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Aspire

“I write so that I don't die
before I'm dead”—Thomas Williams

Literary Texts
by the Participants in
En205: Introduction to
Literary Studies

Summer 2011

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Emotions
Melanie Tobey

I walk, I tumble, I fall,
It isn't always what you expect,
But you'll get through it.

I fight, I crawl, I cry,
We've all been through it
Every emotion.

I'm happy, I smile, I laugh,
It can change so fast,
Enjoy it while it lasts.

I'm angry, I yell, I rage,
We all handle it differently,
Though the feelings remain the same.

I walk, I tumble, and I fall,
I fight, I cry, I crawl,
I'm happy, I smile, I laugh
I'm angry, I yell, I rage.

Life is a rollercoaster,
In a minute our emotions can change,
There is no way to control them.

Though they are part of life,
They can cut you like a knife.
If your lucky they raise you up.

The list goes on and on,
The good the bad the ugly,
Our Emotions define us.

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Ding Dong Ditch

Kristin Elliott

It all started when the leaves turned; the air was crisp and the grass was freshly cut. I liked to call it soccer season. The fresh smell of cut grass and paint on the field cast a rush of energy through my body. I hustled out to the soccer field and started to put my gear on for practice. As I sat down with my teammates and put my stuff on, I felt ecstatic to be on the team. It was big deal for me to make my middle school soccer team. I was one out of the three seventh graders to make the team. The team only consisted of seventh and eighth graders, so I considered myself pretty “cool.”

As I laced up my cleats and pulled up my socks, the older girls started to talk about what we were going to do at the team sleepover that night. Our coach came on the field, which stopped our discussion, so we started practice. She was very serious, so we knew once she got to practice there was no time for fooling around. So the discussion about our sleepover would have to be continued later. After two hours of soccer practice, everyone rushed out to their cars to get ready for the sleepover. I guess they had forgotten about planning what we were going to do that night. So I packed up my gear and hurried to my mom’s car.

I couldn’t contain my excitement when I got home.

I kept bugging my mom and asking, “Can we leave yet? I want to be the first one there!”

My mom replied, “Why are you so excited about this sleepover?” And then with her most famous motherly quote, “You better not get into any trouble!”

I answered back, “Mom I know! You know, I wouldn’t do anything I’m not supposed to.”

My mom always told me not to anything I wasn’t supposed to do, even if everyone else is doing it. It was the last thing she said to me every time I left the house. It might have been annoying, but I listened, because I felt if I didn’t I would’ve been a disappointment. Finally, it was time to leave and we headed over to Kelsey’s house. The captain of my soccer team, Kelsey lived on a very long and wealthy street called the flume, and her house was at the end of it. As we drove to the end of the street, we passed many houses. The driveways resembled a serpent in form that led to enormous houses, where the lights shined through their vast windows just like a lantern. I knew a lot of people who lived around here, but, for some reason, these houses just seemed eerie. After about 3 miles, we

arrived at Kelsey’s house. I quickly grabbed my sleeping bag and pillow, gave my mom a hug and ran into Kelsey’s house.

Everyone started to trickle into the house as the night went on. We gorged ourselves on pizza and ice cream, as we watched movies and played games. As it got later into the night, Kelsey and some of her fellow eighth graders were whispering about something in the corner of the room. They were giggling and getting excited. They then decided to share with the rest of the team what they were talking about. Kelsey thought it would be fun to go play ding dong ditch in the neighborhood. All my teammates got wound up and thought it was great idea except one of the girls in my grade, named Julia. I used to go to church with her and remember she was kind of goody two shoes. Not to say that I was a bad kid, Julia just always had to follow every rule. She started telling us how she had done it before and the cops showed up. I started second guessing myself and thought about backing out of this adventure. But then Carlee, another seventh grader, stood up and said, “What are the chances the cops are going to show up? It happened once; it’s not going to happen again. Anyway we are in the woods and practically in the middle of nowhere; cops never come here.” Maybe she was right; we were pretty far back in the woods and the street looked abandoned when we were driving to Kelsey’s. Also, I couldn’t let Carlee be the only seventh grader to go. I was “cool” now, and I had to keep up my reputation.

Going against my conscience, I put my shoes on and headed outside into the dark with the rest of my team, leaving Julia behind. It was nighttime when we stepped outside, but the moon illuminated the street as we sauntered down the flume. As we walked down the street everyone discussed how we were going to approach “ding dong ditching.” I kept to myself; all I could think about was Julia. Was she right? Should I have stayed back and kept it safe? Just as I thought about turning back, Kelsey thought it would be a good idea to work in groups of four. Of course, Carlee was in my group along with the two eighth grade captains, so there was no turning back now. We started to go in our groups up to people’s houses ringing their door bells and then running and hiding behind a tree. The rush of adrenaline I got from running away made me forget all about what Julia had said. We kept on “ding dong ditching” until we reached the top of the flume and started to walk back to Kelsey’s house. The street was deserted the whole time we had been “ding dong ditching.” Suddenly, out of nowhere, lights from a car shined on us like a spotlight. We all stopped like a deer in headlights as the car pulled up to us. A woman was driving the car; she started to slow down and rolled up her

window as she approached us. The woman looked very angry and started to yell at us. She said, “You girls can’t go around ringing people’s doorbells at this time at night. We thought we were being robbed, you are lucky no one got shot!” She was being a little dramatic with the whole getting shot part so most of the team kept walking back. The woman was done yelling at us and, as she was about to leave she said, “Oh and, by the way, we called the cops and they are on their way.”

My stomach dropped like a watermelon hitting the pavement from a ten story building and all the things Julia had told us rushed back to me. Kelsey immediately grabbed her phone and called her mom to come pick us up. We were quickly walking back to Kelsey’s as Kelsey’s mom came to get us. When she arrived most of the team piled into the car, but not all of us could fit. Kelsey, two other eighth graders, and Carlee stayed back and said they would keep walking until she came back again. I was about to squeeze my way into the car, and then I thought I thought to myself. Was I going to miss out on my opportunity to really connect with the older girls? Was this my final chance to prove to them that I was “cool?” I certainly couldn’t let Carlee be the only seventh grader who was accepted by the eighth graders. So, I went against my gut and stayed and walked back.

We continued back to Kelsey’s and the older girls were pretty impressed by our aplomb. I was so overwhelmed with the fact that the eighth graders were impressed by me that I hid I was apprehensive about the cops coming. As soon as I thought everything was going great, blue and red lights flashing behind us over the hill. I couldn’t move. My legs were like Jello and all I could think of is what my parents would think. The cop pulled up to us got out of the car. He knew we were the ones “ding dong ditching,” so he asked for our names. As we were giving our names to the cop, Kelsey’s mom showed up. The cop let us off on a warning and said that we should be careful because he still had our names. Kelsey’s mom wasn’t mad when we got in the car; she was just happy that we were all safe. Everyone was excited that he only took our name. But not me I sunk into my seat as the thoughts flew through my mind about how my parents would react. I couldn’t disappoint them. I could envision my mom saying, “Kristin, I’m not mad at you I’m just very disappointed in you.” I always hated when she would say this. I would rather be grounded for three months than be the blunderer in the family. As we got closer to Kelsey’s house I kept thinking to myself, “Why did I do that? Was it worth going against all I was taught just to impress my teammates? Is this what true friendship is? Was it really worth it?”

July
Nick Milley

Leaning in the moon at noon,
a silver knife of lighted way.
On dock it sits and watches through
over velvet body of rocky current.
The offered are of two by way
of one bygone and one to stay,
Sky’s shadow leaps to what is thought.
Was it his or was it owned,
gliding on moving gear,
in new surroundings familiar seen,
soon be missing like the rest
As this it is I take the light.

Mi Familia Loca

Christine Hines

“Mija is scared.”

My grandfather acknowledged my discomfort as we surveyed his gutted out rental property on 62nd and Vermont, three miles from the Coliseum in the aftermath of the 1992 riots. The insurance company wanted photos of what was once a popular Mexican deli, Sonora. It was a place where fellow émigrés ate grandma’s menudo with gusto in the 50’s, 60’s and into the 70’s--its non-greasy, flavorful broth sharing the light golden hue of many a gringa’s hair, the tamales stuffed with shredded pork enveloped in a light masa. The business was a family affair, swallowing up a fair amount of my father’s youth - hours spent after school and on weekends helping his parents achieve the American dream.

A young adult, I had tagged along with my parents to visit my paternal grandparents on Workman Street in Lincoln Heights, the oldest suburb in Los Angeles.

“Oh, it’s a dog.”

Moments before someone decided it best to have an entourage accompany my grandpa on the aforementioned mission, I gifted my grandmother with an egg--a real goose egg. It was decorated with lattice work, a pattern carved into the shell with a dental tool. Wearing protective goggles, I made the delicate cuts, fashioning what I hoped resembled one of Faberge’s imperial creations. The objet d’art a la mode d’enameled chinoiserie might as well have been a hand grenade; Noni suffered from advanced macular degeneration.

“It’s an egg, momma. Christine’s taking a class.”

There was that French name my mother carefully selected for her first born with the intent of underscoring my French ancestry, amounting to little more than a great grandparent I knew nothing about. She flinched whenever someone called me “Christina,” having worked hard to shield her offspring from the prejudice she experienced growing up in the barrio. The ruse was plausible owing to alabaster skin that mirrored my paternal grandfather’s – his resulting from a thirteen-year-old Mexican peasant’s encounter with an Anglo. At 96, my great grandmother still stonewalled when pressed for the details, her noble chin lifted in profile.

Arriving north bound on the 5 freeway, razor wire was wrapped around the exit signs to discourage tagging –graffiti ghetto art – an indication we were reaching our destination. We drove past twisted metal

debris, broken buildings with bars on windows having long ago lost any architectural integrity, not a shrub of greenery in sight.

A group of twenty men or so, black and Hispanic, sat idly at the corner liquor store abutting my grandparents', where after too many drug deals, shootings, and arrests, childhood dead-ended for boys who couldn't shoot hoops like Kobe or tell their sides of the story like Coolio and Ice T.

“Relax, honey; everything is fine.”

This reassurance came from a man who grabbed a hammer and walked with purpose towards our neighbor’s home, as though he meant to turn off a forgotten water hose, after Mrs. Ally had skipped the cops and dialed up my dad upon returning home to a busted out front door. She was certain the intruders still lurked amid the shag carpet and white, vinyl bar stools.

“I prefer we don’t test your optimism.”

The whiff of parfum in my constitution overtook me, as I noted the eyes locking ours with expressions more discernible. Grandpa struck up a conversation with an elderly black man meandering slowly in the alley behind the dingy rental units. Though I could not make out their words, amiable smiles and nods ensued. The strangers on the corner took regard of the exchange as well.

When we finally piled in the car, I wanted to know the identity of the old man.

Grandpa shrugged, “I don’t know him, but I pretended to. You see, mija, you have to show that you are not afraid.”

Oh great. The reality: my personal well being was as tenuous as the local job market. Grandpa smiled at me with blue Spanish eyes, proud he thought to pepper the man with the names of bodega owners, neighbors and their children, coming and going back decades. In an oft-told story that would sound apocryphal to anyone who did not know my grandfather, he returned to his store with my father to turn off a slow cooker the night of the '65 Burn Baby Burn Watts riots. Cops with rifles at the ready approached him.

Dad shouted, “He’s my father! We own this place.”

They took in the scene: my dad, the cook who lived above the store with his young wife and newborn carrying out some belongings.

“Get everyone in the car and get the hell out of here. Keep driving and don’t stop!”

Apparently, my family's brand of crazy goes way back. We don't look ethnic enough people! Mendel's powerful recessive genes have muddied the waters; my brother is blue eyed as well.

It had grown quiet on the ride back to Orange County. Thoughts about changing race perceptions - something akin to felling a giant Sequoia with a butter knife - gave me a headache.

Now safe at home, a demographic once removed, I accompanied a neighborhood acquaintance on her walk. Still, just how far I had retreated from the sentiment pervading the earlier part of my day remained a question mark.

Marie invited me inside her dated, 1980s styled unit after we completed the last lap around our complex.

"I hate going to the pool and seeing all the Hispanics. It's gotten to be like livin' in Santa Ana," she enjoined after I told her a man in my building threatened the life of another.

"Marie, he's White. It's about socioeconomics, don't you think?" Wondering why I bothered, I sought a coaster for the generously worn coffee table, then reached for the hospitality proffered, salted peanuts in the upturned lid of a wide-mouthed Planters jar.

She was now on the defensive, "I told you I dated an Italian man just after my divorce, right off the boat..."

This frightened, middle-aged woman sitting in a low-ceilinged room that grew on you only after a little alcohol was visibly agitated. My pulse slowed.

"Some of my best friends are bigots," I concluded with a wry smile before changing the topic.

Momma Says

Karlynn Wells

Momma says you can do no wrong.

Black cocoa man of God, he built you nice and strong.

Momma says I need to find a man just like you,

One that loves me and will forever be true.

Momma says loving you can be easy as breathing air,

But sometimes as hard as combing my course brown hair.

Momma says y'all gon grow old together.

Sickness and health, till death do you part; you'll make it thru whatever.

Momma says you would never let your thoughts linger,

To another woman's chest, butt, or legs, not even her finger.

Momma says suck in that stomach and thicken those thighs,

A black woman's body is her black man's prize.

Momma says prepare, the neck bones, cornbread, and collard greens,

No husband of hers will stand skinny or lean.

Momma says make sure I give my man babies,

Turn my boys into gents and my girls into ladies.

Momma says your daddy is the only man I love,

No one but God would I ever put above.

I say to Momma your truth is a lie,

Momma says, "Chile, I know, but without him I'd die."

One Moment

Lauren Giesecke

“This basement is ridiculous! This house is ridiculous! I can’t stand all this stuff in such a small space! Ugghhhh!” For some reason, it made me feel better to say it out loud. I just needed to find the Longaberger basket that goes with the liner to put the vegetables in for Nancy’s party. “I probably should have done this last night.” Bags piled on top of boxes with no order whatsoever fill the basement of this tiny 1960’s city ranch. Pathways have been cleared to provide some access to all this stuff. “I want to get a dumpster and toss all this junk.” I rant. Scott says nothing but continues to try to help in the search for the serving tray, although I know he has no idea what he’s looking for. Just as I think I’m getting close to some items that were from my kitchen before I married Scott and moved into his Manchester house, I uncover her tote bag. I’d forgotten about it, as I’d forgotten about most of the stuff I have stored down here. I pause, my frustration completely dissipating, then, almost with reverence, lift the small canvas tote by the handles. Quietly, I peer inside the small purple-ish pink bag she liked so much.

Inside are a few envelopes with her handwriting on them – bills with notes to herself about check numbers and payment dates. There’s a list of things to do, so typical of my mother. She worked as a Library Aide in an elementary school for over 35 years. She liked to track things. I chuckle to myself when I see this, as it reminds me of taking her grocery shopping and how she’d add items to her list and then check them off when she bought something she hadn’t planned on. She was always checking things out, maintaining order. This basement would horrify her, but not surprise her.

Under the envelopes I find a small, crisp counted cross-stitch piece she was working on in a tidy zip lock bag. It was a gift for one of her many friends, but I can’t remember who. She didn’t have a lot of money, but she gave away what she had in small, thoughtful ways.

At the bottom of the bag is the book she was reading, *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*, by Kim Edwards. My mother loved books, loved reading. She wanted us all to love reading too, spending hours and hours, even in our teens, reading to us. She read children’s books new to her library and classics, like *Little Women*. Whereas some teens lash out against their parents by lying or doing things to get into trouble, my teenage rebellion was carried out by not reading. I subconsciously caress

the cover. This book is the last thing my mother read. She thought about it and talked about it – savored it, like an exquisitely cooked meal. I hold it in my hands and remember.

I remember it so vividly – sitting in that old rocking chair in my mother’s living room. It is an early evening in April, still light out but the sun is beginning its descent. I am slouched in the chair with my feet planted on the floor in front of me and my head tipped back, rocking slowly, as I watch flecks of dust float in odd directions through the filtered sunlight. The old, dried out wood of the chair creaks as I move back and forth, rocking, rocking, burning this moment into my memory. I know I will want to remember it: the stillness of it, the peace of it, the somberness of knowing I have been blessed.

Delicate white lace curtains with scalloped edges grace the wall of windows. I remember hanging them for her when she first moved to this apartment. At that time, it seemed too early to move her into senior housing. She seemed to be so much younger than the other residents there, but that hadn’t held her back. She joined committees and book clubs and the local historic society. She went on trips with friends she met at the local YMCA. She helped her fellow residents when they needed a ride. My fears were unfounded. This move was a blessing. It gave her all sorts of freedoms she didn’t allow herself when she was busy raising my sisters and I. Her social network became a backbone for her that I did not fully understand the significance of. Not until now. In the 8 years since she’d moved here, she learned to live out loud.

I remember the details of that moment and the details of that room as I rocked in time with the ticking of the clock on the wall. A sprinkling of neatly arranged trinkets and keepsakes interspersed with framed photographs of friends and family lined the wide white window sill, each one carefully arranged. I know the story behind every one. I am glad for that. Glad that at least I paid attention enough to know that the chubby glass bluebird was a gift from Kaye Klein, the Elementary School Librarian in the school district my mom retired from. The stained glass angel hanging in the lower right window pane was a Christmas gift from Tish, a friend she shared the experiences of motherhood with. Glad that I knew the funny picture of ‘the ladies’ wearing hair nets was taken last fall when they took a tour of the candy shop in Ogunquit. And so glad to know the ladies in that snapshot, the friends with whom my mother had met purely by accident one day in the senior’s exercise class at the local YMCA. It was two of those very ladies who found her confused and unable to walk in this apartment so many months ago, when this drama

began. Betty and Esther had stopped by this apartment to visit. They had expected to see my mom that morning at their usual coffee date, but this day she wasn't there. Betty, so direct and no-nonsense with an uncanny sense of knowing, took matters into her own hands and headed right over to check it out.

They found my mom sitting at her kitchen table, seemingly normal at a glance but confused – not at all like my mother. They decided it would be best to get her to the emergency room. Once there, they called me. I'd taken the day off from work to bring my daughter, Hannah, and her friend, Jenny, to the New England Aquarium. It was the Friday of Veteran's Day weekend in November. Hours later, I finally made my way through the traffic in time to talk with the hospitalist and see my mother admitted for pneumonia. It was late by the time all seemed to be in order, leaving my mom to rest and recover.

At 5:15 the next morning, my phone rang. "Is this Lauren?" the voice on the other end said. I confirmed, unsure of whom this person was and what could be so important to call me so early in the morning. "At 5:00 your mother's nurse was in her room and noticed she was having difficulty breathing. Your mother seemed to be in cardiac arrest, so a code was called. The doctor's are working on her now and they're doing everything they can do" The voice kept talking. I don't know what else she said. I heard words continuing to pepper my ear, but my brain was stuck on '...doing everything they can....' "What?" I asked, my brain not fully accepting what I'd heard. She repeated the same words, like it was a canned script.

The hospital became my nightmarish reality. Tubes and machines pulled bloody fluids from her insides. The prognosis was not good. Weeks went by before ICU nurses began chasing me with 'Do Not Resuscitate' forms to sign. I couldn't do it. "Do we just give up on her? She was driving her friends around and attending book clubs and historical society meetings a week before this happened. How can you just sign a form and file her away like a statistic?" Thanksgiving had passed and we were working toward Christmas. My sister's finally consented to work with the doctors with me to try something – anything- to get her off the ventilator and out of ICU. The attempts were finally successful, but by now she'd been so long in the hospital that she couldn't walk. Now it was rehab we faced, followed by setbacks brought on by Congestive Heart Failure. Somehow she made it. She was wrecked, both emotionally and physically, but she made it. She transitioned her way back to home.

As I stand there holding her book in this crazy cluttered basement, I remember the light beginning to fade that April evening, and my thoughts wandering to what would happen next. I didn't want the ICU nurses and the emergency room doctor to be right. They didn't know her or know what she's made of. And yet I knew. Somewhere deep inside myself I knew it was the beginning of the end.

"What's that?" Scott asks. "It's my mother's book." I reply, as if there were only one. "She was reading it when she died," I add. "You should read it," Scott offers. I should. I will. "I'll bring it on the plane to Hawaii with me and read it then. I won't have time until after my Intro. to Lit. class ends." Feeling calmer, centered, I tuck my treasure under my arm and abandon the search for the basket. "I'll put the vegetables in something else. Let's go."

Auntie

Kathryn Kirkpatrick

Your grace and beauty will
 Always be remembered.
The lessons you've instill'd
My Little Ears have learned.

Time is of the essence.
 Let's make some memories.
We'll ask in His presence,
 "Don't take her from us, please."

Saturdays at the beach,
 Our favored place to lie.
Wishing days lived f'ever,
 So our time would never die.

We'll make memories and pray
 Until He takes your breath away.

A Surprising Trip

Christina Moreira

"I can't wait to meet them," said Megan.
"Oh, trust me, you're going to wish you never said that," Joe replied.
Megan and Joe have been dating for two years and she has yet to meet most of his family. Joe's family lives in Calabria, Italy. It's beautiful there; its hot and the beaches are clear blue.
Megan is twenty-two years old and lives with two roommates. She has long, straight brown hair and green eyes. She's a blend of different nationalities, but her family refers to themselves as "Americans."
Joe is twenty-four years old and lives by himself in his apartment. He is tall, with very short, dark brown hair and brown eyes. He is one hundred percent Italian, which often makes Megan feel like an outsider when she is with his family.
All of Megan's family lives in the United States, so Joe has met just about all of them. Megan was upset that she had barely met any of Joe's family besides his parents and sister. She wanted to get to know Joe's family, but she thought it would never happen.
One day, Joe's grandmother in Italy called him and said, "Joe, we all miss you so much. It's been a year since we've seen you please tell me you're coming to visit soon!"
"I'd love to come, Nonna. I miss you, too. I was thinking of coming in August," said Joe.
"We would love that! How about you bring your girlfriend that your mother is always telling me about? I'd love to meet her!" asked Joe's grandmother.
"Hum..." Joe paused trying to come up with an excuse. "I don't really know if she'd want to come, Nonna. She doesn't speak any Italian and it might be kind of awkward for her," said Joe.
"Joe, I'm sure she'd love to come. I'll tell your mother to ask her about it! I love you and I'll talk to you later," Joe's grandmother said as she hung up the phone.
Joe didn't know what to say to Megan. He knew that if he told her his family wanted to meet her, she'd want to go to Italy with him. Joe was afraid to see Megan's reaction of his family. He figured he just wouldn't tell her, but, of course, his mom already talked to Megan.

Megan went over to Joe's house after work very excited.

She said, "Joe, I'm so happy that you're family wants to meet me too! I can't wait to go. When do we leave?"

Joe asked, "Are you sure you want to come? My family can be, well, kind of obnoxious."

"Of course, I want to come. I think it's about time I meet your family, Joe," Megan said.

It was August second and Joe and Megan were at the airport waiting for their flight to Italy. Megan was so nervous she was biting her nails while pacing around the airport. She was usually very outgoing and not the least bit shy, but this really had her scared. She was afraid the family wouldn't like her. Joe tried to assure her that the trip would be just fine, but even he was having trouble believing it.

A little before landing, Megan was looking out the plane window and saw the beautiful beaches of Calabria. The water was clear blue, the sand was white, and the people looked like they were having a blast. Megan couldn't wait to get out in the hot sun and go to the beach; unfortunately, her trip wasn't going to consist of fun days at the beach.

After a long six-and-a-half-hour plane ride, they had finally landed in Italy. Joe called his grandmother to let her know they had landed, but, of course, being eager to see her grandson, she was already at the airport along with the rest of the family.

"Joe! It's been too long. I miss you! I haven't seen you in a whole year. Come visit your grandmother more often," Joe's grandmother said as she was smothering him in hugs and kisses. "Introduce me to your girlfriend!" she said. Joe introduced Megan to his grandmother, but with the language barrier all they really said was "Hi" and "Nice to meet you." While Joe was saying hello to the rest of his family, Megan was just following him around hugging his family whom she barely knew.

After meeting Joe's family, Megan knew that coming to Italy was a big mistake. She could barely have a conversation with any of his family because they speak very little English. She felt as though they were looking at her weirdly because she was not Italian. She knew Joe's family, especially his grandmother, would be much happier if Joe were dating an Italian girl.

A few of Joe's aunts stayed at his grandmother's house to cook a huge meal for the whole family, as they did every time Joe came to visit. Megan was a little nervous for the dinner because she knew she would just be sitting there quietly eating.

When they arrived at Joe's grandmother's house, his aunts were still cooking.

"Joe, why don't you go in the living room with your uncles and cousins? Megan can stay in the kitchen and help the women cook," asked his grandmother.

"How about Megan comes with me? She might be a little nervous in there with all of you," Joe replied.

"She does know how to cook, doesn't she?" asked his grandmother.

"Not really, Nonna. She's not Italian. She can't cook like you can," Joe answered.

"Well then, Joe, she's going to have to learn. How will she cook for your family one day? I think you could find a nice Italian girl who knows how to cook. You're here in Italy right now, why don't you look for one?" she asked.

Joe didn't respond. He knew it was going to be a long two weeks.

Megan didn't know what was going on because she didn't speak Italian, but, luckily for her, one of Joe's cousins could translate for her. When she figured out what Joe's grandmother was saying, she knew it was a mistake to come to Italy.

She went in the kitchen started cutting up vegetables for the salad. Joe's grandmother came over and said, "No, no. Too easy. You take this and make the sauce."

Megan had no idea what to do; she couldn't make sauce but didn't know how to tell her. She just stood in front of the stove for a minute with the ingredients that she was given until Joe walked in. He went over to the stove and started helping her until his grandmother told him to go relax.

Megan followed Joe and told him that she knew it was a mistake that she came. "Joe, I'm so sorry, but I don't think I can stay. I wanted to meet your family so badly, but I can tell they already don't like me. Your grandmother wants me to make sauce and I don't know how. I think your aunts were talking about what I'm wearing and I know they don't like me because I'm not Italian," Megan said sobbing.

"Megan, don't be upset. This is why I didn't want to come in the first place. I love you and it doesn't matter what they think. I'm sure you guys will get along great; just give it some time," Joe replied.

On the Merrimack

Chelsea Hildebrandt

Joe's grandmother overheard them talking and, although she couldn't understand everything Megan said, she got the gist of it. She told Joe that she was just looking out for him and apologized. She told Megan to go relax with Joe and not to worry about the cooking.

While in the kitchen, Joe's grandmother said to his aunt, "She looks like a sweet girl but she is not good enough for my grandson. She is not Italian, she can't cook, and she can't speak the language. I wish Joe would find a nice Italian girl, she'd fit in our family perfectly."

"She can't even cook. How will she make a good wife? What will Joe and the children eat? Every woman should know to cook and know to cook well. I'm surprised at Joe. I always thought he'd want a nice Italian girl," Joe's aunt replied.

Joe overheard his family talking and came into the kitchen. He explained to them that things were different in America and people marry who they love; it doesn't matter what their nationality is. He told them that Megan can cook, but she's not Italian so she'll have to learn how to cook Italian food. He assured them that once they got to know Megan, they'd love her.

After a week went by, Megan was so happy she stayed. She and Joe's grandmother had been getting along great. Megan had been going food shopping with her and watching television. They're conversation was limited, but they enjoyed each other's company. They put aside their differences and even learned a little from each other.

Joe's grandmother taught Megan how to make many Italian dishes, and was pleased that Megan was so eager to learn. Megan even taught her how to make a few dishes, too. The last night of their stay, Megan was able to help Joe's aunts and grandmother with the cooking; the whole family was pleased.

At the end of their stay, Joe's grandmother handed Megan a beautiful necklace and said, "For you. Thank you for coming. Come back with Joe next time."

Megan gave her a hug and a kiss and said, "Thank you for everything. It was great meeting you. I think I can even make sauce for Joe on my own now!"

As Megan and Joe were walking to their plane, laughing, Megan said, "And you said I'd regret saying I wanted to meet your family. I told you I wanted to go and I'm glad I did."

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

Up the river along with the current
Row quick, weak, quick, weak
Down the river against the current
Row slow, hard, slow, hard

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

Our paddles hit the water with a hard slap
We're now on our way as the crowds clap

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

Look up from your hands and stare downstream
The sun is glistening on the water with a bright gleam

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row
The swing of eight bodies all in a line
Each in unison, you better keep time

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

The thrill you feel once you kick off the catch
Oh, it's a feeling that almost nothing can match

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

Our paddles hit the water with a hard slap
We're now on our way as the crowds clap

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

Look up from your hands and stare downstream
The sun is glistening on the water with a bright gleam

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

The swing of eight bodies all in a line
Each in unison, you better keep time

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

The thrill you feel once you kick off the catch
Oh, it's a feeling that almost nothing can match

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the river we row, row, row

This feeling is something that you must experience to understand
So quick get a paddle, grab it in your hand

Get in the boat and go, go, go
Down the Merrimack we row, row, row

A Chance of a Lifetime

Mike Gale

My dad said it was, "a chance of a life time." To sail with 22 other people as a crew member on a 125 foot schooner, the Westward, from Rockland, Maine, to Bermuda and back in three weeks was an opportunity I did not want to miss. I envisioned the open ocean sailing lazily down the Gulf of Maine and starry nights. So I jumped at the opportunity. Who wouldn't?

It was June 17, 2009. I woke up at 5 a.m. to the sounds of a raging Nor'easter. Normally, I would just turn around and go back to sleep; but this was the day I was to leave on my sail trip. Thoughts raced through my head. Will the trip be delayed? Did I pack my rain gear? Can I back out? No one wants to set sail in 20 foot swells. But I knew from experience that summer storms are short-lived. I let out a big sigh and proceeded to get ready.

My parents drove me to Rockland, Maine. The drive up seemed to take forever. Wait. It was forever. It took six long hours! You couldn't see six feet in front of you. The rain and the wind just would not let up. We finally arrived at our destination and I checked in. I looked around. Everybody looked skeptical. Do they really think we should board the ship in these conditions? Unfortunately, it was a yes. My dad, who has been sailing all his life, told me not to worry. He looked up toward the sky and said, "Michael, this storm will pass quickly. You probably will hunker down in a nearby cove." I looked at him with great skepticism and nodded.

Orientation to the ship lasted three hours. I took note of the safety portion. I wasn't about to fall in the ocean in the middle of the night. Now what did he say about being tethered at night during third and fourth watch?

There would be a group of four people on watch 24/7. Watch was to look out for other boats, like the big ships, freighters, cruise liners, and sailboats. You can see them, but they can't see you. Night out in the middle of the ocean is eerily pitch black. Unless you had some moonlight, you can't see anything. So, we had a buddy system on third and fourth watch. This was in case you accidentally fell overboard during the night. You'd hope your buddy would take notice that you fell overboard and call out. Every 15 minutes you would call out to your buddy to make sure she

or he was still on board. This was important since we were sailing through big swells and high winds. It's easy to get swept off the ship.

The captain ordered to set sail at 3 p.m. We put on our rain gear and the crew members who stayed on deck tethered themselves to the ship. We noted the eye of the wind, a course was given, and we headed for an island off the Maine coast called Matinicus Isle. Matinicus Isle is a small island that is approximately 20 miles due east from Rockland, Maine. Off we went blasting through 20 foot swells. The seas were choppy. The wind was blowing on average 30 to 40 knots. Our faces were pummeled by the wind and ocean water. We were sailing using only one sail and it wasn't the main sheet either. We felt like we were on a roller coaster. Our stomachs were flip flopping and half of my crewmates were throwing up over the side of the ship. The twenty-mile trip seemed like it took forever. Wait! It did seem like forever especially when you were focused on your stomach, the constant nausea, and couldn't wait until land was sighted. All you thought about was setting foot on terra firma!

By nightfall, we reached our destination and hunkered down in a cove off Matinicus Isle. Here the waters were less choppy and we were protected somewhat from the raging winds. I couldn't wait to sleep. Guess who got fourth watch?

Every 15 minutes I heard, "Mike, are you there?" And I'd reply, "Yup, I'm here." The next 15 minutes I would ask, "Josh, are you there?" And he'd reply, "Yup, I'm still here." This would go on for five hours during fourth watch. Once I called out for Josh and he didn't reply. I panicked. Dang. Did he fall overboard? I called out again, "Josh, are you here?" No reply. I tugged on my tether to make sure it was secured and started to walk around on deck to search for Josh. I called out to the other two crewmates. "Ryan...Ben... Are you there?" They both called back, "Yup, I'm here." I told them that Josh failed to call back and needed help to search for him. We all went into panic mode. It took us around 20 minutes to find his tether. We followed his tether to the bow of the ship. We felt Josh and heard a laugh. He called out, "It's about time you found me. I could be floating in the ocean miles away being chased by a great white shark!" Josh was playing a game on us. He wanted to test how long we would notice he was missing and how long it would take us to find him." Josh was the jokester on this trip. He was my watch buddy so you can imagine how my watch was like during those long third and fourth watches.

So far, I hadn't seen any starry nights or experienced a lazy sail down the Gulf Stream. Instead, we were in the midst of a Nor'easter that wasn't letting up. "What did we have to look forward to tomorrow?" I wondered.

The next morning we were crew members learning the ropes and handling the sails. By midday we set sail in the Nor'easter that had calmed down to 10-15 foot seas and 20- 25 knots of wind. Whatever happened to that warm summer day with a few cumulus clouds, a calm sea, and a mild southwesterly breeze? This is not what I had envisioned. Sailing down the Maine Gulf Stream can be demanding, dangerous, and sometimes even deadly in calm seas, but we were sailing in a nor'easter. Waves were whipping across the water forming five foot whitecaps. Instead of those white fluffy cumulus clouds, we had storm clouds that would darken the sky, often signaling a squall where the wind picks up even more. When this happened, all hands had to turn to and shorten sail.

For three days we battled the storm. "When was this storm going to end?" we all wanted to ask. According to our radar, we were trapped in a circular storm pattern. You can imagine our despair. We lived in our storm gear, lacked nutrition as we were too nauseous to eat, and we were becoming delirious. Sarah, one of the three girls on this trip, told us we were all getting "cranky" due to lack of sleep and "smelly" due to lack of bathing. We kept telling her, "Sarah, we showered...in the torrential downpour. It counts." We hungered for sleep. It was difficult to sleep in these conditions. How can you sleep when you couldn't stop "rocking' and rolling" in your bunks? Difficult! We felt every wave. Every night someone fell off his or her bunk. You would hear:"Thump!" This would be followed by a nice expletive! It was dangerous on deck during a nor'easter and, it was dangerous below deck.

On our fourth day, the wind and sea was at its best. The sun was shining. I was at the helm, and looked toward the bow and saw what I thought was a school of fish. But it wasn't. It was a school of over 50 dolphins. I yelled out to my crewmates, "Look, dolphins off the port side! Dolphins off the starboard side! Dang. Dolphins are everywhere!" The dolphins were jumping and playing in the ocean abeam to the ship. We started to jump up and down ourselves. We were yelling out "Flipper, Flipper... screaming "he's the king of the sea... and laughing.

The noise brought all the crew members on deck. The captain took the helm so I could watch portside. We were whooping it up. Dan, who was known to be timid, started to sing the Flipper song: "They call him Flipper

Flipper, faster than lightning....” Pretty soon he had all of us singing the song. We were laughing so hard. It was crazy. Imagine a bunch of 18-21 years old kids singing the Flipper song. Sweet! Seeing the dolphins helped re-energize the crew. It was like magic. Just seeing those dolphins transformed our mindset. We found a new sense of being.

We saw the dolphin sighting as a positive sign because it was when the wind and sea became its best. Sailing became relaxing and fun. I saw those starry nights when the sky and everything is pitch black and all you see are stars.

Life was temporarily confined within the limits of the deck and nothing else in the world seemed to matter. To experience this, it was a “chance of a life time.”

A Dog's Tale

Al DeCiccio

“My little old dog,
a heart beat at my feet.”

My owner, Edith Wharton,
offers her verse about me.

But I can tell you more
than what's in these pretty lines.

Who do think delivered
the pages of “Roman Fever”?

Wharton was in that high bed,
writing and drinking her tea—

Thinking about Rome and love
and the possibilities for rendezvous.

It was, of course, her old dog,
the heart beat at her feet,

Who took on the real work
of getting those pages to the public.

Do you know how hard it is
for a dog to retrieve paper?

Bones. Now they're easy,
because my teeth are for gnawing.

Eight and a half by eleven
thin sheets of paper: Hard for

A little old dog,
the heart beat at your feet.

Of course, you liked Lily Bart
in The House of Mirth.

Do you realize how many paper
cuts I got from all those pages?

What self-respecting veterinarian
Treats a dog for 345 paper cuts?

You also probably liked that dark,
ironic work, Ethan Frome, and the

Pulitzer Prize-winning book,
The Age of Innocence. More paper cuts!

Still, this little old dog,
this heart beat at the feet,

Got to know a good deal
about our Edith Wharton.

And also about Mr. Henry James,
twenty years her senior, but

The one whose ideas and writing
almost single-handedly stole her heart

Away from her little old dog,
a heart beat at her feet.

Tempting Winter

Brendan Bioren

“Don’t forget your warm gloves,” screamed Lauren.

Dan Lambert and Lauren Hutton have been dating for almost three years and decided it was finally time to go on a much needed skiing trip. Dan was able to get a long weekend off from his delivery job as a mail man in Danvers, Massachusetts. This was the only vacation time he had left all year, and Dan was able to convince Lauren to go with him even though skiing was not her favorite pastime.

Lauren met Dan on a trip to Cabo many years ago. The two met while swimming in a resort pool, come to find out they lived within miles from each other. Lauren grew up in an elegant, modern six bedroom six bath house with ten acres of land and a garage big enough for eight large size vehicles. Her father owned a local strip mall and rented out apartment buildings in the center of Boston, prime location. Ever since Lauren was little he had been saving money in an account for her and the day she graduated from college it would all be hers. Lauren was a carefree soul, standing five feet two inches tall, with long blonde hair. She had always been brought up to dress her best no matter the price, but ever since she met Dan she rethought that and devoted herself to him and his working class lifestyle.

“It’s gonna be real cold on the top of the mountain today,” muttered Dan quietly as he started to load the car with skis and poles.

“I can’t wait to finally get on the chair lift and see the newly fallen snow groomed on the trails,” exclaimed Lauren while hopping in the truck. “I heard the forecast for today is supposed to be around 10-12 inches of new snow on top of the foot we got last night.”

“There sure will be plenty of snow today; let’s hope there aren’t any avalanches like last time,” said Dan chuckling aloud.

Last year during the annual ski trip Dan went out for an early morning ski run before the mountain opened and on the way down found himself in the middle of an avalanche. He was trapped under a light packing of snow for a few hours before the rescue snowmobile found him. Had he not been wearing his bright orange ski helmet, no one knows if he would have been found. It saved his life and he would never ski without it.

The tires crunched down the snowy road as Dan and Lauren drove to the base of the mountain from their nearby rented cabin. As they traveled, thoughts poured through their minds that led to mixed emotions. Terrifying images of the avalanche filled Dan's head and caused the almost dormant fear to rush back like a powerful river. Lauren was not as fearful, and couldn't wait to get on the slopes and enjoy the beautiful snowy day. As they pulled into the parking space, Dan tried to shut off the horrible avalanche images in his head and jumped out of the truck grabbing the ski equipment and started walking with Lauren to the chair lift. As they reached the base of the mountain, they strapped into their skis and boarded the lift.

"Ready?" screamed Lauren loudly to Dan while giving him a quick elbow shove.

"Yup. I can't wait!" said Dan excitedly as they both jumped off the lift and started to slide down the snowpack. This was the most terrifying experience he had ever gone through.

The two began to pick up speed, carving side to side flying down the fast packed trails. The trees stood tall and heavy covered with hundreds of pounds of fresh white snow making the trails more defined than ever, creating a wall. As they got closer to the bottom of the slope Dan relaxed.

Getting back on the lift, Lauren spoke excitedly, "Want to go down the backside next run?"

The backside was where Dan had been caught in the avalanche. It was the portion of the mountain that was not groomed for, and was for experience skiers. Chance of avalanche was possible because of the natural aspect of the trails. Dan had no desire to get stuck in another avalanche, but in his mind wanted to conquer the part of the mountain that almost took his life the year before.

"Ya, let's try it out. I almost forget what it looks like," said Dan laughing.

As they reached the top of the lift and started to get off, Dan's heart pounded. He had never been so scared to do something in his life. All he could think of was the avalanche and couldn't believe he had decided to go down that same spot again. He reached Lauren waiting for him at the entrance of the backside, stuck his poles in the ground, and throttled himself down the trail disappearing into whiteout of the winter snow.

Communication

Rachel Myers

Maybe I should paint you a picture
With the well-known worn out brushes
That we bought that week when I was younger
(You, of course, look the same),
And then maybe we will be understood.

Maybe I will paint with words
(After all, this is a poem),
The wide scarlet strokes of words, like
"Need" or "changes"
Or maybe "I think"
In subtler soft watercolor.

Can I paint to you with music?
A strings and trumpet declaration
Of where we stand and where I am walking to.
Will you come with me?
We have journeyed together, you and I,
As it should be for people like us.

I think I must paint to you in actions –
After 5,000 days a currency all its own
Traded in stock markets inside our hearts
(The exchange rate is unknowable).
That will make all things clear
And no precious paint or pencil or violin
Is necessary today.

Enlightenment

Matt Renda

The van comes quickly to a halt. My driver curses in a foreign tongue while he fiddles with the AC knob. We are both sweating like pigs, the van offering zero comfort from the sweltering one-hundred degree plus day. Traffic is proceeding slowly. I am heading to the airport, not looking forward to the twenty-eight hour flight back to America. “I need a new job,” I say to my driver, who simply smiles and says nothing. This foreign country is getting the best of me; the heat is outrageous. Back at home children are playing in the snow, building snowmen, having snowball fights, and sledding. The air is cold and crisp and quiet. “I miss my home,” I thought. A drip of sweat lands in my eyes, ripping me from my brief relief from the heat.

“Musta been accident,” my driver points at the skyscraper in front of me. “Traffic no this bad. Musta been something bad,” he says with a glum face.

“What do you mean accident?” I say blankly, thinking of car accidents, or perhaps someone fell off their moped. My driver shakes his head. He provides no insight. This country is so foreign. Everything around me seems to be held up by magic. Buildings are constructed terribly, sometimes out of no more than mere cardboard and dirt. The people looked as bad as the buildings, so dirty, so unclean. Everyone I met here is oddly friendly and kind. It is strange to see a country with people so disconnected from one another. I was sure that my new co-workers didn’t live like this. Even my driver must have been decently sheltered. This country seems to divide the poor, the better off, and the rich. None of these different social groups ever interact. It baffles my mind.

“America,” I thought “is not like this place. America does not have these problems.” The van comes to another jerking stop. A moped has cut us off. My driver starts arguing with the driver. “Funny, so many people have mopeds,” I say to my driver after he finishes his argument.

“You Americans have it lucky,” he says, “You drive big car, eat big meal, and have money to do so; we struggle to get by. Moped much cheaper than big car. All we can afford. I sort of lucky. I live in okay house. But I fight to keep this van. It cost so much it hard to keep around,” says the driver in an angry tone. I have nothing to offer in reply. I am the ignorant sheltered American after all. Attempting to prevent any more conversation, the driver turns the radio on. A Taylor Swift song is

playing. I glance at the driver, and he senses my discomfort. He turns the radio louder and begins singing terribly. Traffic starts creeping slowly.

The driver’s words echo in my head loudly. Have I overlooked something in this country? This place is so foreign, yet seems so familiar. The people are different, the climate is oppressive, and the buildings are appalling. Yet something seems so familiar. The people here are just like any other people in the world, all trying to get by any means necessary.

“This country may not care for its citizens like America does, but that does not make them any less human,” I thought. It occurs to me how blissfully ignorant I am to the world. I suddenly realize how lucky I truly have it with all the nice things I have at home. Blue lights, sirens, and a commotion of activity knocks me from my enlightenment.

The police officers race ahead to surround a pile of rubble. “This what cause traffic,” says my driver, turning down the radio, allowing me to speak again. In front of me is a massive skyscraper. People are on every floor. It is an unfinished building. There are holes in the safety net, oddly enough, the holes are shaped like a body. “Someone musta fell,” says the driver.

“Impossible.” I reply even though I know the answer “How could that happen? We always use safety nets and so much protection.”

“This not America. We do what we can to do to get by. Why you not understand?” says my driver in a more angry tone.

“I apologize. I just am not used to this.”

“You young. You company should never send child out to do man’s job. You need grow up more before you come back. Then you won’t be so stupid,” my driver says.

“I am not a child. I am an adult. I worked hard to get where I am today, and it is only my second time in Asia,” I reply back.

“You just stupid American. I do my job of delivering you. But that is all.” He says in a tone that sounds quite evil. Clearly, I am quite offensive to him. His words are like bullets to me. It is hard to hear the truth from someone who can barely speak English. The van finally drives into the shadows of the skyscraper, providing relief from the heat. I look up at the immense building once more. It is hard to believe that someone could fall. The van rounds the corner. Traffic is all but gone in front of us. To the right of me is the police squad. Through the crowd I can see the raw horror of which my driver speaks. A man, my age, fell to his death. His body lays strewn across the pile of rubble. The body looks like a rag doll a child has hrown and is done playing with. The officers poke him

and smirk. One of them says something. I imagine it was “poor bastard,” as they all nod. The driver slams the accelerator and I return to reality, my head smashing into the seat as we speed off to the airport.

Getting Rid of It

Abi Sayre

I arrived at Thonburi Bus Terminal in Bangkok, Thailand at 11:45 pm prepared to catch my bus to Krabi province, 16 hours south of Bangkok, within the hour. With two 70-pound suitcases, a backpack containing such valuables as a laptop, an iPod, and a few hundred dollars cash on my person, I struggled, stumbled, and slumped my way to the premises becoming more and more panicked by the second at the lack of activity.

Where are the buses?

I looked around and saw people sleeping in baskets on the side of the highway, stray dogs picking at garbage, and what appeared to be a very closed bus station.

“8:00 am.” From what I gathered from the complicated Thai script and array of numbers on the door, the bus terminal would not open for roughly 8 hours. Panic hit me in a way that I had never experienced before in my life, in a way I hoped to never experience again. I found myself alone on the side of the highway in a foreign country 9,000 miles from my home with no way to contact anyone and everything I would need for the next year in my possession. I have always been told to remain calm and to think clearly in order to avoid acting irrationally. I quickly saw this becoming my only option.

I kept myself awake for the next 26 hours, the moments from arriving at the deserted bus station to arriving at my guesthouse in Krabi a nerve-wracking blur. The panic I felt at my realization of my situation in Bangkok was absolutely nothing compared with the relief I felt collapsing on my scratchy, buggy cot at the hostel in Krabi.

The next few weeks were filled with plenty of excitement as I moved into a stilted bamboo hut on the outskirts of a rain forest, struggled to pick up two foreign languages, and tried to become acclimated to the treacherous heat and violent monsoons. I cannot describe what it feels like to be scared every day, but I was. If I missed the boat, where was I going to sleep that night? Could I drink this water? Were these people really bringing me where they said they were bringing me? Was this a safe place to spend the night? What would these people do if I offended their culture?

Could that spider kill me? I had returned to my home one night, lonely and exhausted from a day of work. There in the corner of my palapa was a spider unlike any I had ever seen before. Its two-inch legs came to sharp points at the ends, its body a dark marble of poison. It was black and blue and enormous, not a spider that could be captured with a napkin, nor a spider that could even be killed with my flimsy plastic sandals. A rush of panic took over my body and I started reacting physically and mentally; I had physical flashbacks to the first night in Bangkok. I was sweating, my heart racing, shuddering, terrified to blink in fear that in the split second my eyelids closed, the spider would move to a hidden corner of my room. It was late at night; I was in the middle of nowhere. And the reality of my situation being that I had to do something about this spider on my own was horrifying.

Weren't the small spiders supposed to be the quick ones? My eyes began to dart around the room frantically searching for a bowl or bucket, something domed that I could drop on top of the spider and at the very least leave until the morning. There was nothing. Wiping the sweat off of my violently shaking hands, I realized what I was going to have to do. I stepped onto my mattress to make my way toward my enemy. The pressure on the mattress caused the spider to move, crawling at shocking speeds higher up my wall. Curse words were flying out of my mouth, goose bumps raising all over my body.

I made my way to the wall, unsure of what I would do as soon as I got within reach of the spider. I needed to get it down. What if it fell on my while I was sleeping? Crawled on me? Bit me? I began kicking the wall with all of my might, and to my conflicted relief, the menacing creature came running down the wall.

"Please don't bite me, please don't bite me," I pleaded over and over between squeals of revulsion and fright. And then I did it. I cupped my hands around the spider and bolted to the door, kicking it open, fleeing down the stairs and several yards toward the edge of the jungle. I threw my hands open and flung my nemesis into the trees. Running back into my palapa, I still could not shake the feeling of fear and panic that I had become all too familiar with since my first nightmarish experience in Bangkok. After taking meticulous care to tuck my mosquito net tightly around my mattress, I lay down and tried to calm my anxiety to ease into sleep.

I woke up thinking, as we often do, that the previous night's event was a dream. A few months ago, I would have slept outside standing up to avoid touching a spider with my bare hands. I had traded in my comfortable life in Cheshire, Connecticut for an adventure that I hoped would change my perspectives and help me put some direction in my life, and I realized that I had already begun to do that.

I would continue to experience dangers and fears for which I thought I could have never prepared, and as I did this, I would discover a courage I did not know I had. The moments of fear and uncertainty eventually would become so overpowered by the feelings of pride and happiness that followed.

Sometimes you just have to take the risk and catch the bug. When I ran out of my palapa into the woods, I was not only throwing a spider away. With it I threw with it my fears of the unknown.