

VOICES :

creative expressions from
the storytelling project



Spring 2015: Volume 3

ABOUT :

The Storytelling Project is a volunteer collaboration between University of Minnesota Duluth students and adults with disabilities resulting from brain injury. During the spring of 2015, students from the departments of English, Writing Studies, and Communication Sciences and Disorders met weekly with ten writers from our community. Through extensive one-on-one conversations, the students and their partners have produced the works of memoir, fiction, and poetry assembled here.

Further information: z.umn.edu/storytelling

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PREFACE :

Creativity is what drew me to this project more than anything else. College students are presented with myriad options to volunteer in the community, but it's few and far between that a program comes along which requires a poet or creative writer; someone who loves the written word and smithing those words into some new type of expression; basically, the exact skill-set of an English major. What is so wonderful about this program is that it gives both the volunteer students and the community members the chance to experience worlds they normally wouldn't have access to—both in the stories on which they collaborate and in the conversations they have while building those stories. As a student writer the year previous, I had the opportunity to experience this one-on-one dynamic. Now as the Graduate Coordinator, I get to see these relationships form, see the smiles and hear the laughs as I make my way from group to group. This is what I shall take away from being part of the Storytelling Project: the sense of community these collaborations foster. I would like to thank each and every person who participated in the creation of these stories, as well as you, the reader, for your interest and support of such a worthy program.

Scott Koski

April, 2015



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JENNY'S STORY

By Jenny Staskus

In Collaboration with Linden Wiegel

I swallowed four ounces. I just didn't care. I wanted to be dead. I wanted to be with my dad. I was careless, I was depressed. It tasted gross, burning as it went down my throat. The kitchen was too small to lay down in so I went out by the garage door. Next thing I knew the EMTs were gathered around. Ambulance. Fire truck. Cops. I couldn't talk. Milk and water wouldn't go down. I was being rushed to the emergency room. My stomach got pumped with charcoal and I had to keep drinking the charcoal until I was all cleaned out. I still couldn't talk. I was in shock and had a horrible taste in my mouth. Next they took me to the psych ward. They took all my belongings: shoe laces, belts, sharp rings, necklaces, bracelets. All I could wear was a night gown. The EMT said that if I had swallowed more than eight ounces I would have made it, I would have accomplished my goal.

To this day I can't stand the smell of nail polish remover.

When I was sent away the first time, I was devastated. I didn't know what to expect or if I would ever see

my family again. The shelter had a lot of rules. There was a girls' side and a boys' side. Alarms. Windows. Doors. So many rules. Then I went to the foster home. That was also full of rules. While I did make a lot of friends, I was always mixed up with the wrong crowd. I would run away because I didn't agree with all the rules. So many rules. I was skipping school and doing drugs so they couldn't handle me for very long. We even vandalized my old house one night. Graffiti. Fire Extinguishers. Broken windows. We did it all, and we loved it.

Moving around was difficult, but when you make bad decisions, that's what happens. People can't handle you. The hardest part was changing schools over and over. Meet new people, then move again. That's how it went. I didn't even have a real parent, I had a "guardian." No thanks to my mother. She gave me up. Maybe my dad wouldn't have done it, but he was dead. He killed himself when I was only three years old. I still missed him, though. A lot. He had even been in the Sky 2 Navy, and was buried somewhere in the middle of Fort Snelling. But with or without a parent, I kept on moving. Next came Mankato.

When I moved to the group home in Mankato it was pretty rocky still. In fact, it was very rocky. Especially on that one day. I was really pissed off at the staff so I decided to take it out on my roommate. "Hmm . . . what can I do to kick her ass?" Then I saw the perfect tool. A gallon of milk. A whole gallon. I grabbed it, dumped it on her head, and then I punched that bitch right in the face. I was charged with fifth degree assault, but the charges were dropped. Mankato West High School didn't go much better. I got bullied a lot, so I would skip school with my roommate to go get drunk or high off our asses. One time we came back and it was a pep rally. Instead of rallying, I thought it was a good idea to act like a chicken in the hallway. "Be careful! We're gonna get caught!" my friends told me. But being a chicken was so much more fun. "Who cares if there's two cops in the hallway? I can do whatever I want." Detention wasn't even that bad. My roommate and I got it one time; we could choose to take it at school or at home. Of course we chose at home. We had to clean out all the cupboards! But guess what? We found a candy stash! Hah! We decided maybe we'd skip school more often.

I hated the staff there. They were so evil. Every time my mom would come to visit me they would accuse her of stealing my money because we would come back with a bunch of shopping bags. Even though she bought everything. They assumed everything, they assumed I and anyone I was with was bad news. They were assholes, and I hated them. I hated everyone. I hated everything. Except for Chris. And the Leep Special Olympics.

During my first year of track is when I met Chris and Derek. We would always hang out together. We went to movies, to each other's houses, to

play sports; we were like the three musketeers. They were like six years old, the way they acted. They would always be stupid, but one thing was for sure: they could always make you laugh. Chris especially. He was very athletic and skinny. Even when I felt like my blood was about to boil and I might throw another snowglobe at somebody, I knew I could Facetime him and he would lighten the mood. He would stick his tongue out in the middle of a conversation while I was venting or ranting. I would always end up laughing myself silly, and the snowglobe or the gallon of milk would be set down. He was always there for

me, through the good and the bad.

I played all kinds of sports during our time at the Special Olympics. I did volleyball, basketball, track, bowling, softball, you name it. I wasn't the best, and we definitely didn't win all the time, but I was very competitive, and I enjoyed myself a lot. It was a great way to make friends and get out all the energy and anger I had built up inside. My favorite part of the Special Olympics was the dances they would put on. We had Halloween dances, spring fling dances, and every September they would do a formal dance, just like Prom. I got to



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dress up in a beautiful ball gown, get my hair and makeup done, and of course my nails. Except now the polish remover was actually going on my hands. I felt just like Cinderella at those dances. Until Tori and Jules came along.

If I was Cinderella, Tori and Jules were the evil stepsisters. They made me feel like I wasn't liked every time I went to a dance.

"Whore."

"Bitch."

"Slut."

They had a lot of names for me. They also had a lot of punches and slaps for me. But of course the stupid staff never did anything because "Tori and Jules would never do such a thing!" They were angels! I stopped going to a lot of the dances; I just didn't want to. And when I did go, I felt like crap. Whenever I said anything about them, I was the one who got in trouble. Just like I would have gotten in trouble if I told anyone about how my stepfather molested me. For six months straight. So I threw more snowglobes, and more TVs. I didn't even know who I was mad at anymore; I was just mad at the world. Every time I had something good, it would get ruined by something else. Until I moved to Waseca.

Waseca is where I learned the power of a good support system. It can

make all the difference. While at the group home there I got a job working for a catering company called Starfire Events. I worked long hours, sometimes from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m, but I loved it. We catered everything, from graduation parties all the way to weddings. The weddings were my favorite. It was so much fun to see the different types of dresses they wore and to dream of how one day that could be me, in a poofy princess wedding gown. The coolest one we ever did was the one time we catered a wedding that was at an old bowling alley. The hardwood floors shone beneath all the dazzling strings of lights. We always got to serve the head table ourselves and talk to the brides and grooms.

"Iloveyourdress!" "Congratulations!"

But the best part was the people. They were like family. I still call my old boss and talk to her about things. My co-workers were always there when I needed them, just like Chris.

Here I am today, living at TBI in Duluth. I have had so many great opportunities and jobs here, and I am proud to say that no gallons of milk have been dumped on any heads for a long time, and no nail polish remover has been touched. I am now working on getting the skills to move out on my own, and boy is it about time. I have lived in group homes for more than half of my life, and I am finally ready to move on.

LIFE IN THE BONEYARD AIN'T THAT BAD

By Richard Kraus

In Collaboration with Taylor Singleton

My name is Richard Kraus and I had a “severe TBI” twelve plus years ago. And this story is all about this new life.

Well, I was born in New Orleans. In a year when we got a new president: John F. Kennedy.

In that same year, on January 24th, a B-52 crashed with nuclear warheads near Goldsboro, North Carolina. This just happened to be the same day I had my accident. Who would have known? Or was it planned – that I would someday fly the same plane? Or sit in the copilot seat for a couple of hours?

When I was about six months old my mom, dad and two sisters (whom my mom had before she met my dad) moved to San Francisco or San Bruno in the bay area. We had a pretty normal life growing up. Out there even in the sixties, one of my first jobs in the seventies was working at “Skateboard City San Francisco.” It’s now called “Skates on Haight” in the Haight-Ashbury district, to which the hippies were all drawn.

So I used to like to board a lot. Hit the skate parks and me and my buddies would go on some long winding roads etc. I played baseball, soccer, and golf but we didn’t have a cold winter to play hockey!

When I was in my teens, diesel mechanic school was too spendy. And I

thought a good education was to join the Air Force, since I had always liked airplanes and knew those mechanics made good money. So I picked five bases in California but they sent me to Minot, North Dakota. After basic training I went to Spokane, Washington for some more training, and that’s when Mt. St. Helens blew up. So we had to get all the aircraft.

When I got to Minot, N.D., I became a Crew Chief on the B-52s. Got engine run qualified and flew on many missions. I got married and four years later went to aviation votech school (college), got the required licenses, and was hired at Rockwell International, building a B1. I was authorized to “start up” a B-52H model. Boeing was the Seattle aircraft company that made the 757 & Airbus A-320 we were flying back from Guam. And the copilot asked if I would sit in his seat until he got back from taking a nap. It was a long flight. But not as long as 22.5 hours on my longest flight. Anyway, the pilot just told me to stay back about one-to-two miles from the bomber ahead of us. So while he read the paper for almost three hours, that’s what I did.

Thinking back on that 22.5-hour flight in the B-52 . . . that was during the Cold War. In Top Gun when the commander says “do not fire until fired upon” -- well, that’s what our pilot said to our gunner, on that mis-

sion, which was called Bright Star 83. They are still going on today. Anyway, we were somewhere in the Mediterranean on a special bombing mission. It was fun and scary back then. Stationed on the alert pad loaded with X number of nuclear warheads, starting the B.U.F.F. (Big Ugly Flying... .“Fellow”) with the flight crew, and waiting for the answer from above to “take off” or “shut down” your engines. We all knew that if we were to take off, we probably would not come back. I still feel on alert today reading the world news.

Years later I got hired at North West Airlines in Minneapolis. Moved up the ranks for almost seventeen years: mechanic, inspection, lead inspection, management. I still get some pay from them. But I don’t get flight benefits, because you can’t fly when you are sick.

I was really in trouble back in that time of my life. And drinking was my escape. The roads were icy back on 24 January, 2003, and I was wasted drunk that day. I don’t remember anything. And the months before are very vague, as this new life is now. It’s just a memory defect now.

On a weekend after work, I had just left the bars a couple miles from home, in the country. The roads got a little icier, and I was doing about 60 MPH and on a small curve the truck slid off the road and hit a big

tree on my driver's side. Then my new life began. They took me to Hibbing. (About ten years later I bought a used pickup topper from a guy who still lived out there, and I brought up my story – how I used to live out there – and my accident. His jaw dropped and he said, "That was you?" He said he was one of the first responders there to rescue, and they thought I had died because there was so much blood.

Well, let's go back to Hibbing.

They put it in nitrogen or someplace to keep it safe. So they could put it back on, which was about two months later. They also put me in a medical coma for about a month, or that's when I started to awake. And I thought I was in Portland looking at the lake outside; I think my brain must have recognized my mom's voice during her visit from her home there when I was in my coma.

I have volunteered to work more than 2000 hours at the hospital and



The brain is the most powerful organ, and least understood.

--Einstein

Do what you can do, and that should be good enough for you.

--Vicki

The most misunderstood injury is the injury to the brain.

--Me

The doctors there after a few hours (I think) and the cops there wanting to get my blood that the doctors were holding back on because they were giving me blood just to stay alive!

I got airlifted to Duluth. Well, when I got to Duluth the neurosurgeons were watching the pressure of my brain. And then they had to take the top off, or a piece about the size of a checkbook so my brain could swell and not die.

donated to the Miller-Dwan foundation, to help there. Now Vicki and I are volunteering at Animal Allies and living together. We love the brain injury support group meeting we attend every Tuesday, which Vicki has been attending since about 1982.

PANTSUIT AND COOKIES

By Kelli Wilson

In Collaboration with Mareesa Lindstrom

It was time for our annual meeting and I was so excited to share my good news with everyone. At the last meeting, I had announced that I was looking for an apartment and was sending in my application. “I feel I’m ready to move out and I’m up for the new challenge,” I said. Now, I was proud to know that I was going to be able to tell everyone that I did it. To let everyone know that my application for the apartments I wanted was approved. I wanted to frame the approval letter for the apartments; keeping it as a trophy for myself as a reminder that I can be outgoing and reach for my goals.

The first day I went to check out the apartments was the same day I was handed the keys to my new home. I got my favorite apartment out of the three I was able to pick from. The one I chose overlooked the wildlife and had the setup that I liked best. Something I really liked about it was the fact that I could reach the top and the bottom of the cabinets in the kitchen. I guess the fact that I brought cookies and was looking good in my new pantsuit paid off. More often than not, if I bring cookies, I’m going to be happy with my results. The way to approval is through the stomach with cookies and sweets.

I remember the process of moving out. I threw away so many things

while I cleaned out my clothes, papers, scrapbooks, magazines. I was always one to keep everything that I got, and moving out to my new apartment, I felt like I could have less baggage and be more organized. To have a clean slate and a new start in my new home. It was hard to do, but I always finish a job when I start it. Like I said, I was ready for the new challenge. And when you close one door, another one always opens.

I was really proud of myself for achieving this goal. With having so much going on each week, it was difficult to move out and live on my own. I had work three times every week at Old Navy, where I was known as the “Fitting-Room-Queen.” After working there for five years I made it to the service level. Now, having five and a half years at Old Navy, I am ready for a new challenge. I got a new job at Gander Mountain in my lucky pantsuit after saying, “I’ve got you hooked, line, and sinker,” to the manager at my interview.

And he replied, “You’ve got me hooked and reeling in. You got the job.”

On top of working so much, I was also going to college two days a week at Lake Superior College. They always doubted me and thought that I wouldn’t be able to make it, but I wanted to prove them wrong. So I took one or two classes a semester because of stress levels. All to work

towards my degree and become a medical receptionist.

When I first moved into my apartment I hung a Canadian flag by one hook, unsure of the spot to shine. Now it’s hanging by two hooks, spread out wide and confident. I am volunteering more and giving back to the community. I enjoy waking up in the morning only to the sounds of nature and the birds in the trees. And now, it’s so quiet before bed at night that you could hear a pin drop. It makes it easier to clear my mind and relax. I am working with the BHC, Duluth Zoo, and my church, loaded with my stronger sense of confidence. In the beginning, living on my own was an unknown adventure that was more about showing people that I could make it. Now it feels as if I am pushing myself for the higher standards I know I want, and can accomplish.

I like to do a job start to finish and to make people happy. If there is any possible way to fix things, I will do whatever it takes and I am always double-checking what I do to keep myself one step ahead of the game. Life is a rollercoaster. You have to hold on, enjoy, and learn the right rounds to take while living in an apartment with neighbors.

Like they always say, “She loves fishing, but she’s a keeper.”



THE SHIP OF HEARTS

By Dan Clark

In Collaboration with Melissa VanDerStad and Samantha Williams

It's just another day at Mesa Senior High. Brandi stands still while ten cheerleaders form a circle around her. They have her surrounded. Cecile and Kakeya, the head cheerleaders, walk towards her and the rest of the team follows. Cecile has long, straight blond hair and blue eyes. Kakeya has dark skin, straight black hair, and hazel eyes. They sneer as they close in on her. Brandi falls to her knees and covers her eyes, mumbling to herself, "Please get me out of here."

The vice principal comes to break up the clamoring. The cheerleaders try to make up a story that Brandi instigated it. He knows Cecile pretty well and he knows how she works, so he doesn't buy it.

"You have a choice of detention or you can get back to class," he says to the cheerleaders.

They run off to class. The vice principal then comforts Brandi and writes her an excuse for being late for biology.

She goes to class and while there, she nods off and begins to dream.

She opens her eyes to find herself standing in a tall field of grass. The sky is a dark purple with thin, wispy, grey clouds. She starts walking through the tall grass, trying to get to the end of the field. All of a sudden she hears a rustling in the grass, and she looks

around frantically. Then she hears it again, and it circles around her.

Then, suddenly, it is dead silent. Brandi is scared, yet she is curious about what made the noise. She hears another rustling in the grass.

Every time the grass ripples, the ground shake. It is obvious that something big is moving through the grass. She notices that now there are ripples in the grass, following the big creature. There are so many creatures, she can't count them!

She is panicked, terrified, and frantic. In a flash, the two biggest monsters pop out of the grass simultaneously. She freezes, her eyes full of terror.

She sees the fiery red eyes and an upper body with four arms. The other monster starts to freeze the field. As it jumps out of the grass, it shoots spikes of ice in a circle around Brandi, like a cage.

Goblin-sized monsters come into sight as well. They are running circles around the two big monsters and Brandi. They have the speed of cheetahs, and they look like hyenas.

The two big monsters slowly begin to close in on Brandi. She panics, sinks to her knees, and covers her eyes. "Please," she mutters, "My faceless love, get me out of here!"

She wakes up in the middle of the teacher's lecture with a scream. The whole class turns around and stares at

her. Her face turns bright red, and she excuses herself from class. She runs home in embarrassment.

She comes through the front door and she sees her mom on the couch watching her soap opera.

Puzzled, her mom asks, "What are you doing home so early? Is everything alright?"

Brandi flashes the talk-to-the-hand sign and storms up the stairs. She goes into her room, leaving the door open a crack, and falls onto her bed.

She lies there and feels exhausted. Slowly, she drifts off to sleep.

She wakes up in a forest. It is dark and spooky, and in the distance she can hear coyotes howling at the moon. She can also hear crickets chirping. In the distance, she hears something bubbling. She walks towards the sound and sees a lagoon.

The water is dark and murky, and it smells like a swamp. She walks over to the lagoon and peers into the dark water. A putrid smell makes her gag, and she walks away in disgust.

The water ripples as a figure emerges from the lagoon. With her backed turned, she doesn't notice the dark figure. The shards of ice glisten in the moonlight, forming a complex ice armor. The lights' reflection makes her turn around, and she gasps.

She turned and runs until she finds an opening in the forest. She kneels

down in the trees and suddenly wakes up.

“The Spring Formal will be held in four days, at 6 p.m. on Friday. REM Computers, owned by the principle’s high school friend, is sponsoring this dance. The dance will be held on a cruise ship in the bay of the city,” the intercom announces.

The whole school is excited; a dance on a boat just sounds so magical. No one can stop talking about it, and the dance is the talk of the school for the next few days. The rest of the week is constant planning and primping. The guys get tuxedos and arrange to find a date for the dance. The ladies go to

the beauty parlor for the works, spend hours dress-shopping, and dream of the guy who will take them to the dance.

After Brandi is done getting ready for the dance, she is in her room trying to get her makeup kit and accessories ready to go. Then the time comes for everyone to head off to the dance. She hears her friends outside. One of her friends’ dates is picking them all up in a corvette.

They drive to the bay where the dance will be. Everyone starts boarding the cruise ship. The whole ship is covered in icicle-shaped lights that twinkle red, pink, and blue. The cruise ship is giant, with two decks, and it is

white with a purple stripe all the way around.

All of the students and chaperones are on the ship, and Brandi sits on the sidelines as the dance starts. She watches as everyone dances and has lots of fun, and Brandi feels lonely.

That is when the mystery man comes over to her, and asks her to dance. The lights cast shadows on his face, obscuring it, but she can see that he has wavy brown hair and wears a formal white admiral suit. His medals gleam in the light as he bows slightly, one hand behind his back and the other extended, asking for her hand on the dance floor.

They go up to the dance floor and



dance for the first time. The music is slow and romantic, and he leads her in a perfect waltz. As they dance, his face appears, and his perfect hazel eyes gaze at her. Looking into his eyes, she knows that they are meant for each other.

She recognizes him from school and understands why she couldn't see his face in the dreams: deep in her heart, she wanted to keep him a mystery. She truly wanted to see his face, but her heart was protecting her from getting hurt. Before this moment, Brandi was afraid that he would not love her back.

When Brandi realizes that he has been here the whole time, the guy from her dreams, she feels like she is walking on water.

She snaps back into reality and notices that her faceless lover has brought

her to the balcony of the ship. While standing there, Brandi feels the gentle touch of his hand slowly circling her waist. She turns and looks up at him.

"There are one in a few million diamonds in the night sky that are very rare, and you are one of them," he says.

Her lover picks her up, high above him, and goes in for the kiss of true love. They share an elaborate, passionate kiss. Time stands still.

As they stand together, the faint sound of ballroom music starts to arise. It gets louder and louder, grabbing their attention, causing them to snap back to the dance. He sets her down gently and bows. He holds out his hand and asks her to dance. She looks up at him with a twinkle in her eyes and nods.

Right before they head back to the dance floor, they hear a chorus of squeaks. They turn around and see a pod of dolphins playing in the bay. They peer over the rail to look at the beautiful dolphins.

He whispers in her ear, "Did you know that dolphins are messengers of the unconscious mind? They are the symbol of dreams. They are guides to the realm of dreams."

The dolphins jump over the waves, heading off into the distance. The full moon shines brightly over them. He leads her to the dance floor. He gently twirls her to begin their dance.

After many hours, they stop to sit at a fountain in the center of the ship to catch their breath. The clear water glistens in the moonlight. The surface of the fountain water is covered in rose

petals. It smells sweet and soothing. They lean in close as the water splashes behind them. Brandi can feel the warmth of his hand as he caresses her face. Slowly, they move in closer, pause for a moment, and then he kisses her. Brandi is happy because she has finally found the love of her dreams.



RAPPIN' MC ROXANNE

By Roxanne Nelson

In Collaboration with John Fabnenstiel and Crystal Smith

Yo yo yo, What's up y'all?
Miss Lady here,
a.k.a butterfly
Cause I'm so sweet!
Roxanne's Rap coming at ya!
Hear her go!

They call me Foxy Roxie
R to the O to the X to the I to the E
I came from Milwaukee
Born in '82
I surprised you!

My name is Roxanne
I came from Wisconsin alright
Had parents that didn't do right
So I live in Minnesota now
I've lived in the Minneapolis B.P.
Brooklyn Park
I represent
I wear glasses so I can see better
Have you ever tried to walk in snowy
weather
I like to run, leap
Doesn't miss a beat, doesn't cheat
May beat you at a game or two

Who's wearing the t-shirts and the
shorts? Not you
I ain't no size I'm supposed to be or
size 3
I got curves like Alicia Silverstone
I ain't afraid to show it off
I got a phat booty
Hold on tight, see me

I got a haircut and pampering
Making me feel sexy, looking good
I'm as independent as I can be
I love to do the 1 - 2 step
Everybody get on the look-out

Because this Caucasian girl is coming
through
I know how to drop it
I'm a nice girl
Eligible bachelorette

I don't like cheaters
I wear my own style of clothes
I've been on TV, magazine
Dance to the music
Usher's hot, Ciara can dance, sing
But now look at me

I'll show you how you can do it like
me
But don't copy me
Cause that's my way of dancing
Beats in the back beating
Popping my way
Take one for me

They want to spend that on
Goes out to my favorite fans
I want to be a balla
High rollin
Want a Benz, Hotel
I like to wear shiny things
I got flat screen pretty sweet
Want to know what gets me

I'm in pain
Something out of wack
That Zack from saved by the bell was
clever at that
Stay positive for all you kids are going
to take over
Girl power
It's cute to see how they run
Even the tiniest, or their height
They'll show you how it's done
She was the size of my hand

She was a premie
I have blond hair
That's how I was born
Don't doubt our hair when you got
no hair
No offence
You know what a good offense makes
a good defense
I should know I played basketball
They called me threat down under.

I'm from Wisconsin all right
yeah, that's right
Represent to the fullest
Go B to the A, D to the G, E to the
R, S!

I may be raised in Minnesota all my
life
But Wisconsin football is out of sight
You may not like green and yellow
Reminds me of my Junior high colors
And I'll wear it to the fullest

I like Milwaukee Brewers
Watch out all, I'll be on the next girls'
league
I got an arm swing like no one's busi-
ness
Can catch and throw like you
wouldn't believe

I like playing football
Watch out now, they say I'm MVP
Can't touch me
You best not put your hands on me

I can't stop thinking about what Jesus
did for me
Paying for my sin
When I feel like I keep going at it

again
I hope to go back to what I love to do
Which is dance

Dancing, singing, it's my thing
Drawing things I'm especially good at
to bat

I'll like beats beating from my African Drum
Can you hear the music flowing
My brother and I blowing
We gonna make it change

Dance, Sing, rap, act
I let the music take over
I'm on fire
I'm so secure

I'll do my rap
I've been in, this is my fifth play
Went out of this world in my play
I think I've had time to communicate
Yeah that's also one thing they said
I had speech impairment

I'm feisty in the rap
Just telling the truth

I'll tell ya what
I've been through a lot of stuff
I dare ya to call me on my bluff
I have PTSD
I've had tragic things happen to me

No one's going to blackmail or take
advantage of me
I already got a PDD
from parents shaking me
They couldn't figure out what was
wrong with me
I'm wondering what the next play
will be.

I don't have no skeletons in my closet
I'm an open book
Nothing private
Not to me

Dance wherever I don't care
You'd think I'd made a lot of friends

back then
Sorry to tell you I didn't
I didn't know what was the deal
I wish I could have been in 4H or girl
scouts back then
I came to Brooklyn park when I was
9 or 10

Thank God for my mom and dad
Hey ya
I know I got it
Happy here

Don't dis Wisconsin, because we beat
you
Don't think I'm trying to take your
man
I can find my own man
Don't tell me what to do
I got two brothers that do
Realest you'll ever get to meet
I have a family that loves me
That wants me to do right

I grew up in '92



Listening to rhythm and blues
I miss my blood brothers when they
don't show

I can only come down once a month
or so

I like my birthday, it isn't that far
away

I've come a long way

Got to get some sleep

Do what's right for me

I'll wait some more

Shoot, I've waited practically a life
time

Wonder what it's going to be like at
Thanksgiving

My uncle passed away

He didn't even make it to 70

I'll miss him so

Thanksgiving won't be the same with-
out Dennis or Christmas

I like him so

He talked to me and read my public-
ity

It's a shame our dog got old

We have to put him down

I want to have a child again someday

Mean time there's other guys I got my
eye on

Like JoJo

I hope to get Greg or Andrew or
Shawn to come around

Where they should be

Don't say 'I love you' unless you
meant it

For all my crushes it's OK

We can be friends

your loss

Moving on to someone new

Andy That's who

Acting is what I love to do

I like a guy named Andrew

I must tell you

I adore you

I'd give everything I have for you,
Would you for me?

I think about you

See you

Cause I dance and shake it like no
other

I'm in love

I don't mess around

I don't fight my feeling for you

I wanna make this Andrew my baby

He makes me smile

I don't go out with him he's a friend
of mine

He's the coolest person you'd ever
want to meet

He's a rapper like me

He's the one I got my eye for

You'll be what I represent

Be yourself if you don't have to try

Shake it like you never see

I'll love you endlessly

I make people want to get involved

Glad you come over

I be myself

I hope he calls me his girl

I just wanna live

You be my better half

Ass bodacious

Can we walk down that aisle

Love for you

Can have your kid

There for you

If you only knew how I feel

I have a future

Give me a sign

Proceed to give what you need

If you'll love my body, bom bom

Shape like a hour glass

Put it down, move around

It's intuition

Some things you can't question

I found my best friend

I believe waiting all my life

No rhyme or reason

I love you

Know that I met you

Only competition

Your eyes piece

I found my way home

On Monday, Tuesday

Rescue me

I hope we last

Head on something

Feel like how that feels

Pictures or me

You make me happy

All I have

How do you know

Is written on my face

I hope it don't go away

Fall into your arms

The love when it smiles

My promises are for real

I lose control

My mind, heart, soul

I forgot to mention these

Those that were worried, don't be

Like Jennifer Hudson said, "I got
this"

Anyway, what I want to know is

Jackson brothers didn't get a fair trial

Come engage at the engage church
with me

I don't lie,

It's a pretty cool place to be

You heard I'm a bachelorette goin' on

33

Holla at me

I like to cook

Oh UMD is the place to be

It's OK

Challenge yourself like me.

Yo yo, what's up everybody

It's ten to eleven and I'm up talking
to you

I'm a plus size women

ain't afraid to admit it

I was eligible to be a model

I was the young thing back then

Look at me now



I'm rapping in front of you
 I sure didn't think I would
 If you knew how I was back then
 I wear my own style
 Pretty mind and in skirts
 Tight shirts
 Sleeveless blouse
 My favorite thing to wear
 Shoot I don't care
 I'll wear what I want to wear
 Haltered tops, short shorts
 I hung my clothes up today
 I'm well on my way
 I want to get out of where I am at
 I just have to prove I can do that
 Pray for me so I can love myself as
 unto others
 You think I'm silly for wanting to rap
 Just open your mind
 My next goal is sing

I get everybody fired up
 Give it my all
 I'm working harder
 Thank God for making me a sur-
 vivor
 I'm not going to stop
 Wish you the best, bless you
 Still come happiness
 Strive with positive things
 If you were broke
 You'd still have my love

Go out and buy
 This rap will do me wonders one
 day

I like things short-simple
 I know I can do this
 Because I can do anything
 If I put my mind to it

No doubt bout it
 That's all I got to say
 That's it I'm through
 P.S. I showed you how
 Now your turn

Watch out
 What's next I'll do

GREAT FRIENDS

By Timothy Raun

In Collaboration with Kenzie Braden and Ainsley Riebow

I was living at home with my parents the summer I was fifteen years old, recovering from my surgeries and three-month stay in the hospital. I was being tutored at home by my school administration so that I could keep up with at least one or two of the classes I was behind in. While I've had a struggle or two, fortunately I had a large network of family and friends who supported me.

My neighbors were the grandparents of one of my classmates named Jackie. Her grandpa, Vin, owned a bar called Vin's Dugout. After that difficult summer when I fought for my life, I hadn't regained my strength yet but I was out of the hospital. Jamie was Jackie's older brother and he had just gotten a new car, a sporty GTO. It was definitely a macho car, a hot rod. Even though I couldn't drive, I had a fascination with

cars like this one and I knew a lot about them. To my surprise, instead of wanting to take a girl out on one beautiful sunny afternoon, he knocked on my door instead. "Would you like to go for a ride in my GTO this afternoon?" he asked, and even though I couldn't hop I jumped at the chance.

We were cruising through town, and took the long way around until he said, "Let's go see Grandpa Vin at





the Dugout Bar.”

“At a bar? Jamie, what do you mean? I can’t go in there! I’m too young!” I responded in surprise.

“Ehhh, that won’t be a problem. I’ll get you in there,” he said confidently.

It was such a sunny day out that when we got inside after all the brightness it took me a minute to adjust to the dim bar lighting and see what was going on inside. Jamie supported me on the walk downstairs so I didn’t injure myself, as I was still weak from the hospital. I looked left, didn’t see anything, turned right, and couldn’t see anything. When I looked forward all I could see was Jamie’s Grandpa

Vin standing under a light at the bar.

“Hi Vin!” I said. He waved and smiled and my eyes finally adjusted to the darkness of the bar. I looked right again and didn’t see anything special, but when I looked left you won’t believe what I saw. All my classmates had popped out of different hiding spots to yell “SURPRISE!” It was stunning; they had thrown a surprise party just for me! At that time, on that day, I had never realized how much love and care my classmates had for me. It made me feel so fortunate that I had so many wonderful friends. This memory has always shown me how important friendship really is. I am truly stunned

at the thought of how many friends I have today all around the Duluth area. I am thankful for their support every day.

NIGHTMARES I ENDURED ON MY JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS

By Vicki Gustafson

In Collaboration with Natalie Moriarty

Life was difficult growing up. It was a nightmare to me because I had gone through many incidents such as being two years old and having a brain injury. And as a small child I saw my parents fight. In high school, I slid down a hill and hit my head.

I've endured many nightmares throughout my life, many of which occurred when I was younger. Life was difficult growing up, having suffered my first brain injury at age two. My relationship with my mother was never easy. She wouldn't let me spend the night at friends' houses. She would

only pick me up when she wanted me to come home. She wouldn't let me go anywhere unless she had the address and the phone number. She would embarrass me wherever we went.

During my first quarter of tenth grade, I was in a major car crash and suffered major injuries. My brother

and I were dropping off some friends after hanging out. We were making a turn and two vehicles going around a turn at seventy miles per hour crashed into our vehicle. I don't remember much about the months following my accident. What I do know is that I suffered from brain stem damage, a



broken collar bone, collapsed lungs, a lacerated liver and bladder, and a broken pelvis and hip.

I felt like my hospital care was unfair. I distinctly remember a nurse calling me an infant because I didn't have control of my bladder. They would punish me by taking away my phone

privileges. But gradually I learned how to walk again with crutches and underwent physical therapy.

The hospital finally decided that I could go home in the spring. When I arrived home, I didn't receive a lot of support from family or friends. I felt like I was going through life alone. I

especially had difficulty dealing with my mother. She would chase us through the house with a leather belt. She would hit us or say abusive things. Years later when she was in assisted living, she told me she loved her cat more than me.

I had to take off. I couldn't stand being

around my mother any longer. I went downtown to a business to use the phone to tell my mother I'd be okay, but I was in a non-desirable business. And the employees drugged me and took advantage of me. I don't remember much. My brother spotted me downtown and brought me home.

And later that summer my boyfriend went AWOL and came home. We planned to be a family and then we went down south. And then he came back at the beginning of the year and we had a baby.

I eventually became a group facilitator for twelve years at Miller Dwan and Polinski Rehabilitation Center, working with people who also had traumatic brain injuries. I enjoyed this job very much. I would ask participants at the meetings to give me topics they wanted me to research. I would stay up until two in the morning researching things.

Throughout my life, I've suffered pain from my injuries. I've endured countless doctor appointments and surgeries. Despite all the nightmares

I've encountered, life hasn't been all that bad. I've never been in trouble with the law. My driving record is clean. I've owned my house for twenty-five years and I have no debt. My daughter works as a government-contracted nuclear missile account manager. I've always been a perfectionist. But despite all these good things in my life, I'd also felt like something was missing from my life. When I met Richard, I knew that he was this missing piece.

I met Richard in 2004 at a support meeting after we both had a T.B.I. Almost two years later we became friends, and later it turned into a relationship for almost nine years. In 2012 we decided to go our separate ways but I knew that we still

cared deeply for one another. I had the choice of rekindling our relationship but I chose not to. I knew I never should have let Richard go to Oregon. All along I knew that letting him leave was the wrong choice. I would lay in bed at night wishing he was here. I wasn't happy with someone else. In November and December, we had been keeping in touch and he decided to come home. We were both miserable without one another. The trip to come home was supposed to take three days, however he took two and a half days. For two and a half years he's been back. The house has been rearranged with both his stuff and my stuff. I made half the shed his shed so he could have a man cave. I just wanted him to feel at home. We made the house our house.



MOM

By Matt Philgren

In Collaboration with Tony McNeely

August 14, 2014
A was the day my mom passed away.

Barbara Pihlgren-Warner: teacher, musician, and most importantly, mother. Of course, as her son, I always wanted to and had to support her practices, even when they weren't at the most convenient times for me. For instance, there were many times when I would find myself trying to sleep and my mother just kept practicing her music. Normally this wouldn't be a problem, but considering that my bedroom was also her practice room, well, you can see why I struggled to sleep sometimes. I remember thinking to myself, "MOM, I have to wake up and go to school the same time that you have to get up and go teach!" Honestly, I sometimes wish they'd had sleeping pills back then. Now, I don't mean to imply that she was being inconsiderate. She just loved her music so much that, well, it was technically her piano, and her house, that she had the right to practice whenever and wherever she wanted. Plus, she had to drive me to the school she taught at every morning just so that I could get a ride back to my school. This was because, around fifth-grade



time, when I played the clarinet, I was on the bus and I hit someone with my clarinet case. This got me kicked off my school's bus system. So, since I could not ride my bus anymore, my mom had to drive me.

My mom was born December 29th, 1942 in Fargo North Dakota, and this is her story. Growing up she mainly lived in Fargo. She developed her love for music at a very young age, which led to her playing instruments such as violin, viola, and piano. She loved to sing as well! While she loved all sorts of music, classical was her favorite to play, sing, and listen to. However, prior to her passing away, she was attempting to put together a CD of Broadway show-tunes that was aimed towards elementary school students. This was because

her job for a majority of her lifetime was that she was an elementary school teacher. Like I said, education was a major part of her life from beginning to end. She graduated from Concordia College in 1965 with a Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology, French, and Music. She then went back to school, to the University of North Dakota and graduated in 1971 with Bachelor of Science degrees in Elementary Edu-

cation and Music. And then one last time, she went back to college at St. Cloud State University and graduated with a Masters of Science degree in Special Education in the year 1976. After graduating from college, she worked as a teacher until she was 62 years old, when she retired in 2004.

As I said before, while my mother did many amazing things, her greatest achievement was adopting her four children. In early 1970 my mother adopted my oldest brother, Ptahams, when he was just a baby. Ptahams is a great man. He has four children, a beautiful wife, and now he is the guardian of my older sister, Liisa, and he takes wonderful care of her. A few years later, my mom again chose to adopt another child when she adopt-

ed my other brother, Eric. Eric is also one of the most amazing men I know. A few years after Mom adopted Eric, she adopted my older sister, Liisa. Liisa is a very smart girl: even though she has lived with epilepsy, she has been able to overcome so much. When my mother passed away Liisa held it together for about a week. At

though, due to her brain injury. But I remember comforting my nephew when he was crying at the casket. He had a really hard time dealing with it as well. This was the first loved one he had lost, and as we all know, it's not easy. My mother adopted me in 1980, about one year after Liisa. I was sixteen months old. That made

Last year, I was able to go down to the Cities and spend Mother's Day with my mom and my sister. I believe we went to Ruby Tuesday's for dinner. To be honest, the location is not the important part. What's important is that this was the last time I got to truly hang out, and enjoy spending time with my mom.

Shortly after Mother's Day, my mom and my sister went to Florida. When they were there they had a great time. In Florida they went to Orlando and Disney World. When they came home they thanked me for the suggestion, because I had previously been on the same trip.

Then, a couple months later in July, my mom went to the hospital. When she first went in we thought it was just because she was dehydrated. Unfortunately, this was when she ended up being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I know she was diagnosed in July, and passed away in August, but I wish she had been able to live longer. Living with cancer for only one month is way too short, even for cancer.

My mom had wanted to be cremated, so my siblings and I felt it was only appropriate that we choose an urn that was in the shape of a book. We have not had the chance to spread her ashes yet, because my family and I are trying to decide where is the best place to do so.

To this day, I know my mom is still my guardian angel watching over me. She's making sure that I am making good choices within my life. She would be so proud to know that I am doing the best that I can to achieve my goals.



the funeral she eventually broke down to the point where she was unable to make it to the luncheon. She went home with my Aunt. I remember when my mom passed away my sister asked if she could see her before the funeral home came and got her. I was amazed that she wanted to see her; I think that would have been too hard on me, to see my mom so soon after she had passed. It was very hard on me when I got to the funeral service to even see my mom in the casket. She looked so different . . . the cancer had changed her so much . . . I think my sister is a little stronger than I am when it comes to this sort of stuff. I don't think she quite understands

me her fourth adopted child. When she adopted me, she chose me out of all the babies she could have chosen . . . and she didn't have to do that . . . she did not have to do that, but she did, and to this day, I still thank her for it. My mom and I were super close. When Ptahams was in college and playing football, we would go to all of his games together, just the two of us. She and I once went shopping during one of his games because it started to snow. We went shopping for her wedding dress and the outfit I would be wearing at the wedding. She got married later that year, in December of 1991, to a man named Bill Warner.

CLOE'S TALE

By Dawn Stewart

In Collaboration with Ellie Mueller and Jenny Wiles

This is Cloe. She spent the early years of her life growing up with her brothers and sisters and learning how to herd sheep. One of her owners, Katherine, would weave sheep wool into sweat-

music. Sugar had a very special job to do; she was training to be a guide dog. Katherine and Mark had an eight year old son named Patrick, who was born blind. Sugar stayed close to Patrick and guided him around the farm.

would splash in to escape the hot sun. On the other side was a busy road which many cars traveled during the day. Sugar and Cloe made sure that Patrick did not wander near the road. Master Mark traveled that road every day to go into town and delivered fresh eggs, milk and vegetables. One of his daily stops was delivering milk to Dr. James Harriet, the animal doctor. Master Mark sometimes brought Sugar or Cloe along on his trip and Dr. James Harriet was always happy to see them.

Some other animals on the farm included Danny the Irish Setter, Ducky Duck, and Mitsy Kitty. Danny helped Master Mark flush the birds away from the tall grass so he could keep an eye on them. After a long day of keeping an eye on the birds, Danny would spend his evenings playing the banjo. Ducky Duck did not play any instruments but loved to move her webbed feet up and down to the music. She would often quack along to Danny's banjo playing. Mitsy Kitty loved to be in the kitchen with Katherine, lending a paw and kneading the dough to make bread. Mitsy Kitty also accompanied Katherine on the harp.

One day, Cloe was doing her job herding sheep when it began to rain. She had to quickly get the sheep into the barn before they got too wet. Inside the cabin, Mitsy was helping



ers. At night time they would sit in front of the fireplace in the cabin and listen to Katherine play the harp. Katherine's husband, Master Mark, would listen along and puff on his pipe. Next to Cloe was Sugar, the Golden Lab, who danced to the harp

They all lived in the cozy, brown, wooden cottage that sat atop the hilly pasture with long green grass and tall trees that covered the farm. Sheep from the farm would spend their days snacking on the grass. On one side of the farm was a pond that the animals

make fresh bread for lunch. Everyone loved the delicious bread that she made because the warm aroma could be smelled all around the farm. When they were done eating, Mitsy Kitty licked her paws and washed her face alongside Katherine, who played the harp. The three dogs were lulled to sleep by the harp's soothing melody.

They woke with full stomachs and noticed that the rain had stopped. The dogs followed Ducky down by the pond to go for a swim. In the early morning, frogs would jump from lily-pad to lily-pad on the calm glistening water, and birds would sing on the trees. Mitsy Kitty went along even though she was a bit afraid of water. Mitsy Kitty sat on Danny's back and they dipped in the shallow water. Afterward, Mitsy Kitty went home and was brushed by Katherine. When it came time for Mitsy Kitty to have her babies, she knew just what

to do to keep them clean.

All the animals were good friends on the farm and loved to spend time together. They helped out and protected the children from doing scary things such as going near the road with oncoming cars.

When winter came around, it was very quiet on the farm. The snow was falling heavily on a mid-morning Sunday. It was hard to see amongst the banks of snow. Sugar was playing with Patrick, who was playing with a ball. All of a sudden Patrick was out of sight and heading for the road. He was heading towards a turn in the road and cars were zipping around the corner. The snow blocked out the noise of the cars and Patrick did not know he was near a turn in the road. Cloe raced through the snow towards Patrick to save him. She got close enough to Patrick and pulled him away from the road. As she pulled

him away, a car sped around the corner and hit Cloe's back legs. The driver stopped the car and went to look at Cloe. He picked her up and took her up to Master Mark and Katherine's house. Master Mark called Dr. Harriet to come to the house to help bandage Cloe's legs up. Dr. Harriet brought Cloe back to the hospital and bandaged her legs. The animals on the farm were worried about Cloe and missed having her around the farm. The animals decided to have a party for her.

There was a nice lady who worked for Dr. Harriet and loved Cloe and gave her special treatment. Her name was Dawn and she had two dogs herself. She drove Cloe home when she was feeling better and went with Cloe to her party. Dawn would watch Cloe and the other animals when the Horans went out of town.

To be continued...



MEMORIES OF TEXAS

By Ingrid Sitter

In Collaboration with Veronica Fiscus

The first time I went to Texas was when I went to ninth and tenth grade at William B. Travis High School in 1982. Back then I was a Dixie Bell, which meant I would go to the games and cheer the players on. When I moved back to Minnesota for eleventh and twelfth grade, I went to South High School in Minneapolis and became a second soprano. I was very active in school and always loved music, dancing, and singing. I think it all started in eighth grade when I danced at the school talent show. The teacher who ran the talent show told me there was too much hip-shaking after it ended. I didn't care; I did it anyway.

I officially moved down to Texas in 1987. When I moved to Austin I was nineteen; it was right after high school. I moved into Point South Apartment. I was very active then too. I went up and down the hill I lived on many times to go to HQ Fitness. I would do everything at the gym from swimming, kick boxing, aerobics, and even weights.

While living at Point South Apartment I met this guy Steve. He started talking to me right out of his car when he drove by. We started hanging out, we did everything together or sometimes we just hung out at my apartment. Me and Steve just clicked. We almost drove to Minnesota once; we only got so far as Dallas Texas.

That same year in 1987 I moved to a little house on the same block as my dad. Steve would still come over and hang out. I remember during that time often going to the Northcross Mall. It had this huge ice rink in the middle of the mall where stores surrounded it.

Then in the summers of Texas, my dad, my brother Ethan, and sometimes my aunt did a lot of swimming at the largest spring water-fed pool. It was called Barton springs. They had everything: a train that people could actually ride around the park, a snack stand, and showers. I always had fun when I spent time there.

As the years went on I ended up moving again, to Concel Ridge Condo. I met my friend Christine at McDonalds where I worked. I still talk to her today. She currently lives in Georgetown, Texas. Christine and I were close friends and still are. I remember her giving me a kitten named Vanity; she was a Calico Siamese. She lived to a very old age, I'm thinking it was twenty-two. My neighbors at the condo ended up giving me a dog named Gucci. It was a Pomeranian Spits.

While still living at the condos this guy named John Fields Jr. use to live with me; he was my first boyfriend. At that same time my dad use to come visit. He'd smoke cigarettes and drink with us.

Then I went to Austin Community College for two semesters where I took the basics, reading and math. I didn't want to start with the basics; I wanted to start at the top with things I was more interested in.

But things weren't always the greatest. John was mean to me and didn't treat me well so I kicked him out on his butt. But then, with my luck, I met George through a friend of mine.

George and I hit it off without a doubt. We spent a lot of time and many nights together. He ended up living with me and things progressed from there. At the time, neither of us was working, but we were happy. I ended up getting pregnant with my daughter.

When I was pregnant I would go swimming a lot. It was Texas after all. I would also eat a lot. McDonalds was one of my favorite places to eat at.

During my pregnancy my friend Steve was always around. We've known each for 28 years now. When asked that exact question of; if Steve was around when I was pregnant I'd always answer "of course he was. We're like best friends."

My daughter Serena Alexis Lozano was born on Halloween of 1999, at 10:30 in the morning. She was born at St. David's Hospital in Austin, Texas. Serena weighed five pounds and it took a whole fourteen hours of labor to introduce her to this world.

The nurse went out to the waiting room and told George to come meet his daughter. Even George's parents and sister Deborah came up from San Antonio to the hospital to meet Serena. The funny thing was that I had dreamt about my daughter being born at this hospital, with the same doctor, on the same day when I was only twelve.

Life was hard with a new baby. She often woke me up at four in the morning. I would take her to the park all the time. I loved to push her in the swings. My dad was really happy that he had a granddaughter. He would take her overnight so I could relax. Then he would bring her to preschool and then call me to pick her up. He would say "you've got to go pick your daughter up." I will never forget how hard it was to have a baby.

I moved back up to Minnesota in 2002 to be closer to my mom. My mom eventually took Serena up here to Minnesota. My Mother actually



used to live on Cedar Avenue near Minneapolis.

Then in 2003 George followed me up here but we got him court-ordered away for being lazy. It was because he didn't pay the bills and did not work.

Then Serena went to private school up until seventh grade. Now she goes to public school; she's enjoying school, doing well, and has her permit. She's driving her grandmother's car – a new Prius.

This year, 2015, I got a new exercise bike, which I use often. Currently I live in Duluth, Minnesota, and am

thinking about moving down to the Twin Cities to be closer to my mom and my daughter. To know what is going on, hopefully.

I plan to revisit Texas in June. Visit my friend Christin, walk around outside, take the bus to the mall, eat some ice cream, go swimming, get some sun, come back to Minnesota looking like a lobster, maybe see Steve again. Just hang out and do all the things I use to do. I'm looking forward to seeing the people of Austin Texas again.

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