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Each fall, all writing submitted to Waynessence is entered into our writing contest. In the spring, awards are given for the artwork or photographs that appear on the spring Waynessence front and back covers.
CO-ADVISOR’S NOTE
It is truly my pleasure to serve as co-advisor for Waynessence. It has been an interesting experience to see this publication put together remotely. The people involved with this wonderful literary publication are committed and talented. I am happy to be a part of this team. We publish an edition each semester, so if you would like to be a part of the next edition, you can go to the website to learn more.

wayne.uakron.edu/clubs/waynessence

— Susan F. Corl, Ph.D.

CO-ADVISOR’S NOTE
Working with our talented Wayne College students and colleagues has been inspiring to me! Thank you to each of you who shared in this publication and a special thank you to our readers.

— Laine Frantz

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Victoria Furin / Nicolette Kaiser / Atalanta Kelsey / Emma Lehman
DeAnna Morris / Tami Peterson / Elizabeth Simkanin

The Waynessence staff reserves the right to choose and edit written submissions as well as art and photography based on length, technical accuracy, and audience considerations.

Table of CONTENTS

After Dinner the Moon Was Full
Thomas Ostroski .................................. Front Cover

It’s Always Sunrise Somewhere
Thomas Ostroski .................................. Inside FC

Owl in June
Chris Sopko ........................................ 4

Birdsong
Shirley K. Weyrauch ................................ 5

Pink Hydrangea
Elizabeth Simkanin ................................ 6

All Alone
Elizabeth Simkanin ................................ 7

Lady in the Red Mist
Tami Peterson ....................................... 8

Maighdean Mhara
Emma Lehman ........................................ 9-10

Back to the Deep
Shirley K. Weyrauch ................................ 11

Fall’s Enduring Beauty
DeAnna Morris ...................................... 12

The Calm Before the Storm
Atalanta Kelsey ..................................... 13

Bemused by Bubbles
Shirley K. Weyrauch ................................ 14

One-by-One
Susan F. Corl ........................................ 15

My College Friend
Nicolette Kaiser .................................... 16

Daybreak
Elizabeth Simkanin ................................ 17

The Professor’s Garden
Bruce Crissinger ................................... 18-21

Evening in the Garden
Susan F. Corl ......................................... 19

Insect
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 20

Diamond in the Trees
Susan F. Corl ......................................... 22

White Hydrangea
Elizabeth Simkanin ................................ 23

Help Me Up
Susan F. Corl ......................................... 24

Pride
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 25

Gluttony
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 25

To Anne
Shirley K. Weyrauch ................................ 26

A Lily Full of Sunshine
Atalanta Kelsey ..................................... 27

Bamboo Leaf
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 28

My Favorite Artist is Morning Dew
Susan F. Corl ......................................... 29

Girl in the Night
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 30

What Really Happens at Auschwitz Death Camp
Katie Simkanin ...................................... 31-34

Starry Night
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 35

Bandit
Chris Sopko .......................................... 36

Know Thyself
Bruce Crissinger ................................... 37-38

Butterfly of Peace
Atalanta Kelsey ..................................... 39

Birches
Shirley K. Weyrauch ................................ 40

Birches
Shirley K. Weyrauch ................................ 41

Playing Taps: Honoring Those Who Served
Scott T. Hartman .................................... 42-43

I’m Like Water - Always Falling
Thomas Ostroski .................................... 45

Endless Waves
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 47

Mensa
Bruce Crissinger ................................... 48-49

Proposal
Bruce Crissinger ................................... 50

Summer Radiance
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... 51

Our Contributors .................................... 52

Charity Peak Sunrise
Alberta, Canada
Thomas Ostroski .................................... Inside Back Cover

Beyond the Falls
Nicolette Kaiser ..................................... Back Cover

SPECIAL THANKS
We would like to send a special thank you to the students who submitted these wonderful works as well as the Word Processing team who remotely put together another beautiful and high-quality product that we are proud to present to the community.
Today
I thought
rain-washed green
would be my favorite color.
Then I saw
unexpected sunshine,
newly mown field, and
freshly turned sod.
A little further along
I discovered
grazing cattle,
inviting lane, and
fanciful phlox.
No matter.
I know for sure
birdsong was my favorite tune.
Cursed. The early morning light peaked out dimly through the grey sky. Warren groggily peered over at his heavily pregnant wife with sweat dripping from her fevered body. He rose from the chair beside the bed, slow and aching.

Cursed. Harsh glares burned into his skin as he made his way toward the dock. Warren kept his head up. Whispers of gossip filled the streets around him as the villagers noticed the unfortunate fisherman they once called the ‘son of Manannán mac Lir’, but now the god of the sea turned away from him.

Cursed. The man cast his net again where the river branched into the sea. A part of Warren knew that he wouldn’t catch anything today, he hadn’t for months. It became a habit to triple-check his net when in his prouder past he would only check it once, sometimes not at all, and he would still bring in a catch that would feed the village for weeks. They praised him and he absorbed every moment of it. Now he was just waiting for that spark to flare once more. If only just one more... he could care for his family. If only once more... he could feed his people. If only once more... he would fulfill the praise he wanted to prove himself.

Not wanted, needed.

Water swayed against the boat. He ignored the small tugs from the waves. He focused on the bell, rocked gently by the current.

Hours of near-silence dragged on until the ropes tightened. The bell jerked and reverberated. Warren flung himself from his seat and began hauling the net on deck.

Despite the desperate pull, the net was still quite light. It didn’t matter to him though, if he brought home one fish, maybe a dozen, he believed he would earn some praise and he eagerly brought the net on deck.

But there was no fish, instead, a young girl with fearful, amber eyes met the fisherman. Her brown skin was dotted with grey scales that glinted in the sunlight with her black, seaweed-like hair drifting over her shoulders. Instead of legs, a grey-brown tail bobbed in panic becoming more tangled in the net. A small conch-like shell hung from a pearl chain around her neck, glowing and fading rapidly to match her heartbeat.

Maighdean Mhara, the maid of the sea. A ceasg.

Here was the solution to his problems. Here was the answer to his prayers. Here was his redemption.

"Please," she begged hoarsely, her voice quaking in an alien accent. She gripped the net in an attempt to tear it and free herself, but to no avail.

Warren gazed down at her, his expression unreadable. A hard bubble caught in his throat, his chest compressed, yet his eyes narrowed in determination. Pride flickered in his irises.

"I will," he said as he came closer, reached for the net, but dropped his hand at the last second and crouched down to her eye level, "but you must do something for me first."

The words came out much harsher than he intended, and the young girl backed away,
whimpering pathetically.

"My first request is for fish to return to my nets when it’s cast in these waters."

Her lips quivered, but she nodded. The shell below her chin glowed in response.

"My second is for my wife to be well once more."

The ceasg nodded and the shell glowed again. Her shaking subdued as relief crept onto her shoulders.

"Lastly," he said, beginning to rise as he squared his shoulders, "I want you to watch over my descendants. Protect them. Bless them with your life, with the gifts you gave me."

The ceasg backed away more, shaking her head vigorously, a flurry of "no’s" weakly escaping her lips. But it was no use, the shell glowed, then faded into golden edging around it. She hunched over herself in quiet sobs. Her life force now entwined with Warren’s line.

Her weeping stilled. Her head bowed as she took the pearl chain off her neck. Her trembling hands obediently offered the necklace to Warren through her cotton thread cage.

Pleased, Warren took the necklace from her and permitted her freedom. He left for home with nothing but the necklace, but tomorrow he would have much more.

Blessed. The early morning light filled the room. Warren sat up and gazed at his wife sleeping soundly before planting a soft kiss on her forehead. He rose from the bed and drifted into the other room where their daughter slept. The conch-shell necklace hung from her bed frame; the pearl chain glinted disgracefully as he nudged Cora awake.

Blessed… The villagers greeted Warren and his daughter warmly as they made their way toward the dock. The ‘son of Manannán mac Lir’ had endowed them with abundant meals. They were thriving and offering their praise to the man.

A chill nipped at his neck despite the warm breeze.

Blessed? The man and his daughter cast the net where Warren once had twelve years ago. The boat swayed with the current. Cora sat back and absorbed the map in her hands, her enthusiastic trill for navigation faded into the distance as Warren watched a large figure dance around the boat, hovering close to the side where Cora sat beneath the dark water. His heart wrenched.

The bell jerked and the ropes tightened. Cora set the map down and sprang to her feet. Warren wandered over, glancing down at the ceasg below the surface. Cora shouted excitedly over the generous catch, but Warren’s head was weighed down. Everything was heavy. He had nothing to celebrate.
We start in a line with our left fingers hugging the thumb. We clasp our right hands over our left.

Step

Our right feet move in unison onto the blanket of violets. The cool morning breeze wraps around us and weaves us together in this ritual.

Step

The birds call and answer in the canopy. What bird is that? Nevermind—back to the breath....

Step

The sun warms us now as it sprinkles dew rainbows before us. Dandelions in various stages of life caress our ankles and surround us in a cloud of fluff.

Step

We move separately now, each for a different reason—one to lead, one to heal, one to calm, one to soothe, one to connect and one to return.

Step

Remnants of fall crinkle under each step, reminding us of the circle of life.

Step

The ripples on the pond call our names as dragonflies dance above the water.

Step

We reach our destination, but there truly is no destination, only the journey. We return and return and the earth welcomes us again and again.

Step...Step...Step...Step...Step...Step....

Down the path we go—returning home—one-by-one.
MY COLLEGE FRIEND

by Nicolette Kaiser

You are the light in this endless darkness
A light in this marathon of constant despair
   From the endless walk
   Of unchanging darkness
   The next as the speed of light
   You are the bright and happiness
That breaks these walls of solitude
Comforting me with a sunray smile
   Your echoing laughs
Bringing the hope of a better tomorrow
John had been an erudite, though not necessarily engaging, teacher in classics, covering the languages as well as the art and architecture of the Greco-Roman world, a field which now has become literally as moribund as he was. Of necessity retired but still in his early 50's, he crawled down on all fours and pulled at the top of an onion, still green though bent over, but the stem closest to the onion itself had turned brown and was rotting. The top broke off so that he had to gently ease the onion out of the ground with his tremulous hand while with the other trying to steady himself. He searched and found only three onions remaining of the hundreds that had been planted in the spring. Small, insignificant though they might have been, he held them in his hand, then tossed them gently to the edge of the garden. Many of those that had been left for the future to grow bigger had been reabsorbed by the earth. “Just like me,” he thought to himself, “just like me. I too will soon be reabsorbed back into the earth. It hasn’t troubled these onions, it hasn’t caused them any fear or despair, and neither should it me. I’m of no more significance than the onion. How one-with-the-earth it is. Growing in it, covered by it, it stands out green and tall for its time beneath the sun and then withers, leaving behind its enlarged bulb as its legacy of having been, and then returning to the earth from whence it came, from humus to humus.” And very good humus it was that he brushed off his hands and which clung to his feet as he pulled himself up onto the straight-backed chair planted right in the garden itself, a comfortable, convenient place to sit outside where he now spent most of his afternoons, depending on the weather and how he felt.

The season had been exceptionally hot and wet. Many nights had been too hot to sleep, and John had sat up until 2 a.m. often, waiting for the house to cool, and then been awakened by the blinding morning sun. The thunderstorms that promised to bring relief only added even more humidity to his misery. He had never before known a leisureed summer, a time of idleness (for him now imposed). The stalks of corn and the towering sunflowers were exceptional. They were not, perhaps, practical choices. Corn was not expensive to buy, and he didn’t much care for the syrupy, sweet American corn anyway, unlike the ur-grain of the Aztecs. But this was an heirloom variety. As for the sunflowers, he never made any attempt to harvest the seeds. He just enjoyed looking at the lofty plants, amazed that they could grow so much, so fast, and so sturdily in such a short season, undamaged by any of the summer storms.

After growing into luxuriant plants that toppled the cages that were meant to prop them up, the Brandywine tomatoes started to bear large, lovely fruit. Everyone has tomatoes in his garden, but like a true academic, he knew that specialization, whether it was biological or academic, was key to success; consequently, he only grew this variety, an Amish heirloom. Now muttering Claudius-like to no one but himself as...
he crawled on all fours and picked out a tomato. “How am I going to put all this stuff on the cluttered kitchen counter?”

John studied it, afraid to hold it in his faltering hands for fear that he would drop it and it would smash. More than just something to slice and eat, it was beautiful. Still there was a bit of yellowish green around the stem, while the body one might describe as salmon-like. But most distinctive of all was the shape that could be said to be octagonal. John felt its smooth underside and the deep groves around its shoulders. He tried to count those still on the vine, but never could remember where he had started; rather he just turned this one round and round, appreciating the feel, the texture more than anticipating the taste. He abhorred supermarket, genetically engineered varieties that had been produced to be sturdy, to ship well, that contained a gene from an Icelandic fish, but which in their breeding for convenience had lost all of their reason for being, perhaps a metaphor for the world in which he lived.

Fall neared and the garden was quiescent. He did not visualize the next season, but at least seeing these plants he knew he had once been something else than the husk of a person hunched in a chair. But that was a direction toward which his memory rarely turned now and for which he felt no nostalgia. Still the academic, he pondered the etymology: Nostoi: a return, especially a return home; algia, as every health care professional and student knows: pain.

The rain had brought a renaissance to the garden. He had sat there cold, wet, shivering and for the moment desolate. Activities that once, so recently really, had been accomplished thoughtlessly or planned while he was thinking about something else...he used to claim that he, like Archimedes, got his best ideas in the bathtub...were now impossible.

The tomatoes and cucumbers had withered, but all the hardy plants had a chance to assert their green in the glow of the Indian Summer sun. The broad leaves of the cabbages surrounded the head like a corona, while the corn and sunflowers still towered above them with pumpkins and squash now visible among the stalks and between the rows. With outside help, there had been a number of late plantings: beets, turnips, parsnips, and onions were holding their own and could have been used, if there were anyone to harvest, wash, and cook them for him. John now crawled, reaching as far as he could, just to touch a living plant.
I was a little late getting ready for work on my last day, but I just felt like I had to get a cup of coffee and look out the window. Gazing at the creek flowing gently with the spots of light dancing over the surface, I felt a sense of calm, a feeling like I had arrived somewhere.

A crane crept slowly into my view scanning the rocks for breakfast. The sun peeped through the canopy and warmed my face through the glass. A soft breeze began to sway the treetops in a silent rhythm. With each movement, droplets of rain sparkled like diamonds.

My eyes filled with tears and my heart raced. I was glued to my spot. I realized the true meaning of the phrase “when time stands still.” My mind froze for a second and took in the wonder of the morning. I didn’t care about anything at that moment—not time, not space, not even being late for work. I was planted in the moment.

I took a sip of coffee and thought, “This is what mindfulness is all about.” Then, I walked out the door to face the day.
PRIDE
by Nicolette Kaiser

You are blind to the accomplishments
Of others
All you want is to be above all
No matter who you trample
Solitude is your only ally.

GLUTTONY
by Nicolette Kaiser

You waste and you waste
And you waste
Consuming more than your needs
To have over-indulged yourself
With a commitment to this sin.
What would I hear?
Do I really want to know?
The longings unearthed
may not be ready
to be laid bare
in this harsh light.

What then?
Would they wither and die
like long neglected house plants –
or reach for the light,
moving into it,
lifting their faces
as sunflowers are wont to do?
The dewdrop on a bamboo leaf stays longer than you, who vanish at dawn.

Elzume
Shikibu

*Bamboo Leaf, Nicolette Kaiser*
Lana Kojowitz stood on a dark, swaying train holding her one-year-old daughter, Katya, in her arms. The air was hot and heavy, and everyone was crammed into the small train car on the way to “Resettlement in the East.”

She was alone. The S.S. Nazi guards had already taken away her husband, brother and sister-in-law. Lana and Katya were all that remained of the once-happy family. This afternoon, the Nazis had sent them to the train station, stripped them of their belongings with the exception of one suitcase, herded them onto this train, and told them that everyone was going to work in the east for the Germans.

Now, in this awful, sweltering train car, Lana had no concept of time. She did not know how long she had stood in this tight space, breathing the same air. Even Katya appeared quiet and subdued.

“I’m alone, and I’m scared,” Lana whispered, a sour feeling settling into her stomach as she adjusted Katya in her arms and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

The train car was silent as everyone contemplated their potential fate. Were they going to be killed? Put to work? Reunite with separated family who had already been shipped to this place? No one knew, so everyone preferred to wait in silence.

A little while later, the train lurched forward, and Lana almost dropped Katya and her suitcase, but managed to stay upright. Her thick braid was loosening, and she could feel her scarf tied over her head beginning to slip. Katya, bundled up in many layers of clothing, looked hot and miserable.

“Maybe they will give us some food, or at least a little water, wouldn’t you like that?” Lana cheerfully asked Katya, ignoring her pounding heart.
Somewhere up in the front of the train came the typical whistle to alert some establishment of their imminent arrival.

The men had piled the people who had perished en route next to the door. There were about seven, all elderly and frail. Lana shivered, despite the sweat all over her body. Katya sneezed, and Lana wiped her daughter's nose with her coat sleeve.

The train gradually slowed down, and Lana could feel that they had pulled into a place with people, for amidst the chaos of the train car, she could hear the hum of voices from outside. Suddenly she felt hopeful. Maybe there was some way to reunite with her family again, despite the ensuing circumstances.

Suddenly, the door slid open, and the first thing Lana saw was the dark night sky and numerous train cars.

Uniformed S.S. men shouted at skinny camp inhabitants to “Get them all off!” “Separate them going to further separate you, and then some will immediately shoot you as a lesson to others. We are work for the Germans. Do what you are told, and

The train gradually slowed down, and Lana stepped up to her and shouted, “Does anybody have skills? Sewing? Dress making?”

A couple of the women with children raised their hands, including Lana, and so did several in the singles group. Even though Lana was not the best at sewing, she thought it prudent to follow the man’s advice.

The guard walked over to the women in the singles group, inspected them, and sent them on their way to join the people going to be registered first.

Lana shifted Katya on her hip and inquired, “Can I help you, sir?”

He roughly jammed his thumb under her chin and jerked my head upwards. “Are you a seamstress, lovely one?”

“Yes,” she whispered. Katya gave a disgruntled wail in her mother’s arms and buried her face in Lana’s shoulder.

“Would you give up the child to get a job in a barrack? You’ll get better food and housing conditions. The soldiers would like you,” he bribed.

“Not if I can’t keep Katya with me,” Lana said softly and stubbornly.

“Fine.” The guard glared at Lana and motioned for her to stay where she was.

Everyone stood, shivering in the cold night and wondering what would happen next. Children cried and said they were tired and hungry. Just as Lana thought they were going to make the Jews sleep out here, a soldier with a bull horn yelled, “Women and children line up! You are going to get your showers! Set your belongings down and get into a line and follow me to the shower house!” Everyone did as they were told and formed a neat line. Lana fell in line toward the back and walked forward, clutching Katya and holding a young boy’s hand who had no one with him.

“It’s okay, I will take care of you,” Lana told the terrified little boy.

The people walked for a short distance to a long, low house. Before they entered, the guard once again yelled instructions at them.

“This is the shower house. Everyone must shower to get rid of lice and bugs. It is a rule that we maintain here at camp. Everyone will go inside, remove their clothing and place it somewhere where you can easily find it again. Then you will proceed inside to the next room quietly and in a line. Go, go, go, hurry!”

“Just take your clothes off,” Lana told the little boy, helping him unbutton his coat and removing Katya’s hat. “We can find it again when we are done.” She felt awkward and self-conscious taking off all of her clothes, but knew she would have to swallow her pride and just follow orders.

A few minutes later, male S.S. guards entered the next room, “Go! Go! Huddle together and the
water will be on in a second once the room has filled up! Get in, get in!”

Katya rubbed her eyes and yawned. The little boy named Samuel still clung onto Lana’s hand, softly crying. She gave his hand a squeeze.

The shower room was dark, and smelled funny. Suddenly, the door slammed shut and Lana got a sickening feeling. This was no shower. This was something else. What was going to happen?

Lana’s heart beat faster and faster in the pitch-black room. All around her, women and children screamed as a thick, cloudy, gas-like substance descended upon the trapped women and children. Katya’s little body immediately went still, and Samuel began to scream and shake.

Lana’s lungs started to burn and she could not catch a breath. She glanced at the ceiling and saw a hatch close and latch. All around her, people were beginning to fall over, still screaming.

Then the gas hit her. Lana started screaming too from the burning pain. They had tricked her. Her husband, her daughter, her family, her life… all was flying by with the blink of an eye, to be snuffed out in seconds. She would never see the light of day again. She had no idea that when she was stuffed into that train car, it would be the last time she would see the sun.

Lana, disoriented, started pawing at the air, perhaps hoping for an invisible trap door to open so she could drag herself through.

“Help me, O God!” Lana called out, coughing, her entire torso burning. Her eyes were stung terribly, and her brain felt dead as her surroundings blurred.

She slipped to the ground. All around her, people were falling, screaming, praying. Katya fell out of her arms and she closed her eyes. As the world went black, she became the next innocent victim to cruelly perish in the evil Holocaust.

* * *

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33
The motto “know thyself” was inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi.
Or as written by Robert Burns:
O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
Looking out at a landscape of blank faces, the one they called their professor remembered a concept he had learned about physics so many years before—inertia—and tried to imagine what thoughts, if any, were going through his students’ brains:
I need to check my phone. I know it’s against the rules, but having such a boring professor should not only be against the rules, but against the law. It’s a human rights violation. I’m going to be working my gluteus maximus off for years to pay for listening to this drivel. If he notices, he’ll just look the other way to avoid confrontation.
Another day. How much more of this do I have to endure? I am thankful that today there’s a blizzard, reminding me that the semester is almost over. Good riddance. He rambles on about nothing anyone cares about or probably ever heard of anyway—writers, history, music, rhetoric. He always tries to show us the root meanings of words from Latin to expand our vocabularies. I mean who cares? (I would have said that in another way, but I must remember this is a family magazine.) He’s so interested in dead people, he probably sleeps in a coffin in the library. He’s like a fixture there, but at least he’s quiet. His lectures, or should I say monologues, are punctuated by these lame jokes. When he doesn’t get any laughs, he just shrugs and says, “That didn’t work the last time I tried it either.” Can’t he learn by experience? A lab rat can.
He always wears an “Akron” sweatshirt, either to remind himself of where he lives or to provide directions if someone finds him wandering around directionless, which was obviously his path in life. Directionless is what I’d say this class amounts to. I just want it to be over, like a colonoscopy without anesthesia. Actually I’d prefer that. At least it might have some health benefits. This class has no benefits except for one useless general education requirement scratched off the list. History, Political Science, Ethics. How will any of those ever help me get a job? That’s what we’re here for, right? Not to supplement his social security.
Every morning he walks, or rather stumbles, into the classroom, wobbling back and forth like Frankenstein’s great-grandfather, moving from side to side without gaining any ground and bent over like Father Time, but with a smile on his face that looks like the paralysis of a stroke victim.
I never used to read the paper at all, but now I find myself scanning the obituaries, hoping to find his name. Then I’d be free and so would all of his other prisoners! How much longer can he last and how did I get to be so lucky to be in one of his last or maybe his last class? They probably have a hearse parked in the faculty lot: from the lot to the plot. That’s
catchy. At least the thought gave me a smile. He assigns these authors no one ever heard of. Who cares what Thoreau experienced at Walden Pond? He should have been bitten by malaria-carrying mosquitos. What time do any of us have for reading? We have real lives, not just something from a book. He asks us what WE think. What do these pumped-up high school students know? It’s his job to tell us what this stuff means and what to put into our papers. No one before in my entire educational career ever asked me what I think. He should just make a handout and I’ll recopy it into my paper. Or what do I care what one of his little favorites thinks: the two who look like they’re trying to be twins with their matching hair, or the one I call “the reader” who also writes poetry. He always has these little side conversations with them. What I think can’t be said in polite conversation, but I’ll put it this way: This is farm country. When you have animals—cows, horses, pigs, chickens—you get (fill in the blank). And to me that’s what this class is made of and what this class amounts to. But even that is useful, if you want to fertilize your garden. Maybe if I put all his tedious handouts through a shredder, someone can use them as mulch.

I just got a text. Finally some distraction. What a relief.

I can’t wait for the class evaluations. Now that’s a writing project I would enjoy. I better bring the largest thesaurus (I used to think that was a kind of dinosaur) I can find to put in all the synonyms for useless, worthless, boring, incompetent. Did I mention worthless? Smile. Sometimes he has this grey stubble, and other times when he’s tried to shave, it looks like the results of a failed suicide attempt. Better luck next time grandpa. He always tells us every skill requires practice. But he’s failed at that just like he failed at everything else in his life.

He’s winding down now. He’s staring at a room of glassy-eyed students. Finally, he’s starting his little speech about what an intelligent class we are (he can’t possibly mean me), and how nice it was to see us again, and how we enrich his life (I wonder what life?), and how he will be sorry to see us go, but such is the nature of life…and…and…and. Better he should enrich a plot of ground somewhere if he cares about the environment.

When I was young, I could have never imagined that being an abject failure in life would have been so much work!

***

Author’s Note:
Frankenstein was the scientist, not the monster.

Butterfly of Peace, Atalanta Kelsey
Walking by a stand of birches
bark tattered, torn,
waving loosely in the warm, spring breeze
layer upon layer
peeling back,
shedding the old
exposing what is beneath –
smooth, new bark
unmarked and unmarred by
Nature’s elements
and daily life.
They ask of me,
What are you to shed
making way
for something new
to emerge?
PLAYING TAPS: HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED
by Scott T. Hartman

We gathered early at the National Cemetery to go over our routine for veterans’ funerals. As members of Marine Corps League Detachment 569, we were seven Marines firing M-1 rifles and one man playing Taps. The weather was cloudy with a threat of rain as we awaited the first funeral of that day. Soon we were told the cortege was on its way.

The dark blue hearse slowly rounded the curve and proceeded to the committal shelter in the National Cemetery. We were standing at attention, but out of the corner of my eye, I could see a long procession of cars following the hearse. It was as if the family wanted to spend one last minute with their loved one. The Marines saluted and waited for the pallbearers to come forward and remove the flag-covered casket. The Honor Guard I was part of presented Arms (holding the M-1 rifle in a frontal salute) as the casket, Marines, and mourners passed by. I was standing 75 meters away holding my horn in the proper position of attention. After the crowd assembled in the shelter, our Chaplain spoke soothing words to the family and friends. Then it was time for the 21-gun salute.

“Aim, fire! Aim, fire! Aim, fire!” The rifle shots echoed loudly in the quiet space of the shelter, startling a young child who started crying. The Honor Guard then came to the position of “Present Arms,” and after a short, silent prayer, I took a deep breath and started playing the 24 notes of Taps. The notes came out clearly and crisply, and the last one sounded in echo; then it was finished. The honors did not take long to perform, but hopefully the grieving family would remember the ceremony for a long time.

The Marines folded the flag and one of them presented it to the family. Our Chaplain presented a bag of spent cartridges as a reminder of the ritual. Then the funeral was over.

That was the first of eight funerals we were to participate in that day. I was hopeful we would have strength and stamina to finish as we had started.
TO ME
by Nicolette Kaiser

Dear me,
How are you? What has become of you
Since spring?
Do you struggle to thrive?
Are you in solitude?
Or in company?
Have you found that soulmate
We both so long for?
Do you have special news
In your time of light?
The sense of loneliness
Beats like an unforgiving wave
A never-ending rhythm
With the never-ending loss
Of hope of it ever stopping
Leaving me
Drowning beneath the waves
That will never hope to end
MENSA
By Bruce Crissinger

Her parents were at least liberals during the 60’s, if not hippies. Her dad had thought about how to prove to his draft board that he was Amish, despite his Greek name, or alternatively about shooting off his foot. However, a series of student deferments had kept him safe until the draft lottery of December 1, 1969, had netted him a high number. He was arrested for possession of a small amount of marijuana in 1970, certainly a traumatic event at the time, but which became a tale worth retelling later.

Her parents had met in college, both were English majors, as well as friends, classmates, and pals, but never had thought of the other as marriage material. Her dad was notably, stunningly handsome, with blue Mediterranean eyes, olive skin, a lean firm body like a wrestler’s, and sensuous pink lips, in short an Eric Roberts in his youth, while Mom was average, medium to small, just short of overweight with her auburn hair in a simple, square Dutch-boy cut and with little interest in fashion.

Meanwhile, Mensa’s dad had been part of a glamorous, on-going relationship, but due to the disparity of their socio-economic backgrounds, the girl went on to marry someone else. It wasn’t exactly clear to Mensa how her parents eventually came to marry. The notice of their wedding in the local newspaper reported that he was employed as a substitute school teacher. His wife, however, worked full time in a neighboring district with only two short leaves for the birth of their children.

By their late 30’s he was working at a small Christian high school as English teacher, play and musical director, and occasional producer of his own original material. His road to Damascus might not have been the expressway north, but his conversion from beer, pot, and sexual freedom to conservative Christianity did not deny his past. Rather his stories of drug use, his arrest, and sexual experience became useful to illustrate the errors of his sinful past. It probably helped with the board of directors of his school, too. He could relate to the students as an equal, discuss temptation, and provide them with a good example of overcoming it—eventually, reminiscent of Augustine’s prayer, “Lord make me chaste, but not yet.”

While her husband commuted in one direction, Mensa’s mother returned to their alma mater to pursue a Ph.D., driven by a need for the kind of success that she knew her husband would never have. Rather, he spent long hours at his school writing, producing, and rehearsing the shows he wrote—an affair was out of the question, though even at 40 he retained much of his looks. His hair was full and long with only a slight streaking of grey, the body lean, the smile sincere, the look in the eye of an innocent child. Only the posture was just a little stooped and the step slowed, as if he were lost in thought.

Mensa’s mother, however, once she had exchanged Dr. (Ph.D.) for Mrs., pursued a more remunerative career as an education administrator at a large university. The divorce was hardly traumatic, though admittedly unexpected, even by the participants, more out of indifference than anything else. But apart from moving apart, their lives were little changed. Both children lived with him so that they could finish school in the same district, Mensa then attending her parents’ alma mater; the son, after struggling with ADHD, depression, and the social anxiety of being gay in a fundamentalist home, announced he was moving to New York to become an artist. In youth his father had held the typical homophobic ideas of his times, despite the outward appearance of liberalism, and religious conservatism only affirmed his disdain, though expressed in a different way. In any event, his son had been the lesser important of his children, remote and difficult to understand, and now “out of sight” was for the most part “out of mind.” However, he brooded when a young man would arrive to take out his daughter, shouting after her the advice: “Mensa, stay pure.” But neither son nor wife were felt as an absence in his life or his house.

For a while it seemed that the mother was studying the world’s religions by dating a series of men of different faiths, but after settling on one, man that is, faith became an indifferent issue with her. One of her suitors had made an improper overture to her daughter; another had been impossibly pompous and demanding, which might have put her off marriage altogether.

At 28 Mensa remained close to both, as well as to her brother, who was partnered, while his sister remained unmarried. She had the blue eyes of her father and had developed a Rubenesque figure. Like her father, she still loved God, and like her brother, she loved Madonna. She taught dance to children, worked at a mall, but knew she was still looking for something that could define her, pull together her various needs and interests.

Mensa is the Latin word for table. We all need a place at the table.
PROPOSAL
By Bruce Crissinger

It is a melancholy object to see our precious students bearing the burdens of multiple responsibilities: endeavoring to balance a full academic program with, in many cases, taking care of families or family members while working at one or two part-time jobs in a vain effort to meet expenses and pay tuition and at the same time putting themselves in debt that will take decades to pay off and feel like the burden of Atlas.

Anyone who could devise a plan to ameliorate this unfortunate situation should receive high regard not necessarily within the academic community but certainly with the state legislature who would gladly seize on any opportunity to reduce funding to these supposedly liberal bastions.

For the most part the students have no idea of what they want to do. I have known so many whose ultimate jobs bore no relationship with their college majors. Perhaps we should return to the old apprentice system. Let the employers train them like the traditional apprentice-ship programs.

Instead the universities should be pared down to only the essential classes for practical and profitable careers, predominately healthcare, computer science and engineering. As for the others, let them eat cake.

A further benefit would be to reduce the numbers or, ideally, totally eliminate that querulous class of constant complainers—the adjunct faculty—mewling and puking about the injustice of their lot in life, overworked and underpaid, no need to rehearse those details here. They are all too familiar. It’s not the universities’ fault that they chose such useless career paths, though the vast majority of the adjuncts, those old boomers, studied at the one or two of the institutions that now employ them. Fortunately classics, history, language and such departments have been virtually eliminated or only employ adjuncts. An ironic fate.

See how well we can do without them.
I myself was steeped in the humanities, as readers of these pages know, steeped like an overused tea bag, soggy, depleted, tasteless, and soon to be thrown away.

Why were the humanities ever included in the curriculum in the first place? To support thought and critical thinking, to see beyond the narrow borders of ourselves and our communities?

It’s all too obvious that the current generations of supposedly educated adults have not benefitted from the courses/curses in history or political science, and any minimal acquaintance with music, art, or literature has been smuffed out in the bud by the brain-numbing power of ubiquitous popular culture.
Our students see connoisseurs of the humanities as if they were the idle rich. (They should see my 1040.)
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