Expressions

Seventeenth Student Anthology
English 1013, Composition I

Department of English
NorthWest Arkansas Community College
Here is the seventeenth edition of *Expressions*, the student anthology of essays by NorthWest Arkansas Community College students in English 1013, Composition I. These ten essays were chosen out of many submitted to the *Expressions* contest.

This anthology contains essays written to fulfill various assignments in English 1013 during the 2009-2010 school year. This batch of essays and authors reflects the diversity of NWACC. The essays range from memoirs and profiles to analyses and researched arguments. The authors vary from Step Ahead students attending high school to nontraditional students juggling fulltime jobs and families.

Every year the English Department publishes *Expressions* to provide English 1013 students with models of essays written by their peers. Writing is a difficult task, which becomes easier with practice and exposure to others’ written work. As you go through this anthology, analyze each essay for what works well and what you would do differently if you were the author. And, at the end of your time in English 1013, I hope you will submit one of your essays for consideration for next year’s *Expressions*.

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Down at the Street
By John Ackerman

As I wade through the recesses of my mind attempting to conjure up old preschool memories, I get sidetracked by faces and names, like ghosts in a dream, long since replaced by fresher and more pressing imprints. Sights, sounds, and smells that envelop a five-year-old’s senses embed themselves deep into the subconscious. They hibernate for decades, finally awakened by a single explorer, giddy with anticipation, who dusts off a chest of memories. Unfortunately, through neglect and abuse, only illegible, tattered fragments remain. Sifting through the threadbare remnants of memories lost, I expose important steps in my journey toward English literacy.

My mother’s formal education ended when she graduated from high school. Past conversations revealed she was ill much of her early childhood and kept home from elementary school much of the time. Consequently, she did poorly when she was able to attend, and this fueled a lack of confidence in her ability to properly direct any preschool education activities for her children. However, mothers of young children had a tool that not only alleviated their burden of educational neglect, but also doubled as an hour-long babysitter: Sesame Street.

I am one among many who can rattle off names of Sesame Street characters quicker than I can name even the closest relatives. The theme song to the show, “Sesame Street Theme,” would serenade me, like a pied piper from wherever and whatever I may have been up to at the moment; it beckoned. There was no TiVo back in the day, so you had to be able to read the numbers on the clock lest you miss the train to the place where “everything is A-okay” and “where the air is sweet.” Once I reached a certain age, though, that train failed to materialize on its own and required a certain “sumpthin-sumpthin” for it to reappear. Young or old, however, I could tell you “how to get, how to get to Sesame Street.” It was the seventies (cue Jimi Hendrix: Purple Haze), but I digress.

There I would sit, at the appropriate spot, cross-legged on the floor, two feet from the television screen (with possibly a little drool from an agape mouth), mesmerized. I learned a solid alphabet and nineteen numerals during my time at The Street. This was also where I saw letters combined to create small words and where the fundamentals of reading were cemented. I recall being particularly engrossed with the two silhouettes that faced off for the word-down. One silhouette exaggerated the pronunciation of the first syllable of the word, the other silhouette countered with the end syllable, and then the three of us spoke the word in unison. This methodology was quite beneficial to me due to the fact that it required two separate senses, sight and sound, which reinforced the lessons.

These lessons were made all the more palatable by my enjoyment of nearly all the Sesame Street characters with one glaring exception: Oscar the Grouch. There was something about his unibrow (though impressive) that struck me as angry rather than just grouchy, and he never (to my knowledge) left the trashcan, a very curious affliction indeed. Oscar needed a shower, some tweezers, and a job to turn his frown upside down, and maybe an antidepressant or two to boot.

Mr. Snuffleupagus and Grover, on the other hand, were by far my favorite characters down at The Street. These two early tutors kept me hungry at the trough of literary knowledge, foraging the screen for any kernels of insight to be found. Snuffy seemed quite mysterious and intriguing to me because the adults were unable to see him. His elusiveness was a trait to be savored—sipped not gulped. He was eye-candy to the three-year-old me. Grover was a
groovalicious character of immense proportion. His mischievous penchant for covertly irritating the bald, blue, mustachioed character was priceless. For me, Grover was the consummate entertainer, eclipsed only by a pre-Calista Flockhart/pre-earring-wearing Harrison Ford. I hold no ill will toward Calista Flockhart or the male earring bearer per se; in this case, however, enough points were deducted to propel Grover back into the higher level of reverence.

In conclusion, in retrospect, and in shock, the children’s television show Sesame Street played a significant role in the development of my relationship with the written form of the English language. I realize now, after piecing together these snippets of forgotten yesterdays, that though I wish my mom would have placed more emphasis on my early education needs, at least she showed me “how to get, how to get to Sesame Street.”

Works Cited
Hart, Bruce, Joe Rapaso, and Jon Stone. “Sesame Street Theme.” 1968.
The death penalty is one of the most controversial topics in America today. Should we have this system of capital punishment? A debate such as this one cannot occur without some amount of bias. It is hard to define a standard when talking about a subject such as death because everybody feels differently about it, and when a person tries to turn his feelings into logic, that logic can be altered. People on both sides of the issue can easily make a case for their position, but the opposition is rarely convinced. In his article, “The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense,” Ernest van den Haag tries to persuade the reader that the death penalty is useful as a deterrent to potential murderers and it is worth the risk of killing innocent people. On the other hand, Jack Greenberg argues in “Against the American System of Capital Punishment” that the death penalty has no deterring effect and that it should not continue. Of the two, Greenberg’s view is more convincing. The death penalty is not an effective method of punishment.

One main subject of debate within the death penalty is deterrence. Deterrence is the theory that punishing murderers by execution will cause potential killers to refrain from committing the crime. Haag claims that the death penalty does deter, which is reason enough to keep this form of punishment. “The death penalty, because of its finality,” prevents some people from killing others (Haag, par. 13). He believes that it is more valuable to deter prospective murderers in order to save their prospective victims than it is to spare murderers their lives just because it might not deter others. Another author who agrees with Haag is Steven Goldberg, who wrote “So What if the Death Penalty Deters?” Goldberg says that the deterrence theory is true and useful. He presents views that try to disprove abolitionists’ opinions that deterrence doesn’t work. His main argument is that abolitionists’ “psychological and moral resistance to the idea of the death penalty” is what causes them to believe that capital punishment doesn’t deter, or, at least, that belief “does not follow from the arguments they deploy” (Goldberg 42). Goldberg also claims that there is statistical evidence that the death penalty deters, but he makes his argument without using this evidence. Both authors are firm in their opinion that executing the guilty to possibly keep others from killing justifies the death penalty.

Taking the opposite side, Greenberg argues against the death penalty because of “its failure to deter” (Greenberg, par. 2). He states that because of the inconsistency of the system of capital punishment (in other words, the rareness of executions as compared with the number of those sent to death row), it loses the deterrence effect. Since it is highly likely they will not be executed, murderers have less reason to refrain from killing. In this case, the death penalty would be no more deterring than a life sentence. He also indicates that most murderers are disturbed or addicted to drugs or alcohol, and they are probably not going to think about punishment. Greenberg, like Goldberg, presents a study about the deterrence of the death penalty. However, Greenberg’s study shows that it had “no demonstrable deterrent effect…even during its heyday” (par. 16). He asserts that the results cannot have changed with today’s faulty system. An article from The Economist, “Down with the Death Penalty,” shares the same opinion. The author agrees that killers “are rarely equipped, or in a proper emotional state, to make fine calculations about the consequences” (“Down,” par. 5). He believes that, when taking the murderer’s state of mind into consideration, life imprisonment would be just as intimidating. Neither of these authors is persuaded by the deterrence theory.

Haag and Goldberg weave complex arguments, but many holes can be found in them. Haag’s statements fall flat due to his indecision and lack of support. For example, he
acknowledges the fact that deterrence is hard to determine and that many variables are involved. When he says he “would favor retention of the death penalty as retribution even if it were shown that the threat of execution could not deter prospective murderers not already deterred by the threat of imprisonment,” he gives up his view that deterrence is a reason to keep the death penalty (Haag, par. 13). One problem with both Haag’s and Goldberg’s articles is that they assume that the death penalty deters because it “instills a psychological resistance to the act” of murdering (Goldberg 42). However, children learn from a very young age that killing is wrong, and they don’t learn it from fear of the death penalty. People learn that murder is wrong from a Biblical or ethical perspective, not from a legal perspective. Humans knew that it was wrong to kill someone long before there was a system of capital punishment. Also, both authors forget the many factors that undermine the deterrence effect. Goldberg himself concedes the “increased likelihood of execution leads juries to convict fewer people, thereby offsetting the deterrent effect,” but he insists that the death penalty should be kept because of deterrence (Goldberg 42). Although Greenberg and the author of “Down with the Death Penalty” ignore the possibility that capital punishment could deter a few, they point out that murderers usually won’t think about the possibility of receiving the death penalty, as most assume they won’t get caught. The deterrence theory, when examined, does not give enough reason to leave the system of capital punishment intact.

Are the guiltless lives we lose to the death penalty a fair price for justice? When it comes to the miscarriage of justice, Haag and Goldberg are willing to sacrifice the lives of a few innocent people in order to save the lives of an unknown number of potential innocent victims. Haag declares that justice is more important than losing the lives of a small percentage of wrongly accused people. He reasons that mistakes will happen in any human activity, not excluding the system of capital punishment, but that the punishment of the guilty is worth it. Haag states we should not abolish the death penalty just because of its few mistakes, because “the advantages…outweigh the unintended losses” (par. 11). In his article, Goldberg implies that the deterrence effect outweighs the miscarriage of justice. He tries to convince abolitionists that more innocent lives can be saved if we retain the death penalty. With the death penalty, prospective murderers are being deterred, therefore saving the lives of their innocent prospective victims; without the death penalty, the small amount of innocents charged with capital crimes will be spared, but fewer prospective murderers will be deterred, therefore fewer innocent prospective victims will remain alive (Goldberg 44). He sides with the possibility of saving innocent people over the possibility of killing innocent people.

In contrast, the author of “Down with the Death Penalty” strongly believes that the miscarriage of justice is an excellent reason to discontinue the death penalty. He calls it a system of terrible mistakes that can never be corrected. Even though it is a small number of innocents that are executed, he declares “this is too high a price to pay” (“Down,” par. 7). He states that the system of capital punishment is not worth the “dubious benefits” when weighed against its “undoubted drawbacks” (“Down,” par. 7). He tells the reader of opinion polls that show Americans do not support the death penalty if life imprisonment without parole is an option, thus making the death penalty nonessential. A life sentence without parole would still prevent the murderer from killing again, but if it was discovered that one was innocent they could be set free; if an innocent person is killed, there is no way to make it right.

Though Haag tries to convince the reader that we should “not give up these activities” because justice is being done through the death penalty, his generalizations and easy disregard of grave mistakes make him closed-minded (par. 11). Executing innocent people is not justice. He
is correct when he says that it is just to the guilty, but when the risk of punishing the guiltless with “the severity and finality of the death penalty” remains, the system of capital punishment cannot be fair (Haag, par. 14). When he compares capital punishment to activities such as trucking, lighting, and construction, and uses phrases like “nearly all,” it is plain to see that he is grabbing for support of his position (Haag, par. 11). Goldberg also tends to generalize and assumes more for which there is evidence. For example, he says the death penalty “deters the murder of people who are,…in all likelihood, more numerous than the murderers who are executed” (Goldberg 44). Most of his arguments against abolitionists depend on his own views in this way. The author of “Down with the Death Penalty” presents a valid argument by first stating that the death penalty does not deter and citizens would prefer to have life imprisonment as the capital punishment, showing that the death penalty is not needed to punish those guilty of capital crimes. If it is not needed, then he claims we could save the lives of innocent people and provide a chance for them to be set free.

Because of its ineffectiveness and margin of error, the death penalty should be abolished in the United States. The death penalty’s inability to significantly deter potential murderers makes it “an unnecessary punishment” (“Down,” par. 7). Life imprisonment without parole would be a sufficient consequence because it would prevent the killer from murdering again and it would force him to spend the rest of his life reflecting on the decision he made. Haag states “the murderer learns through his punishment that his fellow men have found him unworthy of living” (par. 23); but if he does not remain alive, how can he learn from that punishment? Abolishing the death penalty presents the opportunity for a person convicted of capital crimes to change, and maybe then he could pass on his story to convince others not to make the same choice he did. Deterrence can happen in this way, and ending the death penalty would eliminate the possibility of executing innocents. On another note: Haag mentions that death is “our common fate,” implying that it cannot be inhuman (par. 23). But if everyone is “punished” with death eventually, the death penalty isn’t punishing murderers anymore than innocent, everyday people are “punished.” Spending your days in a small prison cell, knowing you will die there, is a far worse sentence than immediate, often painless death.

Works Cited
April 13, 1993, began like any other day. It was a sticky, clingy sweat as I walk out the door morning in New Orleans. I arrived at school a little earlier than normal. Sean wanted to talk to me for the last couple of days, and I had put it off as long as I could. Finally I decided I would listen to what he had to say even though I knew what he wanted to talk to me about. Sean’s girlfriend, Jen, broke up with him, and he was upset that she was dating someone else. Seeing Jen and the new boyfriend together on Saturday night squashed any hope Sean had of getting back together. Not being an emotional person, I did not want to deal with his breakdown. I gambled that if I tried to talk to him about it at school he would hold himself together in an attempt not to make a scene or let Jen know how upset he really was. I looked around for Sean, but I could not find him. I remember thinking that he must have overslept again. This would be good for me because I could put off his emotional breakdown for another day. I worked immediately after school and would not have the time for one of his long, overly complicated stories about what had happened. Sean was the type of person who could make a single thought stretch out into an hour long tale. I could not imagine how long this story with all of the emotional baggage could take. He would not have the ability to make it fit into quick sound bites between classes. Homeroom and math class came and went. I knew when I got to English, he would be in there with a silly faking-a-good-mood smile on his face while desperately wanting to pull me to the side and unleash the torment of his decimated heart. Instead his desk sat there empty, isolated and alone (feelings that in just a few moments I would know for myself). The next five minutes would change the course of that normal day and, as a result, change the person I was forever. From that moment on, I would drop anything and everything for anyone who wanted to talk to me about anything he or she felt was important. A normal, sticky, clingy sweat while walking out the door morning in New Orleans became the day that every assumption and belief I knew about myself and life would be altered. Over those next five minutes I learned of an event that would change this normal day into something unexpected, and over time, I learned how those unexpected days shape more of the person I am today then any milestone moment I planned for.

Like most normal days and events, I do not remember becoming friends with Sean. I know we met our freshman year in high school, but I cannot recall how or when we became close friends. He had this ability to grow on everyone. He was the most likable person I had ever met. He grew up with a deformity in the bone structure of his legs that had forced him to wear braces to correct his walking. Having braces would normally make a kid the unpopular geek, but they forced Sean to have a personality that was extremely outgoing and endearing. His personality was so infectious that I cannot recall anyone ever making fun of Sean, but I knew his braces were his own personal demons torturing him every moment of every day. His braces were the things he felt held him back, but for those of us who knew him best, we knew it was the braces that actually pushed him forward. Sean became my closest friend. Along with my sister Theresa and my future sister-in-law Lana, we would become almost inseparable. We were like members of each other’s families.

The four of us did everything together, but it was going to the Plaza Mall that became our favorite thing to do as a group. The Plaza was an old mall in the middle of a dying town just about fifteen minutes from where we lived. I remember from childhood how active with life the Plaza had been. It was where everyone went to shop for birthdays, anniversaries, and Christmas,
but time and innovation were the Plaza’s enemies. It was replaced with younger, grander malls on the other side of New Orleans. I was sixteen and had just gotten my license. My mom would not let me drive all the way to the other malls, so we were left with only one option, the Plaza. We spent every weekend there and many days after school. The Plaza was our place. It did not matter to us how old it was or that everyone else always talked about the new malls. It belonged to us, and somehow it became our sanctuary away from the everyday dramas of life.

Somewhere in the middle of my junior year, our peaceful sanctuary became a symphony of destruction and noise. In an attempt to help rebuild enthusiasm for the Plaza, a giant carousel was being built in the middle of the food court. Drills, jack hammers, and overly loud construction workers tore apart the sandstone colored tile floors. Annoyed by the clamoring noises and intrusion of the workers, we were resistant to the idea of the new carousel. Then over the course of our weekly visits, we witnessed the carousel’s birth as piece by piece it was assembled like individual cells slowly connecting to each other to form a heart. The carousel was white and gold trimmed and was filled with elaborate racing and winged horses. It looked like it had jumped straight off of the pages of a child’s fairy tale. Every time we went to the Plaza after the carousel opened, Theresa, Lana and Sean would have to jump on the Carousel and act like little kids. They instantly became five year olds every time they saw it. I felt I was too grown up to do something so juvenile, so I never joined them. It was one of the only things we never did as a group, simply because I did not want to seem immature and silly.

Before long, Sean and I were seniors. We had our schedules set to have all of our classes together except for my calculus class and homeroom. Around the beginning of the spring semester on a very normal day, Sean met Jen, a transfer sophomore from St Mary’s Catholic School for girls. She was a pretty, very girl-next-door type with an average height, pretty face, chocolate brown eyes, and golden blond hair. Instantly they became inseparable. It was the first time in his life Sean had a girlfriend. He was in love, and it was the worst kind of love, first love. First love made him feel complete. It made him feel like someone else was actually his other half. It was empowering and intoxicating, or at least it was until it ended.

The warning signs of the relationship’s demise came early. Rumors circulated about her going on dates with another guy, but Sean would not pay any attention. He was in love and believed she was also. Blinded by his feelings for her, he never saw or felt the earthquake that was about to demolish the dream existence he had planned for them. His heart crumbled when she told him she was in love with someone else. She was breaking up with him for someone she had dated the entire time she was with Sean, yet he still believed they would work things out and get back together. Foolishly he believed in the power of first love and did not realize that she did not see him as her first love.

Finally, on what should have been a normal Saturday night, Sean felt the earthquake claw and rip the ground from under him. Sean was out with some other friends who decided they would try to cheer him up. They took him to see a new movie, and then coming out the theater as obvious as a glowing neon sign, they saw Jen. She was with her boyfriend making out in front the theater. Sean did not make a scene even though I know he was annihilated by what he saw. He did not say anything about it to anyone. It was not Sean’s way to react in public. Years of wearing leg braces had made him hold in his emotions until he was ready to let them out.

The next day when I was at work, he came by asking if we could meet up after work to talk. I knew what this was going to be. I was going to have to be the shoulder to cry on. I had already heard what had taken place the night before from some mutual friends. Fortunately I had agreed to stay late to cover someone else’s shift. By the time I got off work, it would be too late
to sit up talking when we had school the next morning. The next day Sean acted indifferently about the situation while at school. He did not want to talk about it there. He knew I had to work again that night, but again he came there at about 9 p.m. to see if I could talk. I was tired and still had homework to do, so I told him I would meet him before school. Even now after all these years, I regret nothing more than this one moment in my life. I let him walk out the door without listening to what he had to say. Maybe I would have heard the pain in his voice. Maybe I would have seen the lifelessness in his eyes. Maybe he would have told me where this story was heading, and I could have changed the ending to a happily ever after.

The next morning I was sitting in English, staring at his empty desk, when the principal walked in. He started to talk to Ms. Hildebrandt, and I saw her turn white as a ghost. In the next five minutes, I would learn that Sean had died late last night. The information would trickle in over the next few hours. I would learn how his mom found him still “sleeping” in his room late this morning. How she tried to wake him and then saw the note and the empty bottle of pills. I would learn how she tried to revive him, but it was too late. He had died around 11 p.m. the night before. She had no possible chance to breathe life back into her only son, but she continued to try until the paramedics arrived.

Sean’s note said he could not go on alone. He wrote that he had spent his life isolated because of the braces. He said that meeting Jen was the first time he finally felt like he belonged, and he could not go back to feeling like an outcast. He told his family that he loved them and said goodbye. That was the extent of the note. Everyone blamed Jen. She became the most hated person I had ever known, but I could not hate her anymore then I could hate myself. I knew I was complicit in his death. He tried to talk to me the two nights before he died, and I could not make the time for him. I could not bring myself to go to his funeral. Since finding out about his death, I had felt the weight and force of everyone’s tears like an ocean pulling me down in its current of guilt. I could not look anymore at the suffering of his family and other friends. I was drowning. I could not reconcile my emotions. I was in a state of delusion. In my mind, I was waiting for him to come to English class, sit down in his desk, and have our conversation after class. His death had to be a dream. It could not be real.

Then time started to pass, and his desk continued to sit there empty. The glaring truth was he would never sit there again, but I could not accept that. It could not be that I would never see that silly smile or hear his infectious laughter again. Three weeks passed after his death before I went to the Plaza mall. I had to get something for a friend’s birthday. I went around the mall trying to find the right thing, and then I saw the carousel. Sitting there staring back at me with disdain, the carousel showed me what I let happen. Within moments, the events of the past four years flashed before me: meeting Sean, our friendship, the Plaza, the Carousel he always tried to get me to ride, meeting Jen, their break up, letting him walk out of my sight before he could tell me he wanted to die, Ms. Hildebrandt’s face, and finally an empty desk. The truth hit me like a grand slam swing hitting a baseball. I fell to the ground from the force of the blow. I broke down in tears. I was a six foot two hundred pound guy curled up on the sandstone tile floor crying my eyes out in front of everyone at the mall. I could not control it. I left the Plaza without a gift for my friend, and never went back there again.

It took a long time, but eventually I came to terms with that fact that Sean was dead. I never actually got over not being there for him. I know he wanted to talk to me about how lost he was. Maybe he would have told me what he was planning. Maybe I could have stopped him, or told his family what he was thinking. He may have never talked to me again, but at least he
would be alive. I never got the chance though. I was not there, and I have to live with that guilt, a
guilt that has forced me to always be there for anyone who has needed me since.

April 13, 1993 was supposed to be a normal day. It was not a wedding or expected birth. It
was not graduation or starting college. It was just a day, but that day taught me that it is not the
days that people know are important like weddings and graduation that actually change life and
who they are. April 13, 1993 taught me that it is the days people never see coming that actually
truly change them. The days that are supposed to be ordinary but get morphed into something
else are the days that most affect who someone becomes. April 13, 1993 was one of those days.
I lost my best friend, and I know I could have stopped it from happening. Everyone else in our
town blamed Jen, but I could not. I could only blame myself. Sean asked for my help, and I told
him that I did not have time. Now even though I have made it my life’s goal to always be there
for my friends in an attempt to never let something like this happen again, I still have to live with
these three facts: Sean is dead, I could have stopped it, and without him, I will never ride on a
carousel.
Home Is Where the Heart Is
By Ashley George

What I call home was once a pile of dirt, rocks, and trash sitting on the edge of a shallow pond-like lake in between Prairie Grove and Lincoln, Arkansas, towns consisting of only two to three thousand residents. The beauty of the house that my parents slaved over is mind-numbingly brilliant. Watching the transformation of this home has been fascinating. But putting the land I grew up on up for sale has been one of the hardest things I’ve had to overcome, because this place isn’t just a home; it was the fairytale I grew up in, the love story of my mother and father. My fairytale ended in an unhappily ever after as my parents finalized their divorce this past summer. I find it hard to see the home I’ve fallen in love with being taken from me and given to someone who could never understand its incredible story.

In 1981 a young seventeen-year-old boy took his fifteen-year-old girlfriend out on a boat ride in an old rowboat across Bob Kidd Lake. On the edge of the lake was a swampy-looking area with empty beer cans, old bait buckets, and other washed up trash. They rowed closer to see what was beyond the edge of the water. They peered between the half-dead weeping willows and oak trees falling over into the water. The land was covered in junk and rubble and looked a mess. After that day, they took regular trips out to that side of the lake and dreamed of what they could turn the trash pit into. After graduating from high school, the boy and girl grew up and got married in 1984, and while they had planned on buying the property, the boy was stationed by the Air Force in Connecticut. They were forced to move away from their family in Arkansas and start new in the North. They agreed to move forward and put their dream of living on the lake behind them, but the girl still dreamed about the house that they would go on to build one day.

Seven years later, my mom and dad finally bought that property, and I was born. They immediately started cleaning the place up, and when I was two years old, we moved into a small trailer home on the edge of the lake. The trash was gone, but the hard ground lacking in greenery was there to stay for a long time. I remember when it would snow; all the snow was white when it fell, but after we would walk through the fluffy white blanket covering the yard, it would turn into muddy slush, making it impossible to make childhood snow angels. I never had a snowman when I was young that didn’t have rocks in it besides his eyes, or dirt and twigs sticking out of his round curves. The place was a muddy mess. My parents worked hard to change that though.

My mom was a stay-at-home mom and spent time gardening in a small square patch of grass which was surrounded by a round rock circle my dad had stacked to make a boundary for the yard. My mom also spent time designing a beautiful house that she told me would be our home someday. I thought it was a castle because of the stone beams that she had drawn to hold up the long balcony with wooden railing. The kitchen and dining room looked like a ballroom because of the tile floor she had sketched out. I would picture Princess Belle from Beauty and the Beast in her long yellow ball gown walking down the spiral staircase linking the second floor to the third floor and spinning from the entryway to the dining room and then into the kitchen.

In 1999 when I was eight years old, we began building our dream house. Dad built it along with two other contractors who were friends of the family. We tried growing grass that spring. My brother and I got to help sprinkle the tiny seeds all over the yard. I remember wishing that we had a sprinkler to put in our luscious green front yard for us to play in. I imagined rolling around in the wet grass. The only problem with that was that we still had no grass. Our attempt for a beautiful green yard had failed. That same summer my father built a dock out of large slabs of concrete and rocks bigger than him that he would get from job sites where he did construction
work. I spent most of my time down at the dock fishing for tadpoles with my Barbie butterfly net.

I remember our house taking a long time to build. We spent two more summers in our trailer. As my brother, Kenneth, and I got older, we used the building supplies to build tree houses in a small gap of forestry between our property and the neighbor’s house. We had built three of them by the time our house was finished the winter I turned ten. The following spring we had grass sprouting in our front yard. The house was beautiful. Seeing my mother and father’s love transformed into this beautiful home was fairytale enough for me.

The gray siding on the second floor blended with the stones covering the first floor. The same stones covered beams that held up a long wooden balcony that wrapped around the second floor. Behind the railing were the large windows that absorbed the rising sun’s winter rays and warmed the carpet where I would wake up early and lay feeling the warmth on my body. The tile floors linking the entryway, dining room, and kitchen were cold in the winter and warm in the summer. The kitchen window overlooked my small blue birdhouse hanging in the large oak tree whose limbs, like arms, stretched over our balcony where it would drop its multicolored leaves in the fall. The spiral stairs led to my mother’s office on the third floor, which was a room with three walls and railing that sat over the living room facing the large windows that looked out over the lake. I could walk out from the living room onto the balcony and see the entire lake with boats, like ducks, resting scattered over it. At night I would watch the town glow with car headlights and streetlights. I would wait for the lights over the football field to go out after Friday night games. I fell in love with the view.

My mom and dad’s relationship hit a peak that year. From that year on, I watched their fights become more frequent and detestable. Dad began spending an abundance of his time in the garage working on his truck. I knew divorce was real, and it was clear to me that my parents were going to turn to it eventually when the fighting and yelling got old. I escaped from the fear of my mom and dad divorcing by going fishing on the paddleboat that Dad made for me.

On my eighteenth birthday, I went out on the paddleboat for the last time. I paddled way out to the middle of the small lake. The sun was setting just to the right of the house. I turned around, facing the place I called home. I visualized the change and transformation the land took. The dark muggy pictures I had seen from when Dad would take Mom on picnic trips in his boat kept popping in my head. I stared at the house and tried to make it disappear and go back to what it was. I pictured the nearly dead weeping willows covered in moss soaking the ends of their long flimsy limbs in the muddy water. Trash covered the bank. Old car parts and garbage sat on the hard rocks and flaky black shell covering the soil. In the beginning there was no road; there was only the large clearing in the trees where our house now sits. I then closed my eyes and opened them, looking at my home. I traced over every detail of the property with my eyes. I followed the gravel road that turned into a circle at the bottom of the hill in front of the house. The droplets of water that sat on the green grass reflected the sun’s rays, making the yard sparkle. The house shot up in the middle of the lightshow created by the grass and sun. Blinded by the reflection of the sun, I saw a castle—the one I thought we were building when I was a little girl.

I bought into the lie that everything in life is a fairytale and everyone gets a happily ever after written at the end of their story. My mother and father’s love story began on this property and ended on this property, and now, as it is time to pass the property off to someone else to begin their story, I realize that this isn’t the end of my fairytale; it is only one of those amplified conflicts in my life that starts the next chapter.
A Shared Space
By Angela Moss

My golden-brown hair was worn in a ponytail, high at the crown of my head, in the days when I ran down the hall of our home and took the sharp right turn into my room. I shared this sanctuary of childhood with my sister, who was two years and nine months younger than I. This was a fact that I promptly added to the end of any conversation regarding age; as if the additional nine months had rendered me unalterably wiser than her. There was, however, no real sense of competition between the two of us. No, we were cut from the same cloth. Our lives seemed interwoven and inseparable.

Our equality was evident in the room we inhabited. The identical beds were pressed against the far wall of the narrow room - a perfect fit - and rested footboard to footboard. The rainbow sherbet stripes of the matching comforters made it difficult to tell where one bed ended and the next began. Hung neatly in the corners above each bed were three-tiered, wire baskets overflowing with the arms, legs and hair of Trolls, Monchichis, Smurfs, and other stuffed animals. At night we would lie in our matching pajamas with our heads together at the end of our beds and talk until our giggles became too loud and alerted our father we were not going to sleep. We would hear the crackle and pop of his joints as he rose from the couch in the living room and plodded down the hall toward us. Quickly we would dive toward our opposing headboards and feign sleep as Dad opened the door and shouted in a warning to get to sleep “or else.” When the door shut again, we were right back at the foot of the bed, knowingly grinning at our treachery.

On the wall opposite our beds were two large, wooden shelves which ran the full length from the doorway to the closet door. These shelves were filled with collections of childhood wonder. There were Lincoln pennies, encased in cardboard, with my grandfather’s scratchy writing labeling each as belonging to George or Henry; his pet names for us. There were the figurines of our favorite birds (a blue-jay and cardinal) that my parents had meticulously hand-painted and fired for us. There were small containers filled with tiny shards of colored glass which my sister and I had collected as treasure on our bike rides around the neighborhood. Most valuable of all was a tiny glass vial of Mount St. Helen volcanic ash which my father had gathered. He had created a small sign from a toothpick and some jaggedly cut paper and labeled it as such. The sign added to the mystique and gave the ash a museum-like quality; an artifact to be labeled, displayed, and touched only when show-and-tell needed a break from the mundane game ball, gymnastics medal, or family vacation photo. It held the same marvel as a ship in a bottle, though there was little wonder how it got in there. More importantly, there was only one vial. There wasn’t enough ash to warrant an equal division in two separate containers, so we shared and, in the sharing, it became rarer still.

Under the shelves sat a child-sized table and two chairs. My sister and I would sit there for hours and write stories, complete with illustrations, before running out to the kitchen to share them with our mother who was awe-struck at our creativity. Other times, we would hold coloring contests and call on our parents to judge. Inevitably they would proclaim that the pictures were both too good to decide upon just one, or would select the drawing the other hadn’t, resulting in a draw. Despite the constant tie, we never gave up the idea that one day we would best each other.

To the right of the table was our closet. There were no folding doors swinging open to reveal a secret hiding place or vast wardrobe. The closet was barely wider than the single door which led to it. The inside panel of the door featured a rotation of posters reflecting whatever my
sister or I was most interested in at the time. The closet itself had one high, built-in shelf containing a selection of board games like *Hi Ho! Cherry-O* or *Chutes and Ladders*. My sister and I would play these games ad nauseam on rainy days, trading wins and losses. The single hanging bar in the closet held my clothes on the right and my sister’s on the left. They were not packed tight, as one might imagine. Instead, there was space between each outfit, setting it apart from the next. Below that was a small, metal two-shelf unit that looked like it belonged in a garage rather than a child’s room. This shelf held a collection of small purses and accessories, as well as various toys, Barbie dolls, and an Etch-A-Sketch. Like everything else in the room, it was a common space where each of us had our own possessions along with our shared belongings.

Outside our room there were many other communal spaces of which we both shared elements and owned separate pieces. We ate meals as a family at the dining room table, but had our designated seats – my sister with her back to the sliding glass door leading outside and me with my back to the door leading to the garage. Not once did we ask or presume to change seats, seeming content with our never-changing view. In the backyard, there was an orange and yellow striped swing set with which our grandparents had surprised us, for no apparent reason, one sunny afternoon. Gifts presented outside the realm of holidays and birthdays were a rare treat. We shared the swing set, but there were two swings and a two-seated teeter totter. The swing set faced two cedar trees (also gifts from my grandparents) which were planted in our backyard. One was my tree and the other was, of course, my sister’s. Looking back, it is clear that the trees were really a gift to my parents, but we relished the thought that a living, growing thing had been planted in our honor.

As I grew older, got married, and started a life of my own, I came to realize the impact that growing up with my sister had on me. When it came time to share my life with a husband, the transition was easy. I had already shared much of my life with someone else. When it came time to communicate about day to day events, the process was natural. I had already talked through many mundane events throughout the years. There was little I experienced in my married life that I hadn’t already practiced for in the close relationship between me and my sister. It was then I realized we were less like a single piece of fabric and more like those two trees in our backyard. We were individuals raised in the same soil with deep roots that undoubtedly tangled around one another at various points. The older and bigger we grew, the stronger we had become. Time had not pulled us apart. Like the outstretched limbs of our adjacent trees, our shared experiences had brought us closer.
The Day That Changed...Everything
By Kristen Phillips

When I was nine, and just about to start the fifth grade, I came home from summer vacation to find out that I was going to live with my grandmother. I loved my Granny very much. We always got along much better than she and my mom ever did, but that knowledge didn’t alleviate any of the anxiety I felt at going to live there, starting a new school and trying to make new friends. There was one thing, however, that did help: reading. That was the day I discovered that books were something more than just a pleasant way to pass the time. They could show me how to live, how to survive, and how to thrive.

Granny opened her aged, wooden door before my knuckles could complete their timid tap, tap, tap. After a moment’s pause she stepped to the side. I edged my way past her, dragging my monster suitcase. It was stuffed with everything I couldn’t live without: my grey, stuffed teddy named “Velvy” so named because she was so velvety soft, my personalized stationary (a gift from my dad), my jewelry box, and a few clothes tossed in at the last minute. I hesitated inside the door, unsure of what to do next. A question hovered, unasked, on my lips, “Why am I here?” It’s not that I was afraid to ask; it’s more that I was afraid of seeming ungrateful. Granny had opened her home to me. I didn’t want to be rude by asking her why.

Granny led me gently, her arm around my shoulder, to a small room on the right. “You can put your things in here. This will be your room now.”

I stood stupefied in what used to be the library. Where were all the books?! What happened to the massive bookshelves that used to line the long wall? Also missing was the comfy, overstuffed recliner that Granny and I would curl up in on rainy days. The room looked barren and sad with just a small bed, one end table with a lamp, and Granny’s old roll-top desk in the corner. She whispered in my ear, “I’ve left you the little desk to do your homework on.”

Her intention was to make me feel welcome and comfortable with a space of my own. Instead I felt like some cataclysmic force that had come and ripped apart this peaceful, orderly home. I didn’t fit in here. I came from the city with its chaos and noise, sirens blaring, car horns honking, and people everywhere. This was another world. Every yard was neatly trimmed. Every house was an exact replica of the one next door. Did people even live in these houses? I never saw any kids playing or even any cars parked in the driveways.

“Do you want to come and help me make dinner?”

Snapping out of my reverie I quickly regained my nervous apprehension. “I guess,” I replied. Sullenly, I followed her out the back door.

The calming strains of classical music drifted from Granny’s bedroom to the backyard as we gathered the ingredients for the meal. Granny’s backyard was the Garden of Eden. Beyond the garden plot, in which the standard herbs and vegetables grew, were graceful trees of plum, pear, apple, tangerine, lemon, and fig. Along one fence was a trailing grapevine and clinging to the opposite side lurked a hulking blackberry bramble. Any open space there might have been was occupied by sweet smelling flowers of all kinds.

“After dinner you may pick out a book to read.” Granny stated as she bent down to snip rosemary and thyme. She had granted me a request I hadn’t even dared to ask for! Her books were prized treasures. Children were absolutely forbidden from touching them. As if she had read my thoughts she added, “I trust you. I know you’ll take good care of them.”

“Do they have pictures?” I asked, my voice barely audible.

“No, dear.” I could hear the awe in her voice, “These stories don’t need pictures. They
are classics.”

When the dinner dishes were washed, dried, and put away Granny led me to the cabinet that now housed her most prized possessions. Sliding open the door, I sat down on the tile floor and gazed at row upon row of cloth-bound books. Their spines were lined up like soldiers and arranged, alphabetically, by author. All of them in those dusty, dull colors—umber, maize, puce, and burnt siena. I used to think of them as the weird colors in my crayon box. A dry, musty smell of things left long undisturbed wafted out at me. They had intimidating titles like *Great Expectations*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Gone with the Wind*. Indecision and uncertainty gripped me. At length I chose *Little Women* by Louisa Mae Alcott. Granny said that it was about a family with four sisters. I was curious because I didn’t have any sisters or brothers. I eased opened my first “grown-up” book. The words were so small, and there were so many pages. I couldn’t imagine actually reading the whole book. Taking a deep breath I turned to the first page. “Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents…” I started to read aloud and then remembered that grown-ups didn’t do that. I pressed my lips together tightly to remind myself to be quiet and continued to read. The characters were all so real. The story was so compelling. I had no idea that books could be so…well…wonderful!

“Kristen? You need to get up now. It’s bedtime.” I tore my eyes from the book long enough to notice that it had gotten dark outside.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“It’s almost nine o’clock.” Granny answered with a smile on her lips. “You’ve been sitting on that floor for two hours.” Two hours?! I’d never read anything for longer than ten minutes before. I had been swept away to another place and time. The feeling was amazing, almost as if I had taken a trip without even leaving the room! I got up, reluctantly, and got ready for bed.

After that day I read every chance I got. In the end I think it took me about two weeks to finish that book. Even though I am a much faster reader now, I still feel frustrated when I have to put down a good book. My daughter, who just turned nine, started reading *Little Women* last weekend. And just last night I heard her grumble sarcastically, “Why do I always have to stop reading at the good parts?”

I know just how she feels.
Vonnegut on the Train
By Jennifer Register

Every night was the same. The same beeping of metro-cards, whirring through the automated ticket takers, only to beep in the same monotonous way and be spit out, card after card. The New York night always muffled through tile ceilings, walls, and floors. Suddenly, yet expectedly, the wind would pick up in the clammy tunnel, and the doors to my train ride home from my twelve hour workday would creak open. Pushing and shoving, even when there were enough seats for all, I would eventually find my place to rest for the time being. Every night was the same, until a few moments after I sat on that same cold, plastic seat. I would rifle through my oversize purse, searching for the familiar feeling of pages and pages of words. As I unfolded my Vonnegut novel I was suddenly transported to a world where no one and nothing could bother me, not even the crazy man sitting three seats away.

I cannot remember a time in my life when I did not read. When I was young I read anything and everything I could get my hands on: train cars, newspapers, cereal boxes, and, of course, books from the local library. Although I read frequently and speedily, I hardly recall having a “favorite,” a book that I went back to again and again. This pattern continued throughout middle and high school. I was always reading, never quite remembering morals or points that the books I was reading had to offer. Nothing ever quite captivated me. After high school, I continued to read, but felt like with every book I read things were getting more and more stale. I felt that the plots were always the same, the characters were always facing the same problems, and that they always had similar ways of overcoming them. I was bored with books.

A few years later, I moved to New York. The first month of my stay, I resided in Queens. On my first hour long train ride to the city I realized I was going to need something to distract and entertain me on my way to and from work every day. Walking by an indistinct bookstore in midtown later that day, I came to the conclusion that a book would be the cheapest and easiest way to keep me at least a bit entertained during my commute. I imagined myself walking into the bookstore, only to be greeted by the same table of paperback bestsellers. I expected myself to blindly judge a book by its cover and quickly grab whichever one looked immediately best to me.

Surprisingly, the table I was welcomed by in this small store was filled with every book Kurt Vonnegut had ever written. Although I was familiar with his name, I had no idea what or who he wrote about. Unaware of the greatness I was in store for I stomped to the table, grabbing the book that was closest to me. The decision was as easy as that. I was ready, yet again, to open this book and read the same story I had heard a hundred times before.

On the train ride home later that night, after sitting bored for a few minutes, I decided to give this new book a try. Taking it from my bag I saw that the title of this book was Cat’s Cradle. Puzzled as to what this book could possibly be about, I began to read.

Immediately I was transported to a world that was both strange and familiar to the one I was so used to; beginning with the main character writing a book about the day Hiroshima was bombed and quickly delving into the invention of a fictional solid alternative to water, named ice-nine, I was bewildered. I continued to read about the island San Lorenzo, its absurd ruler “Papa” Monzano, and also the imagined religion called Bokonism, practiced by the inhabitants of the island. Within minutes there was no banging of the train car, no hurting feet, no worries from the day behind or ahead of me. I was completely caught up in this new world’s problems and stories.
As I reached the middle of the book, I finally thought to look up from the new life I was living. Looking around, I realized I was much further into Queens than I should have been. I had missed my stop. Quickly, I hurried off of the train, embarrassed that I had to turn back around, yet excited for even more time to read the book that had instantly captured me.

During the rest of my time in New York, I read every book Kurt Vonnegut’s repertoire had to offer. In every novel and short story, Vonnegut crafted a world that was intricate and seamless. His books pointed out problems within these worlds, and I slowly realized these were not just problems facing his imaginary property, but difficulties normal people faced in our everyday lives. Every Vonnegut book had the same effect on me that *Cat’s Cradle* did; they transported me out of my stressful, hectic life into a new one that was not so different as to be unbelievable, but much more absurd and deranged than my world was on a day-to-day basis. Above all, these books consider and question things that were going on around me that I had never thought twice about examining before.

To this day I still re-read my Vonnegut collection more than any other books I own or have had in my possession. These books also mean more to me than most of the other things I own. Whenever I read any one of them, whether it’s the third or fifteenth time around, they make me question the world I live in. Each time they do the one thing I felt books could no longer do, turn the world around me into the world on the page.
The summer sun had dried the dirt on the narrow country lane to a fine talc, so we drove at a crawl. It was 1995, and our kids always liked to go to my sister Beverly’s house. My wife and I tried to make it out there every week or so. On our left, the Holsteins were congregating around the dairy in anticipation of easing the pressure in their udders. A large pack of dogs came running to greet us, creating their own cloud of dust. Once they reached our car, they surrounded it to give us their own version of a royal escort back to the house with their voices announcing our arrival to the inhabitants all the way. At the end of the drive we got out of the car. The smell of manure wafted over from the barn, that smell always bringing back good memories. We started our slow walk to the front gate. The dogs, always happy to see someone, circled us like land sharks. We’d take one step, wait for an opening, and then take another. There was a fence around the front yard where Beverly’s two preteen boys could play without being mobbed by the dogs. Now the yard only held Binky’s toys. There was the bowling ball she liked to play with, a baseball she would dive under water and retrieve, and her favorite, the stock tank. The tank was originally put out there for the boys to swim in, but since the weather started warming, she claimed it for her own. The only thing we could see was her head protruding out of the water as she peeked at us over the edge. She was a beautiful eight-month-old Bengal tiger. Tigers are one of the few cats that like water, and Binky loved it.

It all started when a woman with a pet carrier walked into the vet clinic where my sister was working as a receptionist/assistant. The carrier contained three sick Bengal tiger cubs. They were all malnourished and lethargic with bronchial infections, and all of their hair had fallen out because of neglect. The woman was going through marital problems, and instead of taking them back to the Safari Park in Gentry, she let them get sick. The two males died overnight, but Binky held on. Beverly called the man in charge of the Safari and told him if they would pay for food and medicine, she would take the tiger cub home and give her around the clock care. “The first thing I did was give her a bath. She was filthy,” Beverly recalled. After a month of late night care and bottle feeding, Binky started gaining weight, her lungs cleared up, and most of her hair grew back. She also had grown in their routine and hearts. Bev got her a pacifier because she would yowl all the time for her bottle. Afterward, she went everywhere sucking on it. She would sleep on a blanket in the living room with a puppy she had adopted and would suck on the puppy’s ear as she slept. When she was about five months old, they took her back to the Safari, but she wasn’t fitting in with the bigger cats. She wasn’t eating, and she would sit around and cry. The people at the Safari called Bev and asked if she would come get her and keep her a while longer. Bev was happy to.

Back home, Binky went back to being her old self. “We had to keep her out of the bathroom because if anyone was taking a bath, she would jump in with them. She learned how to open the door, and if she thought someone was taking a bath, she would open the door and dive in!” Bev laughed. Another of Binky’s favorite things to do was go places. Beverly would take her everywhere. She would ride in the front passenger seat of Bev’s Thunderbird, and quietly look out the window. Bev would take her to the bank, and all the employees would come out to pet her and make over her. Binky loved the attention. After Binky lived with Bev’s family for a little over a year, it was time to take her back to the Safari. When Bev first brought her home, she weighed a little less than five pounds, and when they took her back to the Safari, she weighed over three hundred. “The last time we saw her she was playing with the other cats,” Bev said.
At the same time she had Binky, Beverly was getting other animals to care for. Once, the Safari people called her at two in the morning to come and get two African lion cubs. The cubs were less than an hour old and premature. Their mother didn’t have a good history of caring for her cubs. While the female cub died a few days later, the male, named Kenta, grew quickly. They kept him about four months. “He spent so much time with the dogs he began to think he was one,” Beverly said laughing. “He started running with one of the blue tick hounds, and they became inseparable friends. One day I got a call from our neighbor living on the next farm over. He told me there was a lion and hound in his front yard, so I went over and got them. We had to tie up the dog to keep the lion at home,” she said. “Kenta would crouch behind things and spring out and surprise whoever was his prey at the moment! He did that to a meter reader one time and just about scared him to death! The next time we got our bill they had written ‘Caution: lion on premises,’” said Beverly.

One of her crowning achievements was when she stopped people from putting a lion cub to sleep. He was born with his front legs turned in, and he could only scoot around on his elbows. At that time Beverly was going to a physical therapist because of a car accident, so she took the cub in, and the therapist showed her some exercises to do with him several times a day. His legs got stronger, and he began getting around better. “By the time I took him back you couldn’t tell he ever had a problem,” she proclaimed proudly.

One day we walked in Bev’s house and saw four bear cubs no bigger than Chihuahuas. They were wrestling around playing on the floor; then they would stand up on their hind legs and try to intimidate each other in mock battle. Bev let us bottle feed them once they settled down. What we thought would be soft and plush fur turned out to be coarse and thick. One cub named Baloo was a rascal. If Bev would slap him on his snout for doing something he shouldn’t, he would swipe back at her with his paw. The last I heard, if you go out to the Safari today you can still see him.

After five years of Bev’s taking in a variety of animals, like all good things, it too came to an end, along with her marriage. Bev believes she took care of somewhere between seventy or eighty animals and only had a handful die. While she spent hours working with them, often getting up every two hours to feed them, she was never paid in money. She did it out of love for animals. It has been eight years since she last had an animal from the Safari. She recently got married and is living on another farm. I asked if she would do it again, and she smiled and said, “Yes, but not so many at a time.” It’s almost like déjà vu when I go to her new house. I have to go down another dusty lane, and there are cows in the pasture, but I don’t see any tigers in the front yard waiting to see who’s coming. Yet.
Textual Analysis: Sun Chips Website
By Chris Stewart

What do extreme sports, Twitter, global warming, compost, being green, and eating healthy all have in common? They all appeal to or are somewhat interesting to a generation of young people who are not at all satisfied with the status quo and are not afraid to look at change as the way to make something better instead of just different. Frito-Lay, with their website for Sun Chips brand snacks, looks at just this idea. They take a bold approach in attempting to reach an audience that is aware of the condition of our world and educated on the ideals of our society; using catchy phrases and visual aids, Frito-Lay not only targets but embraces the mindset of this modern generation. Everything from color choices to the videos on this website points to a healthy, active, and environmentally friendly lifestyle which younger people of today seem to be all about. Frito-Lay has captured the essence of this twenty to thirty year old generation and uses their “hungry for a change” attitude to market its product of snacks and ideas of a better life.

Words and phrases are used in ads to draw the reader in and to attempt to make consumers feel as though this is just the product they have been looking for. Manufacturers will describe details or attributes of the item so as to appeal to the intended audience and lure them into a “needed” purchase. Advertisers will use verbal messages as a means of attracting potential buyers to the products they are representing. Frito-Lay, in their website for their Sun Chips brand of snacks, is no exception. When opening the homepage for Sun Chips, captions used to allure the senses and even the beliefs of the reader immediately catch the eye. “Healthier You,” “Whole Grain Goodness,” and “Harvest Cheddar” are just a few of the words used to entice the consumer’s sense of good health. “Hungry,” “Eat,” and “Snacks” lure the unsuspecting reader into thinking that they might just need a little something to tie them over until dinner. Also, words like “Healthier Planet,” “Who’s Hungry for a Change,” “100% Compostable Bag,” and “Earth” attempt to make mankind more aware of its growing convictions that there is a need to be more environmentally friendly.

As people begin to scan through the expertly penned phrases on this advertisement, a sense of responsibility would almost have to begin to build up in them. Everything on the front page of the website talks about people being healthy or the planet being healthy. The word “healthier” appears three times, “compostable” four times, and “planet” three times. The word “goodness” is the closest word you will find to anything talking about how the chips taste or how they are made. The phrase in big bold letters right in the middle of the page reads, “Because the Earth likes to eat Healthier too.” This statement implies that everyone wants to eat healthier.

This theme of health and environment continues with the opening of some of the links at the bottom of the page which is set on signs that appear to be posted to boards or fence posts. Going into one of those links titled “Our 100% compostable packaging,” you will read how Frito-Lay has come up with a bag that is designed to fully breakdown in just fourteen weeks because “We dream of a world with less waste.” Another link which lists the ads available from Sun Chips has photos of healthy-looking women with captions like “Guilt is not one of its ingredients” and “Can the earth love my snack as much as I do?” Again, almost everything that is written is done so to appeal to the physically healthy or the environmentally healthy aspects of Sun Chips.

Along with the use of verbal phrases, advertisers will also use visual traps as well in their attempts to sell products to the public. The Sun Chips website does a very good job of this with the use of colors and objects that depict exactly what it is they are trying to portray. On the
homepage the use of earth tones to appeal to the earth friendly and just a dab of bright color to still draw the attention of the eye to the bag of chips is one way visual aspects are used. The picture in the center of the page shows the “World’s first 100% compostable chip package” in a bed of compost. The bright orange bag with a wide strip of green is lying the compost in a way to make it appear that it is part of the pile and not just on it. All of this is surrounded by a soft yellow frame and the Sun Chips label with several sun beams streaming down from it onto the compost pile. The homepage as a whole is quite plain. The ads are symmetrical and very down to earth. As with the verbal messages, most if not all of the pictures and photos are more directed at the environment instead of the chips themselves. Even the pictures that you click on to go to the links are square with muted colors and plain white or black lettering.

Once you click on some of the links, things get a little more exciting. On the link that talks about the compostable bag you are greeted with a background of a lush green mountain range with several twenty-something, healthy-looking hikers in the foreground that appear to be gazing across the valley in a very calm, relaxed state. In the center of the picture is a link to a video which shows a Sun Chip bag in the ground decomposing as a gentleman is singing a song about “whoever said that is impossible….doesn’t know me.” After the bag is completely gone, a flower grows in its place. Again, nothing really is shown about the product, just the new idea of an environmentally kind compostable chip bag.

There is a link to share your thoughts with links to Facebook and Twitter, another with the different flavors available and information on the solar energy uses at the Modesto, California plant. However, the link with the most interesting visual is the one that shows the television ads that are coming soon. One of these ads shows a billboard on a busy street somewhere in the U.S.A. Soft calming music is playing. The video shows a time-elapsed view of the billboard as the sun comes up and moves across the sky. As the sun begins to rise and journey across the sky, you can see there is something on the top of the billboard that is sticking out and away from it. As the sun moves higher in the sky, the words “Sun Chips” begin to appear as the shadows of these objects are being formed into the letters. As the sun moves through the day, the shadows begin to elongate and then disappear off the other side of the billboard. The advertisers were very creative in finding a way of using a billboard to market the product without the use of energy or waste. Again, Frito-Lay uses the same environmental theme of a “healthier planet.”

In every scene on the website, the use of lush green landscapes, environmentally safe and kind objects, and healthy attractive people show that the target audience which Frito-Lay is trying to appeal to is the twenty- to thirty-something health and environmentally conscious. Hiking, gardening, walking, and bicycling are all used in visuals to depict physically active lifestyles. All the models used are in the twenty to thirty year old range and all are healthy, earthy, and very attractive looking men and women. Statements such as “The earth likes to eat healthier too,” “Healthier you,” and “live brightly” pinpoint an era of the last ten years of so when the “Green” movement has been popular with a generation of young adults who are into outdoor activities and healthy eating. The concepts of sharing your ideas and placing links to Facebook and Twitter are very appealing to that age group also. My twenty-two year old is quick to tell me that I am a dinosaur when it comes to the use of new technologies such as these.

The material in this Sun Chips website it borderline political and less appealing to the idea that the reader might actually like the chips. All through the ads are underlying messages and pictorials of the need for a “healthier you” and a “healthier planet.” It’s not coincidence that ads like these are becoming more popular and numerous after all the awareness of global
warming and the need to go “green.” America has become a throw-away nation. Most of the older generation is set in their ways. Not all of them seem to buy in to the idea of recycle and reuse; therefore, this sight is appealing to a generation that is more educated and more aware of environmental needs and the need to preserve for the future. For example, on the link for a healthier planet, you see a group of young people gazing over an ocean sunset and in big white letters across the middle of the page are the words “Nurture Nature.” Nurturing has become a very popular idea among the age group being targeted. As you read the paragraph under this phrase, you see sentences like “We’re into changing the world” and “That’s why we are on a mission.” These are also among some of the ideals of the health conscious, environmentally friendly generation that we see all through this website. Frito-Lay did a good job of using visuals, words, and even music that could entice even some of us somewhat past the thirty-something range to think more about what we eat and what we do with the package the food came in.
Chopping Down Our Future

By Amber Voigt

Today’s society is ruled by greed and consumerism—these two attributes along with the complete lack of foresight to future consequences cause us to deplete the earth of its natural resources. Resources like solar radiation, winds, tides, and trees are renewable, which means that they have the capability to naturally replenish themselves as fast as they are used or faster. Unfortunately, we are not taking the necessary steps to help ensure their longevity. Forests are in the most danger of not recovering from our abuse. The total area of Earth’s surface covered by forest is estimated to be 30% or roughly 15.2 million square miles. Today, about half of that is gone. Every hour, at least 4,500 acres of forest is cut down. That pans out to be around 20 football fields lost every minute (Stenstrup 13). All added up, it is estimated that we chop down 18 million acres per year (Norris). Although timber plays a necessary role in our survival, the act of deforestation harms the environment and its inhabitants. If we want to prevent the extinction of this natural resource and allow future generations to exist, we need to reduce the consumption of timber and timber byproducts, replant trees, limit the agricultural use of deforested land, and educate everyone of the severity of this issue.

Trees and the forests they compose are responsible for many of the things we depend on daily, from our jobs to the food we eat, from building materials used to create our homes to the pharmaceuticals we take to cure or prevent illnesses (Gay 8). Commentator Nathalie Fiset argues that deforestation is important economically because it opens up jobs for those who would otherwise be unemployed. She believes lumberjacks, woodcutters, processing plant employees, construction workers, cattle ranchers and other occupations would suffer if deforestation were to decrease or halt completely (Fiset). Forests provide many useful items that we take for granted: rubber, which is used in things like condoms and electronic parts; many minerals like bauxite (the primary ingredient in aluminum), copper, gold, gypsum, iron, lignite, manganese, nickel, and uranium; Diamonds and other valuable gems; food like nuts, fruits, and beef; medicinal plants; and most useful, wood, which is mainly used in furniture and construction (Amazon Rain Forest). And with the growth in population, deforested land provides room to expand and promotes urbanization (Fiset).

Allen Stenstrup, a science educator and author of multiple science based books, considers the cause-effect relationship between deforestation and the results of deforestation:

A forest is more than a cluster of trees. It is a set of complex interactions that affect the soil, temperature, and the cycling of water, which in turn affects all the plants and animals living in the area. When an area of forest is cut down or degraded, various changes trigger other changes, in a cascading domino effect. For example, when trees are removed, the soil is exposed to more sun. The lack of tree canopy causes moisture to evaporate more quickly, [which causes] the soil to become dry and cracked. (Stenstrup 43)

In other words, Stenstrup is saying that our ecosystem is very delicate and even something seemingly as small as cutting down a few trees for survival can throw everything off balance if we are not careful, which we are not. We have cut down half of our forests, and we keep on cutting, numb to the consequences that lay ahead.

One consequence would be global warming. The more trees we cut down the more greenhouse gases are left in the atmosphere, which increases the speed and severity of global warming (Malley). Many scientists theorize that not only large-scale burning of forests but also
extensive logging in rainforests releases large amounts of Carbon Dioxide (CO\textsubscript{2}), which interacts with other chemicals in the atmosphere, creating a buildup of greenhouse gases. In 1996, global emissions of CO\textsubscript{2} reached an all-time high of 26,338 million tons, nearly four times the level of emission in 1950. All this excess buildup of greenhouse gases increases the temperature all over the world (Gay 34). According to The Rainforest Information Centre, “tropical deforestation is responsible for 20\% of the global greenhouse gases—more than all the cars, trucks, planes, boats, and trains in the world combined” (\textit{Solutions to Rainforest Destruction}). It seems like we are just taking the problem of global warming and making it worse by the means of deforestation, which in itself, is a problem.

In nature, climate fluctuates: there can be periods of time where it is colder, warmer, wetter, drier, etc, but when these fluctuations persist for more than a few years, it becomes the norm, or climate change. Climate change can cause major disruptions for flora and fauna that were well adapted to the previous conditions. Organisms that have a difficult time adapting may become extinct if they are not able to overcome the difficulties that climate change presents. Our presence as humans does not help; if anything, it puts more pressure on the plants, animals, and other organisms (Freeman 57). Scientists from the New York Botanical Garden and the Smithsonian Institute have compiled a “Red List” of endangered plant species, which estimates that one in eight plant species in the world, or nearly 34,000 species, are threatened with extinction (Gay 29). Evelina Maciuleviciute, a Hematology, Oncology, and Pharmacy Resident at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota stressed the practical and important use of plants found in forests. Flora are used in the creation of numerous and helpful prescription medications that millions depend on (Maciuleviciute). For example, in Madagascar and the southeast coast of Africa, a plant known as Rosy Periwinkle grows in abundance. This type of plant is used to fight childhood leukemia and Hodgkin’s disease. It is also used to help lower blood sugar and to slow down bleeding (Gay 30). Without our destructive human tendencies, most of these plants would not be considered endangered, but they are and that means that there is a definite possibility they will become extinct if we do not find a solution to the problem of deforestation.

On Earth today, animals and plant species are becoming extinct a thousand times faster than the fossil records indicate is the normal rate in history. In fact, the rate of extinction is the highest it has been since the last great extinction—dinosaurs. The main reason for this increased rate of extinction is due to loss of habitat, which is caused by deforestation (Freeman 14). Kathlyn Gay, author of over 100 books on subjects ranging from culture to environmental issues, estimates that about 50 to 150 species becomes extinct every day. She compares this loss to parts of an airplane: “The loss of individual species, from bacteria to mammals, has often been likened to the continual loss of the rivets that hold an airplane together. Although the short-term effects may not be noticeable, the long-term effects could be disastrous” (Gay 30). About 70\% of all animals live in forests—most of which cannot survive when their homes are destroyed by deforestation. One species’ existence that is being threatened would be the Monarch Butterfly. For the past 10,000 or more years, the Monarch Butterflies have migrated from the Rocky Mountains and southern Canada to a winter refuge in the oyamel fir forests of central Mexico. The thinning of the oyamel fir forest caused 270 million monarch butterflies to freeze to death in 2007 because there were not enough trees to protect them from the inclement weather. In some areas, the dead butterflies lay more than two feet deep. If their habitat is continually destroyed, they will most likely be extinct within the next hundred years (Stenstrup 12).

Deforestation has always been a part of history. And as Stenstrup points out, about 8,000 years ago, a booming farm-based civilization appeared in the area encompassing the Nile, Tigris,
and Euphrates River valleys. This civilization thrived for more than 3,000 years but then disappeared. Recent excavation indicated that the real reason for its downfall was deforestation. The population cut down trees for housing and agricultural needs, and overgrazing by goatherds prevented re-growth. Without the tree cover, the soils deteriorated and farming become impossible. The same happened in the South Pacific on Easter Island. The island was lush forest when the Polynesians first settled there 1,000 years ago. They chopped down the trees and eventually the land become exposed to wind and water erosion and could no longer support the growing population. The quality of life plummeted, chaos set in, and the population crashed (Stenstrup 29). Over centuries, military troops and others who supported efforts to seize native lands for such activities as deforestation, mining, oil drilling, and ranching have killed millions of indigenous people living in forests, like the tropical rainforest. Since the 1900s in Brazil alone, European colonists have destroyed more than 90 indigenous communities. Things like this are still going on today; most recently, urbanized areas in Indonesia and Malaysia have had severe health issues because of smoke drifts caused by logging (Juniper 29). History is repeating itself, but we have to power to stop it.

The solution to deforestation is to lower the demand of timber and timber by-products, replant the tree population, reduce agriculture in deforested land, and educate. Since the demand for timber and their by-products is so high, companies and manufacturers must increase their supply. If we reduce our demand, then the companies in charge of deforesting will have to decrease their supply. Reducing demand can be done in two parts. First, we reduce consumption and second, we recycle what is used. Take paper for instance, paper can easily be reduced by switching to online billing, reading electronic books, and/or by printing only when necessary, etc. Paper is also easily recycled—if we recycle 1 ton paper, it will save 17 mature trees, 7,000 gallons of water, 3 cubic yards of landfill space, 2 barrels of oil, and 4,100 kilowatt-hours of electricity that is enough energy to power the average American home for five months (Juniper 56). If the entire US population (307,006,550) recycled one ton of paper we would save 521,911,1350 trees. Reducing the use of timber is also necessary; this can be done by buying used furniture and/or building with recycled materials.

We can never fully restore our tree population, but we can attempt to reverse some of the effects by replanting trees to replace the ones we have taken. Even if people cannot personally plant trees, several organizations including American Forests, Trees for the Future, Plant a Tree USA, Billion Trees Campaign, and the Jewish National Fund use donations to plant trees in degraded areas. Countries like China and Mexico already have programs in place to restore forests. The Chinese government has banned tree cutting in the Yangtze River basin after the region experienced severe flooding in 1998. The damages caused by this flood totaled more than $30 billion as well as the loss of 3,000 people (Stenstrup 19). China also has enacted a National Tree-Planting Day, or nianjun, on March 12. On this day since 1979, millions of Chinese citizens have planted millions of trees in the hopes of reversing the damage caused by deforestation (Stenstrup 24). The Mexican government planted 740,000 trees in 2008, in the hopes of helping restore the climate, which in turn will help animals, including the Monarch Butterflies (Stenstrup 13). It is a small and simple gesture that can make a giant impact.

The biggest driver of deforestation is agriculture. Farmers cut forests to provide more room for planting crops or grazing livestock (Malley). In the Amazon, 80% of deforested land from 1996 to 2006 was used for cattle pasture (Stenstrup 35). These cattle ranchers slash and burn parts of the forest. The Slash and burn method involves setting a section of the forest on fire to replenish the nutrients in the soil as well as to rid the space of trees for the use of pastures. At
most these pastures provide food to the cattle for 10 years before the soil is completely depleted of all nutrients. It takes many years for the soil to replenish itself (Maciuleviciute). Most of the time these farms are not used to support families directly, but rather they are used to produce crops and livestock to sell to high-income families. If we reduce our beef consumption and buy locally, we can hope to reduce dependence on deforestation agriculture. In the Amazon Rainforest alone, over a million hectares have been converted to pasture for cattle. The cattle raised on those ranches makes its way onto our plates in the United States by the way of the fast food hamburger and other processed beef products (Norris). If we decrease our beef consumption it will reduce the pressure to clear more forests for cattle. Buying locally also will aid in that goal because local products are natural products that are ensured to make a lower environmental impact.

To prevent this issue from growing out of control is to educate. People should educate themselves on facts and statistics to open their eyes to the severity of this issue: More than half the world’s timber is consumed by 22% of the world’s population—The United States, Europe, and Japan. Worldwide, industrialized countries consume over 20 times more wood products per person that non-industrialized countries. The US has less then 5% of the world’s population yet consumes more than 30% of the world’s paper (Norris). Educating and researching forests plays a major role in slowing down or halting the deforestation. There is a need for more research into identifying species (before they become extinct), and other services forests provide, apart from timber, medicinal drugs, biological control of pests and diseases, dust removal from air, soil generation, and climate stabilization. Education regarding social values is also needed. An improved educational system where people learn to think for themselves and recognize themselves as a part of nature is important (Solutions to Rainforest Destruction). We need to break away from our current mind frame—conformity and greed—if we are to solve our problem. Some measures have already been taken against deforestation by government and international development and aid organizations. Often, they are based on the assumption that poverty is a basic cause of deforestation, to which they remedy with the development of impoverished areas. If they were educated on the true causes of deforestation, they would see that development does not actually help the people who need it most and that it accelerates deforestation (Maciuleviciute). The more people that know—the more information that they know, the more of a difference we will make because knowledge is power and with power comes the possibility of change.

Forests are more important for our survival when they are alive more so than dead. Forests provide habitats for plants and animals, produce oxygen, help prevent global warming, and provide us with necessities that we need on a day to day basic like building supplies and food. If we allow forests to disappear, all that they provide us will disappear, too. That is why we must refuse to abuse our resources from now on or history will repeat itself. We can never restore our world to its previous glory, but we can take small steps in preventing it from getting any further, by the means of education, reducing demand of timber, timber byproducts, and deforestation agriculture.
Work Cited Page

About the Authors

John Ackerman
Although I once thought a thesaurus was some type of winged dinosaur, I am amazed/awed/astounded by its potential to transform a blasé sentence into one of intricacy and pizazz...with like, little effort. Thanks to Dr. Linda Lovell and The Writing Center for their helpful guidance.

Taylor Bradford
I am a senior at Shiloh Christian School in Springdale, Arkansas. As well as playing lacrosse and ultimate frisbee, I also enjoy working at the Preschool center at Fellowship Bible Church.

Kevin Faulk
“Carousel Ride” was the very first thing that I wrote in Comp I. Reading it today after completing three English classes, I know I could do better, but that is the point. All of us, whether just out of high school or coming back after years of absence, are growing and changing with every class we take. We learn and can even come to see our own mistakes. That is the beauty of learning. I know I am a person who has made many mistakes, but I have also learned from all of them.

This essay is dedicated to Sean: the first class we ever had together was English, and I am still waiting for you to sit down in your desk in Brit Lit. It seems fitting that I am telling this tale for the first time for an English Class. May you live forever in my story and memory. You are loved and missed by everyone who knew you.

Ashley George
English has always been my favorite subject since it is the class where I am able to express myself through writing. I am majoring in early childhood education, and I will be transferring to the University of Arkansas for the fall semester of 2011. I graduated with the class of 2009 from Prairie Grove High School.

Angela Moss
I am a non-traditional student, ultimately majoring in Secondary English Education, and preparing to enter my final semester at NWACC. I am the proud mother of a daughter who is a senior in high school and a son who is entering his second year of middle school. I owe a great deal of my success as a student to the love and support of my wonderful boyfriend, who affectionately refers to this portion of my life as "Angela, Part Deux."

Kristen Phillips
I am a single mother of two. I was born and raised in San Francisco and transplanted to the Midwest fifteen years ago. I am enrolled in the NWACC nursing program. My ultimate goal, besides raising a future President of the United States and a platinum recording artist, is to be the administrator of a nursing home.

Bobby Rogers
My wife Helen and I have been married for nineteen years, and we have a son Matthew and a daughter Amanda. I worked at the same factory for fifteen years before being laid off because the work was being sent to Mexico. Up until a couple of years ago I thought that factory was where I would be for the rest of my life, and I was satisfied with that. After losing my, job I've had to rethink my life. They offered to send me to school which I never thought I would get a chance to do again. It's like the old saying goes when life hands you lemons, make lemonade.

Chris Stewart
I am fifty years old and have been married to the same wonderful woman for twenty-four years. I am the father of two sons who will also be attending NWACC this fall. I lost my job almost one year ago and quickly figured out that there just isn't much out there in my field at this time, so I am back in school and plan to enter the nursing program in the summer of 2011. I never dreamed that writing would be a joy of mine. Composition I showed me that it is. I mainly enjoy writing poetry, but these essays were a lot of fun too!