

around the
table with
PAWLP

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Fall 2019

Dear Reader,

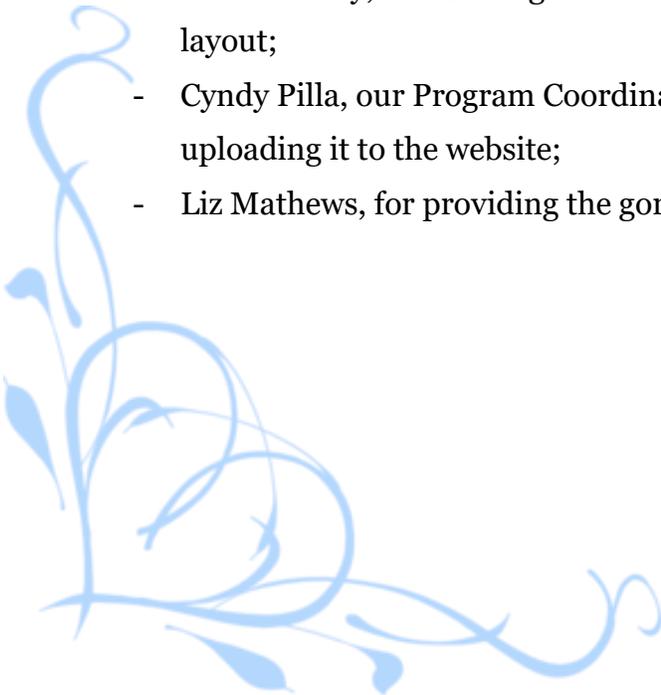
We are thrilled that we've been able to bring the Literary Magazine back to PAWL. We hope that we can make this an annual release, so be on the lookout for a call for submissions!

The pieces that follow are sure to entertain and delight you. Whether poem, prose, or photograph, you will see the love and care each writer has poured into their work.

We hope that you enjoy this issue and share it with friends. We'd also like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the following people:

- Lynne Dorfman and Sharon Williams, for collecting and assembling all of the pieces in the magazine;
- Angela Grabosky, our Graduate Assistant, for working on the format and layout;
- Katie Cooney, our Undergraduate Assistant, for helping with the format and layout;
- Cyndy Pilla, our Program Coordinator, for pulling it all together and uploading it to the website;
- Liz Mathews, for providing the gorgeous cover artwork & design.

We are honored to serve you at PAWL,
Pauline Schmidt, Director
Emily Aguiló-Pérez, Associate Director
Jason Vanfosson, Associate Director



A Simple Gift

By Lynne R. Dorfman

She stoops only to gather fragrant bunches
While gurgling voices spill over slippery rocks,
Splashing cool sprays on
Delicate saffron and blue-violet buds.

Tall wavy grasses
Tickle brown-berry feet
That float like daisy-cutters
Beyond the song-filled meadow.
Throwing open the door,
She spies him, patient and level-headed,
Wondering and waiting and wishing
That she did not have to be so busy.



But eyes smile to match
The slow grin spreading
Across his face like
Morning sunshine fills the kitchen.

My gift accepted...
Message understood.

Barson's Restaurant: Breaking of Dietary Laws

By Lynne R. Dorfman

Mom always treated us to lunch at Barson's when we spent a busy Saturday on Wadsworth Avenue. There was always so much to do – the Cameo Shop for school clothes, buying underwear at Arties, a dozen bagels at the deli. We made a stop at the library – Mom was an avid reader and believed we should be spending more time reading books than watching television. So, we always chose three or four books to take home for the week. I liked to see all the televisions and radios in Brucker's Appliances, probably because I had a crush on Bobby Brucker, our neighbors' son. On Saturdays, Bobby was at the store helping his dad and his uncle.

A day on the avenue would not be the same without a visit to Cakemasters to choose some danish – cheese, pecan, and assorted fruit – or coffeecake (Mom's favorite). Of course, the schnecken, apple and cherry strudel, and cinnamon buns with raisins or nuts were also treasures. Tarts made with almonds and honey, some lemon meringue and strawberry tarts, and of course, eclairs, often filled our boxes.

Anyway, it was our weekly Saturday routine, and we had ordered cheeseburgers with French fries and vanilla shakes. It was a special treat because we did not mix meat and dairy at home – ever! We kept a Kosher house with three separate sets of dishes – one for meat, one for dairy, and one for Pesach (Passover). I could never understand why we did this since Dad rarely went to synagogue with me. I used to complain that our religion was the religion of the dishes.

We were begging for another quarter to play the little jukebox when, all of a sudden, Dad was standing by our booth. We had not seen him come into Barson's. He thought he'd surprise us – happened to be in the neighborhood on the way home from an appointment – and spotted Mom's car parked on the street outside.

Just then the waitress came and put the plates of cheeseburgers and milkshakes on the table. My breath froze in my throat. We waited in stony silence. Dad wore an I-don't-believe-my-eyes look on his face. He shook his head in disgust, "I'm disappointed in you." Then he turned and walked out of the restaurant.

Suddenly, my sisters and I were not hungry anymore. We started to sob and pushed the plates away. My mother looked at us and commanded that we eat the food we had ordered. But as hard as we tried, we could not force the food down our throats. My mom remained calm and cool, eating her cheeseburger and enjoying her milkshake (or trying to). She ignored the stares of couples and families in nearby booths who could not help noticing three sobbing children with their heads down on the table, food untouched. She took her time, and finally motioned for the check. Mom paid the bill, stood up, and said curtly, "Let's go, girls."

Walking out of the restaurant, I could feel my mother's anger. I couldn't decide what was worse – my father's disappointment, or my mother's silent anger. Looking back on that day, I have to say it was my father's sadness that hurt my heart. I think the scar remains.



Words of Wisdom
for the
Impossible to *I'm possible*
Eileen T. Hutchinson 99'/05'



"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come.
We have only today. Let us begin." – Mother Theresa

*Imagine ... Your world of creativity,
Brighten your mind.*
*Hope For a new tomorrow,
With ideas -one of a kind!*
*Dream your heart's desire,
Make each moment worthwhile!!*

ONCE

*We live only **ONCE**,
So keep that **ONCE** alive
Follow your dreams you yearn to strive
Celebrate each day joyously
Hug your loved ones tenderly
Cherish the memories with delight
Grace your pardons with forgiveness in sight
Be grateful for all the blessings in your life
Learn and grow from each triumph and strife
Make your **ONCE** –the life you wish to lead
Time full of joy and wonder with every good deed
Laugh, love, and live
With a heart that truly gives
So spark your desires
Deep in your soul
Just Believe
Let your **ONCE** unfold.
Carpe the heck out of Diem-Open your eyes,
To life's mysteries, wonder, and surprise,
Never say never-**Dare to Dream!**
The possibilities endless- wherever they stream.*

Excavation

By Leslee C. Wagner

6/8/18

The landscaping crew arrived today to rip out the stumps while I recuperate from surgery. Three hemlocks and a single cedar once towered over the side yard by the screened-in porch. With limited leaf growth and at risk for falling, two were reduced to stumps last year. One came toppling down during the Nor'easter in March, taking with it power lines and two telephone poles before becoming an immovable barricade across our street and leaving the neighborhood without power for five days. A buzzing chainsaw cut down the cedar yesterday afternoon - one chunk at a time creating a void immediately filled by the light and breath of the spring evening.

I sit on the sunny front porch. My hands protectively resting gently over the incisions on my swollen torso. I watch as the jaws of the excavator claw and strain at the partially uprooted stump which remains stubbornly anchored to the dirt. I imagine the impressive length and strength of underground roots securely twisted and tangled in clay and rock. The life source that supported that seventy-five-foot tree will not yield to the machine. It seems fitting. After all, permission was neither requested nor granted.

Twenty-four hours ago, in an unnaturally cool and sterile place, smaller and quieter cutting tools separated connective tissue from my uterus, the fertile ground from which Cam and Nick were once rooted and sustained. In a few short hours, this remarkable yet routine surgical procedure removed a part of my anatomy that made motherhood possible and, with my blessing, was no longer deemed necessary. I am stitched up and bruised but freed from the encumbrance of endometriosis and content to follow the recuperation protocol.

I have retreated indoors to "put my feet up" during the chewing up and spitting out bit by bit of bark and wood. Stump grinding is a loud and messy process clearly lacking surgical precision. In protective gear, the men wear away inches of stump from the top, working down as deep as they can, leaving the tattered root system underground. The vibrations fade as do the visible footprints of the trees. In the days to come, fill dirt and soil will be spread over top to allow for new plantings.

I am eager for the coming weeks to pass. After 4-6 weeks of limited mobility, my stitches will have dissolved leaving slight scars on the surface of my skin. I will be free to move, to bend, and to lift without hesitation. I will dig in the dirt and replace what has been taken with native plants from the local nursery. I will add bright and lively annuals in between saplings and perennials. I will tend to them and nurture them. I will mother this patch of earth.

Home is...

By Liz Corson

Home is...

A SOFT PILLOW

A place to lay your head

A place where you can rest and settle in

A place to relax

Home is...

A POWER STRIP

Where you can recharge

Sharing food and laughs

With family and friends,

Ready to face the world,

Once again

Home is...

A LAMP

Where things become clear

You can see and understand

And find clarity,

Especially when you are not sure

Home is...

A WORKSHOP

Write a song or a letter

Build a table or a guitar

Make a photo collage

Plant some flowers and water them

Home can also be...

A TRAFFIC JAM

People stuck

Angry

Getting in each other's way

Impatient

Yelling

Wanting to get out

And also ...

A THUNDERSTORM

Tensions rising

Frustrations brewing

Tempers flaring

Accusations strike

But after the storm, home once again
becomes...

A COMFORTABLE SWEATSHIRT

Feels so good as it embraces you

You've had it forever

And will always take it with you

Wherever you go

(from Multi-genre Home project, PAWLP
Summer 2018)

I Heard a Little Bird

A villanelle

By Warren Kulp

I heard a little bird;
Heard his chirping song.
A second joined and a third.

In my dream, he was heard.
It seemed so far along.
I heard a little bird.

Their song spoke not a word.
Their voices were so strong.
A second joined and a third.

They awoke me all a-stirred.
They perched amongst the throng.
I heard a little bird.

In my ears, it was not blurred.
I will hear them all my life-long.
A second joined and a third.

My slumber was not deferred
Because of their birdsong.
I heard a little bird.
A second joined and a third.

A Prayer Shared Between Two Cultures

By Kelly Virgin

I was inches from crawling into my hotel room bed when I heard a knock on the door. It was our guide from the day, Mario, offering to keep the tour going with an evening stroll through the streets of Guanajuato. The day had already been so jam-packed with activity: I had toured local elementary schools and telesecundarias. I had met so many friendly teachers and warm parents and eager students. I had ridden through the rolling hills of the countryside and gathered around a long table to dine on homemade tortas and mole and tamales. My feet ached, and my body screamed for me to turn down the offer. But a small voice inside my head whispered encouragement, and so I hurried out of the room after Mario.



Together with five other teachers from the trip, we followed Mario up steep hills, down winding alleyways, through vibrant squares and listened intently as he told us stories of his great city. "This is where Pipila, a great hero of the war of independence, stands watching over the city," he said while pointing to a massive statue at the top of a steep hill. "And this is where couples from all over Mexico come to share a kiss," he explained while leading us through the legendary Callejon del Beso. I was so engrossed in the sights and stories that I

hardly noticed when we walked into one of the homes lining the small street we were wandering down. As I crossed the threshold, Mario explained, "and this is my childhood home. Come, I want you to meet my father."

Walking into Mario's home was like walking into a new and unfamiliar world. A tree sprouted in the center of the house and small rooms circled the open-air atrium like petals on a daisy. Mario quickly led us around the indoor garden and into a dimly lit bedroom. As we filed into the room and one by one began to realize the sudden shift in our situation, a quiet hush fell over each of us. We stood, semi-circle, around a single hospital bed and diverted our eyes

away from its frail, dozing occupant. While Mario bent over the old man and quietly whispered a sweet, Spanish greeting, I folded and unfolded my arms, glanced around at the other bowed heads, and tried, ever-so-slightly, to inch towards the back of the small bedroom. My sly attempt at an escape was halted when Mario looked up and asked, "Will you all join me in saying the Lord's Prayer for my father?"

I'd only spent two years as a Catholic school kid and rarely went to church after my parents moved me to public school, but as I joined hands with the others, the words found their way to my lips. "Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." And with each whispered sentence the tension slipped from the room. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And the quiet words mingled with the sick man's raspy breaths as he joined us in the final line. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." On our way out of the room, we paid our respects one-by-one. When it was my turn, I squeezed the sick man's thin hand and through watery eyes tried to communicate how much I hoped for him.

On the winding walk through the city streets back to the hotel, I asked Mario about his father and learned that he had spent most of his life working as a migrant farmer in California so that he could provide for Mario and his eight brothers and sisters. Mario was the only one of the nine children to go to Preparatoria and University. He confessed to feeling guilt over the expense his education had cost his father, and I could hear the sadness lining his voice.

It's been years since that backroads tour of Guanajuato, but I still think about Mario and his father. I wonder how much time they had left together after that night, and I wonder if Mario was ever able to feel he had fully repaid his father for his sacrifices. And I thank them. I thank them for giving me a chance to see into their lives, a chance to walk behind the door that separates our cultures, and a chance to learn more about myself and about humanity by inviting me to whisper a few lines of a prayer with a sick old man and his grieving son.



LOSS

Little things I lose
frustrate me --
my reading glasses
my car keys
my grocery list
my earrings
my socks
in the laundry.

Larger things I lose
annoy me --
a dress at the dry cleaners
my high school class ring
my passport
my checkbook,
a video camera
at the airport in Italy.

Things I lose as I age
scare me --
my energy...
why can't I stay up past 10?
my hair...
where did my full curls go?
my mind...
why did I come in here?

Losing people
has caused sorrow --
my grandfathers
to cancer
my best friend
to depression
many friends
to distance.

Losing purposefully
has brought joy --
saying goodbye to
the clutter
the extra pounds
the bad relationship
the insecurity
the guilt.

As I lose
I gain --
perspective
empathy
wisdom
strength
an eventual peace.

Ms. Susan O'Brien is an English teacher at Boyertown Area Senior High School, teaching American Literature, Dual Enrollment Composition and Journalism. She became a PAWLP Fellow in 2011 and enjoys teaching at WCU during summers because working with the young writers always leads to inspiration -- both as a teacher and a writer.

Catapult into Adulthood

By Sharon Williams

The old neighborhood. My safe place. The place I felt the most secure. The place where no harm could come to me nor my family.

Our house was a three-story row home on West 22nd Street in Chester with a welcoming living room where we watched Happy Days and Laverne and Shirley on Tuesday nights after eating dinner in a kitchen WAY too small for our family of 5 in a neighborhood of over 500 houses just like it.

My bedroom was on the third floor. Looking back, it was the place I always sought refuge when I was less than my usual happy-go-lucky self. I always entered into that room knowing it was a sanctuary for my soul. That is, until that day. On that day, I learned that there is no real sanctuary where you are safe from the ugliness of life.

I remember it was late in the afternoon on New Year's Day. I was lying in my bed reading a book and was trying to dispel the aggravation I was feeling after arguing with my father over where we should put the new dresser and chest of drawers my parents bought me for Christmas. My seventeen-year-old stubborn mind wanted them to be next to each other, but my father insisted he was putting them on opposite walls since that is where my mother told him to put them. He told me it was easier to put them where my mother wanted. He explained that she would just complain about how she had told us to do something, but we, like always, didn't listen to her. I knew he was right, but that didn't stop me from being a pouty teenager and feeling great aggravation that I directed right at him.

I was just beginning to feel myself relax from the altercation with my father when I heard the pounding on the front door and Herman's voice screaming something incomprehensible. I held the book to my chest while my mind tried to decipher what was happening.

I heard my mom scream, and the window in her bedroom fly open.

I felt the blast of arctic air swirl through the third floor of the house.

I felt the floor shake as my little sister, Eileen, went bounding toward the front door.

I heard Uncle George and Barbara yelling for someone to call an ambulance.

I heard Mrs. Banta yelling for my mom to get outside.

I didn't hear Dad.

Fear gripped me in the pit of my stomach. Something was wrong; very, very wrong.

I put my book down on my bed carefully so not to lose the page. I swung my legs over the edge of the bed and slid my feet into my slippers. I ran out of my room, pounded down the steps, and flew out the front door into the frigid January air and into the arms of complete chaos.

Herman was on our front step looking at me with tears in his eyes as he looked over at the crowd gathering in the middle of the street. “Mr. Sanchez just pulled out; another car swerved; Mr. Gebhardt was on the other side of the road...” his voice trailed off as the tears began to spill over onto his cheeks.

His words were not registering. I was not comprehending what he was saying.

My mother ran past me.

I had to follow her.

A strong, firm hand on my shoulder tried to pull me back.

“Don’t go over there.”

I shrugged the hand away.

I saw Mrs. Banta.

Mr. Scharbough from across the street was standing there.

I saw Mr. and Mrs. Garvine, Dan (the guy up the street who I babysat for), The Lexies, and most of the rest of my neighbors. So many people were running down the road toward us that I felt like I were in the middle of a riot.

“Someone get Sharon out of here!”

I looked toward the voice but turned away.

I made my way closer to the crowd. People stepped aside to let me pass.

I could hear my mother’s sobs.

I was still not registering what was happening.

My mother’s wails became more and more hysterical. “SOMEONE HELP HIM! PLEASE, SOMEONE HELP GET HIM OUT OF THERE!”

People continued to move aside.

“Jane, we can’t do anything. We have to wait for the fire department to get here with the jaws of life.”

There were sirens growing louder as they came closer and closer.

I finally reached the center of the ever-growing crowd. Someone grabbed my left arm as my body began to lose all ability to remain upright. Herman grabbed my right. Together they were holding me up in front of the crumpled, mangled and shattered green VW Bug.

Blood was trickling down his forehead from a gash just below his scalp.

The steering wheel was in his chest.

Glass shards were embedded in his face.

His eyes were fluttering open and closed.

“Mr. Sanchez pulled out. The other car had no choice but to swerve.”

Welcome to the end of life as I knew it.

Welcome to unbearable grief.

Welcome to a world where a young girl is forced to grow up way too early.

There were no limitations to the support of the old neighborhood, but it couldn't replace what was lost.

Dedicated to the memory of my most loving, funny and caring father, Robert Gebhardt, who was taken from this world way too soon at the age of 41. Not a day goes by when I do not think of you. I miss you as much today as the day we buried you. I see your smile and quick wit in my son, Jimmy and your kindness and compassion for others in my daughter, DawnMarie. May you forever rest in peace.

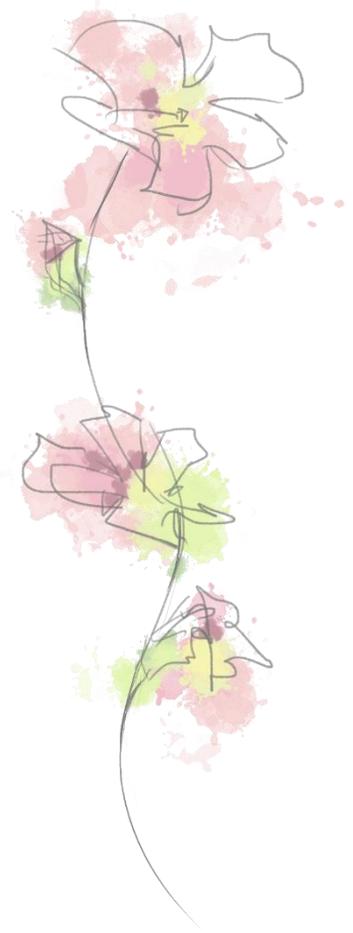
...And with grateful appreciation to Giovanni Antonelli who, at only twelve-years-old, dared to face profound sadness that no child should ever have to face during a narrative writing unit I was teaching the year he was assigned to my classroom. As his 7th grade LA teacher, I was in awe of his bravery as he took on grappling with his emotions over the loss of his mother through writing about this hugely defining moment in his life. I always tell my students that we all have stories to tell, however, most kids detail events such as winning a sporting game or their favorite vacation.

Gee chose to write about the death of his mother. His story was one that evoked such strong empathy in me that I found myself in tears while reading it. When we conferred during writing workshop about his piece, we talked about not only the craft of his writing but also his ever-present grief. I shared with him that I could understand his pain since I had lost a parent when I was young as well. Gee, with the innocence of a child, inquired if I had written about it. I told him after all of those years, I still couldn't bring myself to do it. He looked at me with the innocence of a child and told me one day I would be able to write about it, "when I was ready." I promised that one day I would do just that and would share the story of my defining moment. It took me 32-years, but, Gee, here is it.

On Being Pink

by Melissa Elison

Pink flamingoes perched precariously,
But with all the confidence of a Clydesdale.
Not much to do,
Yet doing much
While waiting, waiting with no reward.
One focus, one mission,
One leg up but remaining grounded.
Content to be.
A pink blur on time lapse photography
Reveals nothing but minor blips
In the unending fuchsia sea.
What will interrupt such vision and grace?
Only there for our enjoyment,
Their own desires remain hidden
Under a mask of pink.



The Thing About Writing
By Janice Ewing

It slips in as sly as a breeze
through a lightly-curtained window
you only notice is open
when the cool air skims your arm

Bringing with it an old image
or a new string of words
or a sudden change of breath
it doesn't matter

You only know
the window is open
for now
and the breeze is welcome.

I Have Stilled My Voice to Listen

By Lisa McCarthy

In the early days,

I sailed in wild winds,

ran very fast,

danced with abandon,

dressed in cardinal red.

And climbed so high. . .

But when I reached the precipice

I found no true companions there.

As you came,

I have been the lighthouse keeper,

have been the steady bow,

have learned to quench my fire with your

hopes and dreams.

I have counted beans for you,

and I have dressed in grey

I have stilled my voice to listen.

And in the waiting, in the holding,

in the subtlest of color,

in your strong voice my child,

I have at last found joy.

My Jelly Bean

By Lisa McCarthy

(From the Multi-Genre Work *A Ticket for the Journey*)



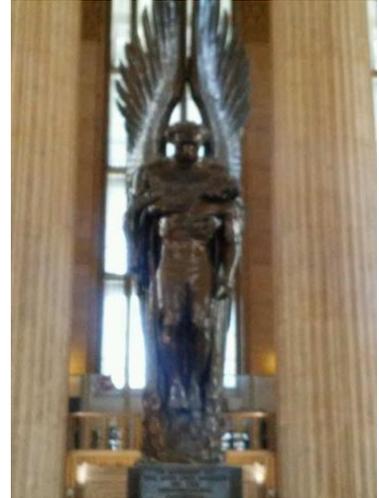
I still see Kathleen. Her height makes her stand out in the crowd, amber braid swinging against her black jacket. She was looking ahead, paying attention to finding her place on the train platform. The marble wall of the station echoed with footsteps, the orders of conductors and passenger's questions. This vast place swirled around me, copper, wood, bronze, neon signs and billboards. Then the *Keystone* arrived, betraying me, taking her away.

30 Street Station, January, snow falling outside, I sat hunched on a wooden bench, like an old-fashioned church pew, and my fingers gripped its smooth surface trying to hold onto time. Tears suppressed and unbidden slid quietly down my cheeks. Moments before, my daughter had affectionately said goodbye and headed toward Stairway 7 which would take her for the last time as a college student to Baltimore. Kathleen turned her head slightly toward me while wheeling her suitcase, smiled, and put her hand up. A wave of life rushing towards her and she was diving into it with relish. Then she disappeared in a crowd of other passengers. I smiled and waved and then collapsed upright on this bench.

Kathleen, my jelly-bean, had just been offered a job in Baltimore through her internship. I knew she would return, but maybe never for so long, and not as my women-child college student. "Yes, I will try to do this myself, but . . .", "Mom, would you have the Crew Team for dinner after the heat on the Schuylkill?". My tears were of joy and nostalgia for an end

of a ritual we had performed for the past 4 years - waiting for the train, having a coffee, and talking. I remembered her bright greetings when she arrived, some of the hurried departures balancing books and gifts, a duffel bag and some homemade treat. She was much more streamlined in her travel now, condensing everything into a neat black wheeled carry-on.

A soft golden light streamed through long station windows and moved with the shadows around me like souls searching for a home. Memories came to me of goings and comings and waiting, so much waiting, in this station. A haze of a particular spring day I had spent watching the hands of the station clock move slowly as I waited for the *Liberty Express* to take me to New York and then the airport and then to freedom, perhaps to sophisticated friends and mysterious cultures. My 21-year-old fingers drummed restlessly against my borrowed suitcase. Each train whistle and squealing brake promising a new life. My mother and father were with me, also, waiting. I barely noticed them, but they looked at the Amtrak Schedule Display with somber faces, quietly. When the *Liberty Express* arrived, my father gave me a tight bear hug, and my mother *cried* . . . I don't know that I had ever seen her cry before and didn't understand her tears. I would be fine; didn't she know I was self-sufficient, independent and so ready for this, or so I thought. I hugged her and hoped the embrace would communicate my affection and . . . my competency. I took my suitcase and turned to line up with the other passengers. I followed the stairway onto the train and became lost in the world beyond my childhood.



The hushed energy of so many journeys, reunions, of so much expectation, linger in the murmuring of conversations and the dust floating in the light under the high ceiling of the Station. Is that my father, a young man again in a suit and tie walking smartly with briefcase in hand towards my mother and me? We had been waiting, always waiting, for my father to come home from a business trip. Finally, he came, smiling through the other travelers with small mementos and recipes from meals in far-off restaurants that we would recreate when we got home.

And at Stairway 5 is that my Aunt Betty from Manhattan coming to celebrate the holidays? Coming with brisk instructions on how to perform household chores, "Chop! Chop!", with news of fashions and finance, with her jolly company while she helped us cook and wash dishes. She would sit with me on those holiday nights when I watched the Late Show and offer

a midnight snack and her warm, comforting presence when the movie was too chilling. Her voice lingers here and her silence.

Is that me over there by Stairway 6? A younger me waiting for *him*, coming in on the *Senator*, to take me to a dance, to make me laugh. Is that *him* standing by the statue of *Michael the Archangel* holding the fallen hero, the one who left and never returned?

I feel a soft wet nose on my hand and look to see a golden retriever, a police dog looking at me, it seems in

sympathy. His fluffy form was attached to police woman, and I see her through blurry eyes trying to give her a look that I hope communicated sanity.

They went on after a minute or so, looking for

something they hoped they would never find. Travelers moved around me towards stairways or stood poised, waiting for a train or a loved one or an inspiration to carry them somewhere -else. I breathed in the human smell of the station mixed with coffee and baking and the more subtle smell of roses from the flower stand. Grey light and cold crisp air suddenly rushed in through the open doors to 29th Street. The souls of the station seem to gather round me and pull me up and out towards the city. I turned around as I passed the Station schedule and looked at the departure times of *Acela Express* and the *California Zephyr*. They call to me to board them soon, to start a different adventure, to mingle my soul with the souls of all travelers and those that wait for them, not to mourn too long for what was, but to embrace what will be.



By Cheryl Lamoreux

Tractor

So much depends
Upon

A brand new
Tractor

Bright orange loader
Mower

Parked in the
Garage

Instead of my husband's
Car

Horses

So much depends
Upon

Not falling off
Again

Avoiding the *Whump!*
Owwwww!

Darn those darn
Bees

Sophomoric (Of Fifteen Years of Fifteen-Year-Olds)
By Jason Fritz

The apropos “It’s Greek to me.” expression
Fills students’ faces, taking on new meaning,
As they learn the roots *sophos*, denoting wise,
And *moros*, denoting foolish, both combining
To form the oxymoronic word *sophomoric*, a
Reference to the immaturity of tenth graders
Much unlike themselves, a stereotype, the type
Of which, immediately, they categorically reject
In all of its negative connotation, having broken
Down a label used to break down their complexity
Into a simplicity implicit in narrow-minded notions
Of others. No more binding to binaries, their lives
Much more than wisdom and foolishness, fluid,
Each and every one authoring novelty, a perpetual
Coming-of-age, mindful minds full, broadening,
Constantly redefining, roles unrolling, no fixation
On prefixes, suffixes. No fixes needed. They will
Write themselves in their own texts and contexts.

STOP MOPPING START CURLING 9/2016
by Lillian Reese Martin

Curling was a hot sport at the 2018 Winter Olympic games. Once the American men got into medal contention all eyes and TV channels tuned in to watch the competitions. I know nothing about curling, other than it's played on ice, with a team, and somehow the participants don't slip. Amazing! I intended to look up the rules and make sense of the sport, but I got caught up in cheering the red, white and blue and remain clueless about curling. The athletes paraded, the Olympics ended and so did my curiosity about curling until...

I wet-mopped the kitchen floor today, and when confronted by a cherry jam blob, near the sink, I realized I was curling, on wet tile. I swept the mop in short, swift, intense strokes: up and down, to the left and right, just like a curler coaxing their stone into the bulls-eye. No shouts of encouragement or specialized equipment needed. I labored until the jam blob vanished!

I'm not minimizing the amount of dedication and practice needed to become a world champion curler. However, I believe there are a lot of potential curling candidates mopping floors and unwittingly training for the Curling Teams of the 2020 Winter Olympics!

BEST WAY TO GET THERE 8/2016

by Lillian Reese Martin

GPS makes life easier. Tap an address, presto, instant directions! It's portable and paper free, traffic soothsayer, chatty, and does not require stopping for directions. Some people NEVER stop for directions.

On a recent drive, to Shenandoah National Park, I gathered my usual souvenirs of maps, trail guides, and local papers. The memorabilia remained in my car until I got a phone call from my brother. He was planning a fall foliage ramble and wanted to talk travel. We exchanged ideas on routes, scenery, and lodging. Then I remembered the maps: glossy wildlife photos, ranger talk schedules, tick advice, and hiking trails. My trip memories were like a 3D film. I was back at the park being sprayed by a waterfall, feeling slightly nauseous from driving through switchbacks, talking to total strangers, spotting a bear, sitting on overlooks musing about people who used to call these mountains home.

My brother will be stopping by today to borrow my souvenirs maps. No doubt he'll add to the collection.

GPS helped me find the path to Shenandoah and back home but it didn't have the power to trigger the delicious moments of a special time and place. Long live print.

By Frank Murphy

As teachers of writers, we **MUST** write. It doesn't have to be with intentions of ultimately being professionally published. It can be for nourishing ourselves or for nourishing others. I try to write in spots - what I mean is that I may write short notes that may be used as lines in a picture book I am just imagining or in the midst of writing. I may write down thoughts I want to gather and aggregate into something I may say or write to my sons or stepdaughter. It may be something I'll email to my wife as a surprise on a random Wednesday. It could be inspired something I see, or it could be inspired by writing right next to my students. Here's a peek into some of my musings that can be found on my iPhone notes and as notes in my library of Google Docs.

**One blade of grass...
amidst countless.
Shadows crisscross.
The sunlight attaches itself to the hues of green.
An entire world...
...shook by the wind.**

(I wrote this in spring 2018 on my iPhone notes alongside my students as they wrote about nature. We were studying Mary Oliver's poetry.)

I loved every second with you today. You speak so intelligently and you're so articulate. Know this. You are so #@%@ing handsome. You look rugged - you have a great face. You are built like an athlete. You gotta start seeing yourself as blessed. Because you are. You will do ANYTHING you want. I have no doubts. On top of all of this you have such a great personality. But trumping all of it is your total and absolute GOODNESS. You ARE better than I could ever be. And I wouldn't want it any other way. That makes me blessed. I love every single aspect of you.

(A note I crafted for my younger son, Chase. This was after a day we spent together, just me and him. Summer 2018)

**What is a poem?
You can write it
And you can recite it.
It might rhyme.
It might not rhyme.
It can have rules.
And it can have no rules.
It may have so many words.
Or it may have just a few.
Maybe only three.
Maybe only two.
*Imagine a poem that had something for everyone.***

And everyone knew it had a special meaning to anyone who reads or hears it.

A poem that means everything.

An unforgettable poem.

Now, imagine that the words we choose to give to people *are* unforgettable poems.

Words that are carefully chosen, but given easily and honestly and powerfully.

Words like...

I love you.

I like you just the way you are.

I need you.

I've got your back...

(This is from the first four pages spreads of a picture book I am working on. The inspiration came from a poem my son, Chase, wrote when he was 11 years old - he's now 19. The words in italics are his - taken from a fifth-grade book of poems that he dedicated to me.)

The Golden Key

By Gregory Maigur

The first thing Sully noticed as he came into the factory owner's office was the golden key hanging on the wall. To say it was large understated the key's massive size. It looked to measure the length of Sully's forearm easily, and he figured that if the key ended up in his hands, he would be reduced to dragging it on the ground.

"Impressive, isn't it?" came the voice from beneath the key. Sully dragged his eyes reluctantly away from the golden key to the man sitting behind a large polished oak desk. He had on clothes finer than any Sully had ever seen in Ireland. His black jacket had burgundy stripes that matched his waistcoat. A black-tie sat atop a stiff, bone-white shirt. The man's wrinkled face was framed by shoulder-length hair, washed and styled to make it shine like strands of silver.

He sat with his elbows on the top of his desk, his fingers making a steeple. He looked at them with the amused air of a grandfather.

"The key was a gift from the mayor," he continued, motioning to the golden idol that sat in the back of his head. Sully noticed that most of the eyes of the kids crowding the room looked upon the key the same sense of awe.

"Who would have thought that me, a boy born on a dirt floor in the wilds would one day rise to own this factory, be recognized by the mayor and given the key to the city of Boston?" Sully heard the group of boys gasp at the last statement. "I can tell you that any one of you boys can rise up to such a place here. All it takes is to play by the rules and to apply yourself to hard, physical work, both of which you will find here."

"My name is Leland Shaw," he rose from behind his desk, his arms outstretched in a welcoming embrace. "You are all orphans of the city of Boston. You have been entrusted to my governance over your lives. I will care for you, and I will feed and clothe you. I will be 'grandpapa' to you lost souls. All I ask in return is that you follow my rules and work. What say you, my new children?"

Many of the younger boys met Shaw's embrace, some with tears streaming down their little dirty faces. Sully stood back and noticed Shaw open his mouth in a large, content smile. Large grey and black teeth filled Shaw's mouth, and from a distance, Sully could smell his putrid breath.

At the sight, Sully couldn't help but be reminded of his journey to the factory.

They had spent a day on the rickety wagon that seemed to find every rut in the road and jolt Sully so hard at one time his teeth clamped down, and he bit the

side of his tongue. As the wagon rolled on, the air, once filled with the earthy smell of trees and horse droppings, became filled with a new smell that reminded Sully of a combination of burnt hair and rotten eggs.

Though it was June, black snowflakes fell on them, marring their surroundings in a thick dark haze.

What's causing it? Sully questioned. His driver pointed ahead, and through the murk, Sully saw a looming tower, taller than any tree he's seen in his life spew forth thick clouds of black smoke. The tower had been his first sight of the factory.

The same foulness the tower had spewed into the air seemed also to mar Leland Shaw's mouth. At that moment, Sully didn't trust Shaw's words or embrace. At that moment, Shaw's black mouth looked diseased and the words coming from it like the black flakes that dirtied the countryside.

An older man led the group of orphans out of Leland Shaw's office to a larger room that housed the boy's dormitory. Sully was struck by the utter emptiness of the room. He saw row after row of bunk beds, each covered with an identical faded blue blanket. Not one picture hung on the walls.

As their guide led them into the room, they passed by the other factory boys. Sully noticed that some didn't make eye contact, while others looked upon them with greedy grins and beady eyes. One boy with a rat-like face gave Sully a huge grin and slowly ran his finger across his throat.

Eventually, Sully was led to his bunk and found himself paired with a small boy around six, with long blond hair and eyes like shiny glass ready to break. He looked nervously at Sully, and when Sully motioned him to take the bottom bunk, he gave a sigh, obviously relieved.

The door to the room shut and the boys were left alone. Immediately, the room erupted into a mad combination of laughter, shouts, and cries. Sully climbed into bed and put his pillow over his eyes, hoping to block out the sound.

His eyes closed briefly when he heard a cry come from beneath his bunk. Sully leaned over and saw the small blond-haired boy jumping up and down. Sully noticed the rat-faced boy holding a round object in his hands, far out of the reach of the little boy.

"Give it back," the boy cried, tears streaming down his face, "Momma gave it to me, give it back."

"Momma?" Rat-face questioned, he peered at the picture inside what Sully saw was a locket. "This ugly cow is your Momma? What'd you run here for, to get away from her face?"

A group of boys, who had formed to watch the spectacle, gave a laugh.

"This is real silver," Rat-face noticed, "I'll get me an extra meal when I trade it with Mr. James." The boy kept jumping, and Sully saw Rat-Face give him a mocking pat on the head. Sully scanned the crowd looking for someone to help the boy, but he only saw casual indifference. The boy tried kicking Rat-face in the shins, but he moved away at the last moment, sending the little boy skidding onto the ground. As he lay on the floor, sobbing, Sully decided that he'd had enough.

"Give it back to him," he said, jumping down from his bunk.

"Mind your own business, string bean," Rat-face grunted, moving away into the crowd. Sully grabbed him by the arm and Rat-face swung at him. The punch was slow, and Sully easily ducked it. When he sprang up, Sully connected his fist with Rat-Face's chin, sending the boy flat on his back.

Sully snatched the locket from the boy's hand and stood up, his fist clenched, challenging anyone else to take the locket from him. The crowd scattered.

Rat-Face shakily rose to his feet, rubbing his chin.

"You'll regret having done that," he sneered. "I'll get even, you just wait."

Sully didn't say a word as Rat-face ran off. He put the locket in the small boy's hands, and the boy's eyes swam with tears of gratitude or incomprehension, Sully couldn't decide which. With a sigh, he went to climb back into his bunk, but to his disappointment, there was another boy already sitting there.

"Would you mind?" Sully motioned to his bed, "I'm so tired I can hardly think straight. I think one whipping is all I can dish out at the present moment."

Instead of moving, the boy struck out his hand.

"The name's Clover," he said, "It's 'cause I'm lucky."

Sully took his hand. He noticed that Clover was around nine or ten, the same age as him. He had long brown hair and a moon-shaped face. Around his wrist hung a tin bracelet with a four leaf clover on it.

"What can I do for you, Clover?" Sully grumbled, settling to sit on the edge of his bed.

"I saw what you just did to Randall," Clover motioned to the spot where Sully had just knocked Rat-face out. "He's a coward, but like all cowards, he's got a good memory. So, trust me when I say that he'll get even with you. Having enemies here can be the death of you."

"I don't even know where 'here' is," Sully exclaimed.

"Why you're in the finest textile mill in all of Boston," Clover boomed, mockingly, but then his voice fell to its normal volume, "at least that's what Mr.

Shaw says anyway. How is it that you're here and you don't even know where 'here' is?"

"I came from Ireland with me Ma and Pa," Sully answered, "They got sick and died on the boat. When I docked in the harbor, a man rounded me up with a group of others, like cattle. They put me on a wagon and took me here. What about you?"

"Me?" Clover gave a crooked grin, "I'm from a family of nineteen. My Pa figures its good business sense to unload a few of us on the factories."

"You mean that you don't get any of the money?" Sully questioned.

"Are you kidding?" Clover motioned to the door, "Shaw decides what we get if anything at all. I've been here two years and never seen a drop."

"What do we do, anyway?" Sully questioned. His knowledge of factories was non-existent, having grown up on an Irish farm.

"This factory makes yarn for clothes," Clover explained, "the big machines spin thread together. We act as gofers for the workers."

Sully raised his hands in confusion.

"Gofers," Clover continued, "Like 'hey kid go for this, or go for that.' But it's not easy work. The machines are dangerous, and I've been lucky enough to be put with a worker who doesn't hit me, but I feel that my luck is running out. So that's where you come in."

"What do you mean?" Sully asked.

"I need someone like you," Clover continued, "someone not afraid to get his hands dirty. I got to get out of this factory, and it's not as easy as walking out the front door. A kid needs some way to survive in this city. If not, then you'll end up on the streets stealing, and this life will seem like heaven."

"So what do you want from me?" Sully questioned.

"It's simple," Clover answered with a grin, "I'm going to steal Leland Shaw's golden key, and you are going to help me do it."

Sully sat on his bunk and stared at the missing hole where the nail of his left thumb had once resided. The heavy bleeding had clotted to form a dark red glob, but his thumb throbbed angrily, the pain tearing up his eyes, making his sight watery and unreliable.

Sully could not have imagined a worse start to his work in the textile mill.

After hearing Clover's plan, Sully had fallen to sleep the instant his head hit his pillow. But then a loud clanging woke him from a nightmare and he woke with a head filled with the disjointed images of his dead mother and father.

As sleep slowly freed him from its sticky embrace, he recognized the loud clanging to be that of a bell. He saw all the children stumble out of bed, fix their clothes and head out the door. Sully looked at the bottom of his bunk and saw a white shirt, brown pants and suspenders waiting for him. He dressed quickly and leaped over the side onto the floor. That's when he noticed his bunkmate, the small blond haired boy, sleeping soundly through the clanging noise.

Sully walked halfway to the door and then hesitated. He hated to be late on his first day, but he imagined the boy's penalty for not showing up at all much worse so quickly returned and shook the boy out of sleep.

Once the boy got dressed, they ran out the door and joined the others waiting in line. An older man was already addressing them, giving orders in a stern voice. Sully hoped that he could slip into the line without the man noticing, but he wasn't so lucky.

"It seems our new recruits have finally decided to join us," the man walked towards Sully, and he noticed a long billy club in his hands. A quick thrust of his hand and Sully felt the wind knocked from his lungs as the club slammed him in the chest. Sully fell to the ground, gasping for air. The man found the blond-haired boy and with a smacking sound, applied the billy club to the same awful effect.

"We all know the penalty for breaking the rules and what is rule one?" he motioned to the line of boys for an answer. Through gaps of air, Sully heard them say:

"ALWAYS LINE UP ON TIME!"

"Yes, now what should we do to our rule breakers?" he asked the line of boys. Someone spoke up, Sully thought it sounded like Rat-face, and said, "Give them the skinny."

Sully quickly found out what 'the skinny' implied. He and the blond-haired boy, who he learned was named George, were forced back to the end of the line. The big man with the club, Mr. James, made Sully and George remove all their clothes and hold them up above their heads. As the two boys walked naked into the factory, they were greeted by the hysterical laughter and jeers of the adult workers.

Sully felt his face burn from shame.

His day did not get better. Though he was allowed to get dressed, he soon learned the misery of life on the floor of a textile mill.

At six o'clock, they started the textile machines and the factory floor filled with the overpowering sound of gears, pulls and joints all twisting and working at the same time. To Sully, it sounded like the water crashing on rocks, never ceasing in its intensity.

He found himself paired with an older teen named Bill with a sore ridden face and vacant eyes. Bill's job consisted of feeding raw cotton into the machine and then collecting the woven ropes of thread that the machine produced. Sully learned that his job consisted of squeezing in between the machine to change the spindles once they ran out.

The machine's noise drowned out any opportunity for conversation, so Bill used a crude system to alert Sully to replace the spindle. One fist to his left shoulder meant to change the spindle on the left machine, one fist to his right meant to change the other. When he struck, Bill's vacant eyes would suddenly light up, and Sully soon learned that such hits gave Bill some break in the endless monotony of working the machines.

Sully could suffer through the hits the older boy laid on him, but what really bothered him was changing the spindles on the machines.

To Sully, the machine looked like a giant mouth, full of sharp teeth. The raw thread didn't seem pulled by the machine as much as chewed by a giant mouth. When Sully had to stick his hand into the machine, it was like diving into the jaws of a hungry bear. At any moment, he feared a clumsy move would cause the teeth to clamp down and sever his fingers.

The morning hours dragged on, and Sully climbed the machine and obediently changed one spindle after another. A bell clanged for breakfast, and the boys got to eat in shifts. Breakfast was a bowl of thick porridge and a glass of water. Sully had only gotten through half his small bowl when the bell clanged once more, and all the boys left their bowls and returned to work. Sully's stomach protested his slowness, but he dared not be late again, lest he face the humiliation of 'the skinny.'

Morning gave way to afternoon, and the machines kept working, Bill kept hitting and Sully kept changing the spindles. No lunch break came, and Sully was afforded just one quick bathroom break.

Around sunset, his empty stomach felt like it was eating his insides alive and when Bill punched his arm to change the spindle, he pretended to hold a bowl and spoon its contents into his mouth, hoping Bill would understand his question as to when they would eat.

Bill looked vacantly at him and punched him in the shoulder again, Sully motioned with his empty spoon and bowl once more, ignoring the command. That's when Sully heard a sharp keening sound, like the whining of a dog, come from the textile machine. Sully saw the panicked look in Bill's eyes, and he jumped up to change the spindle. He just had grasped it when one of the threads snapped on the machines' teeth. The thread caught Sully's thumb, ripping off the nail.

Sully fell to the floor, clutching his now nail-less thumb in his hands. Tears streamed down his face, and the thundering boom of his heartbeat filled his ears, drowning out the steady rumble of the machinery. It took Sully a moment to realize that the machines had stopped. He looked up and saw many workers crowded around him. Suddenly, Bill parted the crowd with Mr. James and he took Sully by the arm and led him out of the factory.

He led him to the infirmary, and with a grunt, Mr. James threw Sully down on a wooden bench and left. He tried to keep his eyes off of his bloody thumb, so Sully looked around the room, but the long tables with white sheets did not catch his interest.

He did notice that the infirmary stood across the hall from Leland Shaw's office. Sully craned his neck and saw light spilling out of the room. He looked up and saw the golden key fastened to the wall above Shaw's desk. In the candlelight, it looked as if a golden halo shone around it, making it seem somehow not real.

He thought about Clover's plan, to steal the key. What chance would he ever have of getting in Shaw's office? Clover must be mad, he reasoned, mad or desperate.

Mr. James returned, carrying a pale of water and some white bandages. He fixed Sully's thumb and left without a word. At that moment, a bell sounded, and Sully saw a crowd of workers file past the door.

His first day as a textile worker had ended.

From the chime of the clock, he realized that he had worked nineteen hours.

Now he sat on his bed, flexing his wounded thumb, he wondered how he'd be able to manage climbing the machine and change the spindles. His head hit his pillow and as he drifted off to sleep, the last thing he saw before darkness took him, was the golden key, hazy and beautiful.

Rough shakes woke Sully from a dreamless sleep. His eyes blinked open sluggishly to see Clover sitting at the edge of the bed, his feet dangling over the side.

"What do you want?" Sully yawned.

"Have you thought any more about my offer?" Clover asked.

"You mean stealing the golden key?" Sully answered. "It can't be done. They'll catch you."

"It can be done," Clover corrected him.

Sully rolled his eyes and put his head on his pillow.

"No, listen," Clover shook him again, "All we have to do is wait for Shaw to leave his office, go in and take it."

"How?" Sully groaned, "We never get a break, how are you going to sneak around his office when you got to be at the machines all day."

Clover tapped Sully's bandaged thumb. Sully looked at him dumbly, but then the realization hit.

"You're going to purposely injure yourself?" Sully shouted.

"Quiet down," Clover whispered, "Yes, I'm going to injure myself. You were in the infirmary today, it's right across from Shaw's office. Whenever someone gets hurt, they got to shut down the machines. Shaw does it himself, so he's always gonna be out of his office. I'll wait till they leave me alone and then sneak in and take the key."

"But how are you going to hide it?" Sully asked.

"I'll hide it in the bandages they give me," Clover said, the crooked grin back on his face.

"You mean you're not planning on faking an injury?" Sully's voice rose again, and at once he regretted it. He could see a few of the boys sitting up in their bunks, woken up by his shouts. He only hoped no one was listening to their conversation.

"Would you quiet down," Clover protested. "I can't fake an injury, then they'll be suspicious. I've been working these machines for two years, and I know what they're capable of. I only plan on losing a finger. Hey, then I'll have four fingers on my hand, a real four leaf clover."

Sully looked at the boy thinking he'd lost his mind. But Clover just stared back at him, resolute and confident in his mad plan.

"What do you want me to do?" Sully sighed.

"Come with me," Clover said. "I lied to you before. I don't have nineteen brothers or sisters. I don't have any parents either."

"I can't stay in this place. If I don't leave now, then I'll be trapped here forever. I'll become just like one of them machines, just work and that's it. If I can do this, I'll be out on the street with a bum hand and a heavy golden key. I need someone to help take care of me for a while."

Even in the dark, Sully could read the urgent need on Clover's face.

"I'll go with you," Sully agreed.

"Beauty, mate!" Clover punched him on the arm, "When the bell sounds ending the day, head to the infirmary. Then we're out the doors and will never look back."

Clover jumped from Sully's bed. Sully lied down, and as he turned over, he saw a boy's shadow duck down. Sully wondered who'd been eavesdropping

on their conversation and a prickly fear crept through his mind. But sleep claimed him once again, and his concern soon faded away.

Bill found plenty of opportunities to thrash Sully the next day on the factory floor. No matter how hard he tried to focus, Sully couldn't keep his attention on the roaring machine in front of him. He was waiting for the machines to stop, for that awful moment when Clover willingly let the machine rip off his finger.

He wondered why he'd agreed to Clover's plan. What chance did they have of making it out of here? But deep down, he knew that life in this factory wasn't anything he could stand for much longer. In Ireland, his parents fed him tales of America, stories full of promise that they'd hope would quell Sully's empty stomach.

But the endless cruelty of the factory couldn't be all America had to offer. There had to be more.

Sully felt a hard slap on his cheek that knocked him down and caused his left eye to water. He looked up to see Bill angrily motioning to the machine. Sully shakily stood up and climbed the machine, careful to grab the spindle without losing another thumbnail.

The breakfast bell's chime broke through the relentless drone of the machinery, and both Sully and Bill walked towards the dining benches. As the boys lined up for their bowl of mush, Sully searched for Clover. He found him already seated at the bench and waving him over.

Sully and Clover ate in the silence of the truly hungry. When finished, Clover leaned over to him.

"I'm going to do it when I get back," he whispered, "I can't take another full day of this. Plus, I'll probably need some rest when I get to the infirmary. I'll lose some blood, but you'd be amazed at how good Mr. James is at sowing a stump shut."

"I guess he's had a lot of practice," Sully added. Clover just nodded.

The bell rang once more, and as Clover got up, Sully grabbed his arm.

"Don't do this," Sully pleaded, "They're got to be a better way out of here."

"If there's a better way, I haven't seen it yet," Clover replied. "Listen, I'll be fine. It's just my little finger. What do you need your little finger for anyway?"

Clover walked away with a laugh. Sully shook his head and deposited his empty bowl. When he turned, Rat-Face stood in his path, a sickly grin on his face. Sully pushed past the boy, hoping not to provoke him into a fight.

As he passed, he heard Rat-Face whisper “good luck.”

Sully whipped his face around and saw Rat-Face waving at him and smiling.

He waved with only his little finger.

Sully ran back to the factory floor and searched for Clover. It must have been Rat-Face listening to their conversation last night. What if he told Mr. James? What would their punishment be?

Sully ran up and down the factory floor, looking left and right for Clover. Maybe Mr. James’s punishment wouldn’t be so bad. After all, they didn’t really steal anything. Kids make stuff up all the time. Maybe they could talk Mr. James into thinking Rat-Face was making it up just to get even with them.

Sully’s mind raced through ten possible excuses when he heard the sound.

Growing up on an Irish farm came with its fair share of chores, one of which was chopping wood. Sully used to enjoy taking a thin piece of wood and bringing it down across his knee, the sharp crack of wood like a gunshot in the cold air.

The sound Sully had just heard coming from one of the machines reminded him of the sound of wood cracking over his knee. The machines had stopped, and Sully saw a man run frantically past him.

Sully's heart hammered in his chest. Part of him knew what'd he see as he rounded the corner. He tried to convince himself it wasn't Clover, it couldn't be. Clover was lucky, he was just going to lose a little finger, that's it. But he saw a shining bracelet lying on the ground. He bent down and picked up Clover's tin four-leaf clover, realizing it was covered in blood. Looking up, he saw his friend, unconscious, his arm stuck in the machine at an angle Sully knew could not occur naturally.

Mr. James nearly knocked Sully to the ground as he raced to Clover and took stock of the situation.

“What happened,” Mr. James questioned. A man next to Sully, who must have been Clover’s adult, spoke up.

“Some kid pushed him into the machine,” he spat, his voice thick with anger.

Sully’s eyes searched the crowd. He didn’t see Rat-Face, but he could feel his eyes watching him. He felt himself trembling with anger but also shame. He’d brought this upon Clover. This was his fault.

It took Mr. James an agonizing amount of time to free Clover's arm from the machine, and when he finally did, Sully recoiled at the blood but also the sight of the boy's misshapen left arm, which seemed to twist loosely behind him.

Someone brought a blanket and he, Mr. James, and Clover's adult put the boy on the blanket and using it as a stretcher, brought him to the infirmary.

They gently laid Clover on the wooden table. Mr. James and the adult left the room. Out in the hall, Sully heard Mr. James talking with Leland Shaw. He spoke of ringing the local doctor, about how Clover's arm would have to be amputated.

Sully felt himself beginning to shake when a hand clasped tightly on his arm.

"What happened," Clover managed, his eyes tight shut from the pain.

"It's fine," Sully croaked, "You're going to be fine."

"I think I might lose more than just my little finger," Clover whispered, at to Sully's disbelief, gave him a weak smile.

"Sully," Clover's voice seemed to be deflating as if he struggled against a heavy weight on his chest. "I don't think I can move, go get the key."

"No, Clover!" Sully protested. "There is a doctor on the way. We can't leave now."

Clover's eyes sprang open, and the fevered intensity of them both shamed and horrified Sully.

"GET THE KEY, PLEASE!" he begged.

Sully started to protest, but he couldn't think of any excuse that would satisfy Clover.

"I'll do it," he sighed, "just promise me you'll rest."

Seemingly satisfied, Clover's eyes shut. Sully slid over to the door and nervously peeked out into the hall. No one stood there, and Shaw's office stood open with no one in sight. The golden key hung on the wall, serene and almost welcoming.

Cursing his own stupidity, Sully crossed the hall and entered Leland Shaw's office. He heart thudded loudly in his chest, the sound matching the roar of the textile machines. He crossed over to the office's far wall and put his hand on the key, which felt cold to his touch. He ripped the key off the wall and hurried towards the infirmary.

Just then, voices came from further down the hall, Sully raced around the infirmary, the key in his hand, not knowing what to do with it. The voices grew closer, and he began to panic. Just as Mr. James entered the room, Sully grabbed the blanket used to bring Clover into the infirmary and wrapped the key inside.

Sully sat on his bunk, his fingers nervously rubbing the tin clover clean.

The rest of the day in the factory passed in a red haze. Sully had managed to hide the key under his pillow when Mr. James had allowed him to return to his bunk to remove his bloody clothes. When the machines ground to a halt, and the bell clanged, Sully hardly noticed. His mind stayed with Clover, the whole time wondering if his friend would survive.

He didn't hear Mr. James approach his bunk. The man tapped his leg with his billy club.

"Are you the friend of the boy we brought into the infirmary today?" James grunted.

"Yes," Sully's heart nearly exploded with anticipation. "How is he? How's his arm? Did they have to amputate?"

"The boy's dead." Mr. James said, walking away.

Sully waited for the lights to go out in the dormitory. Once all seemed settled, he threw off his covers, grabbed the golden key and headed towards the back entrance of the factory. No one would stop him, he realizes, even if they saw him leave.

What better life was there for an orphan?

But Sully had the golden key, he had his ticket out of here, a ticket that Clover had given his life for. Sully took the key from out of the blanket. A lantern hung next to the door, and its soft light bounced off its golden surface.

Sully admired it, and as he went to wrap it back up, his fingernail scraped the key's surface. Sully examined the long gash where his finger had penetrated the key. With dawning horror, Sully brought the key up to the lantern. A long strip of dull grey appeared where his fingernail had scratched. The golden key wasn't gold at all, but an iron key painted with gold paint.

Sully started to cry. His fingers clawed at the key, furiously scratching the gold paint. His sobbing slowed, and he beheld the key, its gold veneer gone and its cold, ugly grey exposed to the world.

Sully took the key, threw it on the ground outside the boy's dormitory and headed back towards his bunk. After all, the morning bell would ring whether he was rested or not and he couldn't afford to lose this job which gave him food and shelter but might end up killing him.

What better life was there for an orphan?

By Sharon Williams

Biological Mother

They are mine
I brought them into this world
They are mine
You have no rights to them
They are a physical part of me

The bearing of a child
You know nothing about
They grow inside of you
Become a part of who you are
An extension of yourself
They are mine

A piece of my heart
Remains in that house
A part of me is there
Did you remove
All of the pictures of me?
How will they know I love them?

I wish I could kiss them goodnight
I miss them so much
Will they remember me
As time marches on?

What is best for them?
Certainly not an alcoholic mom.
One with no money to support them
But who loves them
Enough to leave them
In capable hands.

They will always be
A part of me
They are yours
Yet they are ours
I will not see them again.

Stepmother

They are mine
I am raising them
As if I brought them into this world
They are mine
I do have rights to them
They are part of my heart

They are mine
I carry them with me
Everywhere I go
They are growing in front of me
Becoming a part of who I am
A piece of my heart

How will they know I love them?
I awaken them each morning
Tend to their needs and wants
Kiss their boo boos.
I make their meals and check their homework
I kiss them goodnight

As time marches on,
I will remind them of you
They will know that you loved them
That the choice you made was
What was best for them

In capable hands

They will always be
A part of me
They are yours
Yet they are ours

