

# NARRATIVE ESSAYS



# APRIL BUBLITZ

## You May Not Have a Tomorrow

I have never been a person who would “Stop to smell the Roses”. I was always the person who was too busy or had more important things to do with her time. I would often put these things off until “tomorrow”, but tomorrow would never really come. During this time, I was a young mother with a plate full of chores and errands that needed to get done. I also held a full time job, making my life even busier. I had this sense of urgency that everything needed to be done right that second or it would never get done. For me, it was always the dishes needed to be done or the laundry needed to be folded and put away. Feeling this sense of urgency left one of the most important things in my life, my son, to be pushed aside until “tomorrow”. I’ll take him to the park tomorrow, or I will ride bikes with him tomorrow. After all, he wasn’t going anywhere. So, I thought, what’s another day? It wasn’t until that summer day at the gas station with my son Devan that I finally asked myself and realized what if there wasn’t another day.

I had just finished pumping gas, and I quickly got Devan out of the car. We hurried towards the front doors. As I opened the door to walk in, I was overwhelmed by the fresh aroma of coffee brewing. I quickly scanned the inside of the store to make sure water is what I wanted. The bottles of water were located in the coolers along the back wall. The quickest way to get there was to walk down the candy-filled aisle. I knew he would want something as he always does, but there was no time to sit there and wait for him to pick out a piece of candy. Sometimes, it would take him five minutes or longer to choose something. All I could think about was getting in and out of the store as quickly as possible. We still had a long list of errands that

needed to get done. As we walked down the aisle, I could see Devan's eyes getting bigger and bigger. *Poor kid*, I thought to myself, *having to be tempted by all this candy*. Finally, we made it to the water coolers at the back of the store. I was standing there peering into the cooler door when I felt a little tug at my shirt. I looked down.

"Mommy, I want candy!" Devan said.

"Okay, but you have to hurry and pick something; we have a lot of things to do today," I replied.

I grabbed the bottle of water and headed back to the candy aisle, so Devan could pick something out. As I watched him trying to stretch his little fingers to the upper shelf for that pack of gum, I asked, "Would you like Mommy to get that for you buddy?"

He looked at me with a huge smile on his face and said, "Yes, Mommy".

I grabbed the pack of gum, and we proceeded to the checkout counter. The young woman smiled at us and began to ring us up. Devan was standing patiently and quietly beside me, waiting for his pack of gum.

Then, all of a sudden, I felt his little fingers slipping away from my hand. As he quickly let go, he grabbed the gum off from the counter and ran towards the double glass doors. They were just a few feet from us. As I slowly turned my head to see him, I noticed a large, black SUV out of the corner of my eyes. The SUV was slowly pulling up to the pumps right outside those two double doors. I could hear the clinking sound that the change made hitting the counter, as I quickly turned and ran after Devan. I felt the weight of these imaginary cinder blocks slowing me down as I tried to reach Devan before he made it through the doors. Everything was happening in slow motion; the doors seemed like a mile away. *Tha thump ....tha thump...* my heart started beating so fast and loud. *Was I going to make it to my son before he ran out that door?* I could see the doors slowly open and his little body slide through them. Just as the door

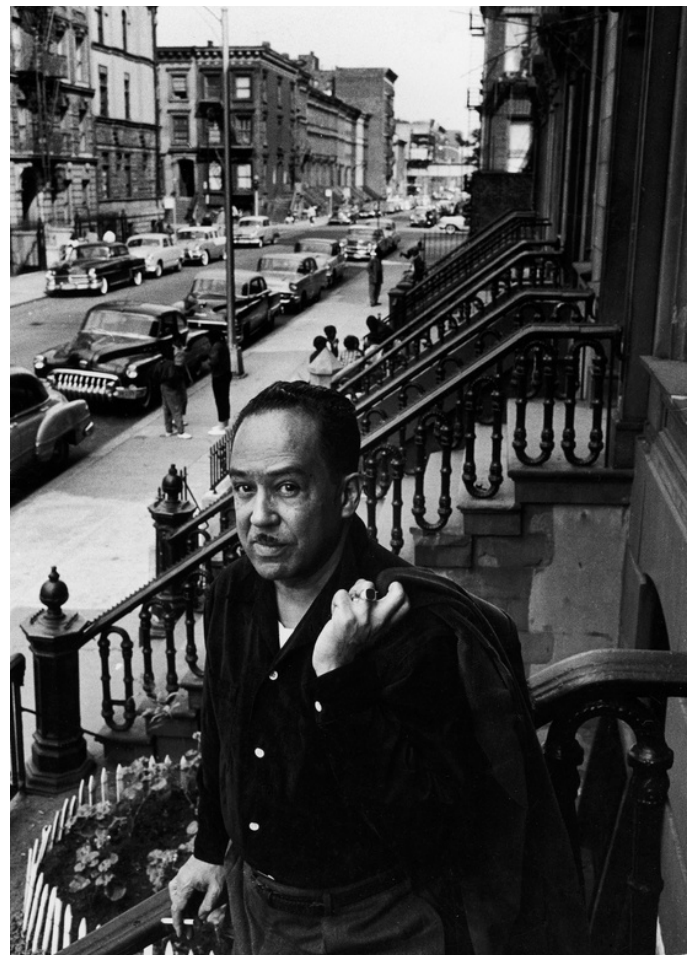
was about to close, I slid through. I stretched out my arms, lunging forward, just barely reaching the collar of his shirt. I then pulled him back towards me just seconds before the SUV came to a stop inches in front of us. As I stood there trembling, my eyes filling with tears, I looked up at the driver. She looked as frightened as I was. She had never seen Devan. I looked back down at him as he started to cry. This wasn't because he was scared, but because his candy had fallen from his hand. It was now under the SUV. In a shaky voice, I said, "Can you please back up, so I can get his candy?" She smiled back at me and backed up a few feet. I bent down to grab the pack of gum, and I picked Devan up. As soon as I felt him in my arms, the tears started pouring down my face.

What had just happened?

As I sat crying, all I could think about was what if that car would have hit and killed my son? What if I wouldn't be able to hold him, kiss him, or tickle his cute little toes anymore? What if I wouldn't be able to hear his laughter or see the goofy little faces he loved to make? Those questions scared me to death. I didn't want to think about all of the what ifs. That's when I knew 'tomorrow' isn't a for sure thing. The realization of not having a tomorrow with my son is when I truly realized how little time I had actually spent with him. I was always too busy with the less important things. That day I was given a second chance to make my son, one of the most important things in my life, a priority.

During the busy times in my life, I often think about that day and remind myself what is truly important. If I can't live tomorrow without it, then it's something that needs to be done today. I remind myself to live for today and not for tomorrow. The dishes can wait, the laundry can wait, but spending time with my loved ones can't wait.

# LANGSTON HUGHES



# "Salvation"

I was saved from sin when I was going on thirteen. But not really saved. It happened like this. There was a big revival at my Auntie Reed's church. Every night for weeks there had been much preaching, singing, praying, and shouting, and some very hardened sinners had been brought to Christ, and the membership of the church had grown by leaps and bounds. Then just before the revival ended, they held a special meeting for children, "to bring the young lambs to the fold." My aunt spoke of it for days ahead. That night I was escorted to the front row and placed on the mourners' bench with all the other young sinners, who had not yet been brought to Jesus.

My aunt told me that when you were saved you saw a light, and something happened to you inside! And Jesus came into your life! And God was with you from then on! She said you could see and hear and feel Jesus in your soul. I believed her. I had heard a great many old people say the same thing and it seemed to me they ought to know. So I sat there calmly in the hot, crowded church, waiting for Jesus to come to me.

The preacher preached a wonderful rhythmical sermon, all moans and shouts and lonely cries and dire pictures of hell, and then he sang a song about the ninety and nine safe in the fold, but one little lamb was left out in the cold. Then he said: "Won't you come? Won't you come to Jesus? Young lambs, won't you come?" And he held out his arms to all us young sinners there on the mourners' bench. And the little girls cried. And some of them jumped up and went to Jesus right away. But most of us just sat there.

A great many old people came and knelt around us and prayed, old women with jet-black faces and braided hair, old men with work-gnarled hands. And the church sang a song about the lower lights are burning, some poor sinners to be saved. And the whole building rocked with prayer and song.

Still I kept waiting to *see* Jesus.

Finally all the young people had gone to the altar and were saved, but one boy and me. He was a rounder's son named Westley. Westley and I were surrounded by sisters and deacons praying. It was very hot in the church, and getting late now. Finally Westley said to me in a whisper: "God damn! I'm tired o' sitting here. Let's get up and be saved." So he got up and was saved.

Then I was left all alone on the mourners' bench. My aunt came and knelt at my knees and cried, while prayers and song swirled all around me in the little church. The whole congregation prayed for me alone, in a mighty wail of moans and voices. And I kept waiting serenely for Jesus, waiting, waiting - but he didn't come. I wanted to see him, but nothing

# BRADY UDALL

## ONE LIAR'S BEGINNINGS

Before all else, let me make my confession: I am a liar. For me, admitting to being a liar is just about the most difficult confession I could make; as a rule, liars don't like to admit to anything. But I'm trying to figure out how I came to be this way—what influences, what decisions at what forked roads have led me to be the devious soul I am today. And as any clergyman worth a nickel can tell you, before you can discover the truth about yourself, first you must confess.

I can't say I remember the first lie I ever told. It's been so long, and there have been so many lies in between. But I can only believe that my first steps, first day of school, first kiss—all those many firsts we love to get so nostalgic about—none of them was in any way as momentous as that first lie I ever told. It's a dusty summer day. I am three years old, and in the Udall household there is going to be hell to pay; some fool has gone and eaten all the cinnamon Red-Hots my mother was going to use to decorate cupcakes for a funeral luncheon.

Down in the basement, I am bumping the back of my head against the cushion of the couch. This peculiar habit, *head-bouncing* as we called it in the house, was something I liked to do whenever I was nervous or bored. I was most satisfied with the world when I could sit on that couch and bounce my head against the back cushion—you know, really get up a good rhythm, maybe a little Woody Woodpecker on the TV—and not have anyone bother me about it. Along with worrying that their son might be retarded on some level, my parents also became concerned about the living room couch—all this manic head-bouncing of mine was wearing a considerable divot in the middle cushion (my preferred section) right down to the foam. So my father, after trying all he could think of to get me to desist, finally threw up his hands and went to the town dump and came back with a prehistoric shaggy brown couch that smelled like coconut suntan oil. He put it down in the basement, out of sight of friends and neighbors, and I was allowed to head-bounce away to my heart's content.

So there I am down on the couch, really going at it, while my mother stomps around up above. She is looking for the Red-Hots thief, and she is furious. My mother is beautiful, ever-smiling and refined, but when she is angry she could strike fear into the heart of a werewolf.

As for me, I am thoroughly terrified, though not too terrified to enjoy the last of the Red-Hots. I put them in my mouth and keep them there until they turn into a warm, red syrup that I roll around on my tongue.

My mother is yelling out all the kids' names: *Travis! Symonie! Brady! Cord!* But none of us is dumb enough to answer. Finally, she stomps down the steps and sees me there on my couch, bobbing back and forth like the peg on a metronome, trying not to look her way, hoping that if I can keep my eyes off her long enough she just might disappear.

"Brady, did you eat those Red-Hots?" she asks, her mouth set hard. I begin to bounce harder.

"Hmmm?" I say.

"Did you eat them?"

I imagine for a second what my punishment will be—maybe spending the rest of the afternoon cooped up in my room, maybe being forced to watch while the rest of the family hogs down the leftover cupcakes after dinner—or maybe she will have mercy on me and opt for a simple swat on the butt with a spatula.

"Did you eat them?"

I don't really think about it, don't even know where it comes from—I look my mother straight in the eye, say it loud and clear as you please: "No."

She doesn't press me, just takes my answer for what it is. Why would she suspect anything from me, a baby who's never lied before, innocent as can be, a sweet little angel who doesn't know any better than to spend all his free time banging his head against the back cushion of a couch from the dump.

"All right," she says, smiling just a little now. She can't help herself—I am that innocent and cute. "Why don't you come upstairs and have a cupcake?"

Right then I stop bouncing altogether. It feels as if there is a light blooming in my head, filling me up, giving me a sensation I've never had before, a feeling of potency and possibility and dominion. With a word as simple as "no" I can make things different altogether; no, it wasn't me who ate those Red-Hots; no, it's not me who deserves a swat on the butt or no cartoons for the rest of the afternoon. What I deserve is a cupcake.

It's a wonderful epiphany: with a lie I can change reality; with a lie I can change the world.

—*Transcribed from the 1999 collection **In Brief: Short Takes on the Personal**,*

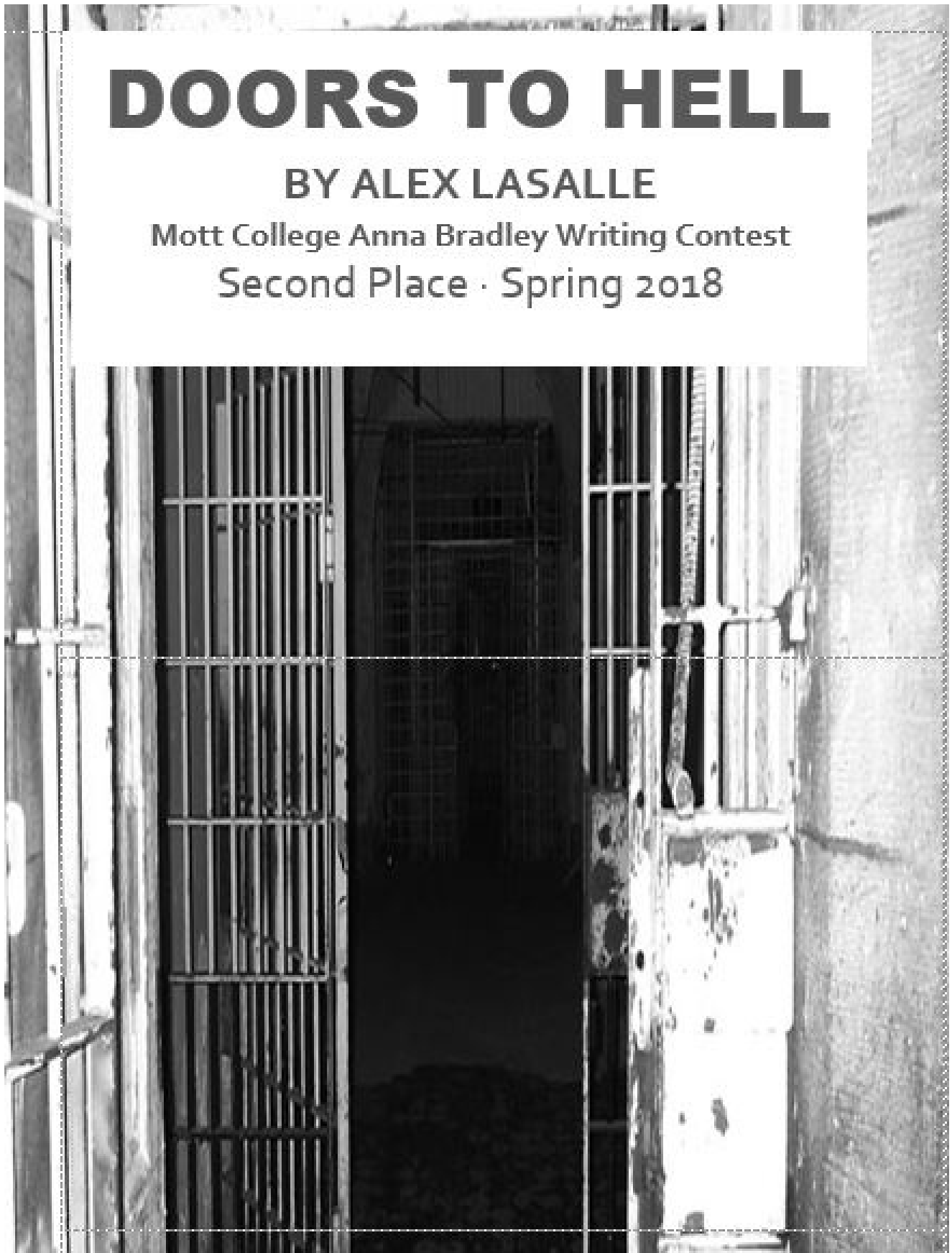


ALEX LASALLE

# DOORS TO HELL

BY ALEX LASALLE

Mott College Anna Bradley Writing Contest  
Second Place · Spring 2018



**Friday night**, an eight-year-old begs her mother to spend the night at friend's house; the answer is no. Friday afternoon, a year later, the now nine-year-old asks to go skating with friends; the answer is no. Fast forward two years on a Saturday afternoon: an eleven-year-old is invited to go a birthday party for her best friend; the answer is still no. For thirty-one months, the answer was no; predetermined plans, regulated visits, and metal detectors flooded my childhood rather than birthday parties, playmates, and fun.

It's Saturday morning. I am barely awake in mom's grey Ford beater rather than barely awake on the bright yellow school bus, which I would prefer. The green clock on the dash reads 6:45 am. I am thinking the same little line that I've thought for the last six months: three hours in a cramped car. Two kids shoving for room in that car, one visit every three weeks.

I try to sleep the whole way, but my brother's bony elbow rams itself into my ribs sometime around the one-hour mark. It stays there till we our reach destination: Cooper Street. Upon arriving to the cold, empty parking lot, the only thing visible is a giant brick building with barbed wire fences and rifle towers looming above us. It's 10 am, yet the grey fog makes it appear earlier and darker than it is. We crawl out of the stale air-filled beater. Mom starts the usual routine: "Check your pockets."

I fish through my little jean pockets with my chubby hands. I wouldn't have anything anyways; I wasn't old enough for a phone, but too old for toys. I knew the regulation.

"Birth certificates folded in the envelope... they are so tattered from doing this for the last year... we need to get the two of you new ones." My mom says this, to no one and all of us.

We walk into the imposing state prison, and I clutch my mom's hand, which is much thinner now. Nine years since I walked in, six years since I walked out. There should have been a sign: "Leave your childhood at

the gate. Leave your youth at the door."

The sliding, tinted glass doors could have been the double doors to hell, with warnings eye level to the eight-year-old me: no weapons, no drugs, no happiness. The doors whine open, as if they want to open as much as we want to be in.

Mom signs us in at the front desk directly in front of the door, writing out names, ages, gender, relation to inmate, and duration per visit; three hours is all we get. One hug upon arrival, one upon exit. That's it. No extras or exceptions. The guard that 'greet us' then checks my brother and my birth certificate to confirm that Brian Randle LaSalle is our biological father, Brian Randle LaSalle: inmate #686740, resident at Jackson.

The three of us sit in the quiet, grey waiting room on creaky metal chairs, sometimes up to two hours, waiting for the guards to process my father on the other side. Time flows like cold molasses; the only noise is the clicking of quarters from the machine in the corner. It cuts through the thickness of silence like a hot, steel knife. Another regulation: no paper money in the visiting room.

Suddenly, a deep, loud voice rings through the silence: "LaSalle!" One word has us running; whatever we are doing is dropped. *Finally, time to see dad! Finally, time to see dad!* As we filter in closer to the next set of sliding doors, I remember *the worst part is still to come. Dad will have to wait a few more minutes, long stressful minutes.*

After we settle into the brightly colored confined space -- plastic blue chairs around tiny card tables -- dad offers to "make us lunch". One by one, we walk to the vending machines with various sandwiches and ice creams. Dad lets me get anything I want out of the vending machines, when mom would only allow one or two items.

This is his parenting time: him helping me reach the chicken sandwiches on the top rows of the vending machine and snickering about what ice cream I

want to try this week.

Tonight, I will have mom's parenting time: She will read my homework to me; she will harp on me to eat my vegetables; and she will tuck me in. All the things I wish my dad could do, but he can't. Behind bars, his parenting is permissive. He means well. But honestly, no one can truly be a parent from behind bars.

Visits end too soon; fun times pass in what feels like seconds, and dreaded seconds last hours in our minds. Before I know it, I'm hugging my dad goodbye, and more than once my mother has to peel me off of him. Every time I let go, I feel like part of me is being locked away, too. My childhood lived in that prison with him, locked away with my father in still photos and metal cages.

As I ride home each time, these thoughts consume me: three more weeks, two more car rides, and -- hopefully -- only one more goodbye.



# JACKIE CERVANTES



Illuminate

It was mid February winter. The air so crisp; clouds formed with every breath taken. I had just arrived to my house after a long and exhausting day at work. Parked in my driveway, I stayed in my car: my radio on full blast to the sound of “Asleep” by The Smiths. I inhaled inward then outward, taking a deep breath, inhaling vanilla bean car air-freshener.

I tried to hold back the burning tears forming on my chocolate brown eyes. Overwhelmed by my emotions, I was ready to call it quits. Dealing with a rude middle age woman that threw every cuss word in the book at me for store policies that I can not control to being a full time worker to juggling school and trying to maintain a social life. At times, everything got too overwhelming — even for a young adult. I’m trapped in an endless life cycle. Pretending to have everything together because a twenty- year-old is too young to have a mental breakdown; it’s exhausting. The older generation would say that I have it *easy*.

*I can't. I can't get bad again. Not again, Jackie,* the voice in my head begged. Begged for me not to fall into the empty, black hole I’ve once fallen before. I took another deep breath; I looked up. The night sky reflected the darkness that once controlled me. The darkness that gave me no motivation to do the things I love. The darkness that made basic tasks like sleeping, eating, and showering an endless struggle. The darkness I’ve been battling since the seventh

grade. The darkness that made me question myself as a living, breathing, human. The darkness that checked me into therapy.

Depression.

My gaze never broke from the night sky as my thoughts consumed me. Everything seemed so dark, scary... empty. The darkness and I never got along; we were enemies. The emptiness and coldness consumed my tortured thoughts. A feeling I was far too familiar with. The night made me uneasy. It was *too* quiet. I never imagined silence to be so loud.

My eyes wandered the sky but were drawn to the big cylinder: the moon. That night the moon was shining brighter than other nights, rounder than ever, too. I gazed in amazement, looking at the grey ball up at the sky, illuminating the night. I questioned if the moon ever got lonely the way I do, even though there are hundreds of moons that look just like it but farther away in different planets. Jupiter has eventy-nine known moons.

My curiosity grew the longer I stared at the moon: Is it hollow and empty on the inside the way I feel inside about myself, or is it strong — full of an iron core after everything it's been through? Does the moon get insecure by the crests on its surface, or does it proudly flaunt its imperfections like an astronaut's steps forever imprinted on its surface? Does the silence of space make the moon uneasy, too? To be left alone at night with its own ongoing thoughts as well?

“Don't feel bad for me.” The lyrics from the ongoing song in the background murmured in the distance. Almost making it seem like the moon was talking to me. I felt sorry for the moon. For being alone, for being so different. To be consumed by the voices in its head like mine. To battle it out alone.

Then something inside me sparked.

Meteors often attack the moon, and it still stands, the same way life throws obstacles at me, and yet, and yet, *I still stand.*

My eyes shifted towards the star that stood beside the moon: the North Star. Keeping the moon company from the lonely, cold night. In a way, I found comfort in the moon having the star right by its side. I scanned the night sky, admiring the hundreds and thousands of stars. Some brighter than others, some with shades of blues and purples. While others flashed at one another sharing conversations among themselves. I never saw the night sky more ~~alive~~. The moon wasn't alone.

It never was.

The moon was surrounded by thousands of stars. Some closer to the moon than others, but they were still there for the moon. The moon didn't stand alone in the cold, lonely night. The night was loud and awake. They all worked together to illuminate the night sky.

I was wrong.

Just like the moon, I wasn't alone either. Times get tough; everyone shares a darkness within themselves, but no one is ever alone. The moon has the stars like I have my family and friends to guide me through my darkness. They illuminate me when things get hard.

I smiled up at the sky, taking in every inch of its beauty. For once, the darkness wasn't so bothersome but instead — peaceful.

“There is a better world.” The song's verse took me by surprise. A line so simple but full of meaning, and truth, and *hope*. The darkness will not last forever. Eventually, the moon will go to sleep, and the sun will rise and illuminate for me to try again. I found security-- comfort -- in the sky that night. Admiring the depths of space, our galaxy, how enormous it is, and yet... I am here. Alive.

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KIM COOMBS

# Reflection in the Rain Drenched Window



**BY KIMBERLY COOMBS**

Mott College • Anna Bradley Writing Contest

First Place

Spring 2018



## *Sometimes the clearest reflections*

come from those who are inside looking out. Most of what I was seeing out that small apartment window was diffused by the large droplets of rain. I was searching and struggling to see what was outside. Much like life, all of us search and struggle to see what is outside. What we sometimes overlook is the reflection right in front of us.

Here I was, once again, sitting quietly, relaxing in my oversized comfy chair peering out the window of my small one-bedroom apartment thinking about life. It was a dark and dreary day. I was anticipating the pending storm as I observed the clouds doubling up on each other menacingly. Moments passed in expectation until finally the rain cascaded down from the heavens to earth. I could hear the rain tap dancing against the window as it fell steadily sideways. I longed for spring and the refreshing newness that spring rains bring. This was the first rain after a long winter. Suddenly, a clash of thunder sent my heart pounding. It sounded as if a thousand arrows were hitting the ground as the fight continued between winter and spring. Spring was winning.

Absorbed with what was going on outside, I was almost oblivious to what was happening inside. The hands on the rooster clock in the kitchen were moving slowly forward towards the hour. One second felt like a minute. One minute felt like an hour. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. There was laughing coming from the upstairs apartment, then thud, thud, thud. The six-month-old was having too much fun bouncing up and down in his baby jumper. An aroma of salted caramel filled the air from a candle sitting on the table next to me. Its flickering flame was mesmerizing.

My nine-month-old cat Jack, black and white, green eyes, frisky, very sweet and tolerant, cuddly and chubby, is my best bud. He was my entertainment for the night as he ran around meowing and chasing invisible bugs. Then my attention was again drawn outside.

The rain was slowing, now softly falling to the ground with a little pitter patter. An occasional car zoomed by on the two-lane road of M15. The wet road looked as if there were diamonds spread all over it from the reflections of the headlights. Beyond the road and past the railroad tracks sits the best pizza place in town: Cardinals' Pizza. Eleven outdoor lights lit up the side of the building, shining down like a theatre stage. The sky was awash with various shades of grey that descended to black as the showery gloomy day turned to dusk. Soon, all I could make out was the twenty-five-foot green pine tree and the silhouette of rabbits on top of my metal bird feeder.

Until something caught my eye.

What I didn't notice before while looking outside was right there before me in the mirror-like reflection in the window. An older woman. She had long dark brown hair that looked like it was greying at the crown of her head. It was messy and pinned back with hair clips. Black reading glasses were perched at the bridge of her nose. She was peering over them and seemed to be staring out the same window I was. Her clothing was far from glamorous: frumpy, bland, and colorless. Grey sweat pants, grey shirt, and grey sweater.

Her body was aging. Possibly a few more extra pounds than what she wanted. Although there were sparse wrinkles on her face, every wrinkle, every line, had a memory in it. The corners of her mouth bowed downward as if she couldn't muster the strength to smile any longer. Still there was a proud carriage shown in her sagging jawline.

Her eyes looked sad as though she had endured too much suffering and was tired of fighting life. Yet, there was strength and wisdom in those baby blues.

She had an aura of loneliness and seemed to be in deep thought. Perhaps reflecting on her life and the lessons it taught her? That she looked to people outside of herself to feel important? That she lived her life to be the selfless wife, the best mother, the dutiful daughter, the enduring friend? To meet everyone's needs before her own so they would love her? Perhaps, all she ever wanted was to be truly loved and accepted, but in the process, lost what mattered the most: her authentic self. Over the years, it seems she neglected to reflect on who she was and what she wanted. Her desires. Her needs. Her due.

Yet, that night, as the storm drew to a close, the woman in the window quit looking outside, and finally noticed herself. She leaned in, rubbed the glass clear, and fully appraised her reflection. It was a beautiful face. Yes, an aging face, but also a knowing one. And so, the woman sighed, leaned back in her oversized comfy chair and did what she hadn't in far too long -- smiled.

# JEREMY YARBROUGH



## Positive Fear

Bears. Mountain Lions. Alone. Miles, maybe days, from the closest source of help. For most folks, the thought of those cause fear to shoot through their bodies like a cold winter wind. The year is 2007, and I have set out to conquer my own fears by going deep into the Maroon Bells Snowmass Wilderness Area in West Central Colorado. This unforgiving area is filled with jagged, snow capped mountains, two soaring over 14,000 feet. Valleys are choked with golden aspens and towering lodge pole pines. Rivers that start as a mere trickle up high rush with the force to kill in the valleys below. Until now, my fears have held me back from pursuing a life long goal.

Early one morning in late August, I step out of my cozy vehicle in front of the dilapidated Marble General Store. The cold forty degree air takes the breath out of me as I walk up the creaky steps. There on the rustic, worn out porch, sit two intimidating cowboys peering at me through the shadows of their soiled cowboy hats. I was hoping that neither of these men were my jeep guide, when one of them broke the cold, eerie silence.

“Are you Jeremy?” says one fellow.

“Yes sir.” I apprehensively shout.

“I hope you got a gun,” says the other fellow.

“Why’s that?” I ask.

“Early frost up high, bears sure are hungry. But they should be down in the low country.”

Hopefully, I think, as we climb into the rusted jeep. For the next shivering three hours we make our way up the narrow, rock lined jeep road to my destination of 11,000 feet. At that point, my nine ounce can of bear spray seems quite insufficient to stop a hungry, powerful bear.

Within minutes, the cowboy and his worn out jeep pull away, taking with them the only civilization I would know for the next eight days. As the deafening silence settles in like thick fog, I look around in amazement and disbelief at the absolute vastness of this country. I slowly ease up the trail on the leeward side of Silver Creek Pass, a rocky saddle between two knife edged peaks. The instant I summit the pass, the cold wind bites my exposed face. With watery eyes, I look north at my intended route. Cliffs. Boulders. Snow. Absolute vastness. My heart skips a beat as I pull out my creased map from my sweat soaked pants. As I survey my options, I realize plan B isn't suppose to happen this early. With evening approaching, I rush to find a flat spot for my tent among the undulating terrain of my surroundings. I have spent many nights in the wilderness, but never alone in bear country.

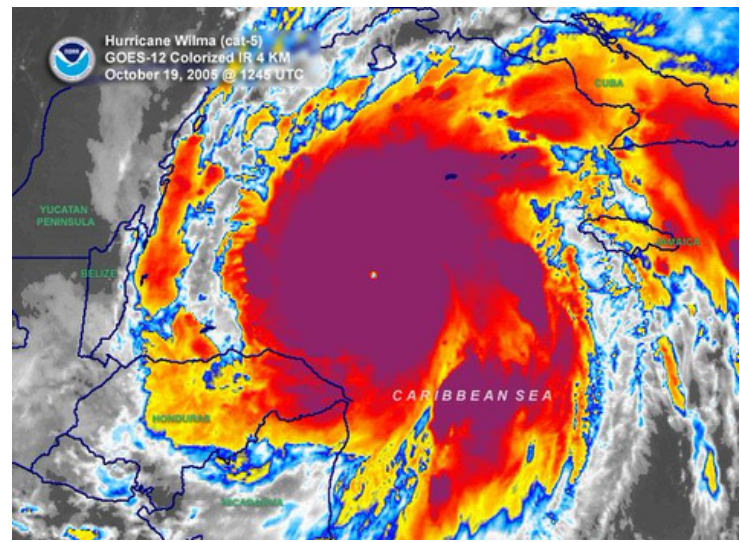
“What was that?” I say to myself as I abruptly sit up, my ears ringing with eerie silence as I struggle to grab my knife and bear spray. I slowly pry back the paper thin door on my tent as my fingers tighten around my knife. Within seconds, my flashlight lightens up the oil like darkness surrounding me, bringing with it a false sense of security. Shadows dance across the jagged boulders as I frantically scan the area immediately around me, looking for what had made that noise. Minutes slowly tick away as the night rolls on. Finally, the eastern sky turns a dull pinkish color, signaling my security. With bags under my eyes, I quickly pack up camp to try  
~~and put some country between me and my potential visitor.~~

With the sun low in the eastern sky, I begin my upward hike towards Avalanche Pass. Once I reach this grassy pass at 12,000 feet, the sun has made its journey across the ocean blue sky. With a thump, I plop down, my listless arms force up my binoculars to my weary eyes.

Bull elk. Mountain goats. Mule deer. All of these fill my binoculars and my body with a boost of adrenalin. I feel like a weightless eagle soaring high above the rugged mountain tops. My own fears have held me back for too long. However, today is a much different day, a new beginning of sorts. The state of euphoria I feel at this precise moment allows me to see the positive side of fear. My heart swells with pride. Until this point, my biggest fear so far was something I thought had four legs; however, that feeling is about to change.

Mighty bolts of lighting crash all around me. Thunderous booms rattle my body. Boulders explode with the enormous energy that lighting brings to the earth. Ferocious wind. Tent - destroying hail. I huddle on top of my pack to try and insulate myself from the earth. Thoughts of my family flash through my mind. My meager one man tent is no match for this storm as it yields over and hits me upon my head. I have always enjoyed watching lighting storms, but this is much different. I plead for mercy! I am sweating. "Please stop," I yell! Finally, the storm fades harmlessly over the eastern peaks. I lay there feeling battered, but accomplished too.

As I sit upon a wind swept ridge top watching an eagle soar below, I realize the obstacle I have courageously conquered. Until now, my own fears have held me back from pursuing some of my dreams. But from my new perspective, I realize that fear makes us sharp and alert, therefore more responsive. It has the power to turn a situation into a tragedy or a triumphant statement of human spirit.



## Wilma, Full Throttle!

The warnings were out, and the coolers were stocked full of food and water. Every house on Florida's deserted streets was boarded up. Normally in the past, a hurricane warning meant no school, and no work. I got butterflies every time the tiniest swirl of clouds appeared on the Doppler radar. It was like a kid in a candy store. You could say that I was ignorant, but I knew no different. Every hurricane that I had ever been through was a *breeze*. Slight winds and no power for a day didn't bother me in the slightest. I never thought that feeling would change, but it did. When it was announced that Hurricane Wilma was coming, my butterflies fluttered. After she arrived, each butterfly died; one by one. As I think back to that whirlwind of a day, I am reminded of my maturity, And how grateful I am to be alive.

It was Sunday October 23, 2005. There was a slight breeze filling the air outside. The trees were swaying in harmony. Inside my house, I was sitting on the couch listening intently to the reporter on TV. I wanted to catch his every word. I was ecstatic for this particular storm. His warnings were harsh. *Stay indoors?* I thought. *It's only a category 1. What are 75 mph winds gonna do? Georges and Irene were a lot stronger than that and they didn't even cause a flood.* My dad jerked me out of my daydream and told me to go to bed. I went, but I didn't sleep. I lay

on my bed for what seemed like hours listening to the soft 35mph winds hitting the house. Before I knew it, her coos drifted me off to sleep.

CRACK! WHOOSH! BANG! I heard it in my sleep, and woke with a start. I jumped off my bed. *It was finally here!* I thought, as I bellowed "sweet!" and ran out of my room. As I reached the back door, I realized how unsweet it was. The rain was falling sideways, and my mind went into a tailspin. *This is weird.* I thought nervously. *It's worse than they said.* I felt like a balloon was deflating inside of me. Putting that aside, I glanced at the clock in the kitchen. The red numbers told me it was 3:10 in the morning. Just then, a flash of green light and a loud static hum filled the blurry night sky. The power went out. I jumped away from the door as my mom and dad came rushing out of their room.

"What was that?" shrieked my mom.

"I think a transformer blew up!" I said back, straining to see her through the darkness. My voice was nervous. *Could I be getting cold feet? Uh uh, I'm going outside.* So, without thinking, I walked to the door, and wrenched it open. The gust of wind was so strong that it snatched the door from my grip, and swung it open. It swung violently around, almost hitting me in the face. *This was, by far, not a category one.*

As I stepped onto the porch, my balance was thrown off. The rush of the wind whipped my hair and clothes around like a rag doll in a washing machine. The smell of saltwater clung to my nose as I watched things fly past me. Branches, cars, and even carports flew by as if they were weightless. I was stunned. This was all new to me. There was so much debris. As my mom beckoned me inside, a huge something fell right where I had been standing. *This is not cool. I could have just died.* I remember thinking. Suddenly, Mrs. "I'm so brave" became frightened. I



was scared for my family, and for myself.

Wilma had more dirty tricks as the night plummeted on. Within two hours of each other, both ficus trees in my yard fell over causing a lot of damage. The house shook violently every so often, (although it could have been my nerves) and made me jump. I glanced outside from time to time, and noticed that visibility was worsening. I just wanted it all to stop.

After a few fingernail biting hours later, I was sitting with my little sister on the couch. We were listening to the howls and jeers of the wind outside. The noises were magnified 100 times in my head. As I sat there holding her, I realized how fragile our lives were, and thanked God for them. *How could I have been so stupid to want a hurricane to come?* As I thought this, she turned around and asked if we were going to die. "I hope not!" I answered, and somehow I knew that we would survive. God gave me strength to comfort my sissy, and the wits to know how to be sensible. I would no longer be ignorant.

Wilma stopped around 11:00 on Monday morning. She had become a category 3, seconds before she hit. 62 people died in this storm, but we were alive. We were out of power for a month, but we were safe. That's all that matters to me now; my family and their safety. Forget the excitement, forget the rush. I'm just thankful to have survived that terrible storm. God and I now have a pact; it's to never be so childish and naïve again. I've stuck to this pact, and it has helped me overcome fears that I never knew I could overcome. I guess it could be said, I have the power of a hurricane inside of me!

# MARK FISHER

## Toting Guns

A faint stench of pollution taps at my senses, trying to tug me back to reality. I resist, hold on to my sleep. I'm dreaming of home again, and my first true love. An old shotgun. Mossburg, bolt action. Big as a fence post and twice as heavy. I see myself in the autumn sun, joyfully romping through the woods with Buford, a hunting dog of some mixed breed

A speeding semi rattles past on the dirty Detroit streets below, taking with it the last of my sleep and dreams of home sweet home. Opening my eyes, I see the four faded walls of home this week. A forty dollar per week sleeping room above a 24 hour diner in southwest Detroit. My hand reassuringly grips the cold piece of steel beside my bed. An unforgiving Raven .25 caliber pistol has replaced the beloved shotgun of my youth.

*What am I even doing here?* Weighs heavy on my mind, as the black heart of addiction pumps an icky thump, twisting my guts into a subtle reminder. King heroin opens his yellow, festered eyes and commands.

"You know that raw over on Dexter sent a junkie to the morgue last night."

*Mmmm, must be good, my poisoned mind ponders.*

Cash is my immediate concern. What should I do? Not going back to Mid-West Wire working all day for peanuts. I could call "D" and earn \$20 on the \$100 peddling poison out on Michigan ave. Go load trucks with ice and scale fish over in the Eastern market, or just say forget it all and head home, my real home in Tuscola county. It's November, and maybe this is the year I shoot that big buck. Easing from beneath the crumpled blankets, I try not to wake what's her name? Yeah, Sue. Knew she

was trouble when she picked me up hitchhiking on John-R.

I say a silent goodbye to Sue, Mid-west Wire, and Southwest Detroit. Shoveling my pile of dirty clothes into my faded army duffel, I stay vigilant for the cleanest of the bunch for the long cold trip ahead. Glancing into the mirror, I see my thin, shabby reflection. Then peering closer into the bullet hole blasted by some idiot prior, shooting right <sup>through</sup> the paper thin wall into the neighbor's next door, I see him in there drinking his breakfast from a paper bag, waiting for his turn to die.

Man this is hell, the sum total of every bad idea, wrong choice and mistake I've made in my life. They all tried to warn me: Watch your actions, boy, they become your character. Watch your character, son, my poor mother cried. It becomes your destiny. This can't be my destiny. I'm going home and hug my mother, find that shotgun under a mattress or back of the closet, and go hunting.

It's a two hour drive by car from where I'm standing, but with luck I'll make the trip in 6-8 on foot. First thing, hop a city bus as far out into the suburbs as I can get and then start thumbing.

Moving to Detroit appeared like beginning an exciting new chapter in my life. I was twenty one, honorably discharged from the Navy, expeditionary medal earned in Beirut. I easily found work, yet in hindsight I see the flaw in my plan. Cheap rent on 8 mile and John-R might have saved a buck, but it cost my soul.

By evening light, I'd made it to my mother's driveway. Dirty, tired, and hungry, but it didn't matter to me. They love me here, and I haven't seen a genuine smile in too long. Mother is happy yet nervous. Her years give her insight my youth lacks. Grandpa scolds, yet smiles himself. I'm home; who knows for how long, but tonight I'm home in Clifford

Morning found me mentally happy, but physically ill. Nothing drastic, like kicking on concrete in a precinct bull pen. I was fine for now, having coffee with grandpa, and I can still hear the old man's lecture.

"Boy, you can't do wrong and get by for very long. If they don't get you down here, they'll get

you up there."

His words burned, and I knew that deep down he was right. Yet, some power or force still held control over my mind and rational thought process. Whispering little lies to my heavy heart.

*This time will be different.*

But it never could be. Truth is, I was street poisoned and involved in a deadly game of cat and mouse. Addiction is a disease where the very poison that is killing you is the very thing your brain, body, and being is crying out for. Pleading for just a taste or touch of relief. The second you give in, you have lost control and are right back in the squirrel cage addiction will keep you inside, for as long as you believe in lies.

The human being is capable of adapting to almost any environment or situation, yet can be held captive by substances if giving them control. All we seek is happiness, then why look for it in such obscene places?

In reality, nothing outside ourselves can ever give us lasting joy. It must always come from within. Everything we need is already there if we seek. There is nothing greater, more successful, or holier within the most accomplished or saintly of humans that isn't also within each of us. But forget not, the opposite of this fact is true as well. There is nothing in the lowest of sinners or deviant of derelicts that isn't there, too.

It's as if there are two wolves, one good, one evil, fighting within us each for control. Which one shall win, you wonder?

Which ever one you feed.