anyone ... I was going insane, and no one was going to be able to save me.

Fear can be something that keeps you stagnant, keeps you in one place, afraid to move forward, terrified to show your face in public. It can make you question who you are and what you can do, what you believe about yourself and the world around you, whom you can trust or count on. It can take away every last bit of courage you have, it can make you want to curl up into a ball and feel sorry for yourself, and, in some extreme circumstances, it can make you want to take your own life. Fear brought me to places inside of myself I wouldn't wish on another living soul. And then, fear did something amazing – it motivated me. It motivated me to get up out of my bed every morning, to stop feeling sorry for myself, and stop settling for the fate I felt I had been given and start doing something about it. It motivated me to start living again.

My official diagnosis is Severe Panic Disorder brought on by PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). I have researched my disorder to the point where I could probably teach a class on it. I have been to many, many doctors and psychiatrists, and I've developed skills to face panic attacks head on. I have learned and been reassured, many times, that I suffer from an anxiety disorder, not a mental disorder, and I was never in any danger of going crazy. My panic attacks are not completely gone, but I take solace in the fact that I was able to go two entire years without one attack. Circumstances which were out of my control brought them back a year ago, and after an adjustment period of having them return, I continue to use the skills I have learned over the years to put them back where they belong.

I have been told a person can completely rid themselves of panic attacks, and I truly hope that someday, I will be able to do it. Until then, I will embrace fear and make it my friend rather than my enemy. I accept that, though this is part of me now, someday soon I will be free.



Has Anyone Seen My Toothbrush?

Rob Hart

Seventeen-year-old Samantha Carter sat on her bed, her back against the headboard, her legs tucked into her chest. Her messy black hair fell over her face as she glared toward the other end of her room, her eyes fixed on the knob of her middle left dresser drawer. Her navy blue backpack rested at her feet. A soft breeze fluttered the curtains over her window to her left. Her parents, Deena and Max, stood over her on her right, openly expressing their deep displeasure in her current academic failures. In turn, she thought about how her parents disgusted her, dwelling on their flaws silently.

"Why, Samantha? Actually, no, not why...how? How do you manage to fail every single one of your classes for two years straight! You've been expelled, and that, young lady, is unacceptable! Do you understand?"

"Look at her. Yelling at me. As if she could ever understand what it is like to be me. She thinks she's so perfect with her waist-long, wavy blonde hair and pretty, sapphire eyes. She thinks she's better than I am just because I wear jeans and a band t-shirt instead of a small, tight dress. Oh, nice ass, Mom! All you had to do was have a random doctor stick you with a needle and suck the fat right out to get your perfect peach ass that Dad loves so much. I wish she would just cram it!"

"Sammy, you are never going to amount to anything if you continue on this trajectory, and I will not stand for that!"

"Speak of the freaking devil! Time for another one of Dad's stupid lectures. News flash, Dad. You don't know everything! Does he have to get so close to me? Seriously freak, unless you are trying to show me my reflection in your shiny, bald head, then keep your dorky owl glasses out of my face. God, I wish

these two trolls would just cram it already!"

"Shut up!" Samantha screamed. "What do either of you know about anything?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" her father retorted.

"Nobody understands me!" Samantha said, half crying and half screaming. "Nobody gets me! Nobody! Not you guys! Not anybody at school! They make fun of me! They treat me like dirt! Even the teachers! They are all a bunch of trolls! That's why I barely go to school or even try! I hate them! I hate everybody!"

Tears welled up in Deena's eyes. "Sammy, honey, we didn't know. We are so sorry that...."

"Shut up!" Samantha sat up, lunging away from her mother. "You never acted like you cared before, so what's your deal now?" She bolted out of her room and downstairs, turning around as she opened the front door to yell, "How about you two trolls just cram it!"

Walking down the street, Samantha kept her head down, cursing under her breath at anyone walking by. Two hours passed before she looked around to find that she was in a park not too far from her house. She shuffled over to the nearest park bench, sat down, leaned her head back, and stared into the trees above her. She listened to the sounds of her breath. How great her life would be once she could leave all of this behind. She smiled softly.

"Oh, hey, Sammy." An obnoxious, giggly voice from behind her woke Samantha from her trance. It was Kelly Brookes, grinning deviously. Kelly was the popular girl at

***"Look at her.
Yelling at me. As
if she could ever
understand what
it is like to be me."***

Samantha's school. She was skinny, tan, and beautiful. Her curly brown hair was pulled to the side, swinging over her right shoulder. Always dressed in a sexy little top and skirt, Kelly was the object of everybody's affection and the source of Samantha's torment. Kelly picked on her relentlessly, every chance she had. By Kelly's side was her best friend, Tanya Martinez. Aside from her straight black hair, Tanya was a mirror image of Kelly. They walked around the bench to stand in front of Samantha.

"Cram it, trolls," Samantha said.

"Aww, come on, we just wanted to say hi," Kelly said.

"Yeah, we just feel bad since you don't have any friends or anything," Tanya chimed in. Both girls giggled, looking at each other.

Kelly pointed to the seat to Samantha's right. "Is that yours?" she asked, with a hint of disgust.

Samantha looked down. A raggedy plastic doll with frizzy red hair and a dark blue dress sat next to her on the bench. She was positive it hadn't been there before, and she would have noticed if Kelly or Tanya had set it there. Puzzled, she picked it up to look at it more closely.

"I guess we were wrong Tanya," Kelly said. "It looks like Samantha does have a friend."

Samantha sprang up, her anger rising, more intense than before. "What is it you want?" she growled.

"Oh nothing," Kelly began. "We were just hanging out over there by the water fountain when we saw this sad looking dog roaming around and decided to follow it to see if it needed help.

Samantha looked around. "I don't see a dog," she said suspiciously. "Where is it?"

Tanya giggled under her breath as Kelly continued. "Well the thing is, once we caught up with the dog, we kind

of realized that it was you!”

They burst out laughing. Samantha tightened her grip on the doll. The anger inside her was searing hot. The tighter she gripped the doll, the stronger her anger became. She began to shake with fury and bent down to pick up a large rock, the other girls laughing too hard to notice.

“Hey Kelly, it’s getting dark,” Tanya said. “We better start heading home before the monsters come out.”

Kelly pointed at Samantha. “Oh no, Tanya! We’re too late! There’s one now!”

“Cram it, trolls,” Samantha said under her breath, lunging at her tormentors. Kelly dodged her, but Tanya’s hair became entangled around the doll’s hand. She spun around to defend herself, but as soon as she did, Samantha smashed the rock into the side of her face. Tanya collapsed to the ground in a daze, and Samantha pounced on top of her, hitting her in the head twice more. Breathing heavily, Samantha stood up, turning to Kelly. Paralyzed with fear, Kelly sank to the ground, crying hysterically as she looked at her friend’s blood dripping off the rock.

“Please Sam,” Kelly whimpered. “I’m sorry! We were just joking around you know? We didn’t mean it! Please don’t hurt me!” Samantha looked down at Kelly, raising the rock over head, opening her mouth to speak, but before she could say anything, she heard, “Cram it, troll.”

Bewildered and confused, Samantha looked around, but there was no one there. She looked back Kelly, now white with fear and looking at the doll in Samantha’s hand. Samantha gasped, dropping the doll to the ground. It had changed. Instead of the red frizzy hair, it had messy black hair; instead of a dark blue dress, it was wearing jeans and a band t-shirt. It looked exactly like Samantha.

“What the hell is going on?” exclaimed Kelly, crying

even harder.

"I don't know," Samantha stuttered. But she did. Somehow she was able to understand that it was the doll that had spoken earlier. Somehow, she understood that this doll was possessed by something. A demon? A spirit? A ghost? Whatever it was, it was feeding off her hate and anger, and by doing so was able to take on the form of the source of the negativity.

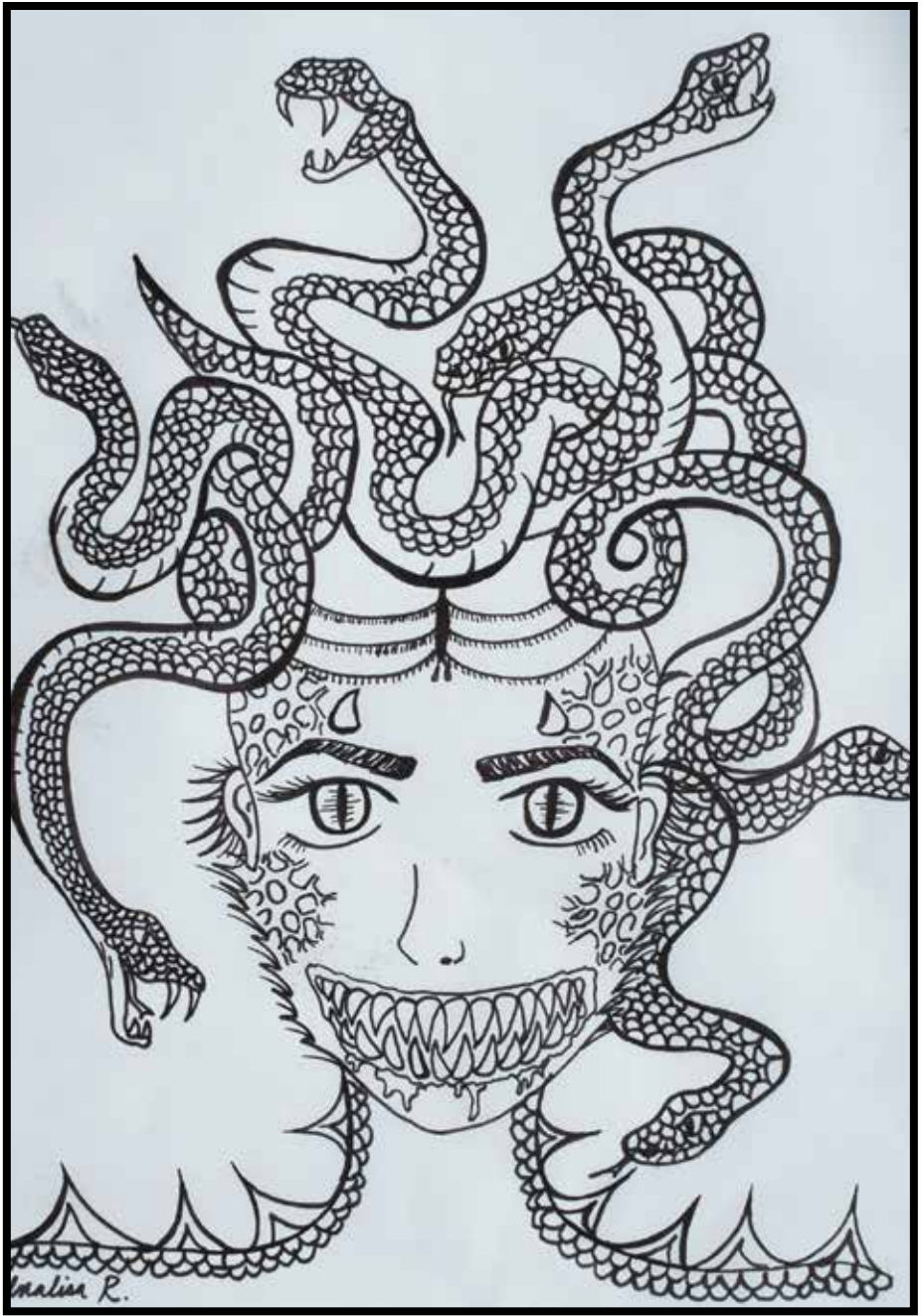
"I have to destroy this thing!" exclaimed Samantha.

"What? How?" Kelly replied.

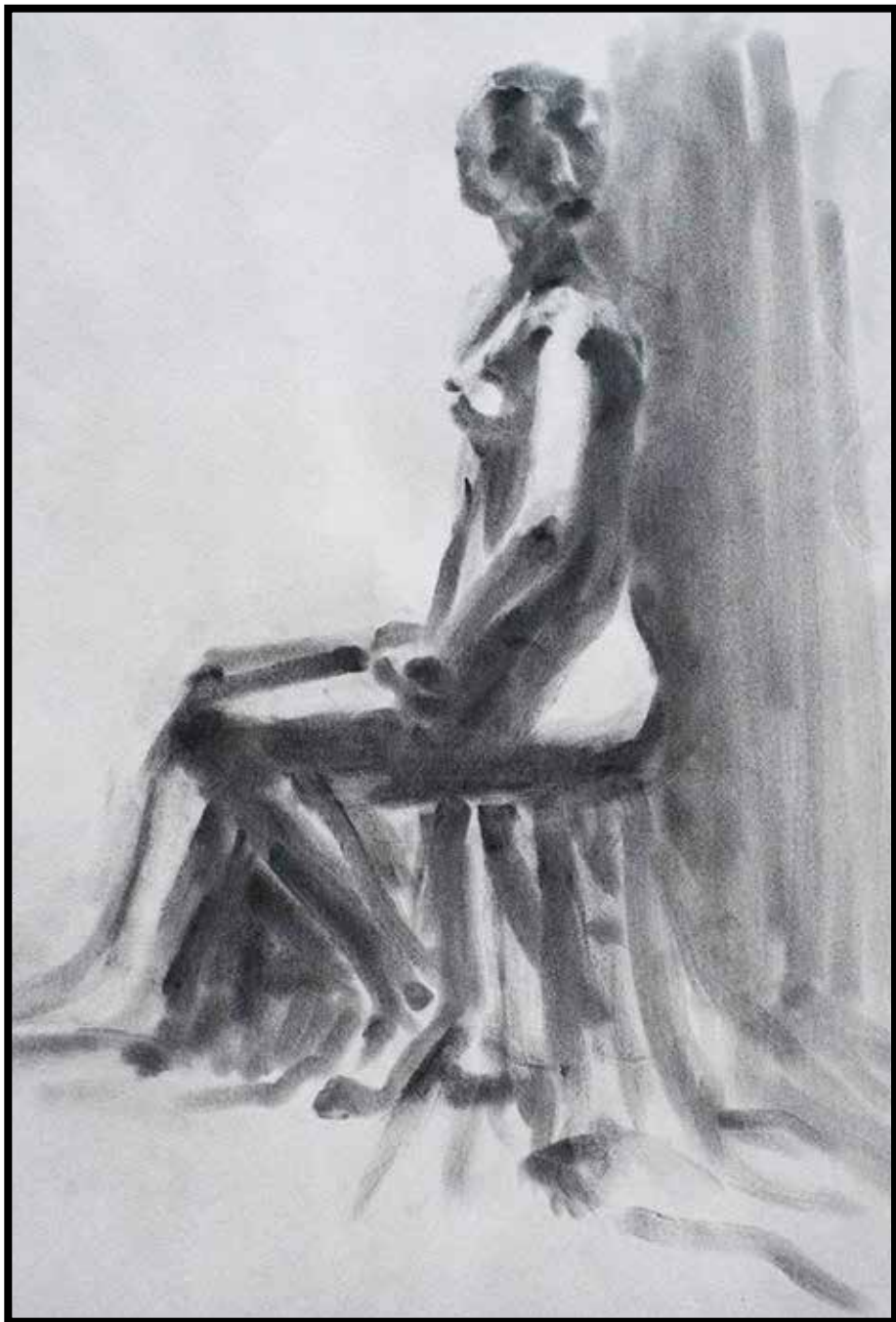
"I have an idea, but right now you need to take Tanya to the hospital."

Samantha didn't give Kelly time to respond. She picked up the doll and ran toward a secluded part of the park. When she'd gone far enough, she dropped to the ground and started digging a hole as fast as she could. She dropped the doll in the hole, and pulled a lighter from her pocket, lighting a flame and holding to the doll. As it caught fire, it began to laugh, sounding at once like a little girl's laugh and something evil. Once there was nothing but ashes, Samantha filled the hole back up.

She walked back to the bench. She sat down, leaned her head back, and stared into the trees above her, and at the stars beyond. Again, she just listened to the sounds of her breathing, and for the first time in a long time, she reflected on all the good things in her life and all the good things to come. This time she smiled from ear to ear.



Medusa
Unalisa Russell



Nude Study
James Church

Complacency Kills

Seth Thomas

Even at 0400 in the morning, the sweat was rolling down the side of my face from under my helmet as the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter shook back and forth, settling on the landing zone at FOB (Forward Operating Base) Sparrow Hawk. Stepping off the aircraft, the acrid smell of hot exhaust and burning trash reminded me that I was back in Iraq. I had to get my head in the game. Grabbing my bags, I headed over to the battalion Tactical Operations Center (TOC) to find the battalion's executive officer, let him know that the last flight of my platoon had arrived, and find out where the rest of my platoon was staged. As sergeant for First Platoon, Bravo Company, it had been my responsibility to close out our previous staging area and ensure that everyone in the platoon had gotten on their flights prior to getting on my own.

Stumbling over the TOC tent guidelines in near darkness, I slowly worked my way toward the chemical lights my platoon used to mark off their sleeping area. I tossed my rucksack on the ground next to Lieutenant Hedgecock, nudging the leg of his cot until he opened his, so I could let him know the rest of the platoon had arrived. As he rolled back over and went back to sleep, I sat down on my cot. It squeaked loudly in protest, reminding me just how long a year sleeping on these things could be. I pulled off my boots to lie down, closing my eyes just as the sun started to crest the horizon, announcing the start of one of many long, hot days.

Since arriving in Kuwait in early June, the battalion's mission had changed from guarding convoys going north

from the border of Kuwait into northern Iraq to staying south, near the border of Iraq and Iran, interdicting the flow of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Gone was the plush trailer living we had been looking forward to, along with the amenities of living on a major FOB. Instead, we had to push out of Camp Adder, near the city of Nasiriyah, to this FOB, not yet fully built. We were living in dirt among the mixture of broken down buildings and tents that housed our command as well as our Iraqi Army counterpart's command element.

Within days, my platoon was training an Iraqi Army battalion nearby in the City of Al Amarah. Separated from the rest of our company, we roamed all over the sector as the rest of our company sat baking in the desert heat, guarding an airfield where the battalion would build a new FOB in preparation for our yearlong stay.

"I got as comfortable as I could in a Porta John in the desert, setting down my rifle and getting down to business..."

Eventually the company, minus one platoon, moved south to an abandoned sugar factory about fifty kilometers from the city of Majar al-Kabir to spread the battalion's effort to slow the flow of arms to the north. Each week one platoon would pack up all their gear on their trucks and head north, looking like the Beverly Hillbillies, to relieve the platoon guarding the airfield.

What struck me when I first arrived back in Iraq was how eerily quiet it was this time. My last deployment, from 2005-2006, had been anything but quiet. I had spent the entire year in central Baghdad training Iraqi soldiers, and it was

not unusual to hear an explosion or two every day or go outside at night and see red tracer fire stitch the sky like some obscene quilt. The quiet was disconcerting to those of us deployed here before. We were waiting for the other shoe to drop.

By the end of August, my platoon found itself in four separate battle positions in the north, guarding the airfield, doing our best to stay cool under a couple of ratty old camouflage nets. Although we had initial success in capturing a few bad guys and confiscating their IEDs, which were headed north into an area known as the Triangle of Death around Baghdad, the desert heat and the routine of staring out into the empty desert, watching the occasional goat herder, had created an eerie air of calm. We began to think that this was just going to be a long, boring deployment.

On Wednesday, I pulled security at the north end of the runway in Battle Position Four with nine men of Third Squad and my own three-man crew. I always arranged for my gunner and me to have the early morning shift; the air was always calmest with the dawn, and the enemy loved to attack just before dawn or right after dusk. As my security shift ended, I grabbed my baby wipes and rifle to make the long trek to the nearest Porta John, about 300 meters between my platoon and Battle Position Four. I waved across the lonely expanse of desert at the soldiers from the forward support company guarding the battalion's ammo point as I went.

I got as comfortable as I could in a Porta John in the desert, setting down my rifle and getting down to business, when I heard a loud explosion in the distance. I looked at my watch; it was only 0545 in the morning. I thought maybe

our Explosive Ordnance Disposable (EOD) team had started earlier than normal. They had been having a heyday blowing up old munitions caches from the Iran-Iraq war and the IEDs we'd confiscated from enemy. Then I heard a noise that instantly brought me to my senses: a shrill shriek starting faintly in the distance but quickly growing louder until it was screaming over the top of the Porta John. For some strange reason, I looked up as if I would be able to see through the roof. I grabbed the door handle and pushed it open, looking toward the FOB under construction. The air grew suddenly quiet, deadly quiet.

Boom! The rocket exploded less than one hundred meters in front of me in a bright red flash. I thought, "Shit, I'm not going to die like Elvis." I grabbed the baby wipes and, quickly cleaning up, yanked my pants up, grabbed my rifle, and shot out the door like a cheetah after its prey. The shrill screams from rockets overhead accompanied me across that long 300-meter sprint through the soft desert sand.

I learned a couple of very cruel facts that day. The first was always to button your pants before running through loose sand across the desert. I must have looked like I belonged in a 70s comedy skit, holding my pants up with one hand while holding my rifle in the other, running across that empty space. The fact that I had lost almost twenty pounds since we had arrived did not help, and my pants repeatedly tried to fall around my ankles and make me fall flat on my face.

The second valuable piece of information I learned was that soldiers should always know what to do in different situations. As I was running by with my pants falling off, I looked over to the ammo point. The soldiers there at least

had the common sense to put their helmets and body armor on. What they hadn't thought through was that they were standing in the middle of tons of explosive material, yet they were looking up at the sky as if they didn't have a care in the world. "Get out of the ammo point you idiots! Those are rockets!" I yelled. Without looking back to see if they had complied, I continued sprinting back to my battle position. About fifty meters shy of my destination, I couldn't do my clown shuffle any longer and stopped to pull my belt tight.

Crossing the berm into Battle Position Four, I arrived to a scene of near panic. Soldiers were in a state of mixed dress, only a couple in full uniform and equipment, a few in pants and equipment, one guy in underwear and body armor. It almost made me laugh. Most at least had the common sense to crawl up to the berm for cover, while some had crawled up into the machine gun turrets on the trucks to get eyes on a target.

I shouted for Staff Sergeant (SSG) Doughty as I put on my body armor and helmet, asking if he had seen a launch point or if he had any contact with the other squads. He pointed to the launch point, and I grabbed my compass and told him to get me an azimuth. I ran to the truck with the radio, hoping to get through the madness that had descended on our little world. I leaned into the truck, radioing the other three other battle positions to get a situation report and ensure all my soldiers were all right. SSG Doughty arrived, handing me the rocket launch coordinates. I changed radio frequency, attempting to break through all the chatter to reach higher headquarters. I had hopes that we could get some air assets up in the sky and fire back at the enemy. Death rained out of the sky all around us. Just as I broke through, the air

grew quiet, five minutes of explosions stopping.

The soldiers, who had been lying in the dirt, started looking around, then started talking all at once like a bunch of magpies. The adrenaline hadn't quiet run its course and the nervous energy exploded from their mouths. It got to the point I had to tell them to shut up because I couldn't hear what was being said over the radio. Those that weren't dressed quickly got dressed, while those that were already dressed continued to scan the desert, just in case.

Within minutes of the end of the attack, a column of armored vehicles rolled out of the FOB to investigate the coordinates we'd sent. A couple of minutes later, a pair of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters roared overhead, their rocket pods bristling with firepower, following the armored column. But the enemy was no longer there. They'd set the rockets up on portable rail systems, complete with a timer so they could be gone long before the attack. What little luck we had that day came in the form of fifteen rockets that had failed to launch and were still sitting on their rails when we arrived to investigate.

In the end, they shot over thirty-five rockets at our little operating base, killing two and wounding five. It was an eye opener for me; the enemy was still there, watching us, waiting for a time to strike. The time of thinking that this was an easy, boring tour was over; nine more months of deployment remained.

Needless to say, we spent the next day building a bunker – just in case.

Sweet Summer Days

Liz Aytes

The feeling of being submerged in water, currents swirling around my body, has always been sacred to me. I love to take a dip in a lake or creek or ocean. Unfortunately, there aren't too many outdoor places to swim around Flagstaff. I've been going to Beaver Creek for years, usually for my birthday. Swimming there makes me feel closer to myself, if that makes any sense.

The first time I went was with my family and a family friend when I was fifteen. We took the way through Oak Creek Canyon and Sedona, so it took us about an hour and a half to get there from my mom's house. Going down the switchbacks for the first time, I was amazed. A world of natural beauty unfolded beneath us, a forest full of so many greens and reds that we couldn't possibly be in Arizona. The little houses and shops, hidden away in the trees of the canyon, looked as if they'd grown out of the ground themselves.

When I was six years old, there was a Boys and Girls Club near the little apartment where we lived. Every day after school,

I would walk there and wait for my mom to pick me up. Many times, I would sit at the edge of the pool with my feet in the water, always at the deep end. I wanted to swim with the other kids. One day I actually brought my swimsuit, sat

"Everything smelled so fresh, and the heat of the summer day warmed and dried me."

down at the edge, and stuck my little feet in, but the life-guard told me to get away. She said I couldn't go into the deep end until I could swim across the pool and back by myself. At that point, I became determined to learn how to swim.

Leaving the village, we crossed a bridge spanning the canyon. I could see the creek below and people in shorts everywhere. The canyon walls turned to red beds of sandstone, and we drove past southwestern-themed buildings and a small group of brightly colored dome houses. Sedona flashed by, seemingly separate from the world around it. The Village of Oak Creek was sweet and calm, but it was relatively boring compared to the towering red cliffs around it. Cathedral Rock was breathtaking.

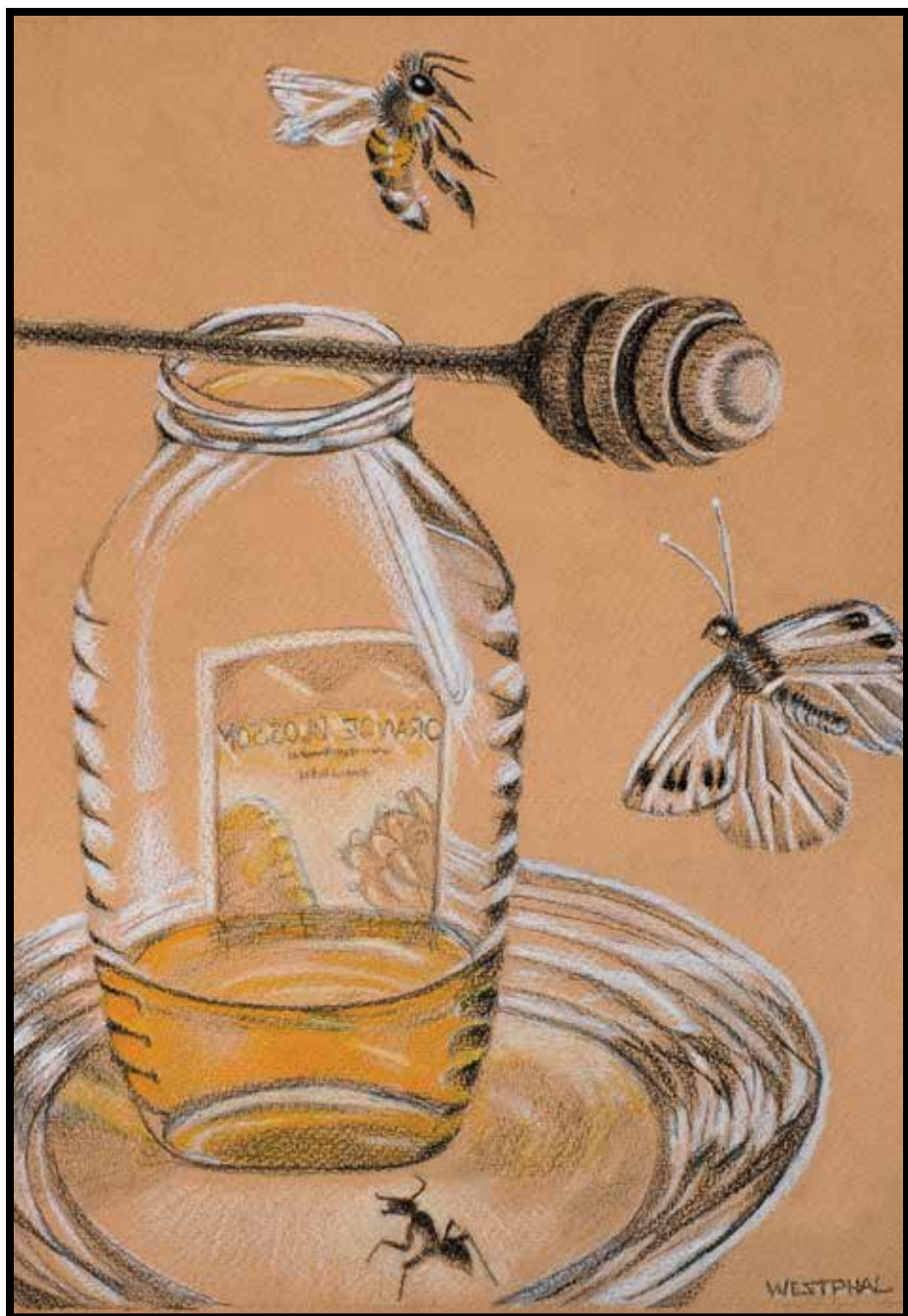
We crossed under the highway and the area became green again. I knew we were close. I was fidgety with anticipation. We pulled into a little dirt parking lot and got out. I could smell the creek, a wet, mossy smell mixed with the scent of moist soil. And I could hear the creek. It wasn't the hard, rushing sound of quick-moving water, but a lazy gurgle. We crossed the road to a worn trail that opened up onto a tiny, rocky shore. Put simply, it was beautiful. A small part of the creek had formed a natural swimming pool, and it was perfect. On one side of the pool, the remains of a large tree hung over the water, complete with a knotted rope. On the other side, a short cliff, perfect for jumping off. Finally at our destination, I relaxed.

Despite my strong desire to learn how to swim, I didn't learn until I was twelve. My family couldn't afford lessons, and there wasn't really a need since we had moved to

Arizona. But I was stubborn. I had friends who went to the YMCA often, and I would go with them whenever I could. I was determined to swim. I started with the doggie paddle and slowly moved on to a very basic stroke. I also spent a lot of time trying to float. I was thrilled when I finally did it. When we moved to Flagstaff, I went to Mount Elden Middle School, which had a swimming pool. I was required to swim for my PE class. At last, I received the formal education I had been yearning for.

After swimming for a while, my mom and I found a nice little path along the creek and went exploring. Everything smelled so fresh, and the heat of the summer day warmed and dried me. I felt at peace. We found wild mint and wild blackberries, so we went back to the shore and grabbed bags, then went to work collecting. The blackberries had thorns, so we got pretty cut up, but the berries were sweet and juicy, with the perfect hint of tang that paired well with their sweetness.

I've tried to go back to Beaver Creek every birthday. My birthday is in the middle of June, right before monsoon season, so it's nice and warm, the perfect time to go for a dip and collect blackberries. There is something so serene about the area. I've even met the person who owns the land, and she's a very sweet woman. She even wished me a happy birthday one year. I've met a variety of dogs, and even a cat, who loved swimming. The creek really is a magical place, and not just for me, but for everyone who visits. There, the sun is always warm against your cheek, the scent of life surrounds you, and nature herself constantly sings you a lullaby with her breezes, the insects, and the creek itself.



Hive and Seek

Sarah Westphal

The late evening heat was beastly. Add that to the fact that he had just had an enormous meal with too much wine and had a loud, intense conversation with his companions . . . well . . . there was reason enough for his discomfort. Add to that the nature of his business, and it was quite understandable that he could barely keep his feet moving along.

Words, talk, words and more, he thought to himself, everything always had to be correct. Always, they had to give their energy and time. They gathered funds, accrued wealth, passed it to the unwashed masses as soon as it was gathered. How were they supposed to finance a revolution, how were they to get support to mobilize if they proved unable to capitalize on income when public support was riding high.

Look where it had brought them. They were a wandering sideshow, traveling entertainment for the poor and disenfranchised, those without a future or land to call their own. What help was it? Why did they expend effort on that rabble? There were wealthy patrons, willing to put significant riches at their disposal.

They squandered all their opportunities, throwing them away to create an image that the most powerful of their people could not even stomach. There had to be a resolution. They couldn't go on like this, not at all.

He leaned against a stone wall to catch his breath and slow his heart rate. Anger and rage overcame him, the wine pounding heavily in his temples.

Then, as if he could hear another voice, he thought of courage and greatness, of being the catalyst to set great events in motion. Let others talk and carry on. Let others speak of the future and hope. They had no substance; they had no grit. All of them, even the boss, they were all talk.

He spoke out into the night. "You are the true patriot. You are the true visionary! You have the power to make this happen. You are strong; you are a man of conviction! You know what needs to be done!" His voice echoed through streets, empty of all but the constabulary because of the festival.

He became suddenly aware that the alleyways were no longer so dark; the full moon had risen, and the shadows were receding. With them, his bravado drained away as well.

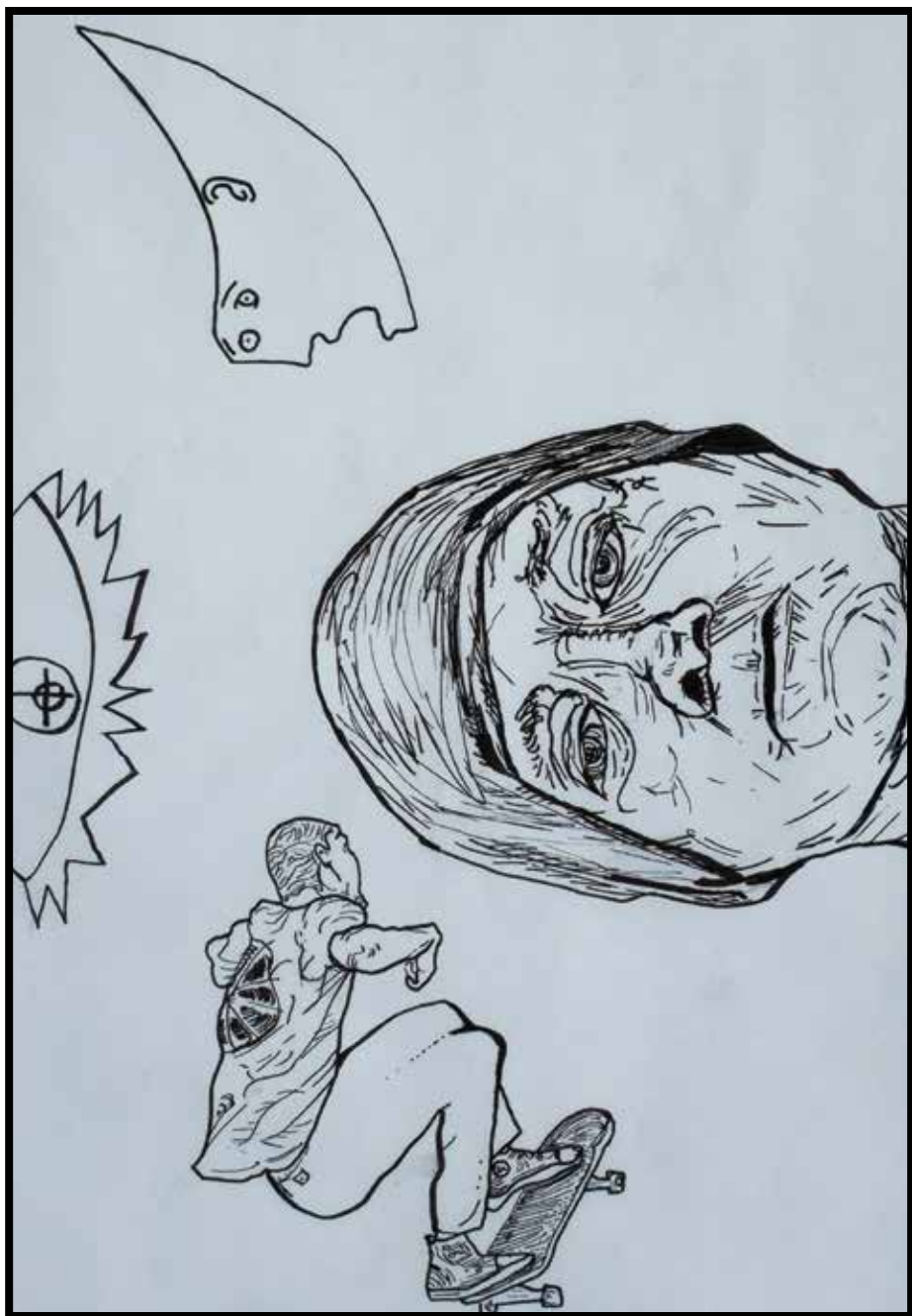
He no longer felt the heat of the night; rather, the sweat drenching his body absorbed the evening breeze, warm as it was, and chilled him to the deep. He imagined he heard laughter, an impish sound mocking him, baiting him. What remained of the shadows seemed alive, and it was from there that he imagined the laughter. Be done with it!

Again he spoke out, more composed this time. "I do have the courage. I do know what I do. I am no one's servant. I am my own master, and at this moment, the whole world bows to my will, my decisions." He laughed, straightened up and walked to the end of the street. His step was sure now, and he walked tall.

At the end of the street, stairs rose high above the street. He climbed them, no longer concerned about the shadows, which he could still see. He was no longer concerned about the whispers or mocking laughter, which he could still hear. He directed his attention to the men at the top of the stairs.

He strode forward, holding out his hand. He looked each man in the eye, measuring them. They are fools, he thought. They think all this will make a difference. Tomorrow will tell a different tale.

"Thirty pieces, Fathers, as agreed. I am Judas, and I have come to lead you to him."



100 Percent Skateboarder

Nelson Flores

Google Beauty

Teresa Konkel

A line I heard often around the house was, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Whenever my mother needed an answer to one of my many dilemmas, she would repeat this old standby. I never really understood what it meant. I just knew it was too complex for me. Perhaps one day I would realize the true meaning. Maybe at some point in time, I would agree with her. I accepted this answer many times, because it was much easier than catching a long-winded talking-to. I avoided boring lectures at all costs, especially having to stand at attention, looking like I was understanding everything she was trying to convey for what seemed like eternity. No thank you. I would much rather eat slimy, cold oatmeal than endure that torture.

If you asked me to define beauty, I couldn’t have given you an answer. I had no real idea. I would have probably said something like, movie stars are gorgeous, or made a reference to Miss America. Surely winning a beauty contest is the epitome of elegance, the winner the one who holds the exquisite title of beauty. The characters in storybooks, the lovely fair maiden, or the striking queen and all of her daughters, the princesses in waiting, those possessed the attributes of beauty. Personally, I didn’t know anyone attractive. Nobody had ever called my sister, my mother, or me beautiful, at least in my presence. My father probably did once when he and my mother were first married, though I don’t know that for a fact. Certainly, he has changed his mind, as they fell out of love a long time ago. We don’t live together as a family anymore.

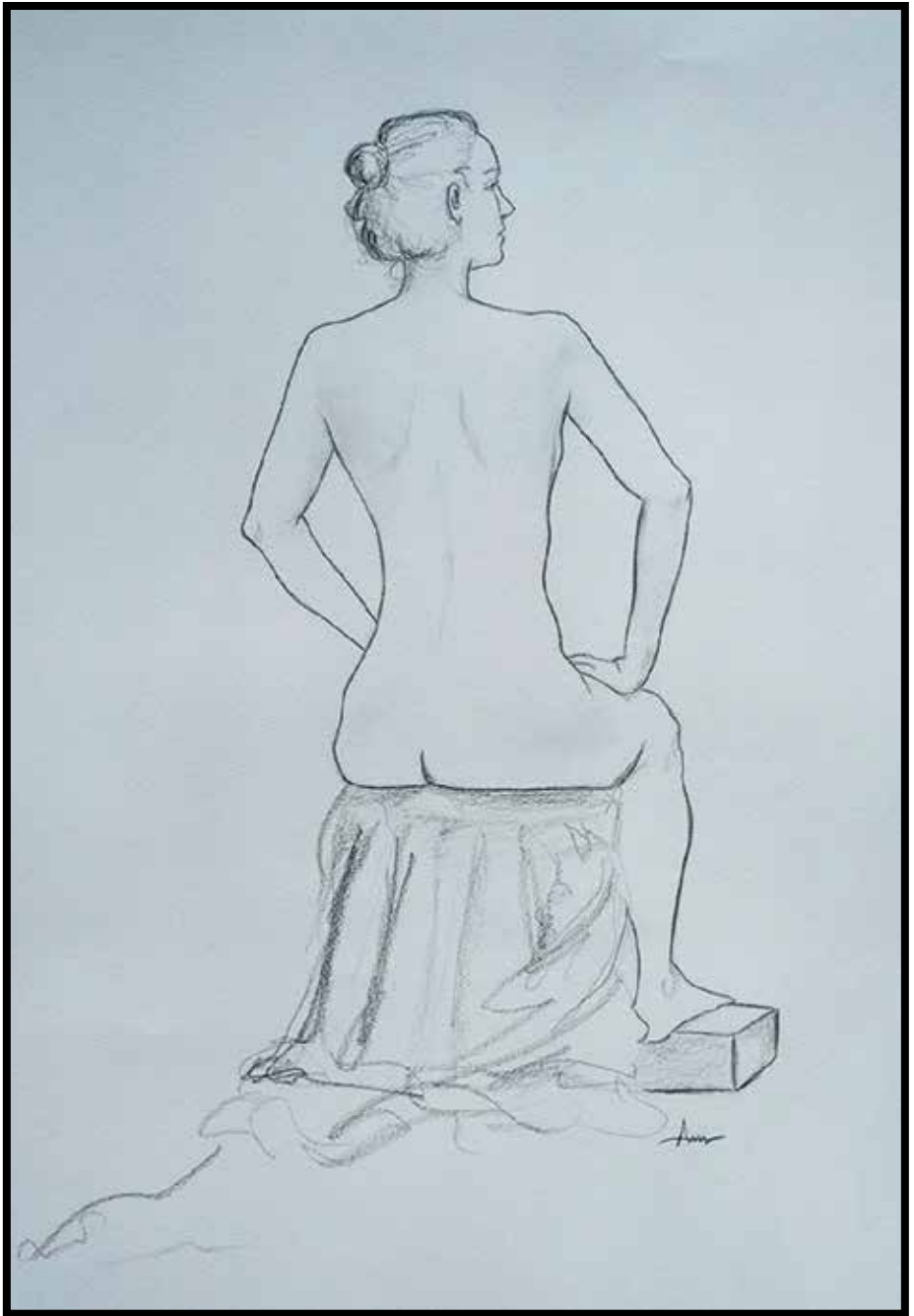
I remember a particular incident when I was in the fourth grade. Nancy, a pretty and popular girl who sat two seats in front of me, was passing a note. She signaled for it to be given to Trey, who sat on my right side in the next row, one seat behind. He was just as well liked and admired, including by me. The note was folded into a compact little package. It didn't pass through my hands on its way, but I knew about its path. Personally, I never passed notes in class. Our teacher was very strict about notes, and she had a special way to curb their existence. Her policy of reading the secret communications aloud, in front of the whole class, was a much too embarrassing consequence for me to chance. One time she taped a note drawn by a student onto the blackboard for everyone to view. I didn't ever want that to happen to me.

*“Ugly,” he’d scribbled.
“Pretty Ugly,” it read.*

After a few minutes, purposefully, the note made its way to me. However, it wasn't a neat little square anymore; it was wide open for all who came in contact with it to read. Everyone else in the delivery train had already seen it, so I glanced down to read it surreptitiously, hoping Mrs. Guppy-spy wouldn't notice. (Her name was Mrs. Gillespie, but we all called her Guppy-spy on the playground, out of earshot. She was compact in stature and had intuitive precision, so the name fit well.) In the message, Nancy asked Trey, “Do you think Teresa is pretty?” On the next line, she had written: “Check a Box,” with two big boxes, a Yes box and a No box. To my surprise, the Yes box had a big dark X right in the middle of it. What? But there was no mistake, the Yes box

was certainly checked, and I was the only Teresa in the class. My heart leaped with the thought that Trey could be polite in this awkward situation. Then, just as suddenly and to my utter horror, I saw a tiny little word barely penciled in right between the two boxes. “Ugly,” he’d scribbled. “Pretty Ugly,” it read. I was crushed. Coming from Miss Personality was this cruel joke; she intended to humiliate me. Snickers and giggles came from every direction as I read. One girl laughed so loud she had to place her hand over her mouth, and I was terrified that our keen teacher would want to know what was funny and that the note would be brought before the entire class. I envisioned everyone roaring with laughter; it was awful enough that two entire rows knew about it. I stuffed the note into my pocket frantically, trying to hide the dreadful message before anyone else found out. But by the time we had made it out onto the playground for morning recess, everyone in our class knew about the degrading letter anyway. Although the story of the Ugly Duckling came to mind for a brief moment, I didn’t feel so sure that the days ahead would magically transform me. After all, my parent swan was a single, struggling mother, living in poverty with two little girls to care for.

Unfortunately, because of this incident and its consequences – continual harassment by my classmates – it would take many years before I could begin to imagine what true beauty was. Though it was almost impossible to envision then, the crowning glory of beauty is the praise, admiration, and honor of my family. Triumph is in the responsibility to do what is right, and beauty is in the eye of the beholder.



Nude Study
Amanda McNeal

Meaningful Anecdote

Rachel Soumokil

After an enjoyably relaxing day of walking hand in hand, immersing ourselves in the rich flavors of Flagstaff's eclectic downtown, we companionably sat down to talk in our cozy bohemian living room. Bookshelves stuffed to capacity overflow with treasured volumes of history, myth, and fantasy. Statues and figurines keep a benevolent and ever watchful gaze as they nestle here and there in every nook and cranny. The golden rays of sunset shimmer through the carefully spaced slats of blinds protecting not only the treasured paintings lovingly created by our children from the damaging rays of the sun but also our privacy from the numerous dog walkers that wander past our yard. Casually sprawled out reclining on the couch in his soft grey boxer briefs and nothing else, he looked relaxed. A soft smile played across his face, lighting it up, and dancing its way around the corner of his sapphire blue eyes as he waited for me to begin asking questions.

When asked who he is, he grinningly waxes philosophical by stating "I am a husband first, a father second, and an employee third." His name is Richard Marcelino Ramirez and he's thirty-eight years old. "I think," he adds, laughing boyishly.

“What was the most influential thing that happened to you as a child? Something that occurred that affected your life, choices you made, how you viewed events or people?” I ask.

His demeanor immediately changes from slightly roguish to thoughtful. He stretches out, getting comfortable as he begins to tell me a story of his 8th grade biology teacher. His instructor was a short, semi-

"His instructor was a short, semi-bald, middle-aged man with glasses who had a sticker on his desk: Answers 50 cents. Correct answers \$20."

bald, middle-aged man with glasses who had a sticker on his desk: Answers 50 cents. Correct answers \$20. The class had been given the assignment to group together and do a report on one of the bodily systems. As an icebreaker, his teacher gave a presentation and chose to do it on the reproductive system, probably because he felt eighth graders weren't mature enough to handle a presentation on penises and vaginas. Most of the class were handling their embarrassment of the subject matter by laughing and giggling as the instructor humorously described the act of coitus, drawing male and female anatomy on the chalkboard with everything labeled. "Insert the penis into the vagina and the man ejaculates, releasing sperm that run through here. They have a race.

This one is first. This one is lost but doesn't know because he's blind." He was making a funny story of it. But, there was something that he said during his lecture that stuck with Richard. An innocuous comment that would forever change how he viewed all his preconceived notions. Richard went on to say that the teacher mentioned that sometimes when he and his wife would get intimate, she'd have something "going on down there" like a UTI, something that when they would have sex would lead her to say, "Nope, we've got to skip that part."

To say he was confounded by that remark would be an understatement. To his young mind, that was like saying you're going to the movies and not actually seeing the film. It made no sense. In his understanding, that's what sex was...that part.

"This was the first time that I questioned something that I kind of just felt I knew. And, here was a teacher that

"The familial wound would be further compounded when he found out that his Dad was doing drugs."

just makes this off-the-wall comment that completely changed my perception on that. And, it made me question a whole litany of things. I would say his comment, that he probably doesn't even remember

saying, affected me the most as far as my future.”

As an example, when he was in high school, he had few girlfriends because he was more interested in getting to know them than just “how quick can I get into your pants kind of thing.” He had absorbed the lesson that intercourse was just one facet of sex and that sex was just one facet of a relationship. He was out of step with the prevailing culture of his peers and okay with it.

This out-of-the box mentality eventually led him to re-examine other assumptions he’d made and would ultimately affect how he viewed not only romantic relationships, but also religion and his own father.

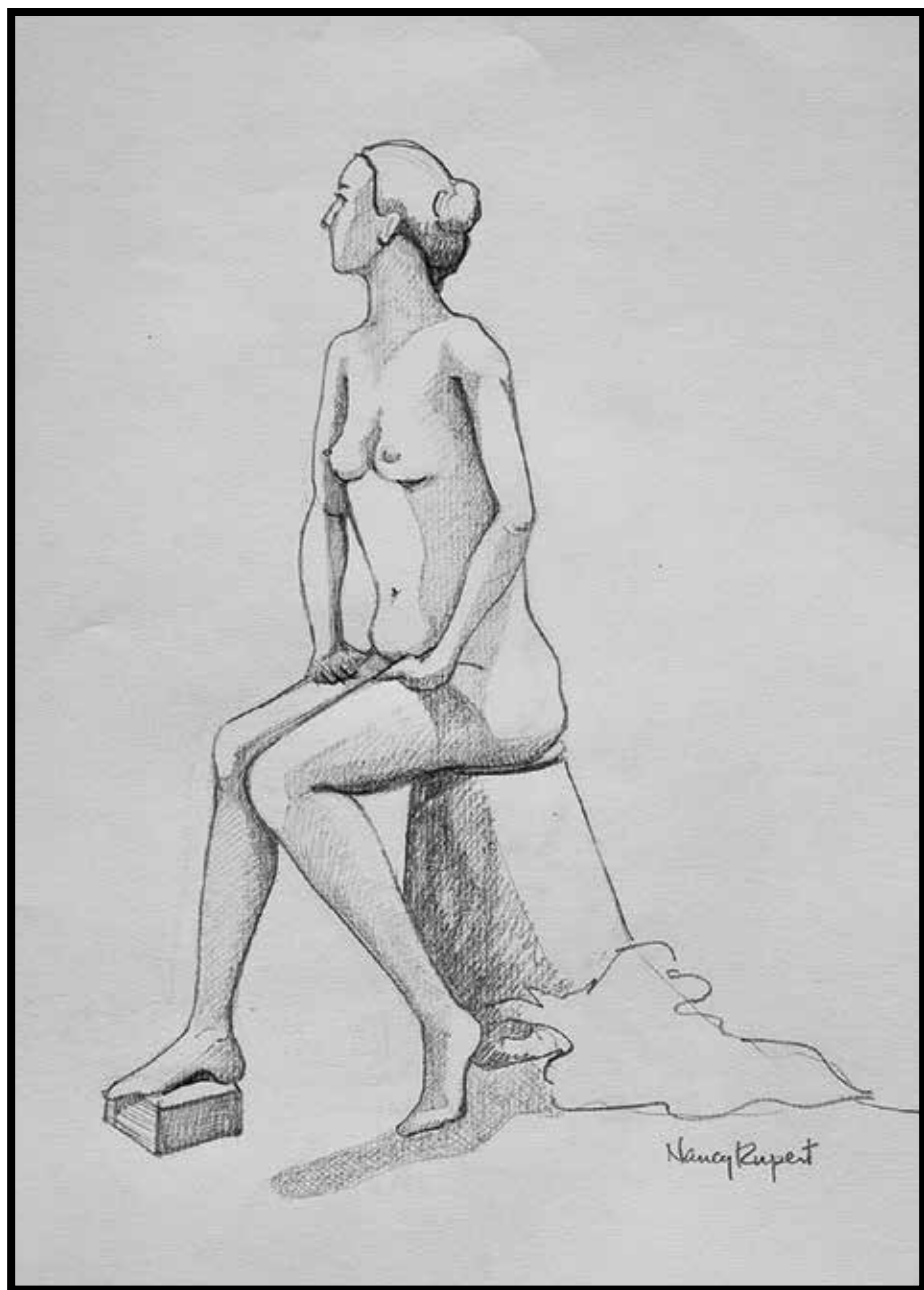
“Like I said, when he said that, it made me re-examine a lot of stuff. After the whole relationship thing, the next thing I re-examined in myself was religion.” Being raised Catholic, he had always had questions that were never satisfactorily answered. “Why did God make a world where he had to sacrifice his son to forgive us? Why is it acceptable in Heaven to watch the suffering of people in Hell? Is jealousy a sin if God is jealous?” Viewing his pre-ordained beliefs with the same level of discernment, he eventually chose the agnostic path.

As for his father, Richard grew up showing the expected obeisance that he had been taught. He had an innate and unquestionable respect for the strong authoritarian figure who had raised him. However, later on when he saw his

father cheating on his wives, he lost a lot of this respect for him because he felt that being unfaithful was wrong. He had already come to a point where he believed that women are not sex objects; they are people you have relationships with.

The familial wound would be further compounded when he found out that his Dad was doing drugs. “I would say that I went into a depression. I didn’t go to school for three days. I was crying. I felt my life was over.” He was unable to conceal his damaged feelings about his father. To say that this affected their relationship is an understatement. His father grew angry with Richard for his change in demeanor. To this day, although he and his father live but an hour apart, they have absolutely no contact. He credits his altered viewpoint in helping him to step away from this toxic relationship despite it going against all he’d been taught growing up. No longer would he be able to do what was expected of him without critically thinking on whether it was true to his internal self.

It’s amazing how a single innocuous anecdote could make such a difference in someone’s life. But, it has. Richard feels that it was hearing this one short allegory that has been the most significant moment to affect his life thus far.

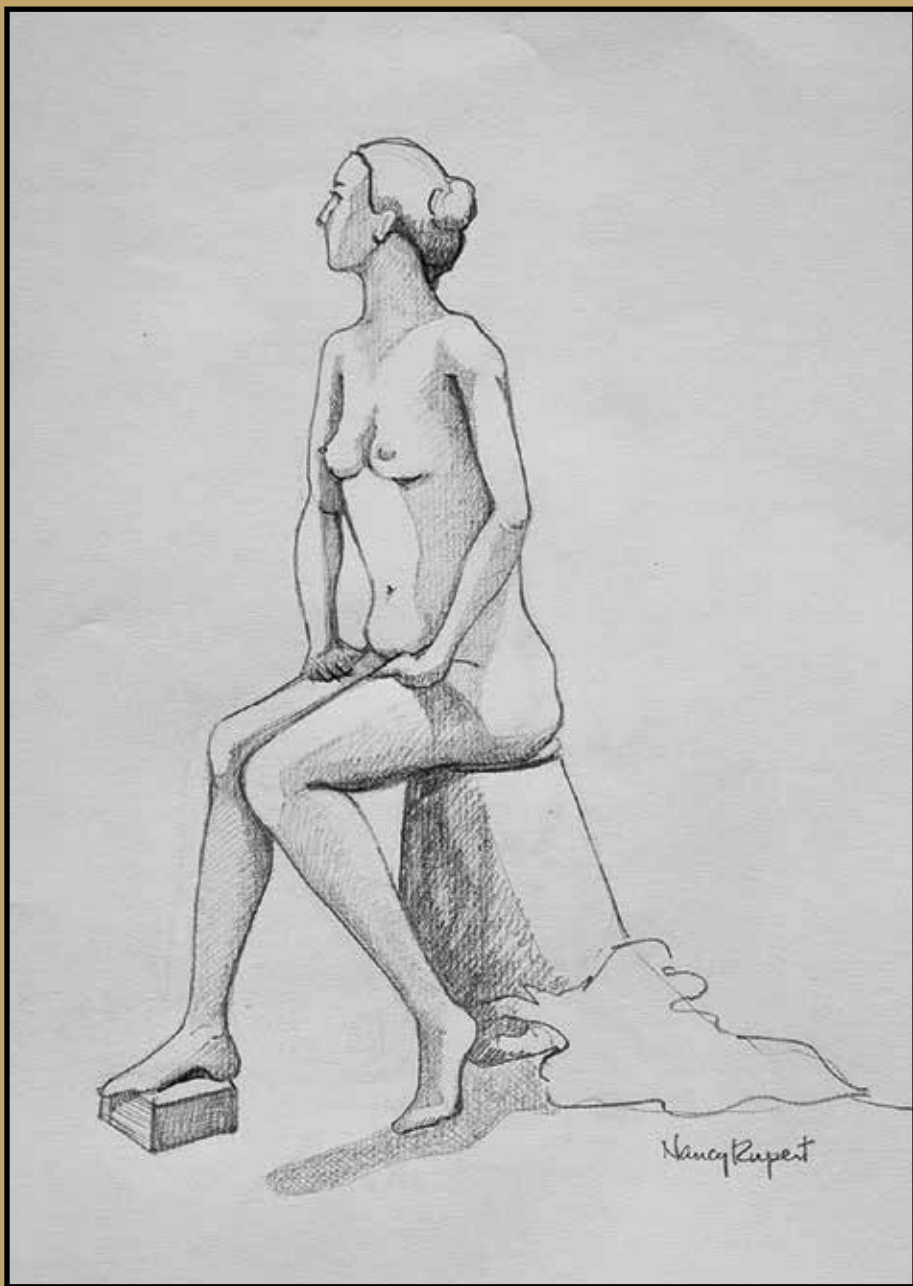


Nude Study
Nancy Rupert



Baby Dragon

Marilyn Tsinajinnie



ONCOURSE

Our intent for *OnCourse* literary magazine is to foster the breadth of creative expressions across our northern Arizona community by providing publication opportunities to local writers and artists. *OnCourse* is produced annually by Coconino Community College students enrolled in COM 181 with the guidance of CCC faculty and staff.

For Submission Guidelines and Charitable Contributions, Please visit us at:
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Front cover image: Terry Cook
Inside cover image: Nancy Rupert
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