

Eastern Illinois
Writing Project

2008-2010

Creative Writings Anthology

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Sue Fuller - The Canvas

"I'm sorry" she carved into the canvas
with a shard of broken glass

For what is she sorry? I wonder when I find it
It could be that she called that boy again,
the one who is too old for her

It might be that she was mean to a friend
and wants to make amends

Maybe she smart-mouthed her mother
as 13-year-olds tend to do

She repeats Van Gogh's story

An artist full of pain and mystery

While I wonder about her apology

and consider that I may never comprehend its meaning

What I really struggle to understand is

Why must her arm be the canvas?

Patty Hawkins - Changin' Tides

He enjoys true leisure who has time to improve his soul's estate.

Henry David Thoreau

http://www.quotationpage.com/quotes/Henry_David_Thoreau/1

Relaxed, towel draped over my chaise
Feelin' fine, sittin' in the warm sun
Beads of perspiration slowly movin' down my entire body
Mind energized and spirit enthusiastic

Acquirin' immense pleasure in readin' and writin'
Just me and my thoughts – merged with Thoreau, LaHaye,

Jenkins, and the news of the day
...Other thoughts creepin' in...
Keepin' busy – WOW! – understatement of the year

Need to depart to a place where...
I will not be as happy as I am now
A place where the wind is quiet and
Where beads of perspiration will more quickly move down my entire body

All this domesticity – NOT my favorite obsession
YUK! Dishes on the counter, along with food crumbs and

beautiful shapes of water rings
Circles, rectangular shapes with curved edges, blobs that look like tiny pools
But, I must...

Dig in and remove the dirty dishes from the counter,
Place them in the dishwasher, and
At that moment 'lysol' away the germs, muck, and crumbs
From the counter

However, for now it's just me and my pencil n' paper
Sometimes they are my best friends
Waitin'...
No talkin' back

They place no demands on me for my time or attention
Patiently restin' there and
Waitin' for me
Like minutemen, they are ready to go on a moment's notice

Writin' is comfortin', like a soft, warm blanket on a cool, fall day
Also, cleansin' – riddin' me of frustrations, stress, and weariness
I must continue
To write

Christy Hild - TJ MAXX: There is a strategy.

FOREWORD

In this little treasure of a book, I will offer you a glimpse into the world of bargain hunting and rock-bottom, rock-on G.S. (Insider's Lingo: Good Stuff.) My sister and I have been perfecting these techniques for years – decades, really, but I don't want to brag – of shopping excursions. We are professional deal hunters, in every sense of the word. We make it our business to scour Goodwill racks and Target clearance bins the world over in the hopes of sharing money-saving strategies to honest, hard-working trendsetters such as you. (We realize many of you trendsters also happen to be broke, but we like to emphasize the *positive!*, so we label our type: *More Creative and Stylish Than Resources Currently Allow.*)

The first concept you must understand and accept is there are different rules for each shopping venue. Just as one would not behave in a McDonald's the same way he or she would act at The Four Seasons, you cannot assume the shopping experience at Marshall's can be executed with the same strategies as The Salvation Army Store. That being said, in this first essay we will closely examine the rules and guidelines for shopping one of our favorite destinations for deals: TJ MAXX. We will call this lesson:

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TJ MAXX: There is a strategy.

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RULE ONE: The Cart

Plainly, you must never touch a cart until you have located and secured the first bargain. Touching a cart when you first enter the store would be similar to an Olympic sprinter taking the starter's gun and shooting himself in the foot immediately before the race. This cart-touching jinx is a serious rule to which the serious shopper must adhere; otherwise, you might as well exit now and proceed directly to Bloomingdales.

RULE TWO: The Bathroom

I think it is the excitement caused by anticipating the unlimited bargain potential of TJ MAXX, because each time we enter, Mandy must immediately proceed to the dirty public restrooms available to customers. Likely, this call of nature will occur within the first twenty seconds after entering, but occasionally, we will get all the way through the purse section before

her stench starts clearing the aisles. This is good for more than just superstition, ladies. In fact, it gets that bitch away from the Clearance-Priced Coach bag you were both eyeing.

If you do not have a sister possessing the same intestinal skill as mine, I would suggest investing in some fart spray. This will create the same aisle-clearing

effect, therefore leaving you to sort through Spode China without that annoying bargain-shopping-POSER peering over your shoulder.

RULE THREE: The Order

As tempting as it may be to proceed directly to the _____ (fill in the blank according to need) Section, STOP YOURSELF. We have found many mistakes made by less experienced shoppers occur within this guideline. In ignoring this rule, you are basically forfeiting deals that will be stolen out from under your noses by more dedicated shoppers. You DO NOT want that to happen. (It gets ugly at check-out.) SOOOOO, Always, always (repeat after me) ALWAYS follow this pattern:

Perimeter, then Interior = SUPERIOR! (Repeat...Good.)

Now that you have the rule down (and I suggest continued practice), here's what we mean. You must work the perimeter of the store first. In the majority of TJs, that means you start in the purses, work your way through lingerie, to shoes, (even though it's tempting, DO NOT skip directly to the clearance shoes), continuing your journey through baby and children, leading directly to home goods, to men's, then gift sets, and finally the cash wrap end caps, which will lead you back to the starting point.

Only then are you allowed to begin scouring the women's and junior's departments (and I use that term loosely – it has too much of a Nordstrom's ring), aisle by aisle. (Again, please repeat those key lines: AISLE by AISLE.) Will you skip ahead of your sister who seems entirely too interested in the cashmere argyle vest for July? NO! Will you think to yourself, *Oh, I don't need any professional attire, so I'm going to prance on over to the cute sundresses in the Junior's department?* NO! You are a soldier who has been trained for duty, and YOU. WILL. BROWSE. EVERY. AISLE.

Now, if this seems too much for you, I suggest you come back when your finances are a bit tighter. You clearly have extraneous income to squander, so why dedicate yourself to such a process? Leave it for the little people and stroll down to Macys, why don't you? Now, little people, read on:

RULE FOUR: Think GIFTS!

Of *course* you don't need a size 12 *BCBG Girls* Python-Patterned 4" Stacked Stiletto...But wouldn't it be an *amazing* gift for your friend's cousin, Bertha? This commendable thought process is the mindset of the true bargain shopper. Always get the good deal and MAKE it work for someone!

This policy is extremely handy when you get to that delightful little aisle we call Invitation Nation. A girl can only have so many note cards (my sister and I have both far exceeded our limits), but they make *PERFECT* gifts for: hostesses, brides, new moms, neighbors, college grads, creepy cousins, and that-girl-you-don't-really-like-but-have-to-kiss-up-to-at-work-in-order-to-use-the-good-copy-machine!

RULE FIVE: "You Can Always Return It..."

If you are hemming and hawing about a particular purchase with the age-old, "Should I?" or "Shouldn't I?" dilemma, let us solve your problem: YOU SHOULD. TJ MAXX remains a beacon of light in the fog of customer service decline surrounding us in modern society. You can basically return anything, with or without a receipt, as long as you have the tag. (And even THEN on occasion, a cool shop girl will feel your regret in purchasing those splatter-painted jeans you thought were SO on-trend and return them without a tag.) My point, people? Get it. There is no limit on the amount of time you can keep it, and TJ's tags haven't changed in years. They'll take it back if you change your mind. Heck, they'll take it back when you're ready to redecorate your house and the item no longer fits your décor. And as shoppers of OLE YORE always say, " 'Tis much better to have a messy closet full of "maybes" than 'tis suffer shopper's remorse." (Okay, we made that up.)

RULE SIX: The Good/Bad Dilemma

There is nothing quite like a dressing room full of potential. (Well, in this case you can only bring in six items at a time – TJ's only downfall, but we're in talks with corporate to fix this nagging characteristic.) All those deals waiting to be had! All those opportunities to improve your wardrobe, and in doing so, your place in the world!

We know, we've been there: You can just picture yourself telling funny jokes at the company Christmas party in that sassy satin skirt while sipping martinis and hobnobbing with retail-price shoppers. Or that angora cardigan – you just know it will catch the eye of John the ka-trillionaire president, who will whisk you away on a yacht to Belize, make you his wife, and

catapult you beyond retail to custom-made!!!

Then you start trying the stuff on, and you look more like your frumpy Great Aunt Barb.

While it's annoying when none of your hopefuls fit, be sure to keep in mind all the money you are saving. (Which is always the thrifty-trendsetter's goal.) Then fall back to Rule #4: THINK GIFTS! If it looks like shit on you AND there isn't anyone you could possibly buy it for, walk away. Walk *quickly* away.

The sooner you acknowledge there is GOOD found in the BAD of the dressing rooms, the happier your experience at TJ MAXX will be. This happiness results in more frequent visits to the store, which naturally creates euphoria upon finding the perfect bargains, clearly a direct cause of a happy life. And that is the stuff dreams are made of.

RULE SEVEN: (The Final & Most Important Rule) Partner Communication

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There are many reasons why having a partner like my sister is crucial in shopping TJ. Most important to our duo's success, however, is the fact that she is a good shopping communicator. Let me describe her qualities in this arena, and then go immediately to your newspaper's classifieds and design a Want Ad for Someone Like Her:

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- She tells me if something I like is hideous. This was especially important in The Case of The Furry Cow Vest I Had To Have. Hindsight is twenty-twenty, I realize, because in my memory it now looks like a cow suit without a head or appendages. Why did I love it, you dare ask?!? Cut me some slack, people, even fashion gods have occasional missteps. At the time, I looked in the mirror and swore Madonna in that "Music" video was staring back at me. (Hel-looo, Gorgeous!)
- She grunts at appropriate intervals. This makes me think she is indeed listening to my woeful tale of inter-office bickering or brilliant intervention plan for my crazy neighbor. I don't take advantage of this quality by quizzing her, ala "What did I say last?!?!?!?", because sometimes, we just need the *appearance* of someone who cares.
- She at least pretends to look at every item that earns an, "OHHH!!! LOOK-IT!" (Thrifty-Trendsetter Translation: "Oh my, dahhhh-ling! You simply *must* take a look at this precious prize.") Note: If Mandy starts to falter here, I throw a fit. Then she corrects. (It's simple behavior modification, friends, but that's a later article.)
- She's WICKED fun, laughs to the point of peeing her pants (this typically results in the purchase of new jeans), and will try anything on for a double dare!

Well, ladies, I hate to disappoint, but that's it for now. There are obviously many more rules and tips we could offer for this store alone, but there is simply no sense in overwhelming fledglings. You have more than enough to get started on your journey, so take these policies and fly! Fly to your nearest TJ MAXX, my sweet sale-priced Sallies, for it's never, *ever* the same place twice!

About the Authors:

Mandy Wiley is a nurse-anesthetist resident apparently living above her means in Plainfield, Illinois. Your first impression of her would be that of a high-class society dame; she is always dressed to the nines, with to-die-for shoes and handbags. (In reality, she is a nose-picking rug rat who gets good deals at Filene’s Basement and Off-Saks.) Upon entering her house for the first time, visitors often exclaim, “My goodness! Your mansion is decorated so beautifully! Who did you have do it?” She stifles her snort-laugh and replies, “She’s exclusive.” (In reality, we spent hours picking through every TJ MAXX, Home Goods, Pier One, Pottery Barn, and Goodwill in a fifty-square mile radius, selecting the perfect accents, not to mention fifty-two furniture outlets and auctions in North Carolina – THE destination for bargain furniture.)

Christy Hild is a writer and teacher who prides herself on her walk-through closet. (In case you weren’t aware, it’s one step above the walk-in.) Although it is color-code-crammed with the latest styles in clothing, accessories, and shoes, she smirks inwardly at the knowledge of its low, low combined price. In fact, she hasn’t paid more than \$7 for a shirt since 1995. Her home is an eclectic page out of Williams & Sonoma, but not one object was purchased there. Instead, she paired with that sister of hers and collected only the best of the best from Estate Sales (a.k.a, scavenging through remains of the wealthy-but-deceased), minimum wage furniture builders (did I mention the importance of North Carolina?), and Craigslist. Adoring fans flock to her palace of cheap, and whisper in hushed tones about her certain “credit-card debt.” She inwardly laughs at such absurdity! Goodwill doesn’t accept credit cards, you ninnies!

Together, these girls form an unstoppable force when entering a store. Much of the time, shopkeepers often look dazed when the duo leaves, as if their stores had been robbed. In the legal sense of the word, they were. These shopping starlets are not afraid of getting on their hands and knees to dig through the very last bin of rejected makeup mixed with necklaces. Nor are they intimidated by the “Sticker Price,” as experience has taught them only rookies pay attention to such nonsense.



Vicki S. Martinez - Bottled Pop, Bottled Water, Bottled Groundhog?

July 9, 2008

Dear Ms. DeGeneres:

I love to drink Diet Pepsi, water and sometimes even those flavored waters. But it always seems that when I am really thirsty, I am out and about and need to get a drink from a vending machine. My dilemma, when I'm done is what to do with the bottle? I usually throw them away, or if someone is recycling, I will give them my bottle. Nowadays, we you're told that reusing our plastic bottles may cause a chemical breakdown. So I shouldn't reuse them for another drink. But after what I saw on Saturday, July 5, 2008, I feel it is my duty to tell everyone to recycle their plastic bottles or at least dispose of them properly. Here's what happened.....

On this day I was taking pictures at a friend's family reunion. When we in the midst of eating, when a truck stopped outside of my friend's house. A man jumped out of the truck and was running feverishly around in the middle of the road. Everyone at the reunion was gathered in the garage and saw the man. I believe at the time they thought he was a lost relative that had just shown up late.

Well, with further investigation we could see that the man in the road was trying to help an animal. The site of this animal was very disturbing. It was a groundhog that had a plastic 20 oz. plastic Coke bottle stuck onto his head. The spout part of the bottle had apparently been removed for some reason. You could tell by the dirtiness of the bottle that it had been stuck on his head for some time.

This strange man, animal lifesaver, tried very hard to reach this animal and pull the bottle off. He grabbed the bottle trying to release the animal, but to no avail. This bottle was on there tightly. The groundhog was very distraught as it tried to claw and scratch this brave man.

Another man, Chad Davidson, from the reunion group ran to get a blanket to cover the animal with in order to help. While Chad covered the animal, and this "hero" stranger pulled and pulled to get this bottle off. After what seemed like 2 minutes (I'm sure it wasn't), the bottle released, the animal was let go. **HE WAS FREE!**

This groundhog ran around scared to death. Suddenly it stopped to stare at the crowd that had formed around to watch in dismay. The look on the groundhog's face was a look of **thanks**. He then ran away with what looked like a smile on his face.

I am sharing this story with you, Ms. DeGeneres, because people need to help save our world, ourselves and animals. These plastic bottles need to be recycled. People need to step up

and become aware of what can happen to others.

This experience made a huge impact on me. I now look at plastic water, pop, and juice bottles differently. This was one innocent animal that just wanted food, or even a drink. I never dreamed that this could happen from a plastic bottle. The groundhog almost died because some human threw the bottle down carelessly and didn't think about the repercussion of their actions. I know this affected me and I want to be proactive. As Student Council Sponsor at Jefferson Elementary in Charleston, IL, I want to tell this story to my 2008-09 Student Council and begin a school wide plastic bottle recycling program.

I am hoping that you will share this story and picture with your audience. Maybe, just maybe, the millions that watch your show will be affected and share the same viewpoint as mine. This was very disturbing to witness and I would like to keep other animals from going through the same torture that this groundhog went through. I sincerely appreciate your time and anticipate a response from you.

Sincerely,

A concerned mother, teacher and lover of animals

Vicki S. Martinez



Julie McGowan - Walnut Point

It began like every other day with the annoying alarm clock buzzing that wonderful sound it makes just as I make it to REM sleep waves. I roll over with great effort – 5:00 am – “no, it can’t be already!” I think to myself as I slam my hand down on the 10 minute snooze button. Seconds later I hear that wonderful sound again, slam the snooze, but then realized I didn’t get last night’s writing assignment finished and up I come out of bed in one giant sloop, feet on the floor.

I grabbed my robe as I gently encouraged my little dog to head to the front door for her early morning potty break. She stumbles her way back in with the hairs on her back standing straight up showing me (all ten pounds of her) who’s the boss. I grab a can of diet Coke and head for the computer.

As I read through my assignment trying to find the exact spot where I’d wearily stopped the night before, I pondered how to begin again. I noticed I wasn’t as far behind as I thought I was. It seems late night dates with the computer often make for poor judgment. Yeah, I was excited! I hurriedly typed in the rest of the paper and checked for correction, then with a big sigh of relief, clicked the print button..... Yes, click the ok button.
.....Then.....nothing! It made the sound like it normally does but - nothing. Oh, wait here comes the papers! As I look with the hopefulness of actually not being rushed for *at least this one morning*, wrong again! Yes, it was printing-printing a bunch of crappy little alien signs that had no resemblance to my paper that needed to be submitted first thing this morning! Frantically, I shoved more paper in, mumbling a few curse words (like that always helps!) and clicked the print and ok button once again. Same alien markings!!! Now what am I going to do?

After telling myself to relax, and relax, and THINK, my light bulb popped on. I would run in to Booth Library and use one of their printers. The only question was, could I do it fast enough and still be at our Walnut Point destination on time? I called Booth Library and find out they open at 8:00 am. I just might be able to pull this off with help. Frantically, I called Heather (who would be my new best friend if this worked!) She answered in her ever-so-calm voice and I told her my situation at about the rate of 90 mph. Just hearing her calm and reassuring voice not only helped to slow my pulsing heart rate, but slowed the flailing arms that I had no use for at all. I told her my plan and asked if she wanted to ride together. She had an even better idea. I would email my things to be printed and she would print them on her printer and give them to me when she picked me up. After more confusion on my part about how to get my mail to her, everything finally worked out and we met at about 9:00 am to head to Walnut Point. We were supposed to be there at 9:00 am, but I had made a call to Robin and explained the situation and she was very understanding. We arrived about 9:25 am. As we trudged to the damp shelter where everyone sat I couldn’t help to notice the beautiful green foliage on the trees and plants. The water was calm and serene as if it were glazed glass except with an occasional ripple from underwater life.

Everyone seemed glad to see us (we were probably holding up the show) but I felt guilty for making us both late because of **my** stupid printer.

It turned out to be one of the best days ever! We did our regular routine minus demonstrations, wrote in our journals, worked on our group project, ate lunch, and had a very relaxing afternoon (I'm sure it's safe to say we all needed that)! Then the best part of the afternoon. Just as we were getting ready to leave, we got to meet the sweet little Daniel St. John. (Daniel is our co-directors two-year-old son.) He is such a handsome little man. He is sure to break many hearts.

Heather and I had an enjoyable commute to Walnut Point. We had a chance to get better acquainted which was really nice especially since we had so much in common: teaching, kids, NWP class. As we got to town I thanked Heather again for being my "lifesaver" and we said our goodbyes. As she drove off I realized Heather is one of those good people that makes you feel lucky that they're a part of your life.

Heather Moore-Hinton - How Shelbi Nicole Hinton Began

It all began on March 27, 1993, Brian and Heather became the Hinton Family. We wanted to be married for about a year before started to think about having a family. I read that a woman should be off of birth control for about six months before she even tries to conceive. In September I decided that it was time for me to discontinue the use of my birth control pills. Then by March we would be ready to begin our family. Well, things worked out a little quicker than we had planned.

We had just returned from a family Thanksgiving trip to Branson, Missouri with the maternal side of the family. Our next stop was to your dad's family to celebrate the holiday. My period was three days late. Until you were conceived my periods came every month at the same time like clockwork. I couldn't stand it. I had to take a pregnancy test. I wanted to know if I was pregnant. Your aunt Tracey was already pregnant and I wanted to share in the joy. We stopped at Kmart in Decatur to buy a pregnancy test. Our next thought was where on earth we would perform the test. Well, there was Hardees. Their restroom was as good as any. While I was in the restroom waiting your dad nervously went to get a drink and to purchase your first stuffed animal a stuffed polar bear that they were selling at Hardees. On Sunday November 26, 1993, two blue lines appeared on the stick that I had just gone to the bathroom on. I looked at the stick then at the box then at the stick and the box again, yip, I was pregnant. I just stared with shock. Wow, I wanted this but, it was way sooner than I had expected. I had only been off of the birth control pill for two months. I had just transferred to Eastern Illinois University and I was only 21 years old.

In my head I quickly began trying to figure my due date. What was the formula? Was it add seven days and subtract three months or was it subtract then add? Think I told myself. When was the first day of my last period? If I figured correctly you should be born around July 21, 1994.

On July 26, 1994, I went to the hospital for a routine doctor visit and ultra sound to make sure that you had turned into position for delivery. The doctors wanted to ensure that you were in the right position for delivery. Not thinking that you were already a week late and that I wanted to meet you I went home to patiently await your arrival. When I got home, I took a shower and decided to lounge in front of Oprah. The phone rang and it was a nurse from the obstetrics floor asking why I was not at the hospital. I explained that I had no idea that I was supposed to be at the hospital. Her response was that we needed to report to the hospital immediately! Your dad and I looked at each with puzzled looks, quickly gathered our bags that had been prepared for weeks, your car seat and left the house as a couple to return as a family.

Upon our arrival at the hospital we were bombarded with people giving orders, throwing forms and asking lots of questions. Then I was ordered to change into this gown with nothing

else on. Well, you know my feeling of no underwear, ugghhhh. I was then ordered to bed like a child. This was not a good feeling. At that time the hospital did not have the beautiful birthing suites that Abbi and Ben were born in. There were two separate rooms that were used for birthing mothers. One was called labor room. It is the room that we were in during the contraction phase of your birth. The other room is called the delivery room. That is where the baby was actually delivered. Both were very sterile and not homey at all. This made things very stressful because you know that I don't like to be given orders and to be confined in one place. The orders continued. At one point one of the nurses came in ordered me to turn off the lights radio and go to bed. You know that I have become much wiser since you were born. I now look at everything from the standpoint of a consumer. If I am paying for it I am the customer and the customer is always right.

We waited and waited for you. After 28 of changing positions, lying there while I was poked, prodded, stuffed with a wick of Cervigel (I will explain what this is later), and forced contractions from the Pitocin they decided that you were never going to come. Your heart rate began to drop so it was suggested that a Cesarean Section be performed.

At 7:33 pm the most beautiful baby girl was born. She weighed 7 pounds, 5 ounces and was 19 ½ inches long. She had coal black hair, porcelain white skin, and looked like an Eskimo baby. I was in shock.

Originally, your name was supposed to be Alyssa Shelbi. Your grandma was so excited that she only heard the Shelbi part. Since Shelbi was your great-great grandfather's name Grandma Teri told Great-Grandpa Johnson that we were going to name you Shelbi. He was so honored. After all of that I did not have the heart to tell them that Shelbi was going to be your middle name. Hence, you became Shelbi Nicole Hinton. According to your birthday keepsake the name Shelbi is from the Anglo-Saxon, and "means sheltered town." Another source translates it as "estate on the edge."

After I was all sewn up with the permanent scar that ruined my bikini body (just kidding), I went to the recovery room. I sat up and noticed that I could not feel my legs. Then I picked up my foot and dropped it. It was the most bizarre moment regaining the feelings in my body as my epidural wore off. The nurse came running to my bedside and forced me to lie back down.

Finally, they took me back to my room where all of our family and friends were waiting for you to make your grand entrance. In you came in the standard hospital issued double t-shirt. One t-shirt was on the top of your body and your other on the bottom of your body. You were wrapped in two receiving blankets and had a little pink hat on your head. The first thing that I did was change you into one of your new outfits and wrap you in the one of the new pink blankets that I had brought with us. When everyone left I sat alone in my room with this little person making plans and wondering what kind of person she would become.

We were released from the hospital on Friday and stopped at McDonalds to get lunch on our way home. You were driven home in the bright red Grand Am. When we arrived at home we walked through the red door of our little blue house into your bunny decorated room. Molly the dog served as your welcoming committee. Things were hectic that day but, we settled in well.

On your first night home we decided that we wanted to celebrate the Bagel Festival with our bagel baby. Two days post c-section I was proudly pushing your Graco stroller down Broadway. My lemon shakeup was sloshing around in the drink holder on top of your stroller. People stopped to admire you. You had so much hair that people assumed that you were a boy which upset me. The funny thing is that you were wearing pink. After we left the Bagel Festival I demanded that your dad take me to Wal-Mart. I was going to buy pink hair bows and spent \$22.00 on hair accessories for a two day old infant. I must have been insane. First, I tried the bows with velcro on them. You had so much hair that they would not stay in place in your hair. After several trial and error attempts of making the bows stay in I came up with a plan. I hot glued the little velcro bows onto little elastic hair bands. Then I made a little pony tail on top of your head. That is the "head horn" that would define you until you were six years old.

When you were about three and a half you began begging for a baby sister. Until that time your dad and I were content with having only one child. You would cry and cry for a sibling. Finally, on your fourth birth day you made a birthday wish that you would become a big sister. At that time your dad and I began to consider having another child. One month lead to six months and a year later you still did not have a baby sister. We finally decided to seek medical assistance. No one could figure out why we could not conceive. We had to keep temperature charts and run tests. All of which were inconclusive.

Next we tried the wonder drug Clomid that was supposed to help us get pregnant. With this drug the chances of a multiple birth was increase dramatically. We began with the lowest dosage the first two months. The doses increased in months three and four and five with no success. After five months of no success the doctors were ready to move on to the next step. I wanted to give it one more attempt. Our friend Lori had a prescription for Clomid that she was not going to use because she was already pregnant. I took the "hot Clomid," and waited for the results.

In the mean time I was referred to Dr. Gratkins, a Infertility Specialists in Champaign. He looked at all of my records and could not figure out why I was not pregnant. He wanted to schedule exploratory surgery after my next period. I was supposed to call their office when I began my next cycle. I never had to call them because on my 28th birthday my period never came. On Valentine's Day I was able to give you the good news that you were going to have a baby sister that would arrive just in time for Christmas. It was a bitter sweet day and a sad day. Your grandma Nancy had a second heart attack that week that resulted in her bypass surgery. Later that month Dr. Gratkin's office called me wanting to schedule my surgery. I advised them that it was not necessary because I was already pregnant.

Being pregnant the second time around was much different. I was a little older and had more responsibilities. I was working on my Masters Degree in Gerontology. On November 20, 2000, a frigid late fall day you became a big sister. Daddy was so excited to go home and get you from school so that you could meet Abbi Brienne Hinton. You were such a proud big sister. The smile on your face the first time that you held her was priceless. I remember when you first told your classmates in Mrs. Reel's first grade class that you had a new sister. She said that you smiled all day. Eighteen months later we were all given another surprise. We found out that we were going to have another addition to our family. After all of the difficulty that we had getting Abbi here, Ben was welcomed as a surprise blessing to our family. On February 11, 2003, Benjamin Scott Hinton was born. As Hannah Montana says, "We got the best of both worlds."

My Leo baby is developing into a young woman. It is said that Leo children like to have authority and are natural leaders. They are outgoing, warm, cheerful and like to be the center of attention. They are very generous and tend to be dramatic. This could not describe you any better. We are so proud of you and honored that God chose us to be your earthly parents. You make us so proud every day. I hope you enjoy reading the story of how you came to be. Happy birthday my beautiful young woman!

All my Love,

Mom

Monica Moreschi - Vito

This is the story of a young man named Vitaliono, Vito to his friends, and dad to me. At the tender age of 16 he graduated from school and yearned for something more exciting to do with his young life. He thought there had to be more than playing soccer and catching frogs with his brothers along the Italian country side. One day a friend of the family came to his father Mario and said, "I could use some reliable boys to come work in my restaurant in Kentucky. Would any of your sons be interested?" Vito jumped on this opportunity. Though his mother, Lidia, was hesitant Vito managed to convince her with those big brown eyes and promises that he would be safe. This daring young man was on his way to the United States.

Now Vito came with no fears, no hesitation and absolutely no use of the English language! He was given a crash course and sent out into dining room. He knew just enough to help him do his job as a waiter. The good thing was that the all of kitchen staff were Italian too, so they could read what he attempted to write on the tickets. As the months went by he learned more and more English every day. Even learning what an old woman really wanted when she asked for a "cork screw". Although the accent was thick, Vito could now speak English.

After 2 years the now 18 year old Vito had to return to Italy much to the joy of his overly protective mother. In Italy every man from has to serve in a branch of the armed forces and they had finally caught up to Vito. It was now his time to "be all that he could be". He chose to enlist in the Navy and once again had to leave the comfort of his family. He was in the Navy for 2 years and was based in several different towns. Although none of his ships ever left the harbor, he looked awfully cute in his sailor's uniform.

Once he was free to do as he wished once again, this 22 year old man made the decision to move back to the states. Again he returned to the restaurant business. This time his adventure brought him to the fascinating state of Illinois, which would be his stomping grounds for the majority of his later life. Not much to do in this lovely state but as fate would have it did bring him to his soul mate. A young 18 year old girl named Karen walked into his restaurant one day. Her long dark hair and beautiful brown eyes reminded him of the woman from back home. Her brilliant smile mesmerized him. Unfortunately, she was to go on a date with another man. But strapping suave Vito would put a stop to that. She never met that other man and Vito and Karen never left each other for the next 31 years.

The happy young couple was married and soon had a baby on the way. Life was good. Vito took another job that paid more money. He now had a family to provide for. Painting radio towers was now his career of choice but not a choice that he liked. Not only was it dangerous but it kept him out of town for weeks at a time. This made Vito sad and lonely, and he wanted to be there for his now very pregnant young wife. When he missed the birth of his first born son, Mark, Vito knew he had to quite the job he now had. Besides, the restaurant business was still calling to him, and it was something he really enjoyed. "13 towns in that first year," Vito would later say. That was his record. Moving to small towns, opening a restaurant, and selling it for a profit is what Vito would do. He was really good at that! But then here comes child number two. His one and only darling little princess (that's me) and he decides to settle down for a bit in Macomb, Illinois.

But Vito, the ever wondering gypsy, didn't last there for long. He craved to move on looking for that next little town to stake his claim. Thank goodness Karen was a fantastic woman and agreed to follow him wherever he went. Two more towns and then a 3rd child was born. Another baby boy, this time named Mathew. One more town and restaurant but tragedy happens here. A fire destroys their business and home, which was a cozy little apartment above. His family must now move again, this time not by Vito's choice. But luckily in the last few years, Vito had convinced his family to join him in America. His mother, father, two brothers and their families all lived in another small town in Illinois. They too owned their own restaurant. Vito, his wife and his 3 young children now joined the rest of the Moreschi clan in Streator, Illinois. Vito kept his family there until they were able to get back on their feet. When the right time came they moved yet again...but wait what is this? To Indiana? Not Illinois?! What a big change!

A year or two and things were going good. Vito actually had two restaurants in this town. But again he heard the sound on the wind. "Vito! Come back to Illinois! Move on Vito." And move he did. Dragging his family to a small rural community called Paris. No not France, that's right, Illinois! But after a few years he could feel that itch coming again. By this time Mark, Monica, and Mathew were all in school and had made lots of friends. So when Vito mentioned it to Karen this time she finally said, "No, Vito. This is home."

And Paris is where they all stayed. Vito ventured out with other restaurants. Savoia's popped up in small surrounding towns like an epidemic; Marshall, Tuscola, Danville, Westville, etc. Open and sold again when he got bored. But Paris always had a special spot in Vito's heart. He always came back. In fact, he has opened a Savoia's in 5 different buildings in Paris.

Then at the age of 48, Vito was in for the shock of his life. After being a family of 5 for 12 years, there would soon be a new member in the Moreschi family. At 39, Karen gave birth to another baby boy named Michael. This energetic young boy was an interesting addition to the family. The family loved him with all of their heart. Thank goodness Karen had three other children to help her. She got tired a lot quicker at this age.

The years flew by. Vito watched his children grow. He began to lose his hair looking more and more like his father. The older children finished school and moved out but they all lived close by. Their family was still strong and always kept in touch. Karen and Vito still loved each other very much and continued to be happy until her death in 2004.

Vito may have lost his soul mate but he has his loving family to see him through the hard times. In fact his family has grown. His oldest son, Mark got married to Tricia and they have two beautiful daughters named Emma and Isabella. Vito is a very proud grandpa. At times he wishes his wife could have met Isabella, the newest addition to the Moreschi family. Then he leans over to Monica and says, "I know she can see her. Right?" Vito has come a long way from his young life in Italy but oh what a trip it has been.

Vicki Pierce - Part of A Storyteller's Story

I don't really know much about my grandpa. I know his ancestor, Joseph Stephens, left England and deserted the British army at some point during the War of 1812. Since that isn't the illustrious beginning that most folks like to claim for their family, Grandpa liked to say our family in the Americas went all the way back to the Mayflower. He said we had an ancestor who started the trip over with the pilgrims, but during that horrible storm that cracked the main mast of the ship, this fella decided to cast his lot with the sea. He jumped ship and started swimming in the direction he hoped was the right one. According to Grandpa's story, when the Mayflower finally dropped anchor and sent a scouting crew of pilgrims ashore, there was this ancestor of ours, sitting in front of a roaring fire inside a cozy log cabin, smoking his pipe and reading the evening newspaper while his Native American wife cooked his dinner. For me, it was the newspaper that gave it away.

I know that my grandpa's dad, John, married when he was forty and his wife, Susanner, was twenty-one. The couple had nine children, two daughters who died in infancy and seven sons who were the vexation of their father, he being too set in his ways to adapt to their shenanigans. Those boys had the run of their pop's eighty-eight acres and the surrounding hills, woods, and hollers. In spite of their father's resignation to their rambunctiousness, or perhaps because of their mother's best efforts, those boys grew up to be landowners and law-abiding citizens themselves.

My grandpa, son number five, bought fifty acres of choice Illinois farmland across the road from 160 acres of woods called "The Lost Hunderd n Sixty." Grandpa maintained that it was misnamed, as it had been right there in the same spot for as long as he could remember. "I've been lost out in it a time or two, though," he would add, and then chuckle his deep, throaty chuckle that he vocalized sometimes for a drawn out effect. Even now, just thinking about him, I hear that chuckle and find myself falling into his long, slow, easy-flowing style of storytelling, for Grandpa was a storyteller.

Oh, he was many other things besides storyteller—farmer, carpenter, preacher, historian, furniture maker, plumber, mechanic, and on and on—the way men of a simpler time had to be, but it was his storytelling that truly enchanted people. Grandpa would, from time to time, send a story in the form of a letter-to-the-editor to the local newspaper. "Pop's got another story in the paper," my dad would say, as he read the evening paper. The paper would then be passed around until everyone in the family had read it. Even through his writing, I could detect the slow storytelling drawl and the build to the punch line—for there was always a punch line—that were Grandpa's trademark. No pun or twist of fate was beneath him, and he was often the object of his own ridicule.

Because of Grandpa's contributions to the local paper, Ray Elliott, a local journalist, used Grandpa as a source in his research for his master's thesis—something about folk stories. Elliott had some kind of "expert" reference books that allowed him to categorize folk stories according to their subject matter, style, outcome, relationships of characters, and other scientific-sounding criteria. Thinking the reading public would be interested in his research, Elliott published part of it in the paper. Personally, I found the article rather boring as the author listed the references to his expert books to support his ideas, and I would rather have read Grandpa's stories, but since I was only twelve or so at the time, that was to be expected. What I did take an interest in was that,

although he cited several neatly fit Grandpa's stories. I could have spared him the trouble of the research, since I knew Grandpa would not/could not be categorized.

As delightful as Grandpa's stories are, I find even more delight in the stories I have about him. His mind was always churning on some idea or other and would spit it out at the oddest times for others to chew on. One of my favorite stories to tell goes like this: My grandpa and my dad used to give each other haircuts. Dad had gotten a set of hair clippers and attachments with Top Value stamps he had been saving from the local Krogers. I don't know how long it took him to save those stamps, but he could now save a fortune on haircuts—for the whole family!

One late spring Saturday morning when I was about ten, Dad and I were at my grandparents' farm getting the garden ready for the upcoming planting season. Dad had brought along the clippers, for Grandpa had called the night before to say he needed shorn. Leave it to Grandpa to use farming terminology. He wouldn't just say he needed a haircut.

After our work in the garden was done, I stood in the kitchen watching my dad cut Grandpa's hair. I was watching from behind my Grandpa because he had his shirt off and at that tender age I felt a little bit uncomfortable seeing my Grandpa's manboobs and white belly. Dad skillfully went about shaving Grandpa's head—to the skin. It was impressive to watch my Dad's technique; he basically had none—just shave a spot and move on, shave a spot and move on.

references to the different sources, Elliott could not find a category into which he could

Grandpa and Dad were chatting about planting and the predictions for a wet summer and on and on, when Grandpa started in about hair. He said that one of his other twenty-six grandchildren had picked up head lice, "hitchhikers" he called them, and the mother was frantic. "I told her I don't see what all the fuss was about. I told her just shave his head—like you're a-doin' mine—and they'd have nothing to hold onto." That seemed a bit drastic to me, but Grandpa couldn't see what a social disaster that kind of treatment would have been in the sixties—nineteen sixties, that is.

"Say, Pop, do ya want me ta shave yer back," Dad asked.

"Well, I was shore long overdue for a spring shearin'. Yeah, go ahead. It'll make it a bit cooler." Grandpa's back needed to be shaved; it was hairier than his head had been! "Do you suppose that's proof that man descended from the apes? Maybe I'm not done descending," he quipped, then chuckled his familiar chuckle. I've often pondered Grandpa's question.

I was so very lucky to have been exposed to Grandpa's stories. Even better, though, was that my dad continued Grandpa's storytelling at our house. We'd be sitting at the kitchen table having a bite of supper, and Dad would start in about his day. It was never just a dull recitation of the day's events, for he had listened to Grandpa's stories often enough to pick up the slow, characteristic drawl and the build to the punch line. Even a trip to the hardware store to buy a pound of nails sounded like an experience not to be missed when Dad told about it.

As I think about the hardships of life in the last century, I've often wondered how many of Grandpa's stories—and Dad's—were embellished for storytelling purposes. By comparison, my life just doesn't seem as exciting. —But sometimes, when I'm relating an event to an audience, I slip into a rural Illinois dialect, hear a voice familiar, yet not quite my own, and find myself building to a punch line. Maybe some things are genetic and some things are learned. Maybe some things are both. Maybe some day I'll be a storyteller.

Josh Robison - "Theme Meals on the Way Out?"

According to a recent poll, a full sixty percent of the Reynolds' household are "sick and/or tired" of the daily theme meal offered up by Mrs. Reynolds. For the last nineteen years Mrs. Reynolds has served her family's evening meals based on what day of the week it is. Saturdays, for example, are known as "Sandwich Saturdays," because the evening meal always consists of some kind of sandwich. Tuesdays are dubbed "Teriyaki Tuesdays" because the meal generally consists of Teriyaki chicken, or, at the very least, some kind of Chinese food. Other days enjoy their own similarly alliterated title.

"When I first began this pattern two decades ago," Mrs. Reynolds explains, "a full one hundred percent of the people in my home agreed that the daily theme meal was a perfect way to enjoy food. After I was married, that figure dropped all the way down to fifty percent. Regardless, we continued to plug along, and within a half decade, when the next poll was taken, my numbers had jumped up to sixty-seven percent. Hey, when two thirds of your voting bloc likes what you're doing, you keep doing it, right?"

Trouble began, however, the very next year with the arrival of Ryan Reynolds, the family's lactose-intolerant son.

"Our numbers dropped, I'll be honest." Mrs. Reynolds explains. "We were back down to fifty percent. Ryan's allergy really put a wrench in the proverbial meal-planning machine. 'Wisconsin Wednesdays,' which, you know, tended to have a lot of cheese in them, were gone. 'Sundae Sundays,' obviously, out the window. 'Fruity Fridays' survived, but that meal was so controversial to begin with, particularly with my husband, that we just kind of lost our steam."

For a number of years, the Reynolds' home was in a state of culinary turmoil, a supper civil war played out in the kitchen between Mr. Reynolds and Ryan on one side of the table and Mrs. Reynolds and her daughter Megan, who claims to "want to grow up to be just like Mommy" on the other. Knowing that a house divided against itself could not stand, or, at the very least, eat in peace, Mrs. Reynolds, according to her husband, decided on a new strategy: covert operations.

"She replaced her birth control pills with Tic-Tacs. Yeah, she really did that." Mr. Reynolds remarks. "Threw the suckers away and just started popping mints every morning like it was totally normal. Few months later, hey, guess what? We're having another kid. Zero population growth, my ass."

When asked how a college-educated individual with almost perfect visual capacity could mistake a heavily advertised mint with oral contraceptives, Mr. Reynolds declined to comment, then walked to the kitchen and made himself a turkey sandwich.

"Told ya' the Tic-Tac story, did he?" Mrs. Reynolds continues, smiling deviously. "Yeah, well, what can I say? Politics is a tricky business. But guess what? My numbers went up, so, in the end, I think it was all worth it. And it, er . . . , I mean, *he's* a tax write off, anyway. Win-win, you know what I mean?" As long as their tax write off, a little guy named Todd who just adores all kinds of trucks but is still unable to distinguish between the colors red and orange,

could not eat solid foods, Mrs. Reynolds' strategy seemed to work. Tragedy struck, however, after his very first "Meatloaf Monday."

"Oh yeah, I remember that night!" Ryan Reynolds explains. "Talk about gross! I bet they went through seven diapers! I just went over to Jason's house and played *Guitar Hero* until, like, midnight. They didn't even know I was gone."

Theme Nights never truly recovered, and, as this latest poll suggests, they may be on their way out entirely.

"They want pizza." Mrs. Reynolds laments. "They want lasagna and roast beef and bratwurst, for heaven's sake! Words that just don't match up! There's no *Ponday* in the week! There's no *Luesday*! How I am supposed to keep things in order around here without alliteration?"

Mr. Reynolds, for his part, is reacting to these recent developments with cautious optimism. "I'm happy, yeah. We're happy, the boys and I, and I think Megan is coming around, too. But I know my wife. She's a fighter. She's a schemer. I'm keeping my fingers crossed. And I'm also having a vasectomy next Meatloaf, er, next Monday, which should help."

As of press time, Mrs. Reynolds was still contemplating her options, but advisors continue to press her to simply "make those lazy asses get their own damn supper, geez."

Lee Roll - Memoir Piece

I live on 9th Street in the house with the belly-button door knob. Every other house I know has a regular door knob on the side, but our door knob is right in the middle of the front door like a big round belly button. One block north of my house is 8th Street, the street the library is on. Ninth isn't paved, but 8th is. Both streets end in grassy places that are mowed once or twice during the summer but mostly are tangled up with wild blackberries and some stinging nettles and thistles from Canada. I'm learning the names of plants. I know Queen Anne's Lace—it grows in the grassy places at the end of the block, too—and bracken fern and vinca. I'm also learning the names of lots of trees.

Beyond the grassy places is nothing but air. Most streets in my town end like this because we're on an island and there's no place to go except down to the water. The neighborhood kids call the grassy places, "empty lots." Both streets drop straight down hundreds of feet to railroad tracks. Below the railroad tracks is the beach where green waves are like smooth muscles that roll over sharp rocks and pieces of driftwood that make splinters when you rub on them too hard. It's a skinny beach even at low tide.

We kids say 8th Street is made of "cement," and it will be a long time before I know the difference between cement and concrete. We can bounce a ball straight up and down on 8th Street, ride bikes and draw hopscotch squares with colored chalk. On 8th Street when we fall, our knees look like someone dragged a sharp-tooth comb over the skin and our owies and boobos are clean and red. On 9th Street balls bounce every which way off rocks and ruts, and our scabs are icky and black with gravel and we cry because it takes a lot of soap and water and that red stuff like fingernail polish with the really big word name ... mer cur o ... chrome ... before our moms say we'll be okay.

Eighth is wide, like what I think a boulevard might be before I know what a boulevard is. And wide branched trees are planted on strips of vinca, the kind with blue flowers, and ivy between the sidewalks and the street. The trees are calendar trees, green for June and yellow orange for October. They are trees with good shadows like in books about how to make good photos with the right kinds of shadows. Sometimes their roots hump up the sidewalk and crack the cement.

The 8th Street houses are big—two stories with picture windows that look out over Guemes Channel, which is always dark green, and my mom says it's a mile across to Guemes Island. Some of the houses remind me of the wheelhouses on the tops of ships where the captain is ... the houses even have bridges like on the ships so the people can see the water. I'm learning about the parts of a ship from a book I checked out at the library. There are lots of ships and fishing boats and tug boats on Guemes Channel. A view of the water is really important in my town. If your house can see the water, it's worth a lot of money. My house is on the small side and I have to share a bedroom, but we can see the water, not as well as the people on 8th Street, but we can see it. People on 8th Street are richer than people who live on 9th Street.

Depending on how you look at things, Louie Dorbolo's house is the last house on 8th Street, next to the empty lot, but some people would say it's the first house. To me, it's the last.

Louie is the neighborhood bully. He's what my mom says is "ornery," which has an *r* in it that some people say and some people don't.

We have to pass Louie's house to get to the library. I start holding my breath a long time before we get there and I count the steps, but I won't hold my mom's hand. *Step on a crack, break my mother's back*, is what I think about. I jump over cracks, on purpose, and I hold my breath even though sometimes I think I'm going to turn purple and burst open. Finally we get past his house and I can let out all my air.

We walk a few more blocks and we're almost to Bobo's house. Will he be swinging out on the tire, wibbly-wobbling out from the dark tree in his yard? Wearing a diaper and shorts? The baby blue shorts with the two big buttons at the waist for suspenders ... but Bobo doesn't have suspenders. I like some books in the kids' section at the library. They're about triplets—two boys and a girl. They are blue-eyed tow heads. The boys wear blue shorts with two big buttons just like Bobo's. The girl, of course, wears a skirt but it doesn't have buttons. Her blouse does, though. The kids are always in a "predicament," a word I think is pretty funny when I'm six.

Mom says Bobo's in big trouble. He slammed the door to the greenhouse and broke all the glass. I wonder what it means, "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." Someday Bobo will have to go to Woodland Park Zoo where they know what to do with gorillas. But do they know what to do with grown-up gorillas who were raised like little boys?

I remember that once we played ring-around-the-rosy and Bobo scratched me with his fingernail. By accident. His fingernail was yellow and dirty, like an old man's fingernail, an old man who works on old cars in a dirty garage with dirty windows and just a little light coming in like a cone. And spider webs ... but no spiders anymore. Just dusty old webs.

I don't see Bobo anywhere.

We keep walking. Past Janie Brazas's house. Past the old hotel that now is just tumble-down brick. No roof, not really even any walls, just piles of broken brick with bushes and trees growing up through the boards that used to be the first floor. Once I found a giant diamond under one of the boards. It was as big as a head of lettuce. It was blue green, and see-through. My dad says it isn't a diamond, not even close. He says it's only melted window glass from when the hotel burned down. But I decided to keep it on my dresser on a lace doily for a long time, just in case dad doesn't know what he's talking about. My mom likes to dye lace doilies in tea or marigold flowers. And sometimes in red roses. Once she used a doily to make a collar for my dress. She sewed the dress on her sewing machine. The collar was pink from beet juice.

We're getting close to the library. It's a Carnegie library, and mom says there are more than 2000 Carnegie libraries, maybe even 3000. A man from Scotland, like Jimmy who helped raise her, gave lots of money to build libraries all over the world, but especially in the United States and mostly just in countries that speak English. She says Mr. Carnegie liked big doors and really big staircases up to the big doors. Mr. Carnegie also used really big words. She says Mr. Carnegie says that big stairs mean that a person is "elevated by learning." He also liked lampposts and they mean "enlightenment." My mom is a teacher and she says I can use big words just like Mr. Carnegie. She is not a reading teacher, but she's an art teacher who reads.

Our library has two lampposts in front of it. The globes on the lamppost are like white milk glass. I know they're like milk glass because my mom has a collection, she has a milk glass hen with a lid for keeping butter in and a vase and a candy dish and some other dishes, but the hen is my favorite so I remember it best. The library has a huge staircase and huge front doors. There are four cement sitting-down places on the sides of the stairs. If the sitting-down places were in front of art museums, I'm pretty sure there would be lions on them.

The whole library is cement, just like 8th Street, and with grass and trees, it takes up a whole block ... almost. Sometimes I like to sit on the top and dangle my legs over the side and spit on a penny and drop it to the sidewalk that goes to the children's library in the basement. Some little kid would love to find a penny.

The steps down to the children's library are outside on the side of the building and are always in the shade because there are lots of big chestnut trees all over that part of the block. I don't like the stairs much. They're always wet and cold and mossy. Not really slippery or anything, just dark. Maybe that's why I drop pennies. Because they're bright. The stairs don't get swept much so leaves and sticks make little nests in the corners of the steps. There's a light on the wall over the stairs, but it's dirty and spider webby.

The door into the kids' library is heavy. Steel. Like an army door because it's a gray-green color with a push bar. Too heavy for kids to push. Kids need their mommies to help them open doors.

The library smells funny. Like furniture polish and old ladies and moth wings. When I'm six, I'm happy in the library. I look at pictures and ask my mom what the words say. I can check out six books at a time when I'm six.

The books I like are on the side of the library away from the stairs, the side where the sun sets, the warm side where lots of light comes in, even when it's cloudy, through the tall windows. It's funny to look up at the windows and see the flower garden above my head, but that's what happens in a basement. On nice days when it's not raining, the sun comes in like a shiny arrow and points to the books I like. I look for the books about the triplets. There are lots of different books because the triplets have lots of different predicaments. Sometimes they do bad things and they learn a lesson and they never do that bad thing again.

I think the triplets are Swedish because they are tow heads. My Grandma Isaacson says I'm Swedish and she says someday I'll go to Sweden and eat seven desserts because that's what Swedish people do. Sometimes she takes me to Runeberg, which is a meeting, to see all the Swedish people who live in my town. I'm scared of all the old people who pat me on the head and talk half in English and half in Swedish and say what a big girl I am. My grandma's friends are there, but they call each other Mr. and Mrs. even though they're best friends and they sit together every afternoon and drink coffee and eat *skorpa* with sugar and cinnamon crusts and cookies made of ginger with white frosting. The triplets have friends, but they call them by their first names. The triplet's names rhyme.

When I'm six, I really, really love the library. And when I'm seven, I love the library even more than when I was six.

.....

When I'm eight, I don't need my mom to take me to the library anymore. I can go by myself. I walk down the block from 9th Street to the empty lot on 8th Street. I'm almost to Louie's house and I'm holding my breath. When I'm eight, I can check out eight books, so I have eight books to return. They aren't very heavy. Only one of the books is about the triplets. I'm too big to read about the triplets, they're for little kids, but sometimes I check one out anyway. The triplets had a tea party outside under a tree on a blue and white checkered tablecloth with a real china teapot and real china teacups with saucers. One of the boys, I forget which one, broke a cup and he told his mom the puppy did it.

I can see some boys come up the hill from Louie's backyard. His backyard is steep. They are older boys, some of them are twelve. They are the kind of boys who put salt on slugs and tweeze them up with two twigs and stick them in girls' faces. I heard that once they fried ants with a magnifying glass and put them in Jill Brown's little sister's mouth and yelled, "Nola eats mouse turds, Nola eats mouse turds." "Turds" is a bad word.

I walk a little faster, but pretty soon, I can feel that the boys are right behind me. I try not to turn around and look but, before I know what's happened, they are making a circle around me and they are saying bad things, things I can't tell anybody. I can't walk away because they are too close to me and they're big. They have fingernails that look like they've been digging for potato bugs and fish worms. Louie is there and some boys whose names I don't know. They say I have to go to their fort or they'll put dog poop in my hair. But they don't say "poop."

I don't have a choice, I don't. They're pushing me down the hill, but I don't fall. I keep holding my library books and I keep biting the inside of my cheek. At the bottom of the hill, they have a fort. It's by Himalaya berry vines taller than Louie's dad's carport. The vines are thick and they're black and they have thorns and I think of Brer Rabbit and the briar patch. And I keep trying to say, "lippity-clippity, clippity-lippity" like they say in the story and I think how Brer Rabbit says he's going to bust the Tar-baby wide open.

The trees are too tall to see the water but I can hear the beach and I think the tide is coming in. The fort is sawhorses and bent-up plywood and tarps and tree branches. An old smelly army blanket is hanging from the limbs and the boys say it's the door. "In," they say and push me under the blanket and push me down with their worm-digging hands.

It's dark inside. The boys must have pulled all the grass up because the floor is dirt. There are rocks in a circle and the boys sit on them. And I'm in the middle. I'm still holding my library books, all eight of them.

"Are you scared?" one boy says. "You should be."

Another boy comes close. I can't see his whole face altogether, just parts of it. I won't let myself see all of him at once, I'm too afraid. And he wiggles his tongue at me and I see his teeth and they are red like cherry Kool-Aid. He has freckles. A thing like dandelion fluff is in his hair. I put my head down and cover my face with the books. They're not heavy. I tell myself to be a bird and tuck my head into my wing and go to sleep. I can smell the boys. Like dirt and something sour.

Louie says, "You're staying right here until you take your panties off."

Another boy says, "C'mon, girlie, we got something to show you." And he makes a suck-y noise.

And somebody says, "You're too stuck-up, that's what's wrong with you. You think you're too good to talk to us" just like Brer Rabbit says to the Tar-baby that Brer Fox made for a trick.

I smell their breath and feel warm air around them. But I'm cold. Shivering. And I try to say "lippity-clippity" and I try to think of the triplets. Someone pokes me with a stick. My eyes are burning and I squeeze them shut.

"You don't go nowhere until you take off your pants."

From down the block, I can hear a car coming.

"Hey, I think it's my mom," says one boy. "Hurry, she said she'd bring home ice cream bars."

"Don't you dare move," Louie says.

The boys crawl out of the fort and I can hear them run up the hill and go away. I sit for a minute or two, listening. Nothing. I can hear the beach and I can hear a car go by, but I can't hear the boys. I push the blanket away and peek out.

"Get your goddam head back inside before I ..." His face is just an inch from mine. I can't see his whole face, only his mouth. I don't know his name or what block he lives on.

I pull the blanket closed and grab the books to my chest and curl up as tight as I can. I suck on the skin at the bottom of my pointer finger. "Clippity-lippity. Lippity-clippity," I say inside my head. "Be a bird, be a bird. Be a ..."

I wait. For a long time. Listening in the dark. Finally I hear voices again. But I don't know whose voice is whose. I can't think where these boys live, on what block. I've seen them before, but, except for Louie, I don't know their names.

They are laughing and then I hear a sound like scratching and swishing. They're unzipping their pants and they're laughing louder and louder and one is saying, "On target!"

Ready ... set ...” Hot pee is making a noise like sizzling on sticks, I can smell it. “Bull’s eye!” someone is yelling and pee is soaking through the door-blanket.

That’s gotta be a record. Beat that distance, morons!”

They’re zipping their pants back up and they’re going back up the hill. I can hear them pushing each other and laughing.

I put the books on my lap and put my head on the books and put my hands over my ears until I can’t hear them anymore.

I wait for a long time, a really long time, and I keep my head on the books. I try to think of big words and spell them. “Predicament.” “ Enlightenment.” I remember that Mr. Carnegie said, “Let there be light.” Even with my hands over my ears, I can hear a dog bark and I can hear cars go by. Sometimes I think the car is pulling a boat trailer because I can hear loose chains. I try to hear if the tide is coming in.

Finally I take my hands away from my ears and I sit up. I touch the door-blanket. It’s wet and it smells and I feel like I’m going to have a stomach ache. I peek out. There’s no one there. It must be late afternoon, that’s how the light seems. I can see, sort of, into the next door neighbor’s yard. There’s a clothesline, one of those that’s a circle like the spokes of an umbrella. There are clothes on the line, clean clothes stuck on the line with clothespins.

I crawl out into the light but it’s really not light but shade and just a little bit of light. I’m holding the books tight, climbing up the hill, stepping onto the sidewalk. Bill Long is mowing his grass and is waving at me. He’s a doctor, rich people live on 8th Street. I wave, sort of, back.

I walk by the empty lot and I see that someone left a lawn mower there, but there’s no one around. At the end of the block, I can see my house. I see the big rhododendron bush and birds pecking away on the lawn and our dog Skipper asleep on the front porch. I see our front door with the belly-button door knob in the middle. I don’t hold my books so tight against my chest any more and I start to cry. But just a little.

Mini-Writing Crawl to Ballenger Library

July 8, 2008

Lee Roll

Rebekah K. Volk - Thirsting Righteousness

Two **p**illars of righteousness,

Upholding their life's diligence.

Two **s**tandards of conviction,

Sustaining a commitment of **t**reasure.

Two columns of **v**erisimilitude,

Penetrated **o**nly by trust.

Endurance beyond reason and

Model **i**nstruction.

Repayment—**n**o—but reciprocating,

Consecrated indebtedness.

Core sincerity to mission,

Thirsting for the **K**ingdom.

Rebekah K. Volk - Mom and Dad

Training us to work, teaching us to love

Fulfilling their vocation:

Dad's hammer and nails—Measure twice, cut once—Mom's tap, tap,
tap of the typewriter—Lifelong learning

Nourishing safety and cultivating warmth.

Tough days scarcely putting food on the table, But we didn't
know through the smiles and laughter—the special memories.

Following footprints in the garden; telling stories about Grandpa;
sharing prayers by bedside; and living selfless sacrifice.