

# MUSE

T W E N T Y T W E N T Y



CALHOUN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A COLLECTION OF WORKS BY  
CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS, FACULTY, & STAFF





Self Portrait *Heidi Hughes*



# CONTENTS

## POETRY

clarity <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	2
I Know You <i>Rayleigh Caldwell</i> .....	2
strawberry <i>Bailey Stuart</i> .....	3
The Girl Behind the Mirror <i>Erin Gonzalez</i> .....	4
exile from neverland <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	7
I Once... <i>Erin Gonzalez</i> .....	7
if ever there should come a time <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	8
The Trend <i>Fernanda Carbajal Rodriguez</i> .....	9
Love Sonnet Number 666 ½ <i>Jake C. Woodlee</i> .....	11
the end of romance <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	11

## ESSAY

J.K. Rowling: The Modern Hero <i>Melissa Brown</i> .....	12
Corn Flakes <i>Lance Voorhees</i> .....	15
Heroism in The Outcasts of Poker Flat <i>Molly Snoddy</i> .....	15
Aristotle and Achilles <i>Melissa Brown</i> .....	16
Immigrants <i>Monica Cruz Martinez</i> .....	17
Living in the Time of Monsters <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	18
Decade of Decisions <i>Nathan Wilder</i> .....	21
The Dream Factory <i>Savannah McGee</i> .....	22
The Power of Music in My Life <i>Michelle Roesener</i> .....	23
Save Me! Save Me! <i>Morgan Bryson</i> .....	24
Technology and the Disconnect <i>Savannah McGee</i> .....	26
Leadership Defined <i>Savannah McGee</i> .....	28
The Accidental Professor <i>Mary Teres Toro</i> .....	30

## SHORT FICTION

Last Day <i>Lance Voorhees</i> .....	34
Memo from the Nihilist Living in My Head .....	35
<i>Jake C. Woodlee</i>	
A Tale of Doleful Joy <i>Benjamin Fouche</i> .....	36
34' North – 87' West <i>Lance Voorhees</i> .....	37

## MUSEPAPER

In the Spotlight: Dr. Burke <i>Jillian Oliver and Amelia Chey Slaton</i> .....	38
Almost Maine <i>Amelia Chey Slaton</i> .....	39
Calhoun Students Travel to Guatemala .....	40
<i>Mrs. Elizabeth Willingham</i>	
Hospice in Prison <i>Reginald Bulls</i> .....	41
Season of Love with the Calhoun Chorale <i>Amelia Chey Slaton</i> .....	41
Led by Example <i>Nathan Wilder</i> .....	42



What Kindergarten Taught Me <i>Morgan Bryson</i> .....	43
Facing Fear <i>Melissa Brown</i> .....	44
Sharing the Love with Calhoun's Community .....	44
<i>Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea</i>	
In the Spotlight: Tatayana Rice <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	45
Student Success Symposium <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	46
In the Spotlight: Chad Kelsoe <i>Amelia Chey Slaton</i> .....	47
Romeo and Juliet <i>Jillian Oliver</i> .....	48
In the Spotlight: Will Lawrimore <i>Amelia Chey Slaton</i> .....	49
Mindfulness Matters <i>Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea, Jillian Oliver, .....</i>	50
<i>and Amelia Chey Slaton</i>	

## ART

Self Portrait <i>Heidi Hughes</i> .....	contents
Hello Friend <i>Julia Shelton</i> .....	contents
strawberry <i>Bailey Stuart</i> .....	3
Shy <i>Allison Smith</i> .....	4
Annamag <i>Jennie Blagburn</i> .....	5
Catadoration <i>Nicolette Pruitt</i> .....	6
Marie <i>Erin Gonzalez</i> .....	8
Beauty and the Beast <i>Morgan Bryson</i> .....	9
Childhood Friend <i>Mackenzie Staggs</i> .....	10
Alternate Reality <i>Carrington Bowman</i> .....	13
Stonewashed <i>Heidi Hughes</i> .....	14
Dreamscape <i>Ana Berry</i> .....	17
Ghost <i>Erin Gonzalez</i> .....	20
Vaporwave Bust <i>Jansen Turrentine</i> .....	24
Moody Circuit <i>Rylan Scott</i> .....	27
Path of Life <i>Malanya Monette</i> .....	33
Risk <i>Judy Baggett</i> .....	34
Tranquility <i>Kim Pourcho</i> .....	50

### On the Cover:

FRONT: Seasons *Nicolette Pruitt*

BACK: Lost and Found *Mackenzie Staggs*

# POETRY

## clarity

there is a distance between us  
that transcends miles.

it is in our minds.

it will never be bridged again.

*Jillian Oliver*

.....

## I Know You

I still remember you;  
The you when you were young.  
The you who watered flowers,  
And leapt like spring had sprung.  
I still remember you;  
The you who loved the rain.  
The you who had no fear,  
And no idea of pain.  
I still remember you;  
You were friends with light.  
The you that loved the day,  
And slept soundly through the night.  
All you are and all you've been  
Shows your soul in a breath;  
An out-heaving of stress, and  
Anxieties in your depths.  
You over-watered flowers,  
You gave, and gave, and gave.  
Who are you when you give it all?  
Too much water leads to an early grave.  
You leapt, smiled, and laughed,  
You loved, guided, and cared.  
You, for giving's sake,  
Have laid your soul so bare.  
You set yourself on fire  
To let those around you see.  
I know you very well, my dear, for you  
have forever - and always - been me.

*Rayleigh Caldwell*





## Strawberry

I know we can't go back and meet as small boys.  
No flower picking, potion making, wild fruit eating, birch tree swinging, creek swimming, snake chasing boys.  
We can't go back to moments that never happened for us.  
We were probably experiencing the same thing at the same time.  
Climbing the same tree in some way, anyway.  
When I fell out of that tree, you felt it.  
When I picked blackberries, they stained your palms purple.  
When I ate those wild strawberries, you tasted them.

*Bailey Stuart*



## The Girl Behind the Mirror

There is a girl behind the mirror  
But she is no longer my reflection  
As I grew stronger, she grew weak  
Poisoned by my progression

There is a girl behind the mirror  
I once had those same empty eyes  
That bled like moonlight through a window  
Oh, the tears that I would cry

There is a girl behind the mirror  
Her skin so cold and pale  
And hair that hangs like wild moss  
Over her face, a tangled veil

There is a girl behind the mirror  
Still as a frozen lake  
She'd whisper to me while I slept  
And when I was awake

There is a girl behind the mirror  
Her presence so much a memory  
Like a dream I could barely remember  
A forgotten mortal treasury

There is a girl behind the mirror  
We once shared the same reflection  
I knew her as my only friend  
For she was my depression

*Erin Gonzalez*

*Shy Allison Smith*











Catadoration *Nicolette Pruitt*



## **I Once...**

I once had wings, and knew no fear  
No limit to my skies  
I once sang my heart into the clouds  
As if day could never die

I once soared above a sapphire sea  
Like a seabird, newly fledged  
I once painted the sunset with my voice  
The fires that burned immortal red

I once flew with pleasant company  
A little dragon was my friend  
I once explored past the horizon  
Where the borders would twist and bend

I once touched a falling star  
It fell into my open hands  
I once borrowed the powers of the palest moon  
Drawing the tides across the sands

But one day a shadow darkened the sky  
My wings were cut away  
The golden feathers fell, and so did I  
By the sea, my voice was washed away

I did not sing, the words were gone  
Like the little dragon, they had died  
No song did leave my quivering lips  
Tears dropped from my blinded eyes

The shadow swallowed my domain  
Painting it darker than the cruelest night  
It ate away every star  
All that had once been bright

I tried to fly, but without my wings  
I was cast into the sea  
The shade consumed my last ray of light  
As I drowned in the waters of ebony

No flight, no breeze, no little dragon  
No stars, no moon, no sun  
The shadow stole my precious world  
For now, the darkness won

I once had wings, and knew no fear  
No limit to my skies  
I once sang my heart into the clouds  
As if day could never die...

*Erin Gonzalez*

---

## **exile from neverland**

arms attached to a body that she no longer recognizes  
reach to the sun stained sky as tired eyes squeeze tight  
against the growing shadows with the hope of  
a reprieve,  
clinging to light.

the trees are stoic witnesses,  
birds sigh at her folly and attempt to sing to  
lure her back to the land of dreams,  
but she cannot answer  
for she does not remember the language she used to speak  
the one of the forests in spring,  
the words that children whisper in their sleep.

a stranger to herself.

in her age, she is  
forgotten

*Jillian Oliver*





**if ever there should come a time**

darling,  
if ever there should come a time when  
I do not know you,  
I hope you will carry for me all the  
memories that have slipped past  
my wanting fingertips

steal for me,  
hours and moments  
save dances,  
mark pages  
for though I am lost,  
I am not finished

*Jillian Oliver*





*The following poem was written as a response to Dr. Byrd's World Literature II assignment in which students are instructed to write a satirical piece on a current issue.*

### **The Trend**

Well, everyone, seems there is a problem.

Those kids at the border...  
 which we didn't order.  
 For now they are in cages,  
 no matter their ages.  
 Yes, they're hungry and confused.  
 We may ignore it,  
 but it is abuse.

The news and cameras are coming.  
 Everyone is wondering  
 what this country is becoming.  
But, no worries, my friends!  
 I know how to make amends!  
 Do you know what people don't like in cages?!?!?  
 Puppies! Yes, in all of their stages!

So we cast a magic spell over Texas.  
 Yeah, I know it sounds ridiculous.  
 But we turn each child into a dog  
 and make an adoption catalogue.  
 No one can bear seeing a young, starving,  
 sick, and confused puppy in a stand.  
 Besides, dogs are a man's best friend.

Keeping them in cages isn't the trend.

*Fernanda Carbajal Rodriguez*







## Love Sonnet Number 666 ½

Every song is different girl.  
Every band is déjà vu—a flash of memory,  
a Sunday afternoon spent driving on egg and flour roads; *The White Stripes*,  
an October night she helped you sneak in a window; *Spoon*,  
the day you came home from jail; *The Strokes*,  
a Monday when you ate nothing but some noodles together; *The Doors*.

Every store you walk past is heartache.  
Every smell, a dream.  
Don't tell your baby your favorite food or what you like about Steed's art.  
Don't show them how to play chess and the one song you can strum on guitar.  
It's your funeral, and you'll see  
when they give away what you've shown them,  
when they ruin all your dreams,  
when you can't bear to hear  
all those chords you saw yourself in;  
the ones that defined you.  
What I mean—they'll tear your heart open and leave you bleeding on the couch.

Unless of course you really love them,  
this time,  
this one.

Then, by all means, please show them all the stuff you like, you love, you want to be.  
Just know you'll remember, and don't expect them to ever depart from the souls of those things.

*Jake C. Woodlee*

---

### the end of romance

the sentiment of our collective soul  
starshine trapped within earthen vessels  
out of place and time  
dreaming of the forgotten things that slip gently  
from heart and fade from mind.  
this world has become strange and yet still  
beautiful in its deception  
taken for what it is  
forgiven what it has  
lost.  
there are some whose thoughts stray out far  
and away imagining trees where there are now only men,  
back to the plains forests lakes mountains sea and sky the places where our Mother began  
instead of this,  
O this  
the end of Romance  
of life and  
us.

*Jillian Oliver*



# ESSAY

*The following essay was judged anonymously alongside papers written by college and university juniors and seniors and was selected for presentation at the 2020 Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta International Convention in Las Vegas.*

## J.K. Rowling: The Modern Hero

By Melissa Brown

“It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are far more than our abilities,” asserts Dumbledore in the *Chamber of Secrets* (333). This observation holds much truth throughout the adventures of Harry Potter. J.K. Rowling, the creator of the magical world of Hogwarts, uses the fluidity of the masculine spectrum to pit good against evil. Rowling offers readers a glimpse into two characters at either end of the masculine spectrum: Voldemort, who exists at the extreme, insidious end, and Harry Potter, who holds moral, unconventional traits of traditional masculinity.

One quality of Voldemort’s hyper masculinity is his volatile ambition to be the best, most powerful wizard to have ever lived. Examples of his ego are seen in *Goblet of Fire* after he re-assumes his physical form. He believes that he is “mightier than any wizard living” (562). He continues this idea by proclaiming that he has “gone further than anybody [else] along the path that leads to immorality” (566). His yearning for power and immortality is the driving force behind the plot. When he hears a prophecy foretelling his demise, he attempts to kill the child that would be his undoing, Harry Potter. Instead of killing Harry, he destroys his physical body. This moment defines Voldemort’s obsession with defeating Harry Potter. Voldemort argues that “Harry Potter escaped me by a lucky chance. And I am now going to prove my power by killing him . . . He will be allowed to fight, and you will be left in no doubt which of us is stronger” (218). Ambition is healthy in small doses. However, Voldemort has it in excess. This grandiosity fosters his toxic masculinity. His ambition goes unchecked because of his corruption, allowing his atrocious behavior to continue.

Voldemort’s quest for power is accentuated by his self-reliance. Voldemort, while having a mass of followers, does not depend on them. He wants them to feel inferior to him. His Death Eaters refer to him as

“Lord” or “Master.” In *Goblet of Fire*, his Death Eaters are seen “on [their] knees and kissing [Voldemort’s] robes” (214). For Voldemort this self-reliance depends upon the exclusion of others. Bellatrix LeStrange is one of his most devout followers, who is also in love with him. Voldemort uses her emotions for him to manipulate and belittle her, staying true to his narcissism. In his interactions with her in *Deathly Hallows*, he compliments her for her loyalty to him, allowing her to feel superior to the other Death Eaters. However, it lasts momentarily before he insults her by mentioning her traitorous cousin who married a werewolf. He does not allow anyone to feel as though they are his equal, not even his most devout and trusted follower.

As a man who is incapable of any other emotion than rage, Voldemort can only express himself through violence. He uses the Cruciatus (torture) curse against his own Death Eaters for doubting him: “Voldemort raised his wand. The tortured Death Eater lay flat upon the ground” (*Goblet* 215). He kills to demonstrate power. In *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort kidnaps Charity Burbage, a professor of muggle studies. He then tortures her before killing her, simply for writing an article expressing her beliefs. He also tortures Bertha Jorkins and Garrik Olivander for information before murdering them. Voldemort’s excessive use of violence is a clear indicator of his extreme, destructive masculinity, as well as sadism.

While Voldemort exhibits violence due to a lack of love, Harry Potter feels things more deeply because of love. Harry is tempted by the Mirror of Erised in *Sorcerer’s Stone*. Most boys his age would crave new broomsticks or the cutest girl—material, superficial things. Harry, however, sees his dead parents. Dumbledore explains to Harry that the mirror “shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts” (157). Harry’s love and devotion are further accented by the devastation of losing his godfather, Sirius Black. Harry speculates that “death is nothing compared to this. . . And I’ll see Sirius again” (*Order* 720). His ability to feel such deep anguish displays the capacity of his love. Dumbledore acknowledges Harry’s ability by stating, “You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it” (*Goblet* 758). Harry’s modern displays of heartache over the loss of his family provide a small twist on the ideas concerning how a male should handle grief.

Harry is also ambitious; however, his ambition derives from a place of comradeship and is restrained by his morals. In *Goblet of Fire*, Harry has to compete in the Triwizard Tournament. During the second trial, Harry resolves that the honorable thing to do would be to rescue not only Ron, but Fleur Delacour's little sister (a stranger to him) as well. In doing so, he loses the opportunity to place first in the obstacle (435-436). In the final task, the competitors are placed in a maze full of magical obstacles. Harry and Cedric both rescue one another and decide that they will grab the cup together, to win together (550-551). Harry's strong sense of morals is seen throughout the novels. Having this integrity and sense of fellowship allows Harry to keep his ego subdued from becoming like Voldemort's.

Unlike Voldemort who excludes people, Harry welcomes inclusion. Harry shows early on that he does not care about prestige, money, or bloodlines. In *Sorcerer's Stone*, Draco Malfoy, a member from a prominent wizarding family, describes the Weasley family as having "red hair, freckles, and more children than they can afford" (108). Ron Weasley, the youngest male in the family, becomes Harry's best friend, despite the family's lack of money or prestige. In fact, the Weasley family accepts Harry as one of their own. Hermione Granger, a witch born from muggles, is Harry's other best friend. Members of the wizarding community refer to people born from muggles as "mudbloods" and often think of them as tainted and impure. Hermione's blood status does not stop Harry from relying on her in times of dire need. Sirius Black advises Harry, "If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals" (*Goblet* 174). In the wizarding community, house elves are considered slaves indebted to the family forever and unworthy of being called a wizard's equal. Harry, however, does not hold this sentiment. He tricks Lucius Malfoy into freeing his house elf, Dobby, with an old sock. From that point on, Dobby is a loyal companion to Harry, even to the point of sacrificing his life to save Harry's. Harry Potter's persistence to include those who are seen as inferior allows him to showcase an uncommon degree of progressive masculinity.

In today's world, men still struggle with the fluidity of masculinity. They need to accept the unconventional traits as Harry Potter does in order to grow to their full potential. J.K. Rowling invented a wonderful,

magical world with spellbinding characters such as Harry Potter and Voldemort who are on two different sides of masculinity. In the end, it is Harry's ability to feel love, to give love, that prevails. As Dumbledore reasons, "The fact that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength" (*Order* 758). The only thing Harry has that Voldemort does not, is love, and that makes all the difference.

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Stonewashed Heidi Hughes

*The following piece was written for an assignment in Dr. Cross' class.*

## **Corn Flakes**

By Lance Vorhees

I suddenly remember you sitting alone at the table with your TV dinner and how quickly it landed in the trash when I came to the door. By the time I stepped into the house, you were blurring past me asking where we should eat. At the Burger King on the corner, we enjoyed conversation while the world hurried around us. It reminded me of summer days when I was a boy and you were the Master of Adventures. Time seemed to ignore us as we romped all over the “farm,” inspecting your trees and looking for the arrow you shot into the air the year before. At night, you would tell me about Odysseus, whose adventures were almost as good as ours. You would laugh as I began to drift, unable to hold out for the finale. These visions ambushed me when I opened a box of our favorite cereal in the house that now feels your absence. There’s nothing extraordinary about a bowl of Corn Flakes, but I ate one with you every night before bed. It’s strange how the smell rendered me immovable, with memories overflowing my mind and spilling down my face.



## Heroism in “The Outcasts of Poker Flat”

By Molly Snoddy

Heroism is a commendable and valuable trait that includes courage, selflessness, patience, and humility. In “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” by Bret Harte, the protagonist John Oakhurst is not a traditional hero, but he definitely acts in heroic ways. He is a classic stoic cowboy personality who has a good heart and a cool temper, while also believing in fate and luck. He is a heroic character because he has a calm, selfless, and courageous nature.

The setting of the story is in Poker Flat, a small gold mining town in California. Various citizens believe the town is in a moral decline. John Oakhurst is a talented gambler with a calm and somewhat intimidating disposition. When he successfully wins a great sum of money from the town leaders, they have him exiled. He is banished not because he is an unpleasant or immoral person, but out of vengefulness and animosity. Although he is exiled from the community and forced to leave with three other outcasts, he retains a calm demeanor throughout the entire story. When he is kicked out of town, he easily complies. His unwavering calmness shows his strength and helps the other outcasts not lose hope so quickly. The four characters head to the neighboring town of Sandy Bar, a day’s journey through the mountains. When the other exiles grow weary and want to rest, he reluctantly gives in and stays with them instead of continuing the journey. As the narrator notes, “The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him” (486). This observation is one of the first indications that Oakhurst is an empathetic and patient man. Another instance is when Uncle Billy steals the mules and ditches the group. Oakhurst stays calm and feels that there is no need in frightening the others. This proves that he is composed enough to handle any bad situation with a brave face.

Heroic acts are performed to assist others who are in need. People with heroic qualities will act in self-sacrificing ways to help anyone, even social exiles, before themselves. Various instances throughout the story show Oakhurst to be selfless. When he plays young Tom at poker, Oakhurst insists on returning the money and advises the naïve boy not to gamble anymore. This scene reveals Oakhurst to be a good person with upstanding morals. He acts selflessly when he gives Tom the snowshoes. The narrator recounts the scene, “There’s one chance in a hundred to save

her yet,’ he said, pointing to Piney; ‘but it’s there,’ he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. ‘If you can reach there in two days, she’s safe.’ ‘And you?’ asked Tom Simson. ‘I’ll stay here,’ was the curt reply” (490). John tells Tom to take the snowshoes and find help instead of using them and saving himself. Oakhurst walks with Tom for some of the journey and then lets him go the rest alone. He then chops firewood to last the women a few more days and quietly piles it beside the hut. These actions are what make him a true hero; he takes a risk and does something that costs him on a personal level. He risks his own personal wellbeing to help the others survive if possible.

Without a doubt, such sacrifice indicates courage; Oakhurst is just as afraid as the others and just as aware of the imminent doom ahead yet acts despite his fear. He behaves calmly and is quick on his feet to the extent that he can be in their unfortunate situation. He makes the snowshoes out of a saddle when he realizes the snow would not slow down. In the final paragraph of the story, the narrator describes Oakhurst as “at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat” (491). He is the strongest in the group because he is independent and in his prime. Readers might argue that he is weak because he shoots himself in the chest with his pistol and is found underneath a tree. In his mind, though he may have thought that it was either kill himself or starve. Being a gambling man, he chooses to accept his fate on his own terms. Oakhurst is strong and courageous because his understanding of poker allows him to accept the influence of luck, both good and bad.

A character does not have to be a stereotypical, crime-fighting vigilante to be a true hero. John Oakhurst portrays an unlikely hero who acts valiantly during dire situations. He may have a hard exterior, but he ultimately does all he can to save the other outcasts until the rescue party arrives. Heroism is an underlying theme in the story, revealing that there is a little good in everyone and that people cannot be simply categorized as moral or immoral.

### Work Cited

Harte, Bret. “The Outcast of Poker Flat.” *The American Tradition in Literature*, edited by George and Barbara Perkins. 12<sup>th</sup> ed., McGraw Hill, 2010, pp. 484-490. 2 vol.



## Aristotle and Achilles

By Melissa Brown

Greek mythology is filled with accounts where a god gives birth to or impregnates a mortal; Hercules, Dionysus, Perseus, and Aeneas are a few. Demi-gods refer to minor deities, but also mortals who are the offspring of a god. Typically, mortal demi-gods have some characteristics that make them better than the common person. Achilles is one such figure. His strength in battle makes him better than his peers. A prophecy foretold that Achilles would either die young and have eternal honor or he would live a long life with none. Aristotle once said that, “a man who is in his self-sufficiency has no need of others, is no part of the community, like a beast or a god.” This assertion describes the character of Achilles during his adventures in *The Iliad* penned by Homer. Achilles is an egotistical demi-god who harbors resentment for his circumstances.

To understand the character of Achilles, a reader needs to examine his origins. Achilles is a demi-god because of his mother, Thetis. She is a sea nymph born from the sea god Nereus. In *The Iliad*, when requesting that Hephaestus create new armor for Achilles since the Trojans had stolen his, Thetis discusses Achilles’ father, Peleus. She says, “He gave me a son / To bear and to rear, the finest of heroes” (18.469-70). She describes her worries about Achilles’ safety to Hephaestus. She knows that if he chooses to participate in the war he will die. Thetis, however, does not try to stop him, only to protect him. Aristotle compares an independent man to “a beast or god.” When looking at the character of Achilles in this light, it is imperative to remember that he is part god. The gods in Greek mythology have tremendous power and ability, but also suffer from anthropomorphic traits like jealousy, grief, and anger. As gods, these qualities are exaggerated. Achilles’ behavior is partly due to his genealogy as he inherits some of these same problems.

Achilles is aware of the exceptional attributes his lineage has granted him, and he lets this inflate his ego. He reacts in an impetuous manner because of this sense of grandiosity. While arguing with Agamemnon, Achilles declares, “When every last Greek desperately misses Achilles, / Your remorse won’t do any good then, / ... Because you failed to honor the best Greek of all” (1.255-59). Agamemnon injured Achilles’ ego when he threatened to take Achilles’ prize. He lashes out at Agamemnon because he believes he is the “best Greek of all” and deserves honor and respect. Achilles

cannot work with others as a result of his selfishness, an aspect that is described in Aristotle’s quote. Ajax comments that Achilles “is a cruel man, and has no regard / For the love that his friends honored him with” (9.649-50). Achilles confines himself to his ship to seethe over the argument, fueling his resentment.

Achilles is filled with outrage throughout the poem and shows little restraint. Agamemnon comments on his “famous temper” during their altercation (1.191). Throughout the dispute, Achilles insults him repeatedly, displaying his temper perfectly for the readers. All of this rage and contempt turns into resentment: resentment for Agamemnon, the war itself, and even the prophecy. Achilles reflects on the war:

In the end, everybody comes out the same.

Coward and hero gets the same reward:

You die whether you slack off or work.

And what do I have for all my suffering,

Constantly putting my life on the line? (9.325-29)

He recognizes how pointless the war is, yet because of his ego, he still only thinks about himself--almost like a small child. He judges the importance of a situation by what he will receive in return. Achilles briefly contemplates fighting in the war since he knows about the prophecy that will take his life. However, his desire for honor and recognition drives him forward.

Achilles is a complex character with human flaws and feelings that make him intriguing. Yes, he is selfish, entitled, angry, rash, stubborn, and bitter. These aspects of Achilles’ personality lend themselves to Aristotle’s assertion. Achilles evolves over the course of *The Iliad*, becoming one of the most dynamic characters in the poem. Perhaps it is a curse for the demi-gods to lead a lonely life. The gods are jealous of each other, but especially of the demi-gods. They meddle in their lives, causing grief and mayhem. Being elevated above the common man causes these Greek heroes to disconnect from their communities because no one understands the call of their fates. Aristotle is right: someone who is unable to be a part of a community due to self-reliance is “like a beast or a god,” but the circumstances that influence the person or character are important to consider before drawing that conclusion.

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# Immigrants

By Monica Cruz Martinez

The United States is a land of immigrants. The colonizers that founded this land were the immigrants of their time. Immigrants risk their lives to come to the United States. Every day they come to this country in search of a better life, a better life for themselves and for their families. They are hardworking people who immigrate here in order to work and send money to their families back home. Immigrants make this country. I believe in immigrants.

Citizenship should not define a person. My parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico, and both of them are lucky enough to have become permanent residents. I believe that immigration status should not define a person. When I was about nine years old, my dad and I were at the park. While he was pushing me on the swing, an ICE agent came up to us. Because of the color of our skin, the agent assumed we were illegal. I was not worried because I was born here and my dad is a resident. I do not fear deportation, but my heart aches for those who do. No human is illegal. Recently a 16-year-old boy from Guatemala died from the flu while in U.S. Border Patrol custody. His name was Carlos. His death was preventable. Thousands of immigrants are suffering in cages because they want a better life. Immigrants deserve basic human rights, not a cage.

Immigrants come to help themselves and their families live a better life. My mom works alongside many immigrants, and she tells me that they often work overtime so they can send money to their family back home. They must work twice as hard in order to work. She tells me that they often work overtime so they can send money to their family back home. They put food on our tables, and live a normal life. They build houses. Immigrants make this country run. I do not see myself as better because of my legal status, because every human is equal. When I see a Spanish speaker struggling to communicate, I try and help them, because everyone deserves the same opportunities.

Often immigrants are brave and compassionate. One day an armed robber came into the cellphone store where I work. My coworker and I managed to run and hide, and while the robber was distracted, the only customer in the store managed to escape. He looked for someone to call the police. He was a Guatemalan immigrant, but he did not care about his legal status. Instead he cared more about making sure that my coworker and I were safe.

Immigrants deserve to be treated equally, and they deserve basic human rights. They came to this country for a better life, not only for themselves but also for their families. They are neighbors, fathers, and mothers.





*The following paper, originally written for an assignment in Dr. Rhea's class, was judged anonymously alongside papers written by university juniors and seniors and was selected for presentation at the 2020 Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta International Convention in Las Vegas. It also won first place in the Sigma Kappa Delta National Literary Analysis Writing Contest and the Best SKD Convention Paper.*

## **Living in the Time of Monsters**

By Jillian Oliver

"We live in a time of monsters," says Jeffery Jerome Cohen in his collection of essays on Monster Theory (vii). The fact that monsters exist, in life and in literature, has always been widely accepted. However, understanding what makes a monster has never been an easy task. The experiences of writers often define either their idea of what a monster is or what events must occur to create one. Some monsters are victims of circumstance while others are inherently evil. In a sense, the reader and writer both benefit from the creation of the monster. It addresses fears, personifies flaws, and confronts the evil that lurks throughout the human condition. In works such as *Beowulf*, a monster is a supernatural being whose monstrous appearance aligns with its monstrous personality. There is a clear divide between what is monstrous and what is human. For Marie de France, as seen in *Lanval*, monstrous qualities are human sheathed in the beautiful and divine. Humans begin to have the capacity to behave monstrously. In *It*, a psychological horror penned by Stephen King, the monster is born *from* the atrocities and irrational fears of human beings. As such, it has the capacity to be deceptively human. The monster is a mirror into the darkest parts of society. And with that introspective lens comes an opportunity to face the weaknesses that might otherwise threaten to overwhelm humankind.

Grendel is the chief offender in *Beowulf*. Grendel's intended origin is not known because it has been lost through the translation of the poem. As a result of the assimilation of pagan literature into a Christian culture, Grendel is said to be descended of Cain. In the Bible, Cain is recognized as the first murderer. The evil born of this sin has followed Grendel down through his bloodline causing him to be isolated, wrathful, and prone to violence. Angered by the sounds of life coming from the great mead-hall of Heorot, Grendel strikes against the Danes for the first time. After the initial attack, he causes twelve years of grief and

terror to descend upon them. This behavior reflects the harshness of his origins, but also his disposition. The narrator says of Grendel, "he had dwelt for a time / in misery among banished monsters, / Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed / and condemned as outcasts" (lines 104-107). The otherworldly characterization of Grendel is also visibly human. He has been banished, forced to live as an outsider, as was his ancestor Cain. His ferocious actions can be interpreted as being driven by jealousy, bitterness, or loneliness. Grendel's terror continues this way, "So Grendel waged his lonely war, / inflicting constant cruelties on the people, / atrocious hurt" (164-166). And in a warrior culture, where each violent impulse translates into a violent act, it is understandable that Grendel should cause outright social disruption. At whatever turn, there is a set explanation for *why* Grendel behaves the way he does. It is in his nature; it is the affliction of circumstance. It is at this stage of literature that a monster not only behaves but *looks* like a monster. However, the reader does well to remember that monsters are not always apparent through violence.

The Fairy Bride, created by Marie de France in her poem *Lanval*, can be considered a monstrous figure. The idea of the monster had evolved drastically by the Middle Ages. The reader begins to lose the justification afforded to Grendel's monstrous behavior. Now, mild monstrous qualities are hidden in the beautiful and divine. Yes, there were dragons, vipers, and demons in Medieval literature, but it was also the beginning of the flawed *human* character. The Fairy Bride is fundamentally human, but she is otherworldly and supernatural in her beauty. The Fairy Bride commands the attention of all those who see her. Most important are those in power who have the ability to change the outcome of the poem. They are unable to tear their eyes from her: "The lady entered the palace; / no one so beautiful had ever been there. / She dismounted before the king so that she was well seen by all" (lines 601-604). She also uses this to her advantage when seducing Lanval: "He looked at her and saw that she was beautiful; / Love stung him with a spark / that burned and set fire to his heart" (117-119). Her power is channeled through this beauty rather than intelligence or wit. Therefore, the narrative puts strong emphasis on the male gaze. This gives her what little power and control women in literature were afforded at the time. However, Marie de France subverted some expectation by allowing the Fairy Bride dominance and giving her the mantle of a masculine role. She, instead of Lanval, is the provider, protector, and rescuer in the poem. While her intentions may not be overtly evil, she, like Grendel, upsets the

social order that surrounds her. This disruption is more delicate than what is depicted in Anglo-Saxon culture. Still, it accurately reflects Medieval culture through the perspective and writing of a woman. Even in today's society, the upsetting of social order is viewed with a critical eye. This selfish mischief is considered one of the great flaws, and often it is unforgivable. The Fairy Bride loans this flaw to a character in contemporary literature who is particularly menacing.

In the novel *It*, Stephen King created an unspeakable evil from a dancing clown named Pennywise. His character embraces the violence of Grendel and thrives on the upset of social order like the Fairy Bride. King reveals Pennywise to be supernatural, but his origin and true form remain unclear. This indeterminate existence gives Pennywise an element of the mysterious that is found in many Medieval works of literature. In the final confrontation, Pennywise says to Bill Denbrough, "You have no power; here is the power; feel the power, brat, and then speak again of how you come to kill the Eternal. You think you see Me? You see only what your mind will allow" (1069). He claims immortality, the power of the eternal. In this passage, the reader comes to see that Pennywise isn't *just* evil. He is the embodiment of *all* evil. Pennywise endures because there is never a shortage of violence or the fear born from it. He is able to change form based on individualized fears. He only continues to grow stronger as the townspeople of Derry, Maine succumb to them. The transformations range from the childish to the chilling. When Ben Hanscom returns to Derry, he has his own confrontation with Pennywise at the public library. Pennywise morphs from his usual disguise, "The clown was gone. Dracula was standing at the top of the left-hand stairway... An ancient man-thing with a face like a twisted root stood there. Its face was deadly pale, its eyes purplish-red, the color of blood clots. Its mouth dropped open, revealing a mouthful of Gillette Blue-Blades that had been set in the gums at angles" (552). The monster now is more terrifying than ever because it can be *anything*. Through it all, King gives Pennywise the ability to retain a veneer of childlike innocence and manipulative kindness to appeal to his victims. In the beginning of the book, Bill Denbrough's six-year-old brother Georgie falls prey to Pennywise's calculating attack. Georgie, playing out in the rain, loses his paper boat down a storm drain. Pennywise is waiting for him, "The clown held a bunch of balloons, all colors, like gorgeous ripe fruit in one hand. In the other he held Georgie's newspaper boat. 'Want your boat, Georgie?' The clown smiled" (13-14). Pennywise often appeals to innocence. He draws his victims in and

gains their trust before he reveals his monstrous nature. He only masquerades as human. In this the reader sees the limitless capability of true evil.

In the case of each of these three figures, the idea of the monster has evolved over time. The monster is born of human qualities in the case of Grendel. The Fairy Bride is a well-intentioned, supernatural beauty with human flaws. Pennywise wears a human face, but he is inherently evil. The monster is a staple in literature and pop culture because it is the personification of our very own human fears and flaws. But it does not just exist within fiction. Contemporary monsters take the form of those such as Ted Bundy, Jeffery Dahmer, and Ed Kemper. Qualities from each of these horrific men are evident in the fictionalized characters of Pennywise, Grendel, and even the Fairy Bride. They thrived on violence and the upset of social order; they appealed to their victims while wearing human faces though true monsters lurked beneath. Society condemns this evil, but the monster persists. It is human curiosity, the desire to rationalize blatant atrocities, that continues to revive it and allow it to evolve through time. Cohen comments on the perseverance of the monster, saying, "The monster commands, 'Remember me': restore my fragmented body, piece me back together, allow the past its eternal return. The monster *haunts*, it does not simply bring past and present together" (ix-x). Wherever a reader looks, there is a new depth to modern evil. Thus, writers will always be compelled to include evil and the monsters it spawns in a narrative, whether based in reality or the supernatural. But the distinction is more muddled than ever. Perhaps monstrous qualities only lend themselves to humans. Or perhaps it is the truly human qualities that make the monster.

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## Decade of Decisions

By Nathan Wilder

Microsoft *Encarta* defines a teacher as “somebody who teaches, especially as a profession, anything that teaches, an occurrence, idea or object from which something may be learned.” This definition also explains that experience can be an effective teacher. Today is my fortieth birthday, and hands down the most teachable moments in my life have occurred during the last ten years, a decade in which I have been incarcerated in the Alabama Department of Corrections. I say this because of the differences in my character from before prison to right now, changes people around me regularly point out. If people had told me fifteen years ago that I would be learning how to live a loyal, humble, and honorable life in prison, they would have been wasting their breath, yet these are all traits that have been hard fought battles for me. I owe an unpayable debt to three ultimate truths and the people who had the bravery to show them to me. Regrettably, I cannot take credit for the comment, “Anything lost can be found again, except time,” because it has become a sobering theme as I age. Over a period of time in my life when change was of the utmost necessity, I discovered how to find purpose in my pain and gain love for others and myself.

I am a momma’s boy, always have been, always will be! My mother was and still is the greatest love of my life. My parents divorced when I was seven years old. It was tough, but made even tougher by my father. Like most sons, I wanted to make my father proud, so I fell into a lot of traps, was blind to hypocrisy, and became a pawn in the divorce war. I was disrespectful, demeaning, and a holy terror toward my mother and anyone who stuck up for her, including my younger sister. Now that I look back, I am extremely ashamed of my actions toward the women in my family. I now understand why my mother worked two, or sometimes three, jobs and chose to be a tough disciplinarian. She was trying to set an example of how hard work and dedication create a mindset that appreciates blessings, all by herself. British poet William Blake wrote, “What is now proved was once only imagined.” Every time I have ever needed her, she was right there waiting, waiting for me to see the truth of how I got myself into the situation I found myself in. When I made the worst decision of my life, she was the one who never left my side. Her friendship, infectious faith, and undying

loyalty have fueled a passion for change in my life. The five-foot two, hundred pound, sixty-year-old lady, whom her friends refer to as “Taco” because of her Hispanic descent, is just a physical description for an unstoppable, God-inspired love that has permeated my soul and my attitude. God knew I was going to need a father and a mother all rolled into one, so He gave His best, and so does she.

Unfortunately, like many men in this world, I developed an ego of generous proportions throughout my teens and early twenties. My decisions to become arrogant and narcissistic resulted in me never experiencing real friendships or relationships because I neglected to appreciate the people who gave me the opportunities. In 2011, when I was transferred to Limestone Correctional Facility, I was introduced to a thunderous personality named Nick. He was everything I was not, and strangely, we became friends. More than anything, I appreciated his no-nonsense candor and his patience with my lack of communication skills. In 2012, we were both offered the opportunity to participate in Limestone’s Palliative Care Program. It took a lot of convincing on Nick’s part for me to understand that this could potentially be the avenue I needed in order to combat my self-centeredness. A poem by English poet Alexander Pope reads, “Teach me to feel another’s woe, to hide the fault I see; / That mercy I to others show, that mercy show to me.” In these past seven years of participating in hospice care, I have developed a deep empathy for those society deems worthy of dying alone. This growth has provided an eye-opening and most joyfully fulfilling purpose in my life. The constant encouragement of a friend, his ability to see another’s potential qualities, and his selfless fortitude have been catalysts to my development of a humble and grateful heart, the possible antidote to the person I was.

An anonymous proverb states, “There is no honor among thieves.” Does this mean murderers, rapists, and drug dealers do have honor? Or are these people thieves in their own right? The thief of life, the thief of innocence, the thief of self-esteem. Prisoners survive on the level of respect they have earned or been proven of deserving according to personal integrity and the dignity with which they treat themselves and others. So can honor be attained in this place? I have a close friend, named Jeremy, who has not only taken the time to bring this dynamic to my awareness, but who has also invested the countless hours of discussion and thought required for me to understand the priori-



ty of having honor in my life. U.S. president George Washington said, "Associate yourself with men of good qualify if you esteem your own reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad company." Throughout my involvement in the lives of fellow prisoners, I have come to the belief that a high percentage of incarcerated individuals have lived with a low regard for their own particular quality, which in turn has given them a sense of contempt for the worth of others. This was my moral state, the one Jeremy has diligently worked to help nurture my maturing. His ultimate patience, difference in perspective, and relatable methodology have been indispensable. Gauging another man's worth is not my place, but I can adopt a filter based on Godly wisdom and apply those principles to the necessary areas of my life. In the book *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, Donald Trump writes, "In the end, you're measured not by how much you undertake, but by what you finally accomplish." Regardless of a man's past, in the pursuit of love and wisdom, I want to believe that his honor can rise from the ashes of defeat.

Admitting to a stranger that for most of your life you treated others selfishly is a demanding and humiliating task. I keep asking myself, "What is my intention and motivation behind exposing and challenging the man I once was? What can I learn that will not only help me but hopefully someone else also?" John 3:19

of the King James Bible says, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." My goal since incarceration has been to advance out of the darkness and grow into a person who cannot be described as the typical felon. I understand that admitting my problems, my mistakes, along with taking responsibility for the pain I have caused others, plus not wanting to repeat these faults, has given me the courage to be receptive to the love and guidance of some inspirational people who have had their fair share of hard lessons in life and want to help someone else not make the same mistakes they have made. U.S. novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder wrote, "True influence over another comes not from a moment's eloquence, nor from any happily chosen word, but from the accumulation of a lifetime's thoughts stored up in the eyes." I have stood face to face with these three eyes of truth throughout the last ten years and have felt the weight of their point of view. Thank God that the "Light" has not only come into the world but has also come into these three lives and reflected into mine. Who knows, maybe the next decade will offer me the opportunity to pay it forward and make a difference in someone else's life. I could only be so lucky.

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*The following piece was written in response to an assignment in Dr. Byrd's class.*

## **The Dream Factory**

By Savannah McGee

Large red stars outlined by gold are scattered along the gleaming black sidewalk, which is certainly impressive and expansive. Famous names and movies inhabit the iconic shapes found along the pavement. A humongous billboard, atop an equally massive building, reads "Welcome to Hollywood." Gift stores, tourist attractions, and street vendors line the path. Some people posing as popular characters take photographs beside individuals for money. The crowd moves like a wave coinciding with the ocean; bodies scramble every which way, their movements embodying a dangerous sea storm. Found hanging from doors or windows, neon signs can be seen at any perspective. Possessing a booming voice, one man attempts selling fraudulent hundred dollar bills. Ignoring the homeless population grows more difficult with each step. Through further inspection, litter consuming the walkway becomes apparent. Hidden betwixt shadows, teenagers smoke and giggle. Girls younger than me receive catcalls from grimy men. Parents accompany no adolescents in view. The number of intoxicated citizens multiply while the minutes pass; suddenly, I no longer see the beauty.

# The Power of Music in My Life

By Michelle Roesener

From early composers such as Beethoven, Bach, and Tchaikovsky to Christian artists like Chris Tomlin and Tenth Avenue North, music serves as a channel to connect people's daily lives, emotions, and desires, and takes us to memories of the past that tell powerful stories. Since the beginning of the world until today, music has the power to create rhythms, melodies, harmonies, sounds, and repetitions. Music's interpretation is magical. Instruments are the perfect tools to create expressions from inside the human heart and mind.

I believe in the power that God puts in music. As a young autistic child, I was scared to death of whatever sounds came my way. I remember crawling under a table and screaming while covering my ears. My parents helped me control those emotions and learn how to handle sounds. As time progressed, music was a cure to what once frightened me. I was introduced to music when I was a year old. My parents took me to a program called Music-garden designed to introduce babies to classical music. In the words of my mom, "I got hypnotized when they started to play classical music." This persists even today. Since that moment, my parents began to search for teachers who would specialize in what would come to be my four favorite instruments. They wanted me to learn from other musicians and interact with them. I remember sitting down at the piano with Mrs. Hampton, who guided me through reading music books. In my mind, I can picture the notes jumping on the piano, producing in me joy, excitement, and a passion for music. I remember holding a violin and bow while learning from two of the best teachers, Miss Maddox and Mr. Frank. I will never forget all the years playing the flute with the Master's Hand Christian School Band and participating in contests like Solo and Ensemble. This competition let me interact with other students and teachers who perfectly understood my favorite language, music. I was introduced to the Decatur Youth Symphony when I was a junior in high school. The orchestra allowed me to interact with other musicians while playing beautiful, well-organized, powerful music. The symphony's mission statement—"Transforming lives through music"—matches my life.

Music has also connected me with my family. For example, the piano/violin duets I perform with my dad and brother make beautiful music. My dad and I are currently working on a chorus from *Judas Maccabeus* by Handel, while "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" by The Piano Guys is the piece I am playing with my brother. I will never forget the many Christmases when our family would decorate the Christmas tree and my brother and I played Christmas carols as a piano/violin duet. I remember the event at my church when my parents shared their life testimony and my brother and I played "Great is thy Faithfulness!" We laughed and cried thinking about the goodness of God. On a different occasion, we played a piano duet to an upbeat song called "In the Mood." At that Valentine's banquet, my brother took one-half of the piano, and I took the other. Our fingers danced to the notes! The harmony and melodies are sweet family memories.

Music is a gift from God for my heart and has a powerful influence in my life. Growing up, I studied dance at the School of Fine Arts. For my senior solo, I chose "Control (Somehow You Want Me)" by Tenth Avenue North. Dancing my solo to the lyrics of the song helped me express the desires, emotions, and hopes in my heart for God to take control of my life. Being autistic has made it difficult for me to fully understand how I can accomplish what is important to me. I felt anxious and worried. Mike Donehey, the lead singer of Tenth Avenue North, wrote lyrics that express my feelings:

God, You don't need me,  
But somehow You want me.  
Oh, how You love me,  
Somehow that frees me  
To take my hands off of my life  
And the way it should go.

I danced to these rhythms and lyrics and reminded myself that God is in control.

Music can also serve as a way to pour out all the energy and emotions inside of me. I can think of a particular song that makes me happy, so I pull out my cello and play "Happy Together." If I'm sad, my fingers can dance on the white and black piano keys when I play "Moonlight Sonata." When I want to calm myself down, the gentle sound of my violin can play the first movement of Oscar Rieding's "Violin Concerto in B minor." If I'm excited, my flute helps me to produce the sounds to the upbeat rhythm of "Fantasia on the Dargason." Sounds and silences are music to my ears and the perfect expression of my soul.

Music can be a powerful art. In my life, it is a healing power that helps me to conquer loud sounds. King David wrote in Psalm 30:11, "You turned my lament into dancing; / You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness." Amazingly, the very thing that was my biggest problem changed into the beautiful notes that soothe me.





*The following essay was judged anonymously alongside papers written by college and university juniors and seniors and was selected for presentation at the 2020 Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta International Convention in Las Vegas.*

## **Save Me! Save Me!**

By Morgan Bryson

Picture the typical Disney princess. She has an unrealistic waistline, big eyes on her perfectly framed face, and, most importantly, she always falls for the prince who comes to her rescue. That was the ancient princess—she would not survive in today's society. Thankfully, a newer, more relatable one has emerged, looking like an authentic woman who is not desperate for a man to save her. Disney is remodeling how young girls view the typical princess, and therefore themselves, through movies such as *Tangled*, *Frozen*, and *Moana*, which exemplify strong, independent women in lead roles who believe in themselves and others and are also capable of saving themselves without waiting on a man.

The first of the modern princesses to defy her stereotype is Rapunzel from Disney's *Tangled*; she proves to be a strong woman by saving herself and

others repeatedly throughout the movie. From the beginning, Rapunzel twists the meaning of a typical woman by using a frying pan for self-defense instead of the typical household definition: cooking. Throughout history, women were seen as the ones to cook and clean; however, in recent years, their role has shifted to one that also protects and provides. When Disney arms Rapunzel with a frying pan, they enlighten young girls that women can be more than what they have been in the past. Not only does Disney adapt to this new role through an object as simple as a frying pan, but also through the numerous times Rapunzel saves her companion, Flynn Rider. For example, when the two enter the Snuggly Duckling, a restaurant full of ruffians and thugs, Flynn is recognized as a wanted man and all of the men in the establishment fight for who will receive the reward for returning him to the palace. Rapunzel yells and screams, trying to get their attention, but no one will listen to her. Once she has had enough of being ignored, she hits one of the men with a tree branch, and all of the evil glares turn to her. She explains that Flynn is the only person who is capable of helping her achieve her dream and then everyone bursts into song about following dreams. Rapunzel's act of courage proves to young girls that just by believing in one's self, great effects will follow. Rapunzel believes in herself and ultimately saves Flynn from the big, scary thugs she feared all of her life. *Tangled* concludes with Rapunzel standing up to her mother once and for all, and, in doing so, she saves herself and Flynn from her mother's tyranny. As exemplified by Rapunzel, being a strong woman does not mean that she must always do what is expected of her, but rather do what she believes is right. Disobeying her mother was an act of rebellion she was scared to do initially; however, this decision was the best thing to do in the end because she saves herself and her true love. Rapunzel is a strong and courageous woman, convincing young girls in today's society that they can be strong and courageous too if they believe in themselves.

Much like Rapunzel, Anna and Elsa from Disney's *Frozen* are the heroines of their story without any help from a man because they believe in each other, which saves them and their kingdom in the end. For example, Anna, who is struck by ice in the heart, knows that she will die; however, even in her last breath, she saves her sister from being killed by the evil Prince Hans. Anna consistently voices her opinion that Elsa is the only one who can save the kingdom of Arendelle, and because she believes this statement to be true, she steps in front of a vicious Prince Hans to protect her

sister from being murdered. Her action convinces young girls that in order to be strong and independent women, they must believe in not only themselves but also in others. Within Anna's choice to protect Elsa, she proves that empowering women means believing in women. Just as Anna shattered Prince Hans's sword into a million pieces, Elsa's heart did the same when she realized Anna's act of love and bravery in her last breath. Elsa was broken and flung herself on her frozen sister, weeping for her loss. Moments later, her devastation became jubilation when Anna rose from the dead. Empowered by Anna's selflessness, Elsa rescued her frozen sister from the clutches of an icy, cold death, furthering the underlying theme of the movie that women do not need a man to be successful when they are plenty capable of saving themselves and others. After the sisters discover that love is the solution to all of their problems, they save Arendelle from its frozen summer, send Hans back to his castle, and prosper in female unity. Anna and Elsa demonstrate to young girls that they do not need a man to be their hero. Women create their own story, and when they believe in each other, the possibilities are endless.

Just as Disney guides little girls to believe in themselves through *Tangled* and *Frozen*, they have done the same with the newest model of the modern princess, Moana, who is chosen to save her village and finds independence on her journey. Whereas Rapunzel believes in herself to pursue her dreams and Anna and Elsa believe in each other to save their kingdom, Moana believes in herself to save herself. To begin the movie, viewers understand that the Ocean chose Moana to find Maui the demigod and restore the heart of Te Fiti, saving the world from complete darkness. She understands that she must be independent from her father's wishes, which are to stay on her home island and be the next leader of the village, so she sets out to find Maui and complete her mission. Midway through their journey, Moana and Maui meet a ship full of evil coconut pirates whose goal is to steal the heart of Te Fiti. To start the battle, Moana is dependent on Maui to rescue the stolen heart; however, once she realizes that Maui is determined to save himself instead, she takes matters into her own hands. More of her independent nature shines when she rescues the heart from the evil coconuts and returns safely to her boat, leaving the enemy ship in ruins. Moana finds more confidence in herself after this scene, displaying to young girls in today's society that having courage and confidence is the key to being strong and independent. Her inner confidence is also shown when she battles Te Kā, the lava monster

who surrounds the island where Ta Fiti rests; Moana is determined to restore the heart herself when Maui leaves her to protect himself yet again. At this point in the movie, Moana demonstrates true courage and independence to little girls because she is willing to risk her life to save the world. Moana successfully sails past Te Kā, arriving at the main island, where she will reach the highest point of the mountain and restore the heart of Te Fiti. However, when she reaches the peak, Te Fiti is nowhere to be found. Moana then realizes that Te Kā is the angry version of Te Fiti and beckons Te Kā to reclaim her heart. Moana displays incredible independence because she comes face to face with the monster who disarmed the great demigod with whom she travels. Moana believes in herself and successfully replaces the heart of Te Fiti, saving the world. If Moana did not believe in herself, this movie could have a completely different ending because Maui, the revered demigod, did not come to the rescue. A girl did. Moana displays courage, confidence, and independence throughout the movie, convincing girls that women are unstoppable and do not need a man to come to their rescue.

Out with the old and in with the new, Disney is redesigning their typical princess to survive in today's society. Rapunzel breaks free of her stereotype by saving herself and others repeatedly throughout the movie *Tangled*; the sisters from *Frozen* also prove that men do not have to rescue women because women are able to rescue women, and Moana demonstrates true independence when she finds courage within herself. As exemplified by these three strong, female characters, Disney proves to little girls that they can do anything, if only they believe in themselves first.

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- Moana*. Directed by Ron Clements, John Musker, Don Hall, and Chris Williams, performances by Auli'i Cravalho and Dwayne Johnson, Walt Disney Motion Pictures, 2016.
- Tangled*. Directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard, performances by Mandy Moore, Zachary Levi, and Donna Murphy, Walt Disney Motion Pictures, 2010.



## Technology and the Disconnect

By Savannah McGee

In “The Flight from Conversation,” Sherry Turkle explains society’s addiction to technology: “Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: that we will always be heard; that we can put our attention wherever we want it to be; and that we never have to be alone” (62). Sadly, this quote is true. Society seems connected. However, analyzing a cluster of individuals reveals the truth. When observing customers of Starbucks from 9:15 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., it became clear to me that technology causes a disconnect, serves as a barrier to conversation, and allows people to disguise loneliness as independence.

In the cafe, I analyzed the interactions between groups and individuals of all ages. I placed importance on both the interactions between individuals as well as an individual’s interactions with technology. One illuminating observation I made was between a mother and two young girls. At first, the mother was invested in interacting with the children, but after a while, she began ignoring the children to scroll through social media. The use of technology caused one of the girls to become visibly upset and begin talking louder. When the child would not stop speaking loudly, the mother ignored the phone to soothe the child. The young girl’s reaction solidified the idea that when a parent ignores a child, especially for a smartphone, the result is negative. On the other hand, I made a pleasant observation as well. Two middle-aged men sitting in the corner were in deep conversation throughout my entire visit. The men made frequent eye contact and laughed often; the pair was truly conversing as well as connecting—something I saw very little of during my time at the coffee shop. Many individuals came in with phones in hand, only putting away the devices to place an order. As customers waited on coffee or food, I noticed the presence of phones and of unwelcoming body language.

While this was happening, most of the individuals seemed nervous, and it seemed as though people were afraid to connect with anything that did not have a charging port. One student, who was studying in the corner, gave a snarky look to the men conversing if they seemed to laugh too loudly. This student was also frequently distracted from a laptop, presumably being used for schoolwork, by a cellphone. Another man cycled through the following steps: anxiously

glancing around, picking up a phone, and sipping a cup of coffee. Although I visited Starbucks during its peak hours, I did not have a large sample population. I do believe, however, that the lack of customers did not affect the data collected, considering that only one group I observed was not in the presence of technology. Most of the people I observed seemed reliant on technology in at least one way; an abundance of the subjects seemed to be using technology as a means of entertainment, while others were using devices to study or do business. As in the scene described by a senior business partner in Turkle’s article, patrons of the coffee chain “lay out their suite of technologies: laptops, iPods, and multiple phones” and “turn[ed] their desk into cockpits” through the use of multiple devices and headphones (60). Many customers in the coffee shop modeled this quote, and I also realized that multiple customers were oblivious to things happening outside of this self-made bubble. This observation caused me to ponder the true effects of technology on today’s society.

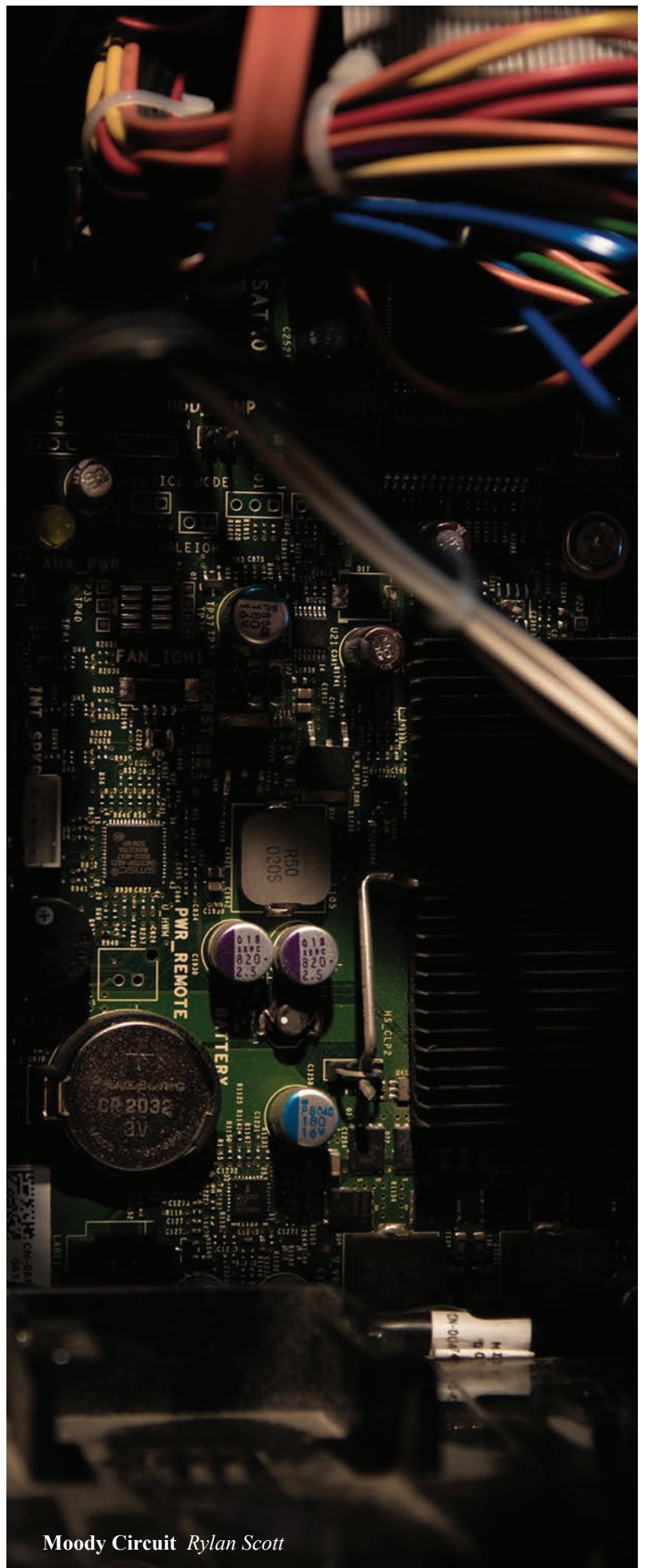
In spite of Starbucks being a company that promotes connection, I saw minimal connection between individuals in the popular coffee chain. Only one set of people in the cafe was genuinely conversing, and while this observation warmed my heart, it also shocked me. Multiple people in the cafe simply surfed the web while enjoying a hand-crafted beverage instead of looking to the person a table over and beginning a conversation. I feel as though society has forgotten how to speak using a voice. People only know how to text or email. This behavior is due to the overwhelming, rapid technological advancement our society is experiencing daily. I anticipated more face-to-face conversations because Starbucks is a popular meeting place; unfortunately, my prediction was wrong. As a whole, society needs to slow down in terms of technology use. My generation specifically is so concerned about how others perceive us that we cannot simply enjoy being alone. The cell phone ensures that being alone never truly means being alone. Smartphone owners should utilize tools to manage screen time, as well as remember that a phone call goes a long way. To truly know a person, one must sit down and have a conversation. Understanding intentions and feelings through a phone screen is difficult, which ultimately results in a disconnect, despite technology’s ability to instantly connect people worldwide. Turkle explains, “We can attend to tone and nuance. In conversation, we are called upon to see things from another’s point of view” (60). Conversations allow one

to pick up on mannerisms, tone, and facial expressions. Without these crucial elements, people can only attain surface connection.

In my field observation, the presence of technology was much higher than the lack of technology. The use of technology creates a conversation barrier and, surprisingly, is not limited to one age group or another. Originally, the smartphone was intended to enrich lives, not harm the growth of healthy relationships. Technology in science is defined as the application of knowledge for practical purposes. This definition is used in research and experiments in the scientific community, but it also holds a positive connotation. With the development of the smartphone, technology has taken on an entirely new definition. This emerging definition is a collection of all things smart: phones, tablets, watches, laptops, and even some cars. Based on my field observation, I am sad to say that I believe this new definition holds a negative connotation due to the effect of technology on human connection. I have come to realize that technology, specifically the smartphone and its accessories, has been detrimental to human connection in numerous ways.

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Moody Circuit Rylan Scott



## Leadership Defined

By Savannah McGee

Leadership, unlike many life skills, cannot be taught. Leaders continually work to improve themselves, the environment surrounding them, and the people they lead. This complex role requires diligence, humility, and care for others. In *Leadership Matters: Unleashing the Power of Paradox*, Thomas Cronin and Micheal Genovese, authors who write on leadership, demonstrate that “leadership is indispensable and thus ubiquitous” by exploring real-life examples and the idea behind leadership (31). Even though leadership cannot be easily defined, it does require self-awareness, presence, grit, and much more; it is also present in multiple forms and places including communities, families, schools, and workplaces.

Contrary to popular belief, leaders are made rather than born. The journey to leadership is a confusing, difficult maze, and our life experiences shape our ability either to lead or to be led. Leaders must be aware of both their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of others. In addition, leaders possess what is known as the growth mindset. According to Carol Dweck, a Stanford professor of psychology, “the *growth mindset* is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts” (52). On the other hand, the fixed mindset is the belief that “your qualities are set in stone” (53). With this distinction in mind, it is important to understand that a person’s mindset affects his/her leadership. If an individual believes that he or she has no room for improvement, then he or she will never be able to improve. Building on this is the idea that improving oneself enables an individual to guide others toward improvement. Those who desire to lead must first understand the importance of knowing oneself well. For example, a person’s greatest strength might also be his/her greatest weakness; to balance this, an individual must learn when to express certain qualities, as well as when to downplay them. Dr. Henry Cloud, an American self-help author, reminds his readers that “the first person you have to lead is *yourself*” and that “your energy is one of your biggest assets” (221,225). Setting goals, understanding one’s behavioral patterns, and listening to feedback are crucial in the development of leadership. Often, the best leaders are those who lead not for power, but for the benefit of others.

The idea of leading for the benefit of others is

commonly known as servant leadership. Robert K. Greenleaf, the founder of the modern servant leadership movement, and of the Greenleaf Center further explores the paradox of leadership. Greenleaf’s hypothesis explains that leaders must be servants, although these words are antonyms. The importance of serving before leading lies in learning why one wants to lead in the first place. Greenleaf explains that the “conscious choice” to serve brings one to “aspire to lead” (82). Servants can become natural leaders due to their ability to listen, accept, and empathize. These three qualities help potential leaders to build patience, understanding, and a willingness to help others (84-86). In Isabel O. Lopez, president of Lopez Leadership Services, “Becoming a Servant-Leader: The Personal Development Path,” Lopez further explains the paradox of servant leadership proposed by Greenleaf. Lopez states that while knowing oneself well is a “life-long commitment,” it is also the “foundation” of becoming a servant leader (103). An inspiring example of servant leadership can be found in Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island, a political prison, for twenty-seven years because of his radical belief in “political equality” for blacks and whites in South Africa (533). Mandela describes how he survived life in prison, how he maintained his cause, and how he made decisions. Additionally, Mandela acknowledges his continued education. He read novels touching on leadership such as *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. Mandela enjoyed *War and Peace* because of its emphasis on leadership. Mandela writes, “Kutuzov defeated Napoleon precisely because he made his decisions on a visceral understanding of his men and his people” (533). This idea reminded Mandela that to “truly lead one’s people one must also truly know them” (533). This connection is a perfect explanation of service-leadership and why individuals choose it.

When contemplating the idea of leadership, it is important to gaze into history. By analyzing past leaders, society can better understand the motives and qualities that form a leader. For example, Harriet Tubman was a strong woman and an even stronger leader. According to the author of *The Underground Railroad*, Tubman presented all of the qualities of a strong leader: “courage, foresight, prudence, self-control, ingenuity, subtle perception, and command over others’ minds” (Blockson 75). Tubman selflessly led slaves to freedom, stopping at nothing to ensure their safety. She set

strict rules, knowing the guidelines were necessary to protect the welfare of the group. Her dedication to the cause successfully earned the respect of her followers trip after trip. Above all, Tubman's grit is certainly attributed to her effective leadership and powerful life. As defined by Angela Duckworth, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, grit is "a combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal".

In her *New York Times* bestseller *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Duckworth defines grit and explores individuals who express this trait. Duckworth thoroughly believes that the possession of grit is the difference between success or failure. She even designed the Grit Scale, a test for measuring grit. The test states that "there are no right or wrong answers" and asks an individual to agree or disagree with a list of statements, such as "Setbacks don't discourage me. I don't give up easily," "I am a hard worker," and "I am diligent. I never give up". Duckworth also explains on her website that "this questionnaire is useful as a prompt for self-reflection" and "grit predicts achievement in really challenging and personally meaningful contexts". In terms of leadership, grit makes perfect sense. When something is meaningful, a person is more likely to express determination, which is why leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sojourner Truth are widely memorable. They exhibited the growth mindset, service leadership, and grit.

All in all, leadership is a vast topic that cannot be fully covered in a five-page essay. Many more concepts should and can be explored, but unfortunately, words cannot always accurately depict the entire idea of leadership. Leaders are influencers, adapters, and pave a path for the future. Leaders will continue to emerge throughout history and challenge the current zeitgeist. Without leaders, whether it be from the front or even the back of the pack, the world would be in anarchy.

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## The Accidental Professor

By Mary Teres Toro

I was sixty-three years old on the May morning in 2012 when I walked into a classroom at Calhoun Community College in Decatur, Alabama, and looked straight into the faces of twenty-nine students younger than my youngest child. I almost turned around and left, but I had waited for this moment for many years. It was now or never, so I took a seat as far back in the room as I could go. I felt awkward and totally out of place. Within minutes a tall middle-aged gentleman with sparkling blue eyes and a warm smile entered, placed his books on the desk at the front of the class, and in a slow southern drawl said, “Good morning, class. I am Dr. Randy Cross.” My first thought was, *Oh my goodness, I am older than the professor!* He looked my way and smiled. I thought, *He seems friendly. This is going to be okay. I can do this.*

Then the introductions started.

“Hi, I’m Joe. Home for the summer from Ole Miss. Just takin’ a couple classes to get ahead a little.”

Dr. Cross smiled. “Ole Miss! I went there. It’s beautiful isn’t it?”

“Hey, y’all, I’m Jessie. I go to UNA, but I needed some credits over the summer.”

He smiled again. “I earned my bachelor’s and master’s degrees there. It’s a good school. Do you like the lions?”<sup>1</sup>

And so, it went; they were from UNA, Auburn, UAH, UAB...

As the students introduced themselves and their alphabet soup of school initials, I sat and wondered what to say about myself. *Hi. I’m an old lady trying to finish her bucket list.* Then it was my turn.

“Hi,” I stammered, “I’m Mary, and I’m here ...”

Before I could finish, Dr. Cross pointed at me and said, “You’re not from here! You’re a Yankee! I can tell it from your voice. You’re a Yankee!”

I stared at him, my “from” hanging in the air, wondering how quickly I could get out of the classroom.

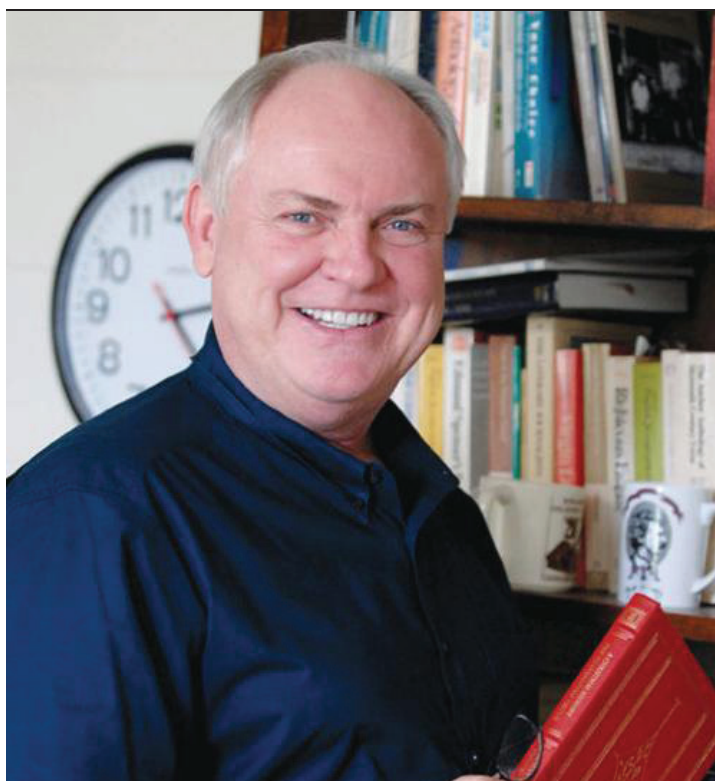
Then he burst out laughing. “That’s okay. Yankees are welcome, too. Go on, finish your introduction.”

I swallowed and rapidly said, “Hi, I’m Mary, and I’m here from AARP.”

Dr. Cross howled and my classmates laughed. *Yes, I thought. Yes, I can do this.*

I had no idea that morning how much Dr. Randy Cross would help me “do this” nor how important he would become to my academic and writing careers.

If you ask Dr. Cross how he came to be a professor of English, he will begin his story by quoting the last lines of T.S. Stribling’s autobiography: “It surely is a strange thing how incidents, trifles in themselves, penetrate one’s life and grow and grow and change its whole pattern, while other matters of apparent great import fade into nothing” (Stribling 230). He will then explain how a knock on his door one night in 1977 changed the course of his life.



He was a twenty-eight-year-old junior high school teacher, who shared a house with his friend and co-worker John. They were home watching television late in the evening when John’s friend Larry knocked on the door and asked if he could spend the night. Larry was driving to the University of Mississippi in Oxford, to begin a doctoral program in English. He had been delayed by a traffic jam in Kentucky resulting from a serious accident. He was tired from driving all day and just needed a place to sleep so he could continue his travels in the morning. At some point in their conversation that night, Larry suggested that both Randy and John quit their jobs as middle school teachers and go

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<sup>1</sup> The University of North Alabama is the only school in the United States with live lions as mascots. Leo III and Una, his mate, live in a special habitat on the campus in Florence, Alabama.

with him to Oxford. “So,” says Dr. Cross, “we did.” A month later, Randy and John were in Oxford getting ready to pursue doctorates in English. Then he pauses and says, “If there hadn’t been an accident, if Larry hadn’t knocked on our door...” His soft voice trails off as he considers the trifles that changed his life so completely.

Randy Cross was born in Florence, Alabama, to Johnny and Marie Cross. He is the youngest of their three children and the only son. “That,” he says, “is why I’m spoiled.” Mr. Cross was a machinist, and Mrs. Cross was a seamstress and part-time telephone operator. Dr. Cross remembers the telephone switchboard sitting in their living room for a while. When someone called the operator, Mrs. Cross would stop what she was doing, answer, route the call, and then go back to her housework. The family home was just across the Alabama state line in St. Joseph, Tennessee, a tiny town with a population of only five hundred people. Randy attended the public elementary school in St. Joseph and Loretto High School in Loretto, Tennessee. After graduating from high school, he attended the University of North Alabama where he received both a B.A. and an M.A. in English. He taught middle school in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and Florence, Alabama. He probably would have continued there if not for that serendipitous knock on the door in 1977. Along with his teaching career, he was a member of the Tennessee National Guard. He joined as a private and retired after thirty-one years as a Lt. Col. Dr. Cross spent five years at Ole Miss, from 1977 to 1982. His doctoral thesis was titled *Religious Skepticism in Various Texts of Mark Twain*. Because of his interest and expertise in Twain’s works, Dr. Cross mentions him frequently and quotes him often. He also frequently mentions Dr. Tom Brown, his doctoral studies advisor and friend. Dr. Cross smiles when he mentions how Dr. Brown corrected the first paper he turned in at Ole Miss. Dr. Brown had circled the word “plethora” in red and drawn a line through it. Above it he had written “many.” One of the lessons Dr. Cross teaches his students is to keep it simple. Don’t use fancy words.

Dr. Cross began teaching at Calhoun Community College in 1982. When asked why Calhoun, his simple answer is “because they gave me a job.” Dr. Cross’ English and composition classes are among the most popular at the college. They are a unique mixture of grammar, literature, videos, and stories of his life. He connects literary works to life because, as he tells his students, “All literature is about you.” He reinforces this point with writing assignments, such as “Write a

500 word essay about a time when you were jealous,” which he ties to the unit on *Othello*. He weaves history and geography lessons into his American literature classes. He explains how literary movements generally flow from Europe to America (east to west), while political movements flow from America to Europe (west to east). Every student in American Literature I must learn the meaning of PEWLAGS in the study of the Puritans and their literature. PEWLAGS is Dr. Cross’ acronym for the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, wrath, lasciviousness, avarice, gluttony, and sloth. “Learn them,” he says. “It will be on the test.” And it always is. But Dr. Cross rarely uses the word “test.” He prefers the term “celebration of knowledge” because he believes learning is good and should be celebrated.

Dr. Cross has a deep love of learning and knowledge. His motto, one which every student quickly learns, is “It’s good to know stuff about things.” His office is crammed full of books. The entire back wall is filled with bookshelves overflowing with books by authors like Faulkner and Poe, and long-time friend Howard L. Bahr; poets like Judith Ortiz Cofer and Billy Collins; and short story collections including *Tongues of Flame* by his friend Mary Ward Brown. They are packed in so tightly that he must yank them out, which he does when he graciously lends them to students. “Here, read this one. You’ll like it. I want it back eventually but take your time.” The other walls are covered with pictures of Mark Twain, Dr. Tom Brown, and posters. Sitting on another shelf is a white beanie baby chicken and a small toy wheelbarrow, which he always takes to class when it is time to read William Carlos Williams’ “The Red Wheelbarrow.” But Dr. Cross doesn’t just read poems. He recites many of them from memory and reads them all with feeling.

Dr. Cross’ classes are filled with stories of his childhood in tiny St. Joe, as he refers to St. Joseph, and his best friends Ronny Springer and Ray Farris. He relates their boyhood adventures to the works read in class. He will talk about climbing trees with Ronny and Ray as a lead in to reading Robert Frost’s “Birches.” Through Dr. Cross’ stories about them, we came to know Ronny and Ray. They were his friends, but ours too in a second-hand way. Then one day Dr. Cross handed out strips of paper with “At some point in your childhood, you and your friends went outside to play together for the last time, and none of you knew it.” He talked about Ray’s funeral and being one of the pall bearers, and then he read Seamus Heaney’s poem “Mid-Term Break,” about the death of Heaney’s four-year-old brother. By the time he got to the last line, “A



four foot box, a foot for every year,” we were weeping.

He made us laugh, too, with tales of his time in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1986 and in Portugal in 1990-1991 as a Fulbright Scholar. He talks about walking on the beaches at Ipanema and Copacabana, and with a twinkle in his eyes, tries to convince us that he was there as a missionary encouraging the women to put some clothes on over their tiny bikinis. He formed lasting friendships with the Brazilian university students to whom he taught English. While he was teaching them English, they were teaching him Portuguese. He still speaks it today, though there aren’t many people with whom to speak Portuguese in Decatur, Alabama. He was able to practice it in 2018, when some of his students from long ago visited him in Decatur.

Because of his genial manner and entertaining stories, Dr. Cross has become a popular speaker. He has been featured in a one man show at the historic Princess Theater in downtown Decatur. There are snippets of the show available on YouTube on the Calhoun Community College channel. In 2017, Dr. Cross and singer Les Kerr, friends since their years at Ole Miss, collaborated on an event featuring Dr. Cross’ stories and Kerr’s songs.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, *The History Channel* aired a multi-episode documentary *You Don’t Know Dixie* about the South and its culture. Dr. Cross was one of the featured guests.

Dr. Cross loves music and starts almost every class with a YouTube music video. Sometimes the video relates to the day’s lesson, but sometimes they are just for fun, like “Copacabana” by Barry Manilow or “Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay” by Otis Redding. He loves the “Dueling Banjos” scene from the movie *Deliverance*, based on the book by James Dickey. After he plays the video, he reads Dickey’s poem “Cherry Log Road,” about a teenage boy and girl who escape to a junk yard to be together in the backseat of a junked car. Then with a twinkle in his eyes and a devilish grin, Dr. Cross passes out copies of Dickey’s “The Sheep Child,” a poem about “Farm boys wild to couple” (1). The poem is not in the course textbook, but it is Dickey, so we read it. One of the many lessons I learned in Dr. Cross’ class is that poetry doesn’t have to be pretty to be good.

Dr. Cross has been my mentor since the day after class when I approached him with one of my poems. I handed the page to him and mumbled, “I don’t know if this is any good.”

He took the page, read it slowly to himself, and then read it aloud. He looked at me and softly said, “That’s good. That’s real good. Keep writing. Show me what you write. I want to see it.”

I have kept writing and showing my work to Dr. Cross. I love to hear him read my poems in that slow southern drawl that makes my words sound so much better than they seem on the page. The highest praise I have received was his telling me one day that I have a special way with words, that my poetry is “elegant.” Because of his encouragement, I have kept writing and have been published. I am working on a chapbook, and if it is ever published, the dedication will read

**To Randy Cross, the accidental professor,  
Whose welcoming smile and words of encouragement  
helped me *do this***

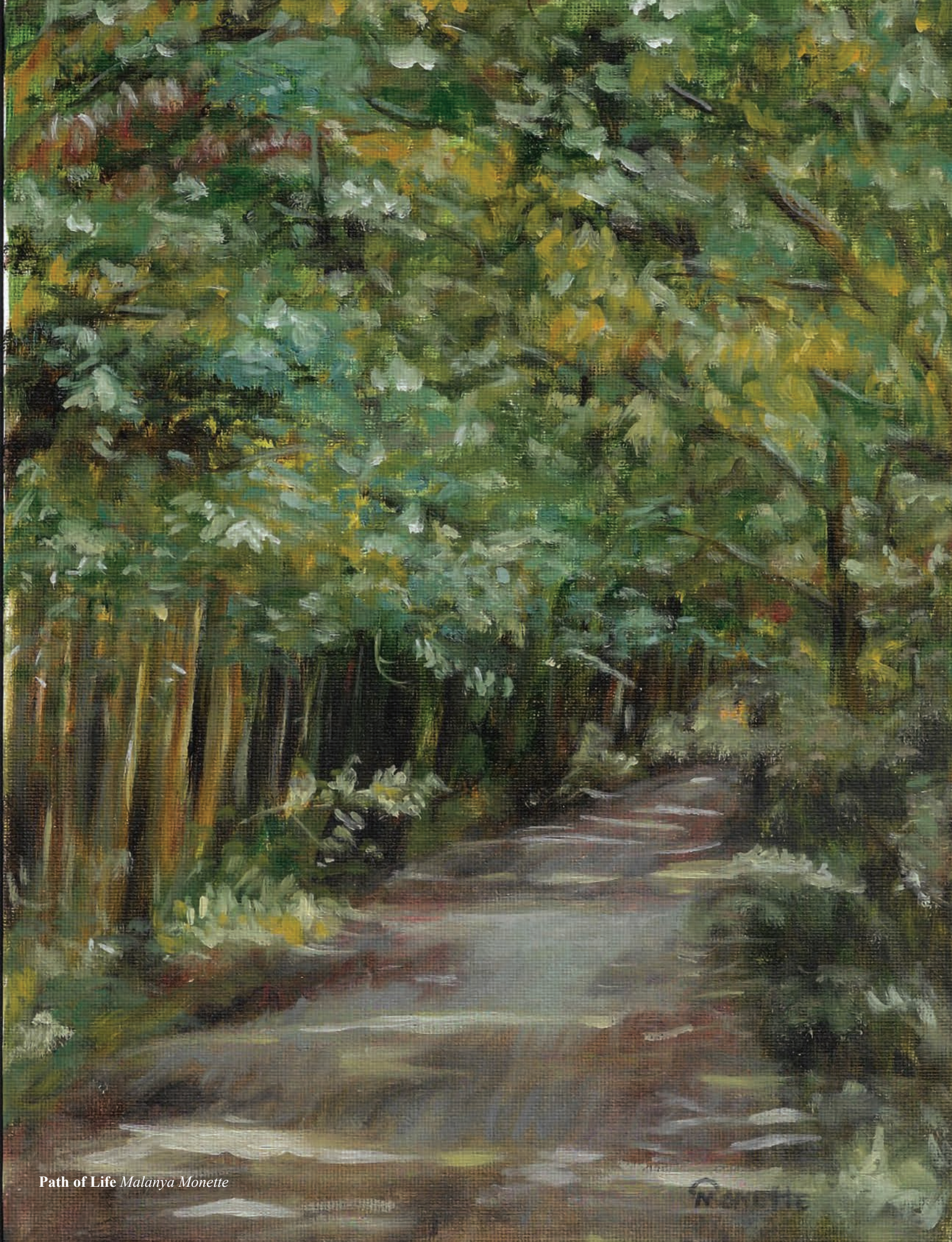
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Path of Life *Malanya Monette*



# SHORT FICTION

Risk Judy Baggett



## The Last Day

By Lance Vorhees

*For Dr. Cross and all of the men and women like him: those who hung up their uniforms  
on the last day and who give to the next generation every new day.*

He stepped through the door and made sure it latched behind him. The halls did not carry the sound of quick footsteps that day, and fluorescent lights did not reflect off of waxed floors. Scents of coffee and starch lingered in the air, but mugs sat as empty as the uniforms that hung in wall lockers. No, his friends were not there that day, which is how he wanted it to be. That day was for him, and any tears he shed would be known only to the cinder block walls. Truly, those walls, painted in shades only the government could devise, appear lifeless and cold to those untrained, but he knew better. They spoke to him that day, projecting memories through their stern visage that unfolded in every room he walked through.

His comrades, hair trimmed close and faces clean shaven, packed bags for a training exercise. As he walked among them he heard their laughter, jokes, griping, and rumors of war. Here, a proper, “Good morning, sir!” There, a Sergeant bawling out an unfortunate, out-of-regs private. He chuckled when he saw himself through a window, much younger, frantically doing push-ups for God. His best friend, the Chaplain, sat at a table recounting profanity-infused tales that produced raucous laughter from the audience of soldiers. In an empty parking lot, his father assured him he would be fed and paid before sending him on his way. At some point, the walls said all they believed necessary and drew silent again.

He stepped out the door and heard it latch behind him. His hand quickly tried to open it again, but it had locked. It was the last day, and it was good. As he drove away, two things kept him from stealing one last look: he dared not tarnish the end of the chapter, nor miss the beginning of the next.

## Memo from the Nihilist Living in My Head

By Jake C. Woodlee

*He who despairs over an event is a coward, but he who holds hope  
for the human condition is a fool.*

*—Albert Camus*

*“It’s okay, Donnie! They’re Nihilists. They don’t believe in anything.”*

*--John Goodman’s character in The Big Lebowski, when confronted with the film’s villains*

Every day is the same in the penitentiary. Years after the first day of your incarceration you become numb to the passage of time as it transforms itself, from a terrifying force of nature full of possibilities into a bland pack of sameness. Like a box of plain oatmeal. Days without taste, nights without color, and every weekend the same western and Wayans brothers reruns must be watched—or else.

Like sands through the hourglass...

Days cease to have meaning. It’s the same thing over and over and over again. Besides Sundays. They only feed us twice on the day of rest and worship. The only days that mean anything, the only ones we look forward to, are our release dates. They’re better than Christmas, birthdays, and the Fourth of July combined.

I haven’t been on the streets for the Fourth since 2009. Somehow I’ve managed to be confined on Independence Day for the last eight years and have watched the fireworks through razor wire and fences, or a one-by-six plated glass window with a bar down the middle to keep me from popping it out, as I brood about the irony of the situation. I ask myself, “Why can’t I handle freedom?” and watch America as it celebrates with explosions of color invented by the Chinese.

At least Bob Barker owns (or owned) the company that makes my jail uniform. America, heck yeah.

Other than staring out into the distance to observe cultural appropriation, my day goes like this: chow call at 4 a.m., count time at 6 a.m., school at 7 a.m., lunch at 10 a.m., school again at 11 a.m., count at 1 p.m., last chow at 3 p.m., weight pile at 4 p.m., count again at 8 p.m., and that’s pretty much it until rack down at 10:30 p.m.: where they count one more time before the 1 a.m. count, which is the last count until 3 a.m., and on and on. Life becomes a blur of white uniforms, chow lines, the same fatuous jokes and complaints from the same assholes, and the same lies and fables from a different set of the same assholes.

The scene of the inmate checking off days with tick-marks on the wall, made popular in movies, is a myth. Nobody does that. You won’t last long if you pay attention to time that much. You have to ignore it so you won’t realize how much you’re missing out on.

The most depressing part of the day is count time, especially the 1 p.m. count; it’s so miserable, in fact, it’s universally referred to as “institutional nap time.” My own mama doesn’t care about me like the state does when it’s time to count. Unless I’m accounted for, marked down, and numbered, life in prison cannot go on. No one can go to chow, school, or the yard until someone makes sure I’m still here. No one knows my name, but they’ll know if I’m not on my rack at 1 p.m. I’m invisible until count time. That’s the only time I matter, the only instance I amount to anything.

Actions breed consequences. It’s so sad, I know.

But then, who does matter? Convict or free, that’s all anyone is, a number. You and I are just an infinitesimal slice of the pie chart that represents the world’s population, and an even smaller slice when compared to all human history. I know you’ve been told for your entire life that you’re special and unique, and don’t misunderstand me, you are. Your flatulence has its own special place in our olfactory memory, and the number you’re assigned at birth is completely unique. There isn’t another like it out there. There’s something to think about next time your identity is stolen—of all the social security numbers out there, they picked *you*! Don’t forget all this when you decide your dog *just has to have* a Facebook page. Nobody wants to be online friends, or friends in reality for that matter, with your dog. His breath stinks, and he really isn’t as smart as you say he is.



## A Tale of Doleful Joy

By Benjamin Fouche

I gazed out my window, witnessing the final isolated patches of snow sinking into the soil and the radiant icicles aloft diminishing one by one. The trees gave subtle signs of spring's long-awaited advent. Yet unlike every other spring, this forthcoming one whispered to me of joyful promises—promises that would wrap me in a happiness—a happiness that would vanquish vivid recollections of the winter and its deathlike offerings. My Basset Hound, Lorelei, rose from her slumber. Her pale-blue eyes looked up at me with hope. The sun's welcoming rays shone upon her exquisite white and gray fur. Her long ears drooped to the floor, and she smelled the air. Together, we left our home and trod down a path through the awakening countryside. The birds hopped out from the brushwood searching for worms and grubs, and the once-frozen brook beckoned me with its familiar sound of water rushing over smooth boulders.

The earth below my bare feet became warmer as its icy touch decreased with every stride I took. The grassy knolls gradually turned greener, and the robin-egg blue sky brightened its convivial hue. Lorelei barked as she looked up toward me, her tail wagging with a delight only a hound could know. I smiled, but the unrelenting memories of winter returned like an unwanted specter. Once more, I stood in the cold room that was our home. The fire had become nothing more than a pile of dying embers, and my mother and father stood before a mere straw bed where my ill grandfather lay in that mere straw bed. In the weak, ghastly light of the lamp, my father, usually a man of a stern and reserved disposition, was nearly broken. I walked over and stared at my grandfather. His breathing increased all at once and a look of struggle came upon his time-worn face. And with one final breath—and a final tear shed from each eye—he departed the temporal realm. My father collapsed to his knees, my mother holding him closely. He clung to me sobbing, and it was then that I had finally known the irredeemable throes of The Reaper.

Yet the brilliant singing of the birds and the wondrous landscape in which I stood brought forth a hope. The air was pleasantly warm, and the scents of the pines and cedars banished my lingering melancholy. How I greatly adored this time and the innumerable gifts of spring. A fiery fox with a belly of white hastened into the woodlands. A mother duck and her ducklings waddled toward the pond, and golden hares hopped hither and thither amidst the meadow. The oaks, maples, and hickories bloomed gloriously whilst mourning doves cooed with a gentle affection that only the Mother Mary could possess. Even so, the majesty of spring abruptly became shadowed by a copse that singularly stood in the countryside. Within this group of old, knotty trees was a cemetery where stood my grandfather's recent grave-

stone. My eyes focused on the statue of a hooded phantom pointing toward the ground below with its gaunt, cadaverous finger. Nevertheless, the comforting statue of an angel stood on the other side pointing upwards, her feathered wings broadly stretched.

Lorelei howled lugubriously and hurried away. I followed her, once more beholding the splendor of life. The lilies, daisies, marigolds, and violets swayed in the mild breezes whilst the cardinals, blue jays, robins, and wrens sang their mesmerizing melodies. Summer had approached by noon, for the oaks, maples, and hickories now bore a thick canopy of green over the sylvan foothills and mountainsides. I paused for a moment and sighed. In that brief moment, I knew not what I anticipated, but I waited nonetheless. However, it was not long before the heart of summer enveloped my soul and my eyes once more stared toward the splendid scene before me. In the meadow, I sat down.

"How I yearn for this to remain," I cried. "How I yearn for the ground to stay warm and the grass to stay green. I long for an eternity, one with the perpetually peaceful songs of the birds and an everlasting impression of glee."

Lorelei licked my face and barked as if I had been speaking to her. I stood up, and together, we trudged through the friendly sunshine. By the afternoon, hints of autumn materialized here and there. The ground was no longer as warm, and the leaves were transfiguring from green to gold, ruby, and orange garnet. The now-grown ducklings were flying toward the horizon, and a bleak overcast began to sluggishly consume the heavens. I sighed once more, and paused. A bluebird then hopped in front of us and chirped beautifully. The bluebird was evidently female, for her feathers were a silver-gray and her breast, a light orange. But rather suddenly, Lorelei ran toward the bluebird and caught her. I shrieked and demanded she release the bird from her jaws. But after Lorelei let the bird be, she was already injured.

Carefully, I took the bluebird in my hands. She breathed ceaselessly with her beak open and watched with her precious black eyes. Lorelei, now ashamed, sat upon the ground and whimpered at me.

"I know you were only doing what a dog does—it's nature, after all," I said.

And to be truthful, I was not angered by my hound's actions, yet I wanted to make certain the bird would live. We solemnly trod down the path and found ourselves again—at length—before the forlorn cemetery within the shadowed copse. By now the sun was beginning to set and the twilight held dominion over the countryside. The air was also considerably colder, the wind stirring the branches and causing the leaves to fall. But then there was a silence. I observed the bluebird in my hand. During that moment, she flapped her wings, bestowing upon me the hope of life. Yet she breathed fast—faster—and fastest—then slowest—and thus she breathed no more. Her lifeless head lay on my hand and

the grim soundlessness endured. Placing the bird upon the ground, I dug a shallow grave with my hands, and once more picking her carcass up, I laid it at the bottom of the grave. As I did this, her lifeless head turned over. She was undoubtedly a lovely bluebird, even if her colors were not as vivid as the males.

When the final handful of soil was placed into the bluebird's small grave, another, brighter and more colorful, bluebird hopped near me. It chirped mournfully, lamenting the death of his mate. An unexpected gust of wind chilled the air hauntingly and violently scattered the leaves. Lorelei and I began marching away—like a funeral march. Once I returned home, my mother and father greeted me. But I said to them, nearly choking on the knot in my throat, “I have no wish to see death again—and for this reason, I will never return. Good-bye, Mother. Goodbye, Father.” They pleaded with me to stay, yet I would not listen.

I made haste into the pernicious cold of the winter with Lorelei. She bawled, and I said to her, “Nor do I wish to remain with you, for I do not want to be here the moment your breathing ceases.” She whined with concern but hurried back toward the homestead.

Through the descending snow, I walked, wishing to forsake what frightened me most. The idea that I would one day witness the death of my father or mother was intolerable. But I did not have to! And therefore, I quickened my pace through the blustery, unfeeling air. Surely they would miss me, I reasoned. But no! I could not see death again, for its torments knew no bounds and I had seen its merciless effects on my own grandfather. The wind over the gnarled and skeletal branches of the treetops groaned progressively louder while my remorseless thoughts remained. Time carried on while I stayed far from those I loved. I grew older, weaker, and more afraid. And before I knew it, my regrets emerged in a discomfiting abundance. These regrets forced a reluctant courage upon me that I seized. Once I returned to my homestead, I saw that the meadows had been overgrown with black, dreary thorn bushes and the house was dusty and vacant. How long had I been away? What joys of life did I miss merely because of

fear? These questions conjured forth an indescribable delirium and sorrow.

I thus departed for the churchyard with a rising dread. Upon arriving, I noticed that there were two other gravestones next to my grandfather's. With apprehension and great precaution, I entered the cemetery and approached the unfamiliar headstones. The moonlight beaming through the dead, snow-coated trees shone upon the names engraved upon them. I dropped to my knees, and the knot in my throat strangled me while I wept. As I wiped the tears from my eyes, I noticed another headstone directly beneath the base of the hooded, wraith-like statue. Before the new grave marking was an oblong hole in the earth. Within the gaping cavity was a coffin—a coffin for me. The hooded statue of impure marble only gazed into my eyes heartlessly whilst its bony index finger pointed into my open grave. I then looked upon the angel statue on the opposite side. She was beautiful in the silver rays of the moon. Her figure carved from pure-white marble. She pointed up toward the heavens with a look of benevolence upon her face.

“I would much rather be buried beneath you,” I said. “And I would much rather journey to the place toward which your finger points.”

I turned and looked back over to my grave awaiting its burial. I sighed, for I knew what I had to do during that hopeless moment. Climbing into the coffin, I shut the lid. As the earth fell back into the hole, I heard the chirping of the bluebird I had buried and the bark of Lorelei, sounds of harmony and restfulness. Now, I shall sleep in my coffin. For when I awake, I will enter the place toward which the angel statue points.

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## 34° North - 87° West

By Lance Vorhees

Colbert stares placidly across the stream toward Lauderdale. Ignoring the cities men have built on their backs, they sit in silent communion. Wilson Dam binds them; his rumbling hum mingling with seagulls' discordant notes. That curious chorus, machinery and birds, can be heard at the terminus. Old woods whisper to each other while draping their shade over the narrow trail, now nearly forgotten. The sun slips delicate fingers through the canopy, caressing the undergrowth. Beneath the dead leaves and creeping vines lie interesting rocks, I am sure. Grand canyons, towering Tetons, and faithful geysers all could not compete with the serene Shoals. He chose the place well. An aged tree stands over the memory, gleaning knowledge from years of curiosity and conversations. The sanctuary murmurs, “Dad...brother...uncle...Poppy—rest.”



## In the Spotlight: Dr. Burke, Calhoun's Interim President

By Jillian Oliver and Amelia Chey Slaton



**Q: What is your favorite part about being in administration?**

**A:** My favorite part has to be the people and the students. So many great people work here, which makes my job easier. We have many effective instructors, and the major concern for all employees is the students' experiences while they are here.

**Q: What past experiences have prepared you for this job?**

**A:** My background is in psychology. I taught it in college for fourteen years and think it is a good background for many things that I have done since. When I went back to graduate school, I gravitated toward higher education. I was fortunate to get a job at a community college teaching psychology and working in Admissions. My experience in the classroom all those years teaching was important. I know the hard job faculty face. Later, I was over Student Services and Financial Aid, so I have really gained an understanding and respect for all aspects of the services we offer.

**Q: In what ways do you think that Calhoun can improve?**

**A:** I would like to see Calhoun do everything we can to make students successful. One of our quotes at Calhoun is "Make Every Student a Success." Helping students who may be having academic issues, or problems at home, or financial issues that may dictate their success is where we strive to help students. That is primarily where I would like to see Calhoun improve.

**Q: Compared to your time as a college student, what are some core aspects that have changed or maybe some that have stayed the same?**

**A:** That is a good question. I was a lousy student when I attended my community college. I did not know what I did not know back then. I guess if I had to psychoanalyze myself I could assume that is why I chose to come back, so that I could do better the second time. I feel that students are primarily the same, and the issues are often the same. Some changes have occurred, of course, in technology. Overall, however, students and campus life are about the same.

**Q: What does "A Day in the Life of Dr. Burke" look like?**

**A:** No day looks the same. Some days I may have to attend a breakfast meeting. We serve Huntsville, Madison, Decatur, Morgan County, Athens, and Limestone County, so I try to attend chamber and economic meetings, which is always interesting. Sometimes I tour local industries. For example, I got to go to Carpenter and see a showcase of some 3-D printers, so that was interesting. I have had the opportunity to go to Polaris and Boeing. I try to meet with

my direct reports at least every other week. Then there are others who ask to get on my schedule and make an appointment. My days are often different and offer unique opportunities.

**Q: What has been your greatest accomplishment as president thus far?**

**A:** It is hard to pinpoint something specific because it is not really anything I have done as president. It is what the people here as a group have accomplished. Some things were already in process when I got here, and I have had the opportunity to help finish them. The nursing program on the Huntsville campus was certainly a big thing. The aerospace engineering program on campus was also a great accomplishment. Working with Athens State on the Alabama Center for the Arts has also been exciting. Many positive advancements have happened due to my great team.

**Q: What can you tell us about the new building going up on the Decatur Campus?**

**A:** It is the Automotive Technology Center. Its purpose is to train people to become automotive technicians, and eventually they can become master technicians. It is going to have twenty bays, a car dealer showroom, and, of course, a couple of classrooms and offices as well. We have a partnership with Woody Anderson Ford and Century Volvo. Both have been great to work with. This generation has a shortage of automotive technicians, so the program and building will be extremely helpful. Overall, we are excited for the new building and the opportunities it will bring.



## *Almost, Maine*

By Amelia Chey Slaton

In the fall of 2019, Calhoun's Black Box Theatre proudly presented a fictional yet relatable play known as *Almost, Maine*. The play by John Cariani is set in an imaginary borderless town of Almost, Maine, on a crisp Friday night. As we peer into nine scenes of contrasting emotions, we allow ourselves to feel the love, excitement, and maybe even heart-break these characters portray. Each scene has a different atmosphere, illustrated by the wardrobe, minimalist props, and the hard work of each actor and actress. Each scene is unique, according to each couple's disputes, allowing the play to appeal to a large audience.

Audience members are never completely reassured of the outcome of each couple's situation. In some instances, they can assume what might happen, but in others, their minds are left to wonder. Although there is one thing that aligns with

each of the couples, the Northern Lights. Each scene uses the Aurora Borealis as the connection to tie together the couples from each scene.

The Calhoun theatre students gave amazing performances and enjoyed the crowd's enthusiasm. Calhoun students seemed to enjoy the play as well. Jillian Oliver, a sophomore, said that her favorite scene was "This Hurts." "I saw a true connection form between these two characters in a way that was both authentic and magical all at once," she noted. Another Calhoun student, Madeline Harwell, shared her thoughts on the atmosphere of the theatre: "The intimate feel of the small theatre pulled everything together, and truly allowed the emotions of the cast to be shared with the audience." Her state-



ment goes to show that the set and atmosphere truly affect the feeling of the play and make the time and thought put into them worth it.

Overall, *Almost, Maine* was enjoyed by many different viewers. Calhoun Theatre always does a great job and their success would not be possible without the service of many talented people. Once again, the students and staff truly outdid themselves.





## Calhoun Students Travel to Guatemala

By Mrs. Elizabeth Willingham

As president of the non-profit organization, Partners of the Americas, I have a deep affection for the people and culture of Guatemala. The organization was founded by John F. Kennedy and is housed in Washington D.C. Every state is partnered with a different country and tasked to exchange with them to help the partnering country thrive. Since Alabama's partner is Guatemala, I have traveled there several times and made many professional and personal connections, which is why I decided to take my students there to study.

One of the most meaningful personal experiences I recall was going to Guatemala to teach. I saw barbed wire fences around the schools, designed not to keep students in, but to keep students out who cannot afford tuition. When I walked outside of the school, people would be standing outside the fence begging to come join classes and study. In the United States, education is taken for granted, and people are provided with an education, while in Guatemala people must earn an education.

In addition to the value they place on education, I also appreciate their sense of family ties. Guatemalans still cherish spending time around the dinner table, and grandparents often live with their families. Sometimes



aunts and uncles will live with them as well. Most the time, until married, the children will continue to live with their families (unless they go off to college).

Just as I have grown to value the unique qualities of Guatemalan culture, so too did my Calhoun students on the 2019 trip. I vividly recall climbing to the top of a volcano with them to roast marshmallows. They loved doing it because it was so much fun. Speaking of food, I love Guatemalan cuisine because it is not like the food in the United States. They tend to do a lot of roasted meats, rice and beans, and everything is fresh.

Aside from the fun of being immersed in another culture, my Calhoun students reacted positively to the differences in lifestyle. They took everything in stride and asked many questions. They also had tutors that they could ask questions about the culture and that took them into their houses to show their way of living. The 2019 trip was a great success, so I look forward to traveling with other Calhoun students in the future and watching them experience a culture I so love and appreciate.





# Hospice in Prison

By Reginald Bulls

Hospice is a program that provides medical care for terminally ill patients. In the face of impending death, the program offers psychological and emotional support to patients and their families in the last months of life.

In prison, the program is different than what most might imagine. The hospice care providers are all volunteers with no medical training at all, but they are often all the dying inmates have. Out of the goodness of their hearts, these volunteers assist the dying with everyday needs—from getting dressed to simply sitting with them, from reading a book or writing a letter to just talking to them. The volunteers help those who cannot feed themselves and those who cannot bathe themselves. They undertake these tasks in the hopes of making the patient's last days the best they can be.

Terminally ill inmates often do not have any family left alive or any family members who care about them, while the ones who do cannot visit with family members due to prison system rules. Without the volunteer inmates, they would die alone. To the dying inmates, the volunteers are angels and saints. To most, this is all they have to look forward to, the help of a fellow inmate in the last few months of their lives.

This volunteer work is a lot to take on for both the dying inmate and for the volunteer. The volunteer feels the pressure of another person relying on him, and the dying inmate realizes the volunteer is all he has. Helping a person face death with strength is more than some can handle, but the ones who can will keep putting on a strong face and doing all they can to make each hospice patient's remaining time as comfortable as possible with the tools available. Maybe one day the system will change, and maybe writing this can help make that change possible.

CALHOUN CHORALE PRESENTS

# Season of Love

*a holiday concert*

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## Season of Love with the Calhoun Chorale

By Amelia Chey Slaton

Every year, the Calhoun Chorale presents a show filled with Christmas magic. The arrangements range from Latin pieces to holiday classics such as “Walking in a Winter Wonderland.” Granville Oldham, the Chorale’s director, makes sure that the students are prepared to perform their best. They practice for months leading up to the shows, performed in the Recital Hall of the Alabama Center for the Arts in Decatur and at Latham United Methodist Church in Huntsville. Some pieces are sung by all performers in the chorale, while others are trios, duets, and solos. Every piece is selected by Mr. Oldham, and each song embodies its own spirit of the season. The reaction to the 2019 show I attended was amazing. Audience members truly felt a part of the show. As the music choices changed, the concertgoers enjoyed the diversity. Parents beamed proudly as they listened to the time and hard work their children had put in. My favorite part was the last song performed by the whole chorale. By the end of it, the audience was clapping and singing along. The song conveyed the idea that Christmas is a season of love, and the audience loved it. A sense of joy rang in the air. I was proud of my fellow classmates and instructor who put on the show. I appreciated the hard work and time that went into putting it together, as I could see that no detail was overlooked. As usual, the Calhoun Chorale outdid themselves. I gained a special admiration for the programs that Calhoun provides for their students.



# Led by Example

By Nathan Wilder

What possesses a man to wear War Eagle bow ties, outlandish socks that coordinate with his vivid shirts, \$5,000 watches, and hats with custom logos sported in tandem with his flashy shoes...in prison? Just ask Auburn graduate and Calhoun Community College (CCC) Department Chair at Limestone Correctional Facility (LCF).



In a recent interview with the colorful Dr. Lawrence Raymond Miller, Jr., he explained, “I was a dork in school, but I learned never to settle, to be creative, and to adapt.” These were hard lessons he humbly learned while earning his bachelor’s degree in environmental design, his master’s degree in landscape architecture, and his doctorate of education in administrative leadership. Dr. Miller attributes a strong work ethic, passion for working with people of diverse backgrounds, and analytical honesty as core values that sustained him in his educational pursuits and that continue to compel him to build up those around him. English writer and statesman Lord Chesterfield wrote,

“Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well.” Whether it is his style, his humor, or his ability to inspire others, Dr. Miller brilliantly reflects excellence.

The youngest of eight children and the proud son of an RV sales manager, who was known as “Crunch” during his rodeo career, Dr. Miller deserves the Jr. abbreviation entrusted to him. When asked about the fondest memory of his late father, he chuckled as he recalled the time when Miller Senior showed him how to toast bread on the hood of an AMC Pacer. Dr. Miller’s father was a man driven to provide a comfortable and judgment-free environment for his son. In his father’s example, Junior found the quintessential “man of his word.” He remembers his father always making time for him, whether he was tagging along on a road trip or being initiated into the fanatical society we all know as “Cheese Heads.” Dr. Miller insists, “My dad taught me everything...everything.” This credit reverberates with truth throughout the Miller family. In fact, they felt it necessary to dub Junior as “Lil’ Crunch.” A proud son indeed.

The statement, “Behind every influential man stands a strong woman,” rings true in this case and describes Dr. Miller’s mother wholeheartedly. She is a woman whose wealth of love supported not only the man who taught him everything but was also the foundation of a young man’s perspective of how to care for everyone. She was reassuring and reinforcing in her convictions of self-worth and respecting the dignity of others. If any evidence is needed, just ask any drafting student who has attended a Christmas or July 4<sup>th</sup> party since Dr. Miller has instructed the program. Without fail, even during her battle with breast cancer, Mrs. Miller bakes on average between fifty and sixty dozen cookies for each party. That is

potentially 1,440 hand-molded cookies, baked under a mother’s vigilant eye, and packed to deliver a taste of home to men who might have forgotten that joy. More proof of this love was found in the smile on Dr. Miller’s face when the word he used to describe his mother escaped his lips, compassion.

True to the character of his father before him, Dr. Miller is also blessed to be supported by his wife of almost eight years. During his interview, he shared, “It was her intelligence I initially found attractive,” but she won him over when she offered to buy him a meal at IHOP. When asked, “Who in your life do you most admire for their honesty,” he specified that he admires her ability to deliver the truth without any hesitation. It was in her innate wit and uncanny ability to “call a bluff” that life and love combined in the woman who is his best friend and mother to their two beautiful children. The honesty apple does not fall too far from the tree. Dr. Miller laughed about their six-year-old daughter having no qualm to speak her mind on various subjects, including the two-dollar fee her daddy is required to pay upon completion of his nightly back rub. According to Dr. Miller, the youngster claims, “This is the family discount rate,” only payable by gold one dollar coins or a two-dollar bill. A small price to pay for priceless memories.

Dr. Miller claims November 9, 2011, his first day of work inside LCF, as his most important day. In reality, it was just the first step in an honorable cadence, set to the rhythm of student after student, semester followed by successive semester, with a crescendo of graduates here, measured alongside a counterpoint of accomplishments there, bringing a harmony of progress to LCF’s Calhoun campus. Since Dr. Miller was appointed Department Chair, the students have

been visited and acknowledged by the United States Secretary of Education, Alabama's governor, a state representative, Auburn University Provost, University of North Alabama's Provost, and the Commissioner of Alabama Department of Corrections. They also have been video recorded as part of an initiative to promote the Second Chance Pell Grant program, been inducted into the first fully incarcerated chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and are currently enrolled in core classes leading to an associate's degree. Next on his agenda is a joint effort between CCC and the University of North Alabama to offer LCF students the opportunity to work toward a bachelor's degree. Being a department chair is not just a job to him. When it comes to providing a chance for people to better

themselves, Dr. Miller is purpose driven to provide the necessary tools for their success.

On November 11, 2019, almost eight years to the day he began his uncharted melody at LCF, Dr. Miller was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma. The C note had been heralded, and played obstructively out of turn, confusing the whole arrangement. Nervous glances, low murmurs, and uncomfortable silences accompanied the anxiety of waiting for his direction. Temporarily distracted, yet determined, the respected and most excellent maestro confidently tapped the podium with his baton, snapped his prestigious finger to demand attention, cleared his throat, and, holding his head high in resilience, led the students back into their procession of honor. Writer Ken Kesey was quot-

ed in an *Esquire* interview as saying, "You don't lead by pointing your finger and telling people some place to go. You lead by going to that place and making a case." Dr. Miller said of his colleagues, "This one takes pride in his work, while that one sees the good in people. This one never complains, while the honesty in that one is empowering." These are all qualities he admires about those who are professionally and personally close to him and also evidence that the dependability he saw in his father, the heart of compassion he is so tenderly nurtured by, and the considerate truth he cherishes are all the color values necessary in his filter to paint a portrait of the college's mission statement, "Success for Every Student."

## What Kindergarten Taught Me

By Morgan Bryson

My membership in Calhoun's Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD) chapter has allowed me to become more involved in my community and my college. These service opportunities have opened my eyes to needs within my community of which I was previously unaware. Through my chapter's involvement in our local school system, service to my community, school, and local chapter are united. I have taken advantage of the SKD outreach program and then shared these experiences with other students at Calhoun in the hopes of motivating my peers to participate in community service as well.

As an education major, I believe education is one of the most important goals a person can work towards because no one can take knowledge away. In an effort to spark change in the leaders of tomorrow, members of Calhoun's SKD chapter, Theta Beta, volunteer their time to work with non-native English-speaking children at a local elementary school through a program we created called "Book Buddies." Austinville Elementary School has graciously provided this opportunity to Calhoun students. The teachers have opened their classrooms to us and allowed us to truly experience education firsthand. Our weekly excursion to Austinville has become something that all SKD members look forward to.

A couple of weeks after the program began, the other officers and I talked about how amazing the results are and how much fun we are having while spending time with the children. We decided to spread the word even more, to go beyond our chapter. In an effort to inform others about SKD and the volunteer opportunities available to students, I asked some of my professors if I could talk to their classes. They graciously allowed me time to share my chapter's volunteer work through Book Buddies. While talking to these classes, I encouraged students not only to join SKD but also to serve their community whether through Book Buddies or through a program of their own. Through my service, I have learned about various needs in my community. To help combat these needs, I have developed a program at Austinville to help the children I work with each week learn their alphabet. I hope they learn much from me, but I know I have learned about the joys of learning and so much more from them.



# Sharing the Love with Calhoun's Community

By Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea



This year Calhoun's chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD), the National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges, began a partnership with Austinville Elementary School's principal, faculty, and students. While volunteering to paint a mural for the college in one of the school's hallways, Dean Donna Estill paved the way for this project with Mr. Tony Willis, Austinville's principal. His passion for his job and his love for the school and its students are evident from his enthusiasm for community outreach. The school's corridors are one brightly colored mural after another, with the main hallway dedicated to companies, restaurants, and services in the community today, another to Decatur's past, and a third that highlights the students' future opportunities. After meeting with Mr. Willis, several SKD members and I began volunteering weekly in the classrooms, sometimes working with individual students and other times with small groups.

We became so enthusiastic about the project that SKD members arranged a Share the Love fundraising challenge for Calhoun administration, faculty, and staff. Several faculty members in the Language and Literature Department made donations, and after SKD member Amelia Chey Slaton spoke to her church, Crossroads Fellowship, about the program, the church members took up a love offering totaling \$70. The funds were spent on classroom supplies and books for the teachers and much-needed snacks for the children. SKD members had fun assembling goody bags for the kids and packing boxes for the teachers, but by far the most fun was had when we arrived at the school with the treats on Valentine's Day.

SKD members look forward to Calhoun's generosity of time, talent, and funding to continue this partnership as we look for ways to build on the foundation we began this year. Plus, we will get to watch the elementary school children reach their educational goals. But, without a doubt, all of the sweet hugs and words from Mrs. Pete's kindergarteners are the highlight of my week!

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## Facing Fear

By Melissa Brown

The feeling when your stomach drops—the pit—not being able to breathe, the panic, the dread, the sweating: it all accompanies fear. This fear seems too daunting to face; you would rather die than face it. These feelings are all too familiar for me. I felt all of them when I learned that my essay was selected to be presented in St. Louis at the 2019 Sigma Tau Delta International Convention. I knew what it meant for an essay to be chosen—one of the biggest fears amongst people, glossophobia, better known as the

fear of public speaking. I considered not presenting my paper. After all having my paper chosen was enough recognition for me, but I am so glad that I presented, thankful even. Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD), the National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges, allowed me to face many fears while attending the conference, from flying in an airplane to presenting my essay in front of an audience, as well as my completely irrational fear of escalators. SKD helped me conquer them all, allowing me to reach the end of the weekend feeling victorious. I prepared my presentation for weeks with the help of Ms. Sneed, Calhoun's SKD co-sponsor on the Decatur campus and communications instructor. She gave me the

tools I needed to push through the anxiety attacks I had when I practiced my speech. When it was time for me to present in St. Louis, I had no fear. Nerves, yes. But I was no longer afraid. I was able to look out into the audience and speak loudly, clearly, and proudly. When I finished my speech, I felt free. Along with conquering fears, I also won the best SKD paper at the convention and a service scholarship from SKD. These accomplishments helped me realize my potential as a writer. SKD provided me with confidence I did not realize that I needed. Facing fears head-on is the best strategy. I know it can be intimidating, but it is so worthwhile. Behind fear often lies the most wonderful rewards.

# In the Spotlight: Tatayana Rice

By Jillian Oliver

In August, I was privileged to reconnect with Tatayana Rice. I came to know her as a dedicated student and a good friend. Tatayana's life story is a complicated one, like most students at Calhoun. She has taken circumstances that could have derailed her life and used them as motivation to transform it. Her example is a beautiful one. I find her motivation and work ethic inspiring and was more than thrilled to be able to catch up with her again for this article.



**Q: During the symposium, you spoke briefly about the tragic loss of your sister. What advice would you give to current Calhoun students coping with similar grief?**

**A:** I think that my biggest problem was that I tried to bottle up my emotions. I tried to hide my feelings when, in reality, I needed to be with loved ones and people that I cared about most. If you are experiencing loss, definitely talk to someone. Calhoun students now have access to a counselor. Book an appointment and try to get the help you need.\*

**Q: How has the community within Calhoun helped you in your pursuit of higher education?**

**A:** When I first came to Calhoun, I was a part of the Presidential Honors Program, so it was very easy for me to transition because I felt like I already had a family within Calhoun. Being involved with clubs is great because you will always have people to encourage you and push you. It made me feel more accountable and encouraged me to continue striving to complete my education.

**Q: How has your experience at Calhoun better prepared you to start your education at the University of Alabama?**

**A:** Well, I love the learning environment. It's smaller, which means that I had time to acclimate to the curriculum. Calhoun was closer to my home. I feel like if I had gone to a larger university, I wouldn't have had time to adjust. I was still grieving for my sister. I needed to be with my family as much as they needed me. And the faculty members are really invested in each student. I love that Calhoun feels more like a community. I don't feel like one of thousands of students. I feel like I belong and that people are there to help me every step of the way.

**Q: I know that your plan is to double major in Political Science and Communications. How did you become interested in those two fields? How do you plan on using them?**

**A:** Believe it or not, I've been struggling to decide on my majors. Right now, I'm thinking of possibly majoring in political science and finance. Who knows? I feel like my major changes daily. What got me interested in political science was the 2016 election. I loved seeing how the candidates interacted with one another. It was like March Madness. As for my interest in communications, it was really thanks to Mrs. Burton, my teacher. She showed me the variety of opportunities behind a degree in communications. There's a lot of fluidity and versatility there. As for finance... I think the thing behind that is the fear of being a barista for the rest of my life. Finance is a safety degree – it will always be needed. Either way, I'm definitely going to double major.

**Q: What is one takeaway from your college experience that you feel motivated to share with others?**

**A:** I think the biggest thing that I've learned is that it's okay to lose. I wish that you could have known me three years ago. I was so negative. Now, if I don't get something, I think that maybe it wasn't my blessing. Sometimes, the greater lesson to be gained is in losing. Last year, I ran for International President of Phi Theta Kappa. It was crazy – I went to Orlando, and I was competing against people from all over. I also *lost* on a public platform in front of those same people. But I still managed to share my sister's story with thousands. To me, that was the most important thing. And now, I have a real chance to affect change in my community. I'm still working and volunteering with Phi Theta Kappa. I'm now an intern for the Senator, and I have another internship with HudsonAlpha. Even though I lost, I gained much more.

**\* On-Site Counseling is Available for All Students**  
Decatur: 256-306-2630 | Huntsville: 256-890-4756





## Student Success Symposium

By Jillian Oliver

The anticipation at the 2019 Student Success Symposium on September 4 was palpable as students and faculty filed into the Multi-Purpose room in the building on the Huntsville campus. Minutes passed and soon the words “standing room only” were being called at the door. The crowd buzzed quietly as they waited for the program to begin. Dr. Pat Wilson, Vice President of Student Services, opened the event with heartfelt thanks before turning the microphone over to Calhoun’s Interim President, Dr. Joe Burke.

Dr. Burke provided a warm Calhoun welcome to all in attendance before conceding the floor to the three keynote speakers: Chad Kelsoe, a Calhoun alumnus; Heath Daws, a member of Calhoun’s staff; and Tatayana Rice, a current Calhoun student.

Chad Kelsoe graduated from Calhoun Community College in 2001 and is currently the principal at Danville Middle School. Kelsoe originally planned to attend Troy University after graduating from Speake High School. However, due to family circumstances and his grandfather’s health issues, he chose

to stay close to home. Calhoun afforded Kelsoe the irreplaceable opportunity to spend time with his grandfather before his passing, time that he still remembers and cherishes. Kelsoe said of education, “You get what you give.” As someone who holds a Bachelor’s degree in Education, a Master’s and an Education Specialist Degree in Education Administration, Kelsoe has certainly put that belief into practice. Kelsoe also believes in his students and wants them to succeed.

Heath Daws wants the same for Calhoun students. His journey to becoming a dual enrollment advisor and recruiter at Calhoun began when he graduated high school in 2003. Daws spent two years at Calhoun following graduation, during which he joined the Warhawks. After working as a flight attendant for several years, Mr. Daws returned home to attend Athens State University where he finished his Bachelor’s degree in Business Management of Technology and began working for Counseling and Career Services. Daws quickly set his sights on a job at Calhoun as an advisor. His advice to students is to find out what they want to do and go for it. He added, “It could be something totally opposite from what [your] family and friends think you should do.” Daws encourages everyone to do what they love. Daws also urges all students to join in campus activities and become

a part of Calhoun’s immense community.

One student who has taken that advice to heart is Tatayana Rice, a sophomore at Calhoun who plans to double major in communications and political science. Her goal is to attend the University of Alabama to obtain a Bachelor’s degree. Tatayana chose Calhoun as her college with the belief that it was the best decision for her. Tragically, she lost her sister a year prior to beginning college and felt that she needed to remain close to her family. She said of Calhoun, “It was probably one of the best life decisions I’ve ever made.” Tatayana encourages everyone to never give up.

Each of the keynote speakers asserted that the recipe for success is different for everyone. It is a mindset. It is a choice and requires determination to overcome circumstances or adjust expectations. When faced with the unspeakable and the unexpected, each of these inspiring people rose to the challenge and came out victorious. With hard work and determination, students can achieve success.

# In the Spotlight: Chad Kelsoe

By Amelia Chey Slaton

**Q: In what specific ways did Calhoun help you grow?**

**A:** My time at Calhoun taught me that I would only be given what I earned. There are no shortcuts to success as an adult. The people who are successful in life are those who had the grit and determination to refuse to fail. My experience at Calhoun helped me come to terms with this reality early on and not at a later time when that lesson would come at a much greater cost.

**Q: If you could change one thing about your experience at Calhoun, what would it be and why?**

**A:** I would have found more ways to serve. No matter what you do, you always feel overwhelmed. As if you are operating at maximum capacity. However, when you allow yourself to be stretched a little further, you find out what you are really made of.

**Q: How did being involved in extracurricular activities affect your experience?**

**A:** It helped me become a better teammate. Your grades are in your own hands, but when you are a part of something with different components, you learn how your actions affect the entire group. In high school, you have more adult-involvement for motivation. As a college student, you learn better how to be responsible for your own motivation.

**Q: How did the atmosphere of the symposium affect the way you told your story?**

**A:** Being flanked by Heath Daws and Tatayana Rice was very humbling to me because their stories were so powerful. Being invited by Carla Swinney and Dr. Patricia Wilson to speak was a privilege. I felt a part of their team, and I didn't want to let them down by not bringing passion and experience to the table. I also had many former students in attendance. I wanted to share experiences that I knew they could relate to or draw inspiration from.

**Q: What is a quality that you have now that you wish you would have had in your times at Calhoun?**

**A:** Patience. I think practicing patience is something that you never really become great at. However, you become better with time. My wife likes to say there are no shortcuts to sanctification, and I believe the same can be said for acquiring patience.





# Romeo + Juliet: Sitting down with Juliet

By Jillian Oliver

Last spring, Calhoun put on a production of Shakespeare's classic play, *Romeo and Juliet*. I had the pleasure of attending the very last performance with my eleven-year-old cousin, Phoenix. I wasn't sure at first that she would be as taken with it as I was bound to be, but I was determined to share the experience with her. As soon as we walked into the auditorium, the atmosphere took my breath away. The twinkling lights above us cast a beautiful glow on the intricate set that surrounded the seats, putting everyone right in the middle of Shakespeare's classic tale. The vibrant costumes, though non-traditional, only added to the excitement of the evening, and they helped



those, like my cousin, who had very little exposure to Shakespeare be able to lose themselves more easily in the production. My friend and former classmate, Grace Little, had the complex task of playing Juliet. It was her first time to participate in the Calhoun Theatre. She took on the role effortlessly, as though she were where she had always belonged. Recently, I had the privilege of catching up with Grace to ask her about her experience with the theatre and how it changed her outlook.

**Q: This was your first time being in a Calhoun play. How did you face the challenge of inexperience and feelings of nervousness?**

**A:** *Romeo and Juliet* was my first large production, or my first real show as I call it. I didn't really know if I was good enough to have a role at all, but I wanted to be a part of Calhoun's theatre for so long that I decided to give it a shot. It was my first audition since middle school, so I was extremely nervous. The Friday before auditions, I got to meet Calhoun's theatre students and the ones who would be auditioning for the show. I was immediately greeted with hugs and everyone made a point to speak to me. This eased much of my nervousness. They made me feel so welcome. Auditions came around the next week, and I was still so nervous! I somehow worked up enough courage to finally walk out on stage and just be who I am.

**Q: How did being involved with the theatre change your experience at Calhoun?**

**A:** Being a part of theatre at Calhoun really changed my perspective on a lot of things - even myself. I knew that I felt passionate about acting, but I never made any effort to get there prior to R&J. I never thought I was good enough. Once I joined, I felt like I was a part of a family - and I was. I realized and am still realizing that despite how I view myself, I can be brave. I started to see that I can be who I am unapologetically. Since then, Calhoun has been more than "just school" to me. It became a place where I can be who I want to be.

**Q: What is one change you noticed in yourself after participating in *Romeo and Juliet*?**

**A:** One change that I noticed in myself after R&J is that I wasn't afraid to be myself anymore. I used to feel embarrassed of wanting to be goofy or dance or anything of that nature, but not anymore. It was really fun once I let go of the boundaries of who I was "supposed" to be and started being me. Life is much more fun this way.

**Q: What would you encourage students who are interested in theatre to do?**

**A:** To any student who is considering theatre even just a little, go for it! It is so fun and worth what you have to do to get there. You will not regret it.

**Q: Would you do it all again?**

**A:** Over and over and over again. Absolutely! *To my theatre family, break a leg.*

# In the Spotlight: Will Lawrimore, Calhoun's Phi Theta Kappa President

By Amelia Chey Slaton

**Q: What kind of humanitarian projects does Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) have planned for this year?**

**A:** We've already done a few, such as the Community First Campaign to help the homeless in our area – Huntsville and Decatur. Each campus will be responsible for gathering hygiene supplies, clothes and food. From there, we'll donate them to outreach centers such as the Tennessee Valley Outreach in Decatur and the Downtown Rescue Mission in Huntsville. More recently, we went to Childhaven Child Home where we painted walls and helped fix up houses that were going to be used for children and young adults going through unimaginable hardships.

**Q: How did you plan all of these projects?**

**A:** We have different teams in PTK. For example, we have a community service team for coming up with ideas and planning events. It's really about the teams within PTK. They're responsible for what we do.

**Q: How do you hope that PTK will affect your community?**

**A:** From my experience, I know that PTK will better our community. There's a lot of meanness, a lot of darkness, in our world. We just want to do our part and influence people's lives for the better. What we do is great as far as academics, but I believe our most important job is to take care of our community.

**Q: What have you done personally to better PTK?**

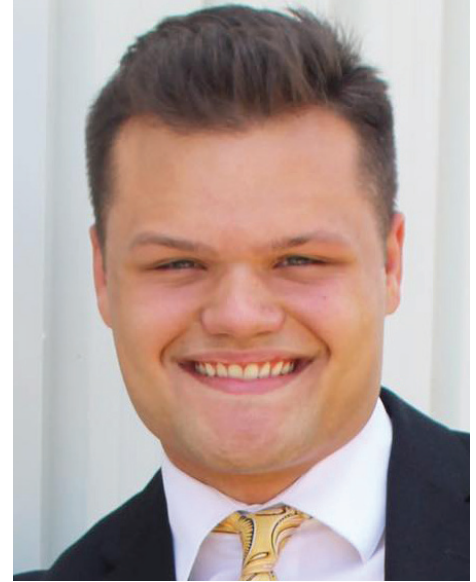
**A:** I usually tell people my job is easy because I have such a great team. My team is motivated, outgoing, and driven. They change people's lives by helping them better their education and careers. Part of my job is to keep the peace when tensions run high and make sure the task at hand is being accomplished in an orderly fashion.

**Q: How do you inspire members to get involved and stay involved with PTK?**

**A:** PTK is a great opportunity for scholarships. Once you are aware of the opportunities that PTK provides, it's easy to stay involved. It sells itself. But a lot of that is done by a membership and recruitment team who are good at getting the word out.

**Q: Last question: Coke or Pepsi?**

**A:** Coke. All the way.







**Tranquility** Kim Pourcho

## Mindfulness Matters

By Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea, Jillian Oliver,  
and Amelia Chey Slaton

For several semesters, many Calhoun students in English Composition I have had the opportunity to read an excerpt from Carol Dweck's book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. They encounter the Stanford psychology professor's life-altering ideas of the fixed and growth mindsets. In the fixed mindset, qualities and abilities are unchangeable. Such an outlook often leads to feelings of hopelessness, fear, and failure. The growth mindset, on the other hand, focuses on improvement, often leading, therefore, to newfound and potentially undiscovered passions, feelings of excitement, and success. Dweck points out that people can have the fixed mindset in one area of life and the growth in another, but more importantly, she provides the tools that allow them to transform their mindsets.

Calhoun freshman Ireland Clark applied Dweck's ideas to her own passion for writing: I have had many ideas for stories in the past, but I had never put any of them

into action. I never thought I would have the ability to write a story because I was stuck in the fixed mindset.

Madalynn Owen, a dual enrollment student at Calhoun, applied the mindsets ideas to her personal qualities: Through Dweck's ideas on mindsets, I am learning to transform my trait of perfectionism, which causes struggles and hardships, into a growth mindset that allows me to recognize my failures and successes so that I can change my perspective.

Madeline Harwell, another Calhoun freshman, reflected on the relationship between her growth mindset and her personal passion, dance: If I had a fixed mindset and let my nerves stop me, I would have never achieved my goal of joining the Huntsville Ballet. From auditions, to rehearsals, and performances, my journey in the company was definitely something I would call a success. The growth mindset I had helped me in my journey as a company dancer. The experiences I had were irreplaceable and taught me to be independent, confident, and happy. Most importantly, however, dancing in the company taught me that I can overcome life's challenges.

Calhoun freshman Alan Sanchez Gonzalez described the all too familiar roller coaster of emotions that he experiences before a test: Breathe in. Breathe out. Okay, good.

I do not need to panic. It's simply a test. That's all. I can't let a simple piece of paper scare me. I've studied too hard for my brain to freeze-up. Why can't this just be over so I can just wallow in my own misery? I wish I could go a day without feeling anxious. I'm tired of anxiety controlling my every move, having it cause me to second guess myself. I need to control it; I need to change for my sake. I need a new way of thinking. Letting anxiety run my life kept me in a fixed mindset and prevented me from growing and becoming a stronger individual. I kept myself from growing for many years, afraid of the unknown and without the courage to step out of my comfort zone. Breaking down the walls that I built and that kept me from exploring the outside world took many years. I had to adopt a growth mindset to begin my path to positive thinking.

Muse student editors read and discussed the book for the professionalism course, a requirement to fulfill their editorial duties.

Amelia Chey Slaton shared her thoughts on how these ideas apply to her future career: One idea that really captured my attention in Dweck's book is how adults groom their children to look down on challenges through the fixed mindset. I am an elementary education major, so applying the growth mindset to my future students is something I hope to achieve. Teaching children that failures do not define them only opens opportunity for new growth. Praising children for their efforts more than

their intelligence is the key to teaching a growth mindset. Dweck uses examples of praise that project children's choices and interest more than their talent, such as "That picture has so many beautiful colors. Tell me about them" (181). I cannot wait to apply these strategies in my classroom to help children tackle many challenges in their lives.

Jillian Oliver applied the mindset theory to the way she views herself: I am unafraid to analyze my strengths and weaknesses, but I put immense pressure on myself to be the best in everything I do. In the past, it has been difficult to acknowledge the fact that I will continue to have weaknesses. Though I work to overcome them, I will never attain the level of perfection that I strive for. I tend to want to perfect everything, including myself and my habits. Mindset showed me that it is important to be open to adjustment and balanced in my view of the world and my own expectations.

As all of these testimonials reveal, reading Dweck's work fulfills the college's vision statement: "Success for every student, the community, and the College." Calhoun students gain a broader understanding of the world and of themselves and, most importantly, the tools for personal and professional success.



## MUSEPAPER



Editors - Jillian Oliver and Amelia Chey Slaton



# MUSE

/myuz/ v. To ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length. 2. To wonder.

N. (Greek mythology) Any of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different act of science. 3. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration.

4. (Archaic) A poet.

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Layout and Design by Mr. Taylor Burton, Public Relations  
Printing by Ms. Lana Powers, Calhoun Printing Services

Published by the Department of Language and Literature  
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