

VOICES :

creative expressions from
the storytelling project



Spring 2013: Volume 1

ABOUT :

The UMD-Duluth Storytelling Project is a volunteer collaboration between the University of Minnesota-Duluth and local nonprofit organizations that support individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. During the spring of 2013, six writing students from the University of Minnesota-Duluth met weekly with six writers from TBI, Inc. and EBI, Inc. Through extensive one-on-one conversations, the UMD students and adults from TBI, Inc. and EBI, Inc. have produced the creative works assembled here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS :

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The participants and staff at TBI, Inc., with special thanks to Brandon Karie, the participants and staff at EBI, Inc., the students at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, Jaime Jost (Department of English, University of Minnesota-Duluth), Katie Van Wert (Assistant Professor of English, University of Minnesota-Duluth), John Arthur and the Community Partnership Grants Committee (University of Minnesota-Duluth), Krista Twu, Michele Larson, and the Department of English at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. This project was funded by a University of Minnesota-Duluth Community Partnership Grant.

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P R E F A C E :

My work with people with developmental disabilities began in 2005 when I worked at Camp Friendship in Anandale, Minnesota. Initially, I was intimidated to work with the variety of campers that we serve. I quickly learned that people are people—ability level is a part of a person’s identity—but it’s not the defining factor. I’ve now worked with the organization in some capacity nearly every summer since then.

Unfortunately, summers don’t last all year. During the school year, I am a graduate student in the English department at UMD. Long hours spent at camp were replaced by long hours working on academics. Soon, an opportunity came for me to be able to combine these two passions.

When Katie Van Wert told me about the Storytelling Project, I happily signed on as the coordinator. It has been exciting to watch the gaps between the students and community members lessen throughout their time spent together. Being able to see the connections form between them has been fantastic and heartwarming. Each of the individuals has a story to tell, and the student writers have been able to facilitate the telling of those stories. What their collaboration has produced is nothing short of amazing.

Jaime Jost

April, 2013



V O I C E S : 4

I BURST OUT LAUGHING

By Jeff Schneidewent

In Collaboration with Auriel Garrett

As I stood there, looking into the eyes of the Travelers, something happened. For each one of those brief moments, I reconnected with a true friend. Though no words were exchanged, they were each telling me the same thing. They were with me. I truly believed that if I had asked any one of them to follow me through the gates of hell, I'd have to hold them back from going in first.

--D.J. MacHale, Raven Rise

At least I thought it was a wall. It sure felt like one. It was hard. It was flat. It stretched out on either side of me. You know . . . wall.

--D.J. MacHale, The Quillan Games

I am telling this story as a way to reach out and hopefully make some new friends. Not just friends that I talk to online, but friends that I see regularly offline. I live in a group home with three women who are all much older than me, so I get lonely. I don't like the idea of silent messages because they are not personal enough. I am legally blind, so I have a hard time reading messages and typing responses. It also takes a long time for people to respond sometimes. It is extremely important to me to make real connections with people, and I don't feel like they can be formed online.

I was born on May 17th 1987 without an esophagus. Doctors had to stretch out what little tissue there was from my stomach. I still have a scar from all the surgeries. It runs from my belly button to my sternum. After they stretched out what

little tissue I had, they had a hard time feeding me formula. My mom was the only one who had much luck feeding me. Almost every year up to seven years old, I had to have my makeshift esophagus stretched. As a result, I can make this awesome pterodactyl noise and produce a very convincing Golem voice.

My father often took us down to his parents' farm in Bruce, Wisconsin. We had fun times down there. First they owned a cattle ranch, eventually they turned it into an emu ranch. We often played on a large willow tree in the yard near an electric fence. Often we would accidentally brush up against the fence, getting the shock of our lives.

When I was about four, my dad and grandpa took me out to a target set up in the cow fields. They gave me a loaded rifle and told me to shoot at the target. Curious, I took the gun and aimed at the target. I

pulled the trigger and fell flat on my butt. I remember being extremely grateful that there wasn't a cow pie where I fell.

My mom divorced my dad when I was three years old. I've been told that it was because he would not take care of his diabetes. At the time I thought it was my mom's fault. I thought she was responsible because she was the one sending him away. I remember my brother siding with my mom the day she kicked him out. I have a vague memory of standing in the door to the garage and peering out to the driveway where my mom and dad were arguing.

I was doing my homework up on the kitchen counter while my mom was cooking a hamburger helper dish. All of a sudden I felt a sharp bop on my head and heard wood splitting. The top half of a spoon fell on my homework. I whipped

around to see my mom staring at a broken spoon. The bowl of the spoon had split in half horizontally. Almost instantly we burst out laughing.

I was diagnosed with diabetes a week before I turned five. I didn't start administering insulin myself until a year later, mostly because I was afraid of the needle. I had a hard time adjusting to the injections, regular exercise, and not being able to eat what I want when I want.

Once, in an Italian restaurant in San Francisco, a manager with curly black hair and a moustache saw me checking my blood and administering my own insulin. He laughed and said in his strong Italian accent, "You are a very brave boy. I will give you a free tiramisu." I felt very special when he set the huge dessert in front of me. It was so big and rich that I had to share it with my brother and grandparents. Even though I only had a little bit, my blood sugar increased significantly.

One time I was rollerblading with my brother and his best friend. They saw a large, steep hill and went down it before I could say I didn't want to. So I had to follow them. It started out slow and smooth, but it quickly got bumpier and faster. My left rollerblade caught on a rock and I tripped two thirds of the way down the hill. As you might imagine, I tumbled down, landing on my shoulder with a bad case of road rash. Meanwhile, my brother and his friend made it down safely and were headed into the commu-

nity park. They didn't notice that I had fallen. My brother claims he thought my screams of agony were shouts of joy. Eventually, when they stopped and heard that I was still screaming, they headed back to find me. I had slid at least five meters along the pavement; they found me moaning at the bottom of the hill. They took me to the park restroom and my brother took care of the first aid while his friend called our mom. She came down quick and took me to a nearby clinic. When the doctor saw my battle scars, he asked if there had been a nurse nearby when I crashed. I told him no, and asked why. He thought the first aid job was excellent. I told him my brother had done it. Then I got x-rays and found out I had broken my right clavicle. That's the last thing I remember before falling into my diabetic coma two weeks later.

I used to live across the street from one of those tornado sirens. When it went off every month for testing, my brother and I would often go hug the siren pole. Once my brother was playing "pretend here comes the twister" in the backyard with friends when the siren actually went off. They ran screaming into the house as fast as they could. When I saw his terrified face I burst out laughing.

I went into the coma when I was about thirteen. It lasted for three-to-four months. The best guess for why I went into the coma is that the artificial insulin I was taking somehow negatively affected my natural growth hormone, causing my blood pressure to skyrocket into the thou-

sands overnight. I also had brain damage from having so much glucose that it caused a blockage in an artery that went to my brain, cutting off the blood flow to my brain. My vision was terribly damaged. The focusing mechanism in my brain barely works anymore. I don't remember the first week after I came out of my coma, probably because it was very traumatic. When I first tried walking, I had to walk with my feet spread way out like I was a cowboy in a western shoot out. I got tired easily, and would usually collapse to the floor.

I was making a LEGO spacecraft of my own design at our kitchen table. I stood up to concentrate on my creation. I was so focused that when my brother took the chair from behind me to get something from a cupboard, I didn't notice. After he had found what he was looking for, he left the chair and went to make himself some food. When I finished my creation a few minutes later, I was so proud that I had to sit down in triumph. Of course I fell right on my ass! My brother and I both burst out laughing.

I spent most of my teenage life recovering from the coma, and I'm still recovering from it. I needed a feeding tube even though I could eat solids. Mom wouldn't give any oral food if I wet my bed, didn't exercise, or coughed. If I wet the bed, I would have to sleep out in the garage. Even in the winter, though it had a heater. If I didn't exercise, I couldn't have oral food or watch TV. The worst incident was sometime in mid-April, 2005. I was sleeping the



garage again for wetting the bed the night before. I woke up and had wet the bed. My stepfather came out to the garage the next morning and smelled that I had wet the bed and said, "Looks like you need a bath." He dragged me in my pajamas into the backyard and hosed me down with ice-cold water. Then he made me strip in the middle of the backyard. I had to walk with my feet numb all the way back to the front door of the house. Then I got dressed and had my breakfast while my mom told me

not to tell anyone what had happened. But I barely lasted through the first hour of school before I told my para-pro what had happened to me that morning. She took me to the school officer and had me tell him everything. Then he took a trip to my house without me to check for evidence. They found evidence, so I was immediately taken out of my mother's custody. I was only a month away from turning eighteen, so I needed a legal guardian.

When I was eleven, my grandparents took my brother and me to Disneyland in California. We were there for about a week. We visited our grandma's sister and went to visit the redwood forest in northern California. Those trees were some of the biggest things I've ever seen.

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF MATT

By Matt Philgren

In Collaboration with Eric King

I'm Matt – I graduated high school in 2002 – I golf in the Special Olympics, and I'm kind of a troublemaker. That's the story – just write it, okay. You want more!? Weeeell, okay. I was born in St. Paul at Regents Hospital on February 9th 1980 – I'm thirty-three. You want to know about the hospital and me being born? I was just born! I don't know that – well . . . I do know that my birth mom dropped me, she shook me and dropped me a couple of times, she took me to the hospital, they looked at her, and they took me away – I don't really remember! I was just a baby then! That's what I know about it. But that's not really the story; that's where it starts because that's where I start, but the story really comes after. You might not know it, but I'm a trouble maker, I was a troublemaker – it's my rough past, and it's behind me now, but you have to hear it to hear me; to understand who I am and you need to know about where I been. So we'll start at when I remember . . .

I guess my first memory was around six or seven in kindergarten; no, that's not right, it was five or six when my grandpa took care of me when I had the chicken pox. I don't really remember anything in particular, so don't ask, but that's where it starts – born, memory, and then . . . wait . . . okay, before that there's a story. My adoptive mother loves to tell

this story, so I'll tell you. When I was two, we had a foster child that was two years old. We were at our god-mother's house, and this little toddler was like a genius – if there was something on top of the refrigerator he wanted, he would pull out all the drawers and climb up. I learned to walk by watching him, but I would walk right into the counters instead of climbing. I would have this little bump on my head, and my foster mother saw that my foster brother was trying to climb the refrigerator and that I was trying to mimic him.

Me and the bump, that was before I remember. But I want to tell you about everything else. The trouble, that's important, because I'm here today – I learned from the trouble I've gotten in, and I'd like you to hear that. There were girls too . . . okay, are girls still. And it's all part of the story of Matt. Leet's see . . . I went to kindergarten at one school, when I was 6, and I was always the oldest kid. I went to first and second grade in that school, third and fourth in another, and fifth and sixth in another. I think they were Emit D. Williams, Edgerton, and Bremhall. Remember much? Ummm, no. Except that I was a poor student. How? Well, I just sucked, okay! Kind of getting in trouble – I guess I was a troublemaker, I'd talk back to the teacher and get in fights. Yeah, that's happened – like this one time this guy took my

Mountain Dew -----

----- I was at my workplace. Where? Oh, yeah, TSE . . . anyway, I was at my workplace, and I had this open can of Mountain Dew, and this big guy – he was waaay fatter than me – took my pop. I got mad, and this female worker tried to restrain me. I accidentally broke her ankle when I was struggling. I got charged with Assault 5 and went to jail. The group home eventually came and got me, and I had more problems there. But I want you to hear it – it'll teach you a lesson: if someone takes your Mountain Dew, don't beat that person up. You'll go to jail instead of that person -----

---- I was twenty-four then. So what if we skipped years! This is my story. Okay, okay, we'll go back for now. After elementary school, I got in a little more trouble. At 11, just after fifth grade, my adoptive mom couldn't handle me anymore, and I went into foster care, then to a group shelter, stayed at the Salvation Army for a little while, and then to a foster home. I got kicked out of there and went back to Salvation Army. But this time I broke a window and got sent to juvy – I did some property damage – but that whole bunch of places brought me to Sandy's.

What is Sandy's? It's a boy's ranch – I didn't like it much, it was just dumb, okay? It was a jail like environment – jail environment, that's funny,

but we'll get there – it was controlled, you had to go to school. I made a few friends, and my mom came and visited a few times. But I went there in '93 and ended up staying for three years . . . weell, I got sentenced to three years. One night, me and some buddies were talking, and we decided to leave. I think, yeah, one guy had a girl somewhere and we were going to go there. But we left, and as we were walking down the street, we heard sirens AND we heard dogs. The next step was only smart – we hid in a ditch along the side of the road. We sat there for about half an hour, and the staff and a sheriff eventually drove by and found us. They sent me back

to juvy then, 'cause I violated my probation (for escaping from the ranch), and they just sent me back again. For three years!

But then I went to Northwoods Children's home up here in Duluth. I was in seventh grade, and it sucked. You had to change your clothes for gym class and go back and forth between classes; I had English, math, and science, so I moved around a lot and didn't like it. But I was pretty much a straight A student – I wanted to be good. Why be good in Duluth? I don't know, I guess it was important to get out of the group home I was in and get back towards the cities – I wanted to be near fam-

ily, so that was important to me. I did good at Northwoods, though, in my first couple days! Then I started to test the system. It was good too. There were a lot more freedoms, and they had girls; that was a good thing. I had a few girlfriends there, but I started to realize that I didn't want to be up here, I wanted to be near my family. It was good though – I had ups and downs, but doesn't everyone in a group home? I mean I'm in a group home now, and my roommate -----

----- my roommate just passed on. It's hard this week – I'm just trying to not shut down. I've slept a lot . . . but I know how to deal with it.



A few years ago, my godmother was passing on, and I found out how to handle losing someone, but my girlfriend didn't have to break up with me too! She knew – she knew that my roommate was in bad shape, and she still broke up with me! She didn't like it that I smoke, so you know what, I can't wait to shop this week – pack of Marbs! I'm thirty-three years old, I can do what I want. Why'd she break up with me? Weeeell, I'm hanging out with a girl she doesn't like – no, no, we're just friends, she's my best friend. Dan? Dan's not my best friend, he's my bro. There's a difference. But let's talk about something else – Paul Barer passed away last week. Of course it's the same Paul Barer, he's the same guy. No! It's always been the same Undertaker too – people thought that, that he changed over the years, but he hasn't! It's always been the same guy! Yeah dude dadee -----

----- Then, yeah, high school came, and I moved back down to the Cities. I went to Highland Park, Humbolt, and then back to Highland Park – I had some problems, I worked them out though. I graduated in 1999 and then stuck around a few years after to get vocational training, but that was at White Bear Lake. Where doesn't matter, though! What happened, that's the important part. I was in high school until 2002, so you know what that means . . . I had my twenty-first birthday in high school! How was it staying around for another 3 years? All I got to say is more proms, dude! And so much more happened in high school . . .

I went out for football at the

start of my junior year. It was fun, and funny – I went for the first few days and then we put on the pads for scrimmage. I was skinny back then, like a small dog that thought he could play with the big dogs, and I was on the line. Before the first play could start, I stood up, looked at the coach, and asked, “could I be the water boy?” I told you it was funny! I'm a funny guy, I know it. But I didn't stick around too long in football – games went too late, past curfew, and I was worried about violating probation again. You see, the group home I moved into in the Cities was the worst ever. If they ever had a problem, they would just call the cops. I ended up in the hospital a lot, in juvy and suspended from school too. So I didn't want to push it too far with the late games.

I played soccer at White Bear Lake too! I was an athlete, man! I played for a year and a half – half way through the second year, my doctor told me I needed knee surgery. At first it was just a little surgery, but things kept going wrong. They put a screw in, and then they told me I needed a realignment. So I didn't get to play soccer too long, but we took second at state my first year!

Did I tell you I did karate for a while too? I was good at it 'cause I was a fast-paced learner – after only a month, I was almost to my yellow belt. And I competed in a couple of tournaments – I was going at it, dude! In one tournament, I got second place in my skills test, and I got DQ'ed from sparring. Yep! I knocked out my opponent – they said I was too rough. I didn't stick with it; the first month was free,

after that it was too expensive, but I like it. I love martial arts, and Bruce Lee is the best! WWE is great, and I love the Undertaker and Kane, but Bruce Lee could kick them all . . . so what if he's dead? Even the zombie Bruce Lee could kick Jackie Chan any day; even wrestlers, yep, cause in that movie where he goes up those levels, in the end there was a sumo wrestler, and he beat him. Bolo Yeung is cool too! He was in Bloodsport . . . did you know that was based on a real guy? His name was Frank Dukes and he won the Kumite. Oh, it's real!

I played some sports, but I promised you, didn't I, so here it is – my twenty-first birthday while in high school. And guess what? I asked my teacher ahead of time if I could not come to school because it was my twenty-first, and she said yes! It was a lot like other twenty-firsts – I took a ton of shots. My fiancé came with me, and we went to every bar possible – my favorite was this bar that gave you a free beer every time you bought one. It's enough to say I got drunk. My fiancé had to go home, so I went to a few more places. The last one, though, was this Italian restaurant; this is funny, I went in, and asked for a free beer – I guess I was being a little loud 'cause they called the cops, but instead of taking me to detox, they just gave me a ride home and I came home waaay past curfew – 1 a.m. I was supposed to be there at 10 p.m. It was a fun night, and being twenty-one, I got to drink at my senior prom later on. But what wasn't fun, the next day. Being hungover and in high school is not as fun as having your twenty-first birthday.

Oh yeah, I just brought her up but didn't explain. I got married that year, too! It was a commitment ceremony – it's the same as a wedding, but you don't get a license. Her name was Younah Sherry Kiry. We were together for three years, but it just didn't work out, I guess. She thought I drank too much, and I didn't like how she was into drugs, and my mom didn't like her either. We broke up, and that was okay, my mom was happy, though – Younah would buy me stuff, and my mom didn't like that either – she thought I was taking advantage of her. But I bought her stuff too! I bought a ring, didn't I?!

But that was high school. 2002 and I graduated. The next two years were okay – we went to a Twins game, me and the group home. It was the one when Chuck Knoblock came back to play with the Yankees. Everyone was throwing stuff on the field so Knoblock would know we didn't like him, and I wanted to too – the staff told me not too, and I was like, "c'mon, that's no fun." I didn't, though, I wanted to, but I didn't want to get arrested ----

---- I have a doctor's appointment tomorrow. I had my annual check-up today, and I'm healthy! I might be fat, but I'm healthy! Tomorrow? That's a hearing test. I'm 100% deaf in my left ear and 20% in my right. Yeah, that's why I sit on your left – I can hear you that way. But the cool thing about tomorrow – I get to go into a sound-proof box. No, it's not really a box, it's a big room. But if I qualify, I'll get new hearing aids ----
---- I got in a little more trouble when

I was twenty-four too. Yeah, in 2004 – I was born in 1980, remember? But this one day, I got angry again. I kicked a hole in a wall, and then I put this guy in a headlock (I was skinny back then too). But I didn't get bailed out that time, and I had to wait months before getting in another shelter; I got in because my family was on the board of directors. But I got arrested again later that year – I was at work, and I got pissed off, people were buggin' me, and I couldn't calm down. So the supervisor told the staff to call the sheriff. When they came, I rose my cane (I was using one because of the knee surgeries). After I calmed down, I tried to talk them out of it. How? I said, "please don't arrest me." They asked me why I was upset, and I told them: not long ago, a cop got shot in an alley. It was the first cop that arrested me, way back when I was thirteen; I knew the guy well – he was the first one to tell me to turn my life around. I got arrested, though, and released the next day. They bought my sob story – I told the public defender, and he said, "Well, they shouldn't have been messing with you that day."

The next year, I left the state-run group home – oh, it was great to leave. I didn't like it much, and when I left, I was like, "see ya suck-ahs!" The staff there was mean, and you'd be mad too if you got called Jerry Springer just for being a flirt. But I left, and went into a foster home. That was great. The foster mom was really nice – it was a small house, one story and a basement, and our foster mom lived in the basement while us guys lived upstairs. She cooked for us

all the time, and when she was gone, we got to do whatever we wanted. But my case worker thought it would be good for me to get a new environment – he found out I violated probation two times by not going to work (I was working at Merik at the time making headphones). That's when I came here to Duluth, a little before my twenty-sixth birthday. I got in 'cause the program director of TBI (that's Traumatic Brain Injury), knew me from way back in my Northwoods days.

I didn't want to go; I was moving away from my family again. But on the way up here, we stopped at Taco Bell, and the house supervisor bought lunch – it helped a little on the car ride, but it still took me a couple of weeks to get settled up here. I started working and started testing the limits – I found out that if I did good, I could get into a better position in the company. And I did. I started out on a lawn crew – that was okay, I rode a John Deere. Can you imagine me behind a John Deere?! Scary, huh. But it was okay – we had our fun days and our boring days. Sometimes the other guys would be lazy, and the job coach and I would have to do all the work. And this one time, one of the other guys found a dead rabbit and threw it at another – it was pretty funny and all the staff were laughing.

And that's what life was like: I would get up, play video games, do an activity, go to work if I worked that day, and that's it. At twenty-nine, I started to go to college at Lake Superior College. It was great. And I stopped on the lawn crew and started

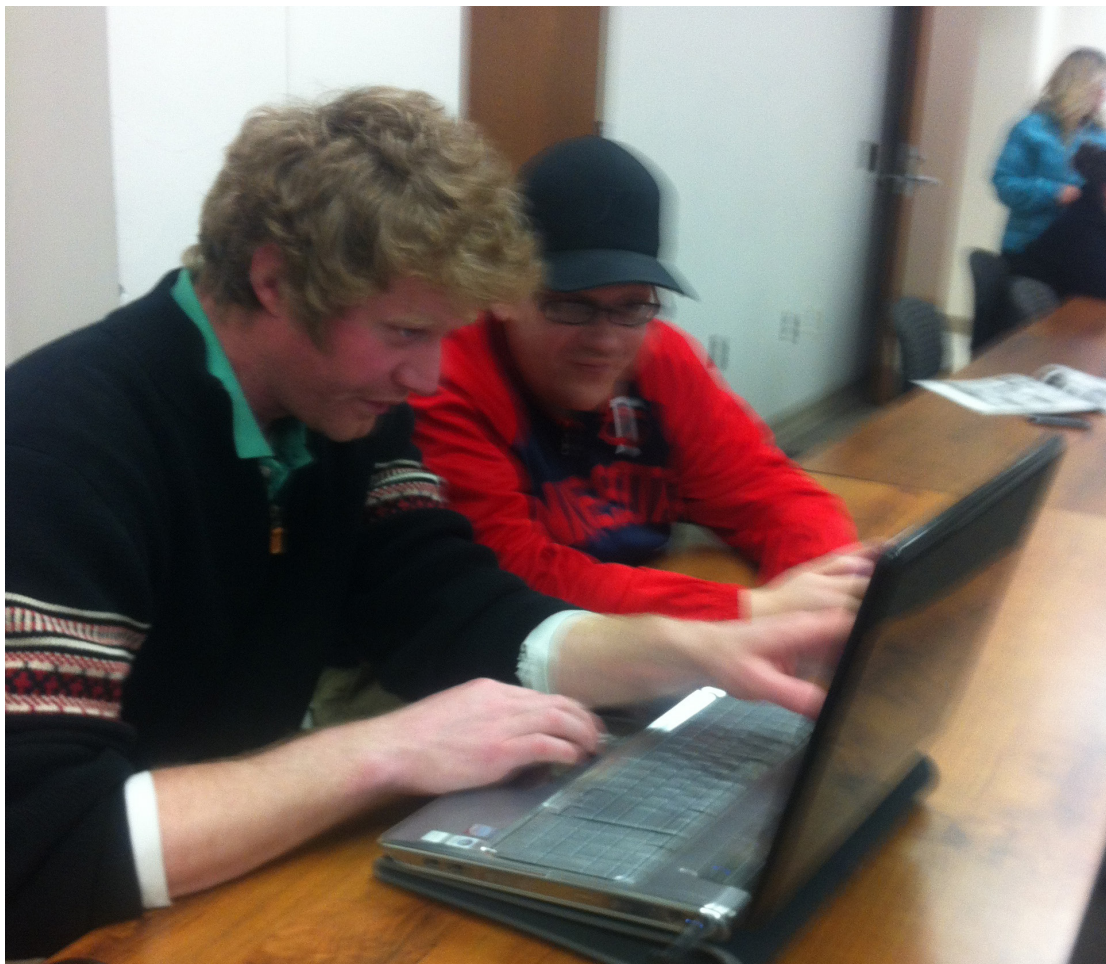
doing janitorial work – I liked that, I got to do my own thing there. People weren't all over bossing me around. I would go in, clean out some classrooms, put up the chairs, sweep the floor, mop the floor, and check with my boss to see if he wanted anything else done. And school was great too – I'm going to go back soon to finish my degree at LSC in informatics, and then I'm going to come to University of Minnesota-Duluth to get my Master's – think about it, a guy with a brain injury going to UMD, that would be a major accomplishment! Then I'm going to work until I want to retire – maybe around eighty; I'd be an old guy knowing a lot about

computers! I started an IT position in TBI less than a year ago too! It's really nice. I'm the only guy that has all the passwords, so if you want to do something you gotta come see me.

So I've liked it up here. I've done some fun things, and it's been good. During the summers, I get to go to golf practice, and I compete in the Special Olympics. Oh, I forgot to tell you, the other day, we were down in the cities, and we went to get my drive tested. I sliced it a little bit, but I hit 179! So I'm averaging 160 on my drive!

And that's me. Matt Philgren. I'm thirty-three, I work in IT, I'm going to go to UMD one day, and I'm

a ladies' man. I'm also an Olympian and love the WWE, and okay, I'll admit that Ken Shamrock and Kurt Angle were the baddest guys in the whole thing. And I've been in some trouble. Life hasn't been the prettiest – I've made mistakes, but I've learned from each one. I'm just like you, and now you know that cause you've heard about me. Think about what I've told you, and always remember, don't beat up a guy for taking your Mountain Dew; you'll only get in trouble.



MONSTER-LOVE

By **Sandrea Mitchell**

In Collaboration with Satya Putumbaka

When I was two years old, my mom tried to drown me. They were taking me away. She said she wanted no one else to have me. So she tried to kill me and my uncle stopped her, 'cos it was at his pool, and his name was Uncle Claydo. I found out when I was about 12 that she tried to drown me, and I shot myself seventeen years old and it happened young and I was going through depression, changes, and I never told nobody. And I wonder why tell her now.

She'd probably say just get over it. I don't know what she is capable of sometimes. My mom's real sick. And she told me that later and I was just like oh wow. I didn't get it until I was older and realized she was gone out of her mind.

People were sick, and that's just how it is. And I grow everyday and I learn about myself. And I just found out I have schizophrenia last year. My grandma was a paranoid schizophrenic and they diagnosed me as a schizophrenic. I got my first hallucinations was when I was on meth, and that was after my accident. I heard screams. It was a bad hallucination. I blacked out. I went into a sweat.

*

"Your brother, Jeffrey. How do you spell that?"

G-e-o-f-f-r-e-y.

"He's three years older?"

I think four. Cos I'm twenty-five and he's twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine—yeah it's 4. I think he's twenty-nine. Haha. That's bad.

"Tell me about you and your brother."

Well we're really close.

"How close?"

He's got my back and I got his back. And I could tell him anything but I wouldn't open up to him about shooting myself for a long time, cos he didn't wanna believe it. So I just kept that a secret for many years until he wanted to ask questions. But then he was like I know. He made a rap song about it. It was really touching. He knows how to rap.

"Do you still have the rap he made you?"

"Yeah."

"How do you—"

He wrote it and then he put it in on a CD but it's all scratched. I think

I need a new one.

"Right now?"

[Nods yes.]

"So he's like over ten years younger than you?"

Yeah.

"Do you have any other siblings?"

"Mhmm. I have my older brother Geoffrey, my olderr sister Cece (Cicera), and it goes—the oldest is twenty-one Decola-how do you spell that? I don't know! . Decola? But I know it's got cola in it c-o-l-a—me and my sisters never got along-- they were mad that my dad let me drive his car."

"So when did your mom Debbie adopt you?"

When I was twelve? Twelve? I lived with as a foster child since I was two though. I was taken away when I was like two.

"Why did they take you away?"

Because Geoffrey told my grandma, and my grandma told the police what was going on.

"What did he tell your grandma?"

I would've beat her ass. What the fuck you doing? That was sick of her. I don't know if it was the drugs or what she was on or the schizophrenia, bipolar. I don't know what made her do that. But she did it. And I don't remember her doing that to me. I don't. I was too young. I just remember the stabbing, that's it. I blanked that out, my childhood. But I don't remember. I don't even remember her trying to drown me. I was just told that.

My mom. I was scared of her? Was I always scared of her?

Yes.

The same scare I get from her is when I fight from her. That feeling. It's real. When she scared me, I just didn't wanna fight her, but she would hit me, fight me, cuss me out. And that feeling that she gave me was a scared feeling like panic like oh my god, what's

gonna happen. Cos she never knows what's going on. And when she was alive, before she died, she snapped at me for opening the car the wrong way. Like when I opened the back door she said why are you sitting in the back? And that was the whole day. Just tripping.

*

“So you were sad, the day she was passing? When was the day she wanted to talk to you? The day before she died? That was it?”

Yep. We had a talk. We smoked some weed. She was in pain.

“Was there a change in your relationship before that?”

[Shakes head no.]

“Were you always scared until that day?”

[A couple nods yes.]

Well, before I shot myself—the day before I shot myself I went to see her, and I thought it was weird cos I just got in a fight with Eric. And I had a black eyes and a busted lip. And so I went over to her house and she said you should stay. And I said no I'm okay I'm okay I just miss you guys and I left some clothes here and I picked up my clothes. I didn't wanna tell her what I was thinking about but I planned to kill myself. I wrote a letter. I wanted people to know. And my little brother Monty screamed when I left, it was so weird, he said don't leave. And I said



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why you crying, I'll be right back. But really, I was gone.

Do you wanna see where I shot myself?

"Yeah I do—oh yeah I do, just one second. Let me. Oh wow."

Yeah it looks funny.

[There's a small dark-spotted groove in this side of her head, a subtle indentation left by one bullet after she put a gun to her head.]

"Do you ever touch it?"

[She smiles and shakes her head no.]

"Do you ever think about it?"

I don't know. I think about it like how I used to think about it. I used to drive, never had a job, did a lot of community service—forced to do it. Got in fights, stole, and a riot. It wasn't me though. But I know those feelings. Like I can feel it. Here, at the back of my head.

*

"When did you find out that she tried to drown you?"

Probably fourteen.

"Who told you?"

My brother tried to tell me, but he couldn't. My godmom told me. He didn't want to talk about it.

"Who's your godmom?"

Daphne. The lady that she stabbed, my mom stabbed her. She stabbed her too. Daphne got a scar from it on her stomach. It's bad.

"How did she tell you?"

She was asking questions cos I had a dream about a clown drowning me, and I had that dream again that day. Why did I dream of a clown drowning me? She thought that was weird. I was like why did I keep having that? It just scared me, freaked me out. And she was like I gotta tell you, and she got all serious.

She said you know what, I shouldn't be telling you this, your brother should, but I don't think he's gonna. Your mom tried to drown you, to kill you.

And I was like no. Where's Geoffrey? I went to him and he said she told you? And that's how I knew. And I was sad that it really happened. Why didn't they tell me this before? And I was kinda mad, but I don't keep grudges. I understand why they didn't tell me. Cos I still talked to her.

"Your mother?"

"You seem like you're removed from it now."

Oh yeah. But now I really understand everything. People are sick, and that's just how it is.

*

So was I always scared of her?

Always.

I never said anything bad about her to her face. But I never really talked to her. Me and her, we opened up on the day before she died. She apologized, she said she was crazy, and she said she put us through hell. She's really hurt that Geoffrey don't love her for what she did to him. And she told me that, only me, cos I was the only one in the room, she was on her death bed and had the oxygen tank on her but I could still understand what she was saying, and she said she believed in me. And I was like, don't say your goodbyes.

But she passed the next day. I had a really bad headache. Do you know that a butterfly was flying in my face? And I was like get the hell out when I was outside smoking my cigarette and the butterfly was in my face.

Our relationship changed when she just wanted to talk to me, just sat down and was like this is how I feel. She never did this. I always thought of her as a hard woman that was mental, and I don't know why she did it at that time. But I needed that.

And at her funeral, I cried. And you know what's weird? When my dad died, I didn't cry. Cos I thought he was okay. I cried a lot at my mom's funeral. She never had the time, never thought about saying how she felt toward people. And a lot of people didn't like her. And a lot of people were scared of her. She was lonely.

THE HIDDEN LOVE

By Dan Clark

In Collaboration with Ben Pieper

Once in the town of Mesa there was beautiful young lady named Brandi; she was a good and kindhearted soul. Everyone that she knew loved her, because there was nothing that could upset her.

Brandi is a Junior at Mesa Senior High, which is in a small suburb in California, where she has lived all her life. Mesa is known for their high school football team, which always comes home with All-star trophies. Most of Mesa's residents commute into the city for work, leaving Mesa peaceful during the day.

Diana was Brandi's best friend and the only person who she could tell secrets too. One day in May, Diana and Brandi were sitting in Brandi's room gossiping and giggling.

"Whom do you have a crush on?" Diana asked Brandi. Brandi became quiet, and Diana noticed there were tears in her friend's eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Diana was confused at Brandi's reaction to her question.

"No, no, it's okay, you didn't know," Brandi replied. "I've been having dreams about this lover but I can't see his face."

"What do you mean, you can't see his face?!" exclaimed Diana.

"I try to see his face, but every time I'm in the dream, his face is hazy," Brandi told her. "Every night when I go to sleep I dream about this faceless man. I wish he would sweep me off my feet when I am awake."

"Well maybe it's someone you know. What about James?" asked Diana.

"James is not the one for me! He is too controlling; I'd constantly be on a leash."

They argued for a while before Diana went home. Once she was gone, Brandi got ready for bed.

That very night, Brandi opened her eyes and found herself in a dark, swampy marsh. All she could hear was the faint buzzing of insects in the air. Her nose started to twitch at the smell of rotting animal flesh. Suddenly, there was a rustle in the bushes across the lagoon behind her. Brandi turned around to see what it might be, but nothing was there.

Brandi started to feel very uneasy and scared. She wondered how she was going to get out of this situation. All of a sudden, she saw a hand coming out of the lagoon in front of her. Slowly, a giant figure emerged from the lagoon. The figure was giant and scaly, almost reptilian. It had a giant horn on the top of its head that looked like it was taken from a rhino. Its skin was covered in the green, slimy muck of the lagoon it had crawled out of. Its head was especially coated in the muck and Brandi could not make out any facial features on its head except for its pointy ears. All of a sudden, a glob of the slime fell off of the creature and revealed an eye that was as wide as the globe in Brandi's school library.

Brandi quickly turned around, when she heard another noise. It was coming from a cave at the base of the hill that was now in front of her. Out of the darkness of the cavern, the head of a dragon crept out of cave's opening. As if this wasn't enough to startle her, another head popped out after the first. Brandi was beginning to feel uncomfortable. The beast lunged out towards Brandi, and in the dim light of the swampland, the dragon's third head came into view.

Trapped by the Cyclops and dragon, Brandi started to dash away from the scene. Then she woke up screaming in her bedroom.

The next day at school, Brandi was peaked. As if her lack of sleep from the night before was not enough to tire her out, she was hassled by her regular terrorizers. The football cheerleaders had made Brandi their own special project to torment. Usually, Brandi and Diana were able to dodge the chaos together, but today Diana was not there, and Brandi was left to fend for herself in the halls of the high school.

Cecile, the head cheerleader, greeted Brandi with a shove into the nearest locker. Once Brandi was stuck inside the metal box, Cecile slammed the door shut like she always did. Brandi felt isolated inside of the cold metal closet. Brandi felt like she was sinking into darkness. She had never fit in with the cheerleaders before,



least of all Cecile, and she had never wanted to in the first place. Brandi hated how Cecile could overpower her by being “cool” in the eyes of everyone else. Whenever Brandi had this sinking feeling inside of the locker, she felt helpless against Cecile.

Brandi never let that sinking feeling last too long. She started to bang on the locker door from the inside with a clenched fist. Eventually, she was able to exit the prison. Brandi ran as fast as she could to class, but she was beaten by the final bell of the day and was given detention.

As soon as Brandi walked into the detention room, she was met with snide comments from James, Raphael, and Mike.

How was the dark box, Brandi?” asked Raphael.

“Pretty cramped in there, huh stupid?” asked Mike.

After Brandi closed her eyes once she was finally in bed that night, she found herself again in the dark marsh of which she had been so terrified the

night before. Only this time, she was on the run from the dreadful creatures that she had encountered.

With the muck-covered Cyclops and three-headed dragon chasing after her, Brandi ran through the towering, shadowy woods. Heat from the fire that the dragon had started to breath was now hitting the back of Brandi’s neck, starting to singe her hair. Brandi could hear the massive club of the swamp Cyclops dragging on the ground and hitting the rocks behind it as it lumbered towards her.

Just when she thought that the situation was hopeless, Brandi came to stop as a knight in black armor with a helmet covering his face charged past her and towards the beasts.

“Stop!” cried Brandi.

The knight did not listen, but instead continued towards the dragon with breakneck speed. With a single swift swing of his sword, the knight beheaded not one, not two, but all three of the dragon’s heads. The long necks that had previously been throw-

ing out flames were now oozing out rivers of dragon blood.

Brandi was standing in awe of the knight’s slaughter when suddenly the Cyclops leaped over the dragon’s corpse and picked her up in its slosh-covered fist. Brandi cried for help and the knight came to her aid. The knight climbed up on the Cyclops’ back and plunged his weapon through the globular eye and deep into its eye socket. The knight quickly jumped off of the wailing head of the Cyclops and was able to catch Brandi just in time after the enraged monster had flung her out of its hand.

The black-clad knight stood triumphantly in the forest, holding Brandi safely in his arms. The sun began to pour through the leaves of the trees and drenched the swamp with light. It shone brightly against the scales of the dragon and made the goo-covered club of the Cyclops glisten in its cold dead hand.

Successful in his quest to rescue Brandi, the knight carried her outside of the woods to mount the loyal steed that had waited for them on the outskirts of the neighboring field. Brandi felt relieved as the two of them rode off through the field as the sun raised high above them.

But then she woke up.

Later on that day at school, Diana was back in class. During lunch hour, Brandi told Diana about the dream she had had last night. She told her all about the horrible monsters that had tried to attack her, and all about the mysterious knight that had rescued her.

“You still couldn’t see his face?”
asked Diana.

“No,” said Brandi.

“Are you sad about that?”

Brandi didn’t know what to say.

Later on that day, Brandi decided that not seeing her lover’s face wasn’t anything to be sad about. She may not know who her knight was, but she knew what he would do for her. Whether it was saving her from dark swamps, or other sinking feelings, she knew that one day; her hidden love would reveal his face.

The End



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DUSTIN

By Dustin Wyberg

In Collaboration with Hannah Oakes

Wrestling

Tournaments took place on weekends but never on Sundays, but matches—they could happen really anytime. Tournaments were always on Saturdays. They were divided up by weight classes, but there were schools from the whole school district in the tournaments. They usually took place in the afternoons. There were always crowds at tournaments, everyone wanted to watch the matches. There weren't any requirements to attend, even poor people

off the street like to watch, you just had to be human.

Before a match, we had to weigh in, and then practice. Other than that, there wasn't really much to do other than chicken out. But, that's true with every sport. There wasn't some big sign that had our names on them to tell us when to go, if it was a team tournament, you just had to pay attention to know when to go, but if it was an individual tournament you had to listen for your name to be called. They took place in a

gymnasium, for individual matches, there were a lot of matches on the gym floor spread out, but in team matches, there was just one mat in the middle of the gym floor.

There were lines printed on the mat where we had to stand, at Roseau the mats were green and white. We had to stand on the lines and wait until the ref gave us the signal to go. Some people would shake hands before they started, but mostly we just took our places on the mats and then waited.



Wrestle. And we began. We would try to attempt our moves to disable the opponent—one good way to take them down would be to shoot at them by taking them out by their legs. The goal was to get them down on their backs, with both shoulders flat on the mat, my favorite was getting them in a headlock to make them lose their footing it was almost a sure way to get them on the ground. Each period lasted only two minutes, when those two minutes were up the ref blew a whistle. Wrestling matches are based on a point system, you get two points for takedowns and reversals, and then one point for escapes. If you kept your opponent on their back for more than three or five seconds, I'm not really sure the exact number, you got an extra point—they're called "back points".

The gymnasium was loud and smelly. Just imagine, there were about ten wrestlers per team, but there could be several schools per tournament. It could be anywhere from four to eight teams at a tournament. That's a lot of sweaty guys. During the match, coaches are yelling at you trying to give you advice. There are so many different kinds of moves for all kinds of positions. There were even a lot of kinds of moves for escapes. I never really paid attention to the coaches yelling at me though, I had been wrestling long enough that I didn't really have to listen. I wrestled from elementary school up until eleventh grade! How much do you really think I had to listen? Not only were our coaches screaming at you, there was also the crowd of parents, younger siblings, random people cheering for us yell-

ing our names, even the poor guy off the street would be yelling and cheering for us! On top of that, sometimes the opponent would be cursing at me.

My favorite moves were the Half Nelson and the headlock. When we were both standing up, I liked to use the headlock. But, when we were both on the ground I really liked to use the half nelson. When your opponent is below you, you work your hand under their arm and then back behind their neck so you can turn them—it kind of works like a lever. So then you use that to get their two shoulders on the ground and pin them.

I started wrestling back in fourth grade, and I kicked the crap out of all the other kids. It was in my genes. My dad was a body builder. I just had the right build to be a wrestler. When I was younger it was more just to kill time, just for fun. I didn't care as much about being competitive. Once I got to high school, I wanted to do better for the team. Once we got to high school, it really turned into more of a team sport. Up until high school, weight classes weren't as important. You never saw fifth graders trying to cut weight—that's probably for the better. I wrestled for the better part of seven years, my "career" as a wrestler came to a halt when my friends and I were in a car accident.

Surviving

On May 17, 2003 around 7:30 in the evening, Randy Brazier, Amanda Ostby and Dustin Wyberg were thrown from their vehicle after it lost control on a gravel road. Amanda passed away an hour after

the accident. Randy was pronounced brain dead the following morning; his parents kept him on life support until his organs could be donated. Dustin was the sole survivor of the accident.

It was a miracle I survived, but my friends died. I was angry. Why did I live? Why didn't they? I don't remember the accident, and I don't remember much from right before or after the accident. I used to flip everyone off after the accident—it was pretty rude, but at the time I didn't really care. Before my accident, I was dating Tiffany Nelson, she was beautiful: blonde hair, blue eyes, a twig, and she was a goody good. We worked together at the Pizza Ranch. We started dating a few years before the accident. It was the relationship every couple would want, we got along pretty well, but after the accident we broke up. I don't know for sure why, but I think it was because I was so rude to her.

I graduated from high school in 2004. It was too soon after the accident, it wasn't all that exciting for me. I was appreciative, but sad. My friends would never have the chance to graduate from high school. They would never receive their diploma or go to college. I never went to college either, my brain injury prevented it. It's okay though, I never really expected anything great to come of college anyways. I just wanted to live a normal life. Things happen, like the accident. You can't let it bring you down, you know? There's nothing you can do. It happened. I lived. I have to be thankful for that.

Being Alive

I live in Hermantown now with three roommates: Troy, Matt, and Dan. My friend Tim used to live in our basement. He died, but none of us really know how. He was blind and had a hard time speaking. I think he died of natural causes, but no one really told us. Troy is leaving soon. I don't know when, but it doesn't really matter. He spends most of his time in his room listening to really loud music. Matt plays video games and sleeps all the time. He isn't very clean. Once, his tooth was so rotted, that it just fell out! Matt also likes to play Monopoly; we play board games together almost every night. I love playing board games. Monopoly, Chess, Scrabble, Skip-bo, Yahtzee, you name it. Did you know there's a version of Monopoly for almost every sport? My dad bought

a Green Bay Packer version for me. Dan keeps to himself. He lives in the basement, and has lived there for 5 or 6 years. No one really talks to him much—he's worse than the rest of us, and he is kind of violent.

My dad comes to visit me often. I love my dad. He lives in the cities, it's not too far away. My parents have been divorced for a very long time, but they get along. I get to go visit my mom sometimes, she lives in North Dakota now.

Dream

The sun is setting and the restaurant is slowing down. My shift ends. I step out into the fresh cool air of our northern town and walk towards my car to drive home. I turn the headlights off as I park my car in the driveway. On my way to the door, I see her standing over the kitchen

sink washing potatoes. Her blonde hair shines in the light and her blue eyes are focused as she scrubs them clean.

"What are you making?" I ask, as I enter into our home. The walls are covered with photos of our past: wrestling tournaments, track meets, school dances, high school graduation, college graduation. Pictures of us surrounded by our families and friends, she in white and I in a tux.

"Mashed potatoes," she smiles. "There's a ham in the oven," she adds, looking over her shoulder at me. She has been planning this dinner all week—all of our friends will be over. We will play games late into the night, talking about our lives, catching up, and laughing together. It will be perfect, because we have not a care in the world. Nothing else will matter.

STRANGERS BECOME FRIENDS

By David Wesley Freed

In Collaboration with Tessa Beckstrom

The Minneapolis-St. Paul airport was bustling with people traveling all over the world. Many people were escaping the dreadful Minnesotan winter. One person stood out in particular. He was sitting by himself in an island of leather chairs, trying to hide the tears that were welling up in his eyes, but his anxiety was clearly expressed on his face.

While he was staring into space, a stranger approached him. "Hey, are you okay?" the stranger asked.

"Yeah I'm fine," Will mumbled while trying to remain calm.

"My name is David," the stranger offered.

"Hey, I'm Will," the boy answered, looking up at David for the first time with worry on his face. "I'm seeing my uncle for the first time in twelve years; he lives in Minnesota. I don't know where he is, though, and I can't call him because he doesn't have a cell phone."

"It's okay!" David responded, "I bet he is just held up because of the weather. Have you ever experienced a Minnesota winter before?"

"I'm from California," Will answered. "I've never really had a real winter before. I am starting college in the fall, so I maybe I'll pick a school where it snows!"

David pulled up next to Will's chair and asked, "What are you going to major in?"

"I've been thinking about Special Ed-

ucation; I think I'd really like that."

"That's really cool," David responded.

Will turned to face David. "Thanks, what about you? Tell me about yourself!" David

got really excited and turned to face to Will. "Yeah, sure! I was adopted from South Korea, because my older brother Matthew didn't have anybody to play with; he had three sisters and no brothers. Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"No, I don't; I'm actually an only child."

"Well," David continued, "the first time my mom saw me she said, 'Not that one, not that one!' She said that I was so skinny you could see my ribs! I ended up in a family with seven brothers and sisters because right after I was adopted my mom found out she was pregnant with twins; two boys!"

Will's eyes were huge with surprise. "That's crazy, David! What was it like growing up with a lot of siblings?"

David laughed. "Growing up in a big family was interesting. One time while it was raining, my twin brothers stole my wheelchair. They short-circuited it while going around the block; it must have been down-pouring! My dad had to come pick it up; he got so mad he almost went crazy!"

"Do you still live with your parents?" Will asked.

David's expression changed from

carefree to more serious. "No, I don't. My biggest regret happened when I was eighteen. It was the Monday after Thanksgiving and I was mad at my parents. The night before, they had asked me to clean the bathroom floor, and I had said no.

My dad told me "if you live here you do chores."

I said, "I am an adult!" That day at school I was supposed to take the school bus home but I didn't; instead, I went downtown. That night the skywalk employees called the police because they didn't know what else to do with me. I kept giving the officer the run around when he asked for my phone number and address. My dad had to come down with the van. I kept opening the passenger door before he started driving. Then officer said that I had earned a ride in the back of the squad car, so I left the door closed until I got home. They had to have police cars follow the van home and two officers had to carry me inside because I was so mad. I threw cans from the pantry because I didn't want to be home.

"What happened when you got home?"

The cops said they were going to take me to the hospital and they put me in the psych ward for the night. The next morning a social worker came and said he was arranging for me to go into a group home. My parents didn't want me to go, and they were so mad they didn't talk to me for a



while. They only went to my graduation because my sister was graduating at the same time. After a month in the group home, teachers and friends said that they had seen a big improvement.”

“Wow, I am really glad that you like where you live now. What do you like to do in Minnesota?” Will responded.

David smiled. “Now I do things like play on the power soccer team and spend time with my girlfriend. My parents joke that I’m robbing the cradle because she is five years younger. I don’t care if I’m robbing the cradle. She is neat and very nice; I like her a lot. We met through power soccer. The first time I asked her out I was a little nervous. I asked her out in the

hallway away from the coaches and volunteers and other teammates. I was nervous, but it turns out she was as nervous as I was. We’ve been dating for five years.

Will interrupted: “Wow, that’s such a long time! What do you guys like to do together?”

We like to go out to eat and we like to watch movies together. One movie I never thought I would see is the Muppets but I decided I’d rent that one just because Catherine and I needed a movie. I actually liked it. But I like to watch action movies with her sometimes. The main reason I want to watch them is because I hope she gets scared and wants to cuddle up to me. I say, “I’m a guy! I just want to scare her once in a

while!” This way she will cuddle up to me and I can show her that I can handle scary movies. Except the Freddy Kruger movies, I can’t handle those. Guess what? I proposed to Catherine. We decided to go with promises. She kind of already knew.”

“How’d you ask her?” Will inquired.

“The way I did it was at the restaurant, Backwoods.”

“She sounds like a really cool girl, David.”

“Thanks, do you have a girlfriend?” David asked.

“No, I don’t,” Will said. “I just like hanging out and playing basketball with my friends.”

“I like sports too. I played wheelchair basketball. I got too old for the

little kid's version. I tried the wheelchair basketball team for UMD but they are too fast! I like playing soccer. You have to kick the ball with the guard, not your feet. Most people have metal guards but we have plastic ones. Soon they are going to change the rules so everyone has to have the metal ones. They are loud, though; you can hear a crash. You can also feel an aftershock that goes through your whole body; it's like bumper cars. If you use your feet that is a penalty. Some people have to have their feet tied down because of the spasticity. Like my feet have to get tied down. I cannot stay sitting straight up. They just gave me a new knee strap to keep me straight up and a butterfly seatbelt because I would slide underneath the seatbelt during the game.

One time my girlfriend accidentally got tipped, upside down and backwards, because one of our teammates accidentally went full blast at her. At our tournaments we have a person with a speed gun to make sure we don't go over the speed limit because they have so many rules to keep us from getting hurt. Because you can only go so fast. So far, I have been under the speed limit."

"I had a friend in elementary school who used a regular wheelchair. What's it like to have a power chair?" Will asked David.

"My very first wheelchair used to have belts and that's what the wheels were on. Like a chain, for a tank. My dad did not like it because he spent a lot of time having to put the belt back on."

"Have you ever hurt yourself while you were in your wheelchair?"

David shook his head. "I have not broken a bone yet but I have cracked my head open about four or five times. One time I was at a school called Lincoln Park and it was raining. I had to go to the old gym and they had not built the way to the gym on the inside of the school; instead you had to go through the playground. I guess my wheelchair lost control. There was a big hole in the blacktop with a tree and a rock. I cracked my head open. My aid had a white shirt on but she did not care. She picked me up screaming and ran to the nurses' station."

While David was talking, a kind looking man with

gray hair on his head and a scruffy beard speckled with white walked through the automatic doors of the airport. "Will?" he asked hesitantly while walking closer to the pair of new friends. The old man approached David and Will, his scuffed work boots squeaking along the linoleum. He was wearing a faded flannel shirt rolled at the elbows and old jeans; the ripped hems tucked casually into his boots. "Hi Uncle Ben," Will responded. "It's good to see you." Will turned to David and shook his hand. "It was really nice to meet you David, thanks for keeping me company. When you get to California make sure you spend some time at Disneyland!"

David replied, "Thanks, it was nice to meet you too. Make sure that you spend some time making a snowman before you leave Minnesota. Have fun!"

As Will and his Uncle walked away, Ben said to Will, "looks like you made a new friend. Can you look up his Face on that Internet Book?"

"Are you trying to be funny?" Will laughed. "Do you mean Facebook, Uncle?"

"Oh that's its name? I don't understand all that new technology," Ben said while waving his hand through the air, swatting the invisible word away. "I just hope you boys exchanged cellular telephone numbers."

As they walked out the doors of the airport and into the snowy night, David could already tell that his new friend would enjoy Minnesota after all.

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