What Makes a Good Story?

Stories by G Block American Literature

January 2018

Editors' Note

In this unit, we discussed what makes a "good" story. We started by watching videos about story writing and creating an interesting plot. From the videos, we learned that "good" stories consist of wonder, adventure, relatability, and more. We then continued the unit by dividing into groups and reading short stories. Each story introduced a unique plot and highlighted different aspects of a "good" story. Each group then taught a class about their short story. The more stories we read, the longer our list of criteria for a "good" story became. Based on everything we learned, we were ready to write our own short stories!

This publication is the collection of our stories. The initial assignment was to study what elements are crucial in a well written short story. After we, as a class, developed a comprehensive list on the aforementioned topic, each student wrote a short story based on prompts we had been given over the course of the unit. The most commonly used prompts were "My mother broke every dish in the house that day," "it was the first time I heard [song name] by [artist]," a significant first or last, an important childhood event, a lifechanging milestone, and a significant moment. Here are our class's stories.

- Saige Anapolle, Sara Barrocas, and Alex Bulanov

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Orange
Saige Anapolle

The first time I heard *Canada Dry* by Barenaked Ladies, I was driving on Commonwealth Avenue with my older brother, Grant. It had been three months since I'd seen him and we were home alone for the weekend. The sun setting behind us created orange-tinted clouds, only slightly visible through the side mirrors of the car. He turned up the volume and looked over. The singer's buoyant voice combined with the speed of our car lifted the falling sun. As we swayed to the rhythm of the music, all I thought about was how lucky I was to finally have him home with me. "This is by the same band that made that song about Canada and chesterfields," he said. It had been a while since I listened to music with another person. I was used to listening to music alone since I had gotten my license. Listening to music with Grant made everything seem familiar. I wasn't the oldest kid in the house, and my brother wasn't a stranger.

When he first went to college, Grant kept in contact. We facetimed almost every night and texted whenever we got the chance. It felt as though I walked through his first days at Dartmouth by his side. I met his roommate, saw his professors, and ate his first meal. Things were as they normally were, he was just living in a different room. As the days drifted on, Grant got entirely immersed in school work and social obligations. I wasn't his priority, he had replaced me with school friends from California, Alaska, and Arizona. He didn't need me to talk to him. This was my reality for a few weeks.

At home, I started sitting in his seat at dinner and taking on his responsibilities. I was in charge of taking my younger brother out for dinner and moving around the cars. It was my turn to take the SATs and tour colleges that I had no desire to go to. My school changed too. The seniors were practically my age and were no longer intimidating. The parking lot was full of people that looked too young to drive, and I was one of them.

The moment the song rang through my ears, these changes disappeared. I was simply a younger sister, in the passenger seat of her

brother's car, trusting his song choice. Every time the chorus played, Grant peeked through the corner of his eyes to make sure I was impressed. It felt as though he had been waiting to show me this song, as though his long days at school were disturbed by a recurring wish to escape into his car's vibrations, with me.

"Is this a popular band?" I asked.

"Not really, but I bet a few of your teachers know who they are." The coins beside my left thigh danced to the rhythm of the wheels hitting every pothole. "Do you like it?"

I nodded.

As we drove along the street's shadows, the sunset drenched the sky with a smoky royal blue. Every time he made the volume louder, the happier I became, the slower the stars showed. Instantly, *Canada Dry* became *our* song. It was the one that reminded me of this car ride, on the cracking concrete, at the brink of sunset.

George and Me
Ilan Barr

It is already afternoon in the beautiful city of New York when I decide to roll out of my makeshift newspaper bed. My 40-year-old back aches from the hard ground it had been lying on. I check my jar, only 2 dollars and 50 cents inside, just enough for some coffee and a donut. Limping, I make it all the way to the Dunkin' Donuts 2 blocks away, and get some breakfast. Bacon egg and cheese on a croissant. My favorite. Tom, the manager there, is a nice man. Most stores won't serve me because they know I live on the streets, but Tom has always done what he could to help me. He even gives me some of the leftover donuts from the day sometimes. After my late afternoon breakfast, I head out to do my daily begging.

My daily begging is basically me walking around the streets of New York asking for money. I usually find cars at red lights and ask the drivers to make a small donation for me. I have got to admit that begging can be fun at times. Sometimes I get to mess around with people and make them super uncomfortable; and sometimes I can even guilt people into giving me free money. It was a typical begging session for me that day. Most people who made eye contact with me looked away as soon as they could, and there were a couple nice strangers who gave me some money. Everything was totally normal until the black car showed up. I was waiting at a green light for the light to turn red, and this monstrous jet-black car pulled up. A brand of car I had never seen before, it was probably some fancy Italian brand. The driver, a middle-aged man with bright white hair, stopped his car during the middle of a green light, got out of the car, and handed me a 100-dollar bill. He then got into his car and promptly drove away. I just stood there with my jaw open and my heart bursting with excitement. I could not believe what had happened.

That night as I lay my head against my pile of newspaper on the rock-hard ground, my head was filled with cheerful thoughts. I was both confused and happy to have received that large donation from the mysterious man with the nice car.

As I fell asleep that night, I started to dream. It was all happy dreams. I dreamt about the good old days, back when I was in high school. I am going to be honest and admit that I am one of those people who peaked in high school. I was the captain of the varsity basketball team. I had Division I offers from multiple top schools including Kentucky and North Carolina. That was all before the incident.

One day after school, I was skateboarding home from school, and I decided it was a good idea to try and trespass through a graveyard. I climbed up the 7 foot long barbed wire fence, and then my leg got caught on the wire. That is where the entire trajectory for my future changed for the worse. I fell.

It is now 20 years later. My leg still has problems, I do not have a college education, not to mention a high school degree. All my offers for college were revoked as soon as they heard I would never be able to play the same way. Not far after, I dropped out of high school because I realized there was no point in finishing. My hopes and dreams were in the same condition as my leg: shattered.

When I woke up the next morning, there was someone staring at me. After rubbing my eyes and clearing my vision I noticed that the person staring at me was the mystery guy from the day before. It could not be. After taking a long look at him, I realized that he looked familiar, but I could not place where I had seen him before other than the previous day.

“James!” he exclaimed. Suddenly it hit me like a ton of bricks. This was George from high school. Oh no… this was George from high school. Back in high school I used to bully George every single day. I had a schedule for him. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I would beat him up, and Tuesdays and Thursdays I would steal his lunch money. “James” he repeated “It’s me, George, from high school” I could not mask my embarrassment. Last time I had seen him, I was king of the world, and now he was looking down on me, pitifully.

“Do you want to go eat something?” he said. “You look pretty hungry.”

“Yes please” I replied. It was true, I was starving.

We dined out together at a semi-nice restaurant and we caught up with each other. He explained to me that he knows about all the family issues I had at home in high school. He sympathized with me because of how my mother left when I was 2 and how my father was an abusive alcoholic. He continued to explain that although I committed horrible acts of bullying onto him, he found it in his heart to forgive me because I was his idol. He had always dreamed of being a basketball player. He explained that the other day when he had given me the money he thought it was me but was not 100% sure. He had followed me around for the rest of the day to figure out if it was really me.

George Clarkson changed my life that day. He brought me to his house, cleaned me up, and then offered me a job as a trainer for his basketball team. He explained that although I could not play well anymore, I still knew the game like the back of my hand, and I would be able to contribute a lot to his basketball program at the high school he runs.

After working for George for a few years I kept moving up and up and I eventually even got to coach at small schools that played North Carolina and Kentucky, the schools where I was considering going. My team even beat North Carolina one time.

George has taught me to always forgive people for what they do wrong because you never know what people are going through. The second chance that George gave me that day was the key to my success and I owe everything to him.

Road to Relief
Sara Barrocas

That night after the incident, my mom, Anne, woke up screaming. I jumped out of bed in the dark and ran down the squeaking stairs trying not to slip. I quickly rushed to her side as she shivered on the cold dusty floor. She was bawling and wouldn't stop no matter how hard I tried. I even had to call Mike, my mom's boyfriend. I went into the other room to make the call and as I hung up the phone, I heard a crash in the kitchen. My mother broke every dish in the house that day

There is something happening to her, the doctors can't quite figure out what the problem is, but there is a problem. We have been to all different types of doctors in the state and even left the state once to go to a good doctor. She wakes up in the middle of the night; has an outburst and goes right back to sleep as if nothing happened. This began about 7 months ago, after she saw my father. That was the first time she had seen him in 13 years. He left us when I was about 4 years old and never came back. I guess he ran off with some other woman and maybe started a new family. But who knows, I don't think of him much. Anyways, about 7 months ago my mother went out to go run errands on a regular Wednesday afternoon. She called me as she was leaving work in her beat up Subaru around 5pm and told me that she had saved up extra money to buy organic groceries that week.

Later that night, I saw her dainty yellow headlights shine up against the house. It was odd since she had shown up so much later that she usually did but ignored that. Knowing that she would come in any minute, I waited for her at the kitchen table to help her unpack the groceries. I heard the door knob jiggle as she struggled to open the door to the kitchen. When the door swung open she had bruises on her face, her clothing was torn and covered in blood. When she stepped into the kitchen she dropped the groceries on the floor along with the car keys and her purse and immediately collapsed on the floor. This all happened in a matter of seconds almost too quickly for me to understand what was happening. My first instinct was to yell, "Mom!". I grabbed her hand as she began trembling. I screamed, "What happened to you? I'm going to call 911!".

She screamed back, "No! Don't! Don't do it."

I began crying, "who did this to you?"

She struggled to say, "I saw your father. He did this."

I was shocked to hear this. It saddened me to know that he abused her like this because I now knew the real reason he left. I tried asking her what happened, but she shook her head. After a few minutes of her lying there hopeless, I grabbed the phone and called Mike. When he heard the news, he quickly rushed over and burst open the door. He saw my mother and rushed to picked her up as he tried not to cry. Mike told me not to worry and to help him put her in the car.

I laid her across the backseats and placed her head on my lap. Mike got into the front seat, buckled his seatbelt, started the car, and backed out of the driveway. At this point my mom was not conscious but still breathing. I made sure to check her pulse every thirty seconds or so. Those 10 minutes to the hospital were the scariest moments of my life. What would happen if I lost my mother? My father wouldn't come looking for me and I would be all alone. At least I knew I had Mike for the time being. He knew how to care for me the way my mom did. I tried to push all these thoughts aside as tears streamed down my face.

We arrived at the emergency room and Mike took her out of the car so I could quickly get help. I ran inside and told a nurse I needed help. Mike quickly carried her behind me as a nurse brought over a bed. We laid her down and the nurse quickly rushed her behind doors with large red writing saying, "Authorized Personnel Only." I knew we couldn’t pass those doors, but I felt as if I was leaving her. This feeling stayed within me as I waited with Mike for a few hours until we could see her. During that time, we called the police and told them what had happened. We wanted them to be there when she was ready to give a statement. However, we did make them understand that she may not remember everything.

When the nurses told us we could visit her, we went to her room, I saw her lying asleep. She was hooked up to an IV along with many other weird contraptions. I came close to her so she could feel my warm breath and I kissed her head. I told her, "Mom, you are a strong woman and I won’t let you give up. I need you." As I looked up at Mike,

he noticed that her eyes were beginning to open. We both held her hands with so much excitement and love. At this time, I was so thankful that she was safe and alright.

Once she settled in, the police came in. She became very stiff, but they reassured her that everything was going to be just fine. She then gave the police a statement and they declared that it was: Sexual Assault. After the meeting she asked the police officers not to disclose where she was, since he had stalked her and followed her to the supermarket. The officer agreed and reassured her that she was not at fault since she looked like she was going to be sick.

At that moment, I thought my mom was going to have another one of her outbursts. However, the nurse told me that she had been put on meds for her PTSD. This was the problem! It was PTSD! She had PTSD from when she was with my father. Her problem was now all cleared up, but my father was still out there. He could be abusing someone else as we speak. She told me her story. My father, Denis, emerged out of an alleyway near the supermarket. He was dirty and smelled of vodka. Denis came up behind my mom and grabbed her hair. He then told my mom that she owed him money. Shocked, she told him that he hadn't paid a penny for their daughter and yelled, "you are a drunk who abused me. I don't owe you a damn thing." He then got angry and beat her. I couldn't listen to any of the details of this, all I kept thinking was that he needed to be locked up. When she finished the story she said, "now we wait," as she looked at me and Mike.

After a few hours of waiting and sleeping, someone knocked on the door. Mike opened the door and invited, the officer who was waiting, inside. He told us that they had just arrested Denis. The officer told us that they received many other reports about Denis as well and the officer will be in contact about possibly having my mom be a witness for his trial. The officer thanked us for our help and exited the room. I looked up at my mom as tears filled her tired eyes and I saw, for the first time, a glimpse of hope and relief.

Waffles
Alexander Bulanov

The plan was waffles. Jack hadn't eaten waffles in around a month, and he was really craving something with special holes for maple syrup. First, he whipped the wet ingredients together, then the dry ingredients, and then he combined them. In all honesty, Jack wasn't a particularly good cook. When he was younger, his mother occasionally asked him to grill, but that was about the extent of his cooking experience. Since he graduated college, he had to learn how to cook for himself. Since then, he became a decent cook. It was finally time to put the batter in the waffle maker. Just as Jack was raising the bowl of batter, he heard an ear piercingly loud explosion coming from the downtown area. He rushed to the window to see what was going on. As soon as he opened the blinds, a burning flash of light hit his eyes. A mushroom cloud the size of a moderate skyscraper was diffusing in all directions, heading right at him. The worst scenario had come to light… he was witnessing a nuclear attack.

Then, out of nowhere, the light started to fade away into a light blue hue. The room around him started to pixelate, and slowly everything turned to darkness. Jack lifted the virtual reality goggles from his face.

“Wow, that was incredible! I felt like I was really there” exclaimed Jack.

“They really blew this world design out of the park, didn’t they,” responded Shawn.

Jack stood up from the haptic chair and stretched his arms. Being inside the virtual reality was tiring but rewarding. It felt like stepping into a totally different world, but at some point, it starts to feel just as real. “Do you want to go grab a bite to eat?”

“Sure,” responded Shawn, “But only as long as we go to that diner downtown that serves those incredible eggs!”

“I’m down for diner eggs any day,” agreed Jack. Jack and Shawn exited the Virtual Reality Center, more commonly known as the VRaC,

and headed down to the diner. To get from the VRaC to downtown, Jack and Shawn had to take the X Line train to Semantics Street then transfer to the Y Line train and ride it all the way North. As they descended into the depth of the city's subway, Jack noticed intricate details. The green paint on the entrance was peeling a little bit, there was an unusually large dent in the railing, and one of the ticket machines had an out of order sign leaning on it. Jack heard the screech of a train in the distance. Jack and Shawn had come to the VRaC after educational development on a Wednesday, so they hit peak rush hour on their way downtown. As an X Line train pulled into the station, Jack noticed some new graffiti on its side. All efforts to prevent graffiti artists from taking over every surface in this city had failed. Yet somehow, the intricate detail and well thought-out layout of the so called "art" amused Jack. He found comfort in the spontaneous nature of it, and truthfully, couldn't care less if it covered the entire city. Jack and Shawn quickly stepped into the train just as the doors began to close. The inside of the train smelled like a sweaty locker room, a typical trait of public transport. The details of the remainder of Jack's trip all felt like a blur, an eventuality of taking public transport.

They arrived at the diner within the hour and quickly ordered their much-awaited omelets. Jack ordered two eggs with extra cheese, bacon, and bell peppers. After the meals arrived, Jack took a minute to admire the perfection of the plate. The omelet was a perfect semi-circle, taking up exactly half the plate. The home fries were arranged in a neat pile in the upper-left corner. There was just enough space in the upper-right corner for a squirt of ketchup and a drop of hot sauce. Everything seemed so perfectly put together.

Just as Jack grabbed a piece of the omelet with his fork and brought it towards his mouth, a notification appeared in the bottom right hand corner of his vision. It read: 'Low Battery'. For a second, Jack was extremely disoriented. Then he snapped back into his senses, lifted his virtual reality goggles from his face, and sat up from his haptic chair. This was the first time he experimented with a virtual reality within a virtual reality. The lines between the realities blurred the longer he was inside the virtual realities. Reflecting on his time inside the artificial world, he remembered the details. This was the first time he really tried to be aware of his surroundings within the virtual reality. The peeling

green paint and the dented railing at the subway station. The screeching trains. The perfectly laid out meal. Then he snapped back into his true reality. He was in a gloomy room with no entrances or exits except for a large concrete door in front of him. The only source of light came from one bulb dangling from the ceiling. Jack walked to the door, opened it, and stared at the desolate nuclear wasteland he had been calling home for the past four years. This room was his hideaway; it was his only way to experience life as it had been before the disaster and escape the reality of today. The line between virtual reality and actual reality became blurred, and that was just what he wanted. Jack took a deep sigh and headed back into the dark, dull concrete room.

An Unfortunate Fortune
Eli Cole

I called the police after the third day. Maybe it was too late. That Saturday night was a week before winter break and John and I went to a party. We had a great time hanging out with friends. Around 11:00 pm, John turned to me and said, “Hey, I am going to go home, I’m not feelin’ too good.” I asked if he wanted me to take him home. He had drank a few too many, which didn’t help the stomach ache he had prior to the party. He said he was fine to make his way home. I told him to text me when he got back to our apartment. We live in a small apartment in a large apartment building on Thatcher St, just off the Boston University campus. He hopped into a cab and I watched as it drove down Beacon St.

John and I have been good friends since the beginning of our freshman year when we were in the same sports journalism class. I stayed close to home for college since BU is only about twenty minutes from my parents’ house. John is from a suburb just outside of Buffalo. We’ve gone to Celtics games, BU hockey games and some concerts together. He’s truly a great guy.

I didn’t get a text from John that night. I assumed he either went to sleep immediately or maybe passed out, but either way I wasn’t too worried about him. So, around 1:30 am, I headed home. I was fine. I got back to our apartment and he wasn’t home. I saw a sign for all-night karaoke in the lobby since it was a building for mostly BU students. What’s the worst that could have happened? I figured he had met someone and went with them to karaoke. The next day I finally got a text saying he would be with other friends for a couple days and he would be back about 4 pm on Monday. He said he would take care of the food. I felt relieved to finally hear from him.

The next two days were rough. I spent most of my day studying for finals and pacing, wondering where John was. After classes, two days before break, I got back to my apartment around 6 pm and found our front door knocked down and a little note on our coffee table between my brown chair and John’s red leather chair, with

some red streaks on it. What was this? The TV was on ESPN Monday Night Countdown. The Buffalo Bills, John's favorite team, were playing the New England Patriots that night and John and we had planned on getting some Chinese delivery from a little place in downtown Boston and having a relaxed night. The Chinese food was on the counter and our knife drawer open in the kitchen. I didn't understand what happened. Where was John? I sat down on the couch and texted John. No reply. I tried calling him, and it went straight to voicemail. Something was seriously wrong. I didn't know what to do. My hands covered my face as I sat down on the couch, looking out of the window at the Charles River. A knock on the wall next to where the door should've been startled me. I turned, and didn't recognize the person peering back at me across the fourteen-foot span between the door and where I was standing at the window.

A small, clear plastic bag hung from the man's left hand. His right hand was placed in his right pocket. He didn't say anything about the door being knocked down, which I found kind of peculiar. His arm stretched out as he reached to hand the bag to me. I asked what was in the bag. He slowly opened the bag and pulled out four fortune cookies. He said, "Sorry, I forgot the cookies." He dropped them back into the bag. This whole situation about him forgetting the cookies made me wonder if something bad had happened to John. I asked the delivery man if he had seen anything happen when delivering the food. He told me that when he arrived with the food, a man standing about 6'2" opened the door. He had black hair and brown eyes just like me. I ask what he was wearing because I knew that John would be wearing his Bills jersey. That's what the delivery man told me and that's John. That is all he told me. Moments after the delivery man left I opened the little plastic bag. He was right. Four little fortune cookies appeared. I opened the first one, and it read, "A friend may need your help." At that point, I seriously started to get worried and this is when I called the police - on day three.

An hour later after telling the police what had happened over the phone, I ran down to the police station. As I pushed open the door I noticed out of the corner of my eye, that the Chinese food delivery man was being held with his hands cuffed behind his back. The cop at

the front desk told me that he had confessed to killing a man named John. The man had previously lost his close friend in a devastating car crash on Route 9 in Boston. The man felt that the only way to free himself of the pain of losing a friend was to take the life of an innocent person. Tears ran down the sides of my face; my best friend was gone. My body filled with anger and sadness. Something exploded inside me and that is all I remember until I woke up the next morning in Mass General Hospital. The doctor told me I had tried to punch a handcuffed man and that he had evidently kicked me – all he could do in handcuffs - and I fell and hit my head on a desk. In some ways, I wished that I was still unconscious because then I wouldn't have to face that this was not all a bad dream – that it was true that my good friend John was gone forever. My heart sank.

Procedure 28
Josh Gans

The freezer door wasn't supposed to lock behind him. That wasn't part of the plan. Benjamin had hid Lindsay's body in there for reasons he would not be allowed to say. Since her death, he could not stop hearing sirens in his head and all over the town of Greendale, Montana. He had the entire plan lined up: remove the head from the body, take her head out of the freezer, and drive 100 or so miles at three AM to an isolated Montana forest to bury the head. He wasn't done with the body. Benjamin was using it for a test-- a test that he wouldn't be able to share with anybody. It was so secret, in fact, that he himself didn't know the full details.

Benjamin knew that once the police would find her corpse he would be in trouble. The evidence was clear: the body, the fridge, the gun planted in his drawer with his finger prints on it. He imagined his peers, including his own three children calling for his corpse once the news broke. But only he would believe himself when denying the fact. Yet the police was not the biggest thing on his mind at the time. It truly wasn't Benjamin who committed the murder of his wife- it was an anonymous woman, the one with the hidden identity. In fact, he had no part in her death. She put his fingerprints on it and placed it conveniently in the drawer, so if any suspicion were to occur she wouldn't be caught.

Today's date was March 23rd. The death date was January 17th. That day about two months ago was almost an eerily quiet Wednesday, when Benjamin came home a bit late from his nighttime shift at the hospital. He worked full time as a surgeon about 40 miles away. He arrived home after a cold, grueling, sleepy drive and hung his coat on the rack. The lights were dim. He went straight to bed and feel asleep. About ten minutes later, Benjamin awoke with a loud bang and was greeted by a female digitized voice, telling him: "Hello, Mr. Johnson. Today is a very special day for you." He fearfully looked around, trying to find where the sound came from. He couldn't. "Don't worry, Mr. Johnson. We did it for you."

“Did what? Where’s my wife?”

“Mr. Johnson, today marks the beginning of your new life.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” He countered. “Who are you? What have you done?”

“Don’t worry. Only your cooperation will make this process run smoother and quicker.”

He jumped out of his bed before colliding with the masked, unidentifiable woman in an all black jumpsuit, dragging the body of his beloved Lindsay away. There was blood. A lot of blood. She had a voice changing microphone in her left hand and a moist knife in her right hand. Benjamin looked on in terror.

“We’ve been waiting for you.” He still couldn’t wrap his head around the situation. “I’m sorry it had to happen this way, but it’s for the greater good.” At the kitchen table, with two guards standing behind her, the woman, still unidentifiable, began to interrogate. “What’s your profession? What are your degrees?” As expected, he remained silent. He would be zapped with a taser after every refusal. He was reluctant to answer questions until they threatened his children, two ten year old twins, one boy and one girl, and a twelve year old girl. Then he had to give in. He answered the questions and then got an oddly specific question: “Would you be physically and mentally able to do an autopsy experiment?” He paused, sat silent for a second. Taser. She repeated.

“I don’t know.” He gave in.

“That’s not the answer I was looking for.”

Taser.

“Okay!”

“Thank you. From that point on, he had a tracker and a camera. Benjamin was told that if he tries to escape a thirty mile radius of his house, she would kill him. They were watching at all times. Now, he had to take the blame if he were ever to be caught. The experiment was designed for him to find a way of reincarnating a human out of his own

wife's headless body, and if he didn't follow any orders he and the rest of his family would be murdered. He was the highest ranked surgeon in the region, and was the only hope for this ruthless experiment to progress. He was told that he was very special and "one of a kind" to be picked for such a tough task. However he also knew that if anything went wrong he could say goodbye to everything he'd known.

It was day 66 out of a planned 78 due to it being a leap year. The experiment was nearly completed, as the final steps were being added. The head inspection was finished, and therefore the body was the only thing left to complete. It was another day at the office for the hostage. Nothing suspicious was happening by his standards, considering the horrific, terrifying and ruthless sights he'd seen. Every single day Benjamin thought of various little longshot plans to overthrow the anonymous woman controlling his life. He couldn't bear this lifestyle any longer, and felt almost like he too was a dead body. His wife was deceased, his children think he'd joined her (and for all he knew they could have been as well), and nobody had heard of him or seen him in months. His life seemed so pointless at this point. He was tired. The conditions he'd been working under were harsh. Two meals a day, one at 10:30 and one at 6:30, roughly six hours of sleep, a limited supply of water, and non-stop, forced labor in a cold chamber on his wife's dead body. It doesn't get much worse than that. Then suddenly, at about 10 PM, Benjamin went to use his nightly restroom break and realized he had forgot to maintain the freezer door. He rushed back, but it was too late.

The door was closed, and the lock to it was gone. The head would still be in there, ready to rot out the body. Therefore unless recovered, the experiment would not be able to be done. He also couldn't experiment unless opened, and all of a sudden he heard a mic drop and saw the bright green button at the top of his headset, reminding him that she was watching. It was only a matter of time before the hitmen would be at his door. He thought back to his sneaky and elaborate life of all the amazing things he'd done to get out of tough situations. He was the smartest person he knew, he couldn't possibly mess this one up. This time, he couldn't think. There was too much on his mind and too few options. Benjamin didn't stand a chance. So, he let them come. There was nothing that he could do but let it

happen. Once arrived, sure enough, she and her sidekicks were onto him. He shed tears. “Please-- Just take me.” However, they seemed quite different than before. They were merciful, almost sympathetic if there was a kind for them. They beat him and punished him several times but did spare him this time around. According to the terms they “agreed” upon (he never agreed, it was read to him as he lay on the ground), he would be killed for such a horrible mistake, which could also be deemed a sabotage. But he was a man so deprived and so out of his mind that he himself felt like the subject of the experiment. She knew that, and therefore trusted him to work on his side. What she didn’t realize, and what Benjamin had just thought of was that he was doing his own little secret “experiment” off camera. He used one of the needles he would stick in his wife’s shoulder and combined it with many suspicious substances, creating a highly toxic needle. One shot would instantly kill a person. So, a guard went to open the door. So many thoughts ran through Benjamin’s head, including, ‘*What do I live for anymore?*’ ‘*Why do I keep going along with it?*’ And ‘*What happens after this ends?*’ After all, he was being forced to perform horrifying tasks and surgeries over his wife’s dead body. And if he were to kill the people in that room on that day, he knew he would be recognized as the serial killer who murdered his wife, before soon being arrested by the local authorities. So he furiously ripped out the needle from his back pocket as the guards watch in terror. He then made a stunning motion and stabbed the needle-- into his own neck. He looked helpless after that.

“What have you done?!” The woman screeched.

“Do me a favor.” He choked. She watched in awe. “Just don’t touch my children. Make sure I’m the first and last experiment you ever do.” His eyes shut.

She checked her list. “Well, that’s disappointing.” Procedure #28: Unsuccessful.

Where did the Car Go?
Eli Goldstein

When I was 14, my family and I went to the Grand Canyon. We stayed in the White Fir Lodge, cooked our own meals, and hiked inside of the canyon. On August 17th, 2015, I was feeling a little under the weather and my dad had buckled his knee. We told my mom and brother to go hiking without us. So, there we were, alone in our lodge room after eating a late breakfast of Mini Trix and sipping the milk from the bowl with nothing to do but watch television. After an hour of boredom, my dad told me that we had to do something that was fun. He had heard about a certain view point of the canyon that was 'must see' so we drove over to the point. It was a very crowded place with a large information center, painted brown with a log cabin feel to it, surrounded several parking lots. We parked our rented white Buick and walked towards the view point. My father saw a large concrete sign with the National Park's Service logo on it. It was about three feet tall with tan brick pillars slightly taller than the smooth concrete. It said, 'Grand Canyon National Park' in bold black letters. I took a picture of him with a big smile on his face. I could see my own reflection in his sunglasses. We then walked to Mather Point; the panoramic view was breathtaking with many different colors and the Colorado River appearing brown in the distance. The sky was totally blue with only a few clouds in the sky. The horizon on the opposite rim of the canyon was a much lighter blue that turned into a faded white. Vegetation was sprouting up inside of the canyon with each outcropping of rock in the mile-deep canyon looking totally unique. The two of us stood there thinking *what a great day this has turned into!* Or so we thought. After taking countless pictures we walked back towards the parking lots.

I walked down the brick path back towards the information center. My dad was walking two steps behind me, looking down at his phone, texting my mom to let her know we were on the way back. We passed by a 'Grand Canyon National Park' sign which was a helpful marker to remind me where I was. Then, we came to a crossroads in the red brick path. My dad went right thinking that that was the direction of the car; he was wrong.

There was a street ahead of us at the end of the path where coach buses went by every once in a while. I was not sure if I had seen a road across from our parking lot when we arrived but I dismissed my pessimistic thought, just like many others that day. To separate the parking lot from the road, there was a line of short pine trees with a few paths to allow visitors to get in and out easily. We walked through the path with the trees surrounding it, feeling a brief moment of shade as we walked towards all of the other cars while trying to remember where the white Buick was. We looked in the spot where we remembered parking but it was not even in that general area. We then looked for any white car we could find but none of them were the Buick that we were looking for. A look of frustration began to set in on my father's slightly sunburned face. I said, "The car isn't here. Let's try looking in another parking lot."

My dad took a deep sigh and responded, "Eli, do you really think you know where the car is?"

After a moment, I said back to him, "Nope."

We went back the way we came, through the tree line, across the street with the coach buses, back to the brick path, to the crossroads and then to the information center. My dad kneeled down next to the water fountain for a sip of water. I thought to myself, *where the hell can the car be? There is no mother fluffing way that we lost a CAR!* I suggested checking one of the other parking lots. The white Buick did not show itself.

We walked back to the information center with defeated looks on our faces. We both knew it was time for dire measures: to call my mom even though there was nothing that she could do about our situation. Miles away from us, at a different part of the canyon, my mom received a call from my desperate father. He was freaking out with a red face and paced as he called my mother in a panic.

"Why exactly did you decide to call me, Wayne?"

"I lost the car!!! What do I do!?? What the fuck is going on! Shit!"

"What do you mean you lost the car!?"

“Eli and I have been looking for half an hour and we can’t find it! I left my wallet in there too!!! What do we do!?!?”

“Maybe you should go find a park ranger and they will help you.”

“How are they going to help me find it?!!”

“I don’t understand… what do you want me to do about it?” My mother said with a kind and confused tone of voice.

With a defeatist panicky voice my dad responded, “I don’t know! I just want you to suffer here with me.”

With that, they hung up. While they were talking, a stroke of genius came across me, as if a gust of wind had blown every single pessimistic and useless thought out of my head. I quickly whipped out my white and silver iPhone 5s and opened Google Maps. It dropped down a red pin next to my current location which was right next to the information center. Very carefully, I located the parking lots that we had already searched. Suddenly, I saw another blue parking sign in the exact opposite direction of where we were searching. *This has gotta be it! It has to be!* The power of technology; what a gift man has been given. I showed my dad the same screen and he said pessimistically, “it’s worth a shot.”

We ran over to the parking lot and passed the same exact sign with **bold** letters that said, ‘Grand Canyon National Park’ and had the ‘National Parks Service’ logo on it. We then ran to the parking and sure enough, there was the car. No one had stolen it, it hadn’t vanished into thin air. We hopped into the white Buick and laughed. My dad said as we were laughing, “What a great story this will make.”

Waiting
Rebecca Harder

"My sister is sick," This is what I have been saying for the past 6 years. The only thing that is different now is what comes after that. From 2013 to 2015, "we don't know what is wrong" would follow but starting in February of 2015, "she has chronic Lyme Disease" would follow. In 2013, my sister stopped being the upbeat, excited about everything person I had known my entire life. She just slept all the time and stopped hanging out with all of her friends. She wasn't the sister I grew up with anymore.

February 2013

I walk out of my dance class and my sisters entire team surrounds me and bombards me with questions. "Where's Natalie?" "Why didn't she come to dance?" "She didn't tell us she wasn't coming." I froze. I don't know what to tell them. I thought she would be coming in between my two classes like always. I simply just tell them "No clue."

I walk outside into the frigid air and walk to my moms car. She is on the phone so I decide not to ask her why Natalie wasn't at dance. I start to go on my phone as she starts driving but I end up hearing "blood draw," "sick," "mystery," and worse of all "too sick to dance". I know at that moment that my best bet when I get home is to go straight up to my room because I don't want to be in the middle of the conversation that is going to happen between my mom and sister.

My mom and I walk into the house. I take my shoes off and walk through the kitchen, dance bag in hand, passing my sister as I go. "Hey" is the only thing that I feel like I can say without saying something I shouldn't. I hurry upstairs to my room so I won't have to be downstairs with my mom and sister. I start doing my homework like I always do after dance but today it is different. It is very hard for me to focus because I am trying to hear when something big happens with my sister.

I keep trying to hear what they are saying, but it is too hard. I decide that I should just focus on my homework because I will probably hear about it during dinner when my mom tells my dad because he is still at work.

I start doing my work again and I am halfway through my chapters to read for English when I hear “Becca, dinner is ready. Please come down.” I fold the page over in my book and head downstairs dreading but also looking forward to what is about to happen. To my no such luck, my mom has already told my dad about what was happening so I feel very out of the loop. However, to my luck all three of them have facial expressions that tell me something is wrong.

April 2015

I can’t pay attention in class. All that keeps running through my mind is that Natalie’s lab results are coming back today. My mom and Natalie are in the doctor's office right now and these are the last tests that the doctors can think to do. They have done all the other tests for illnesses that have symptoms like these and they have all come back negative. I don’t know what it is exactly that they are testing for but I just want it to be the last test. Over the last 2 years she has had so many blood test and other tests that we get a phone call almost every other week saying “Sorry Ms Harder, the test came back negative. Can we bring her in to do another test next week?” I just want them to find out what is wrong with her so that they can give her the right medicine and bring her back to her old self. These thoughts and many other fill my mind for the entire day.

The 3:00 bell rings signaling that school is out. I get on the bus as quick as I can hoping that it will leave sooner even though I know that no matter how early I get on the bus, it is still going to leave the school at 3:10. Even though the bus ride is only 17 minutes it feel like it is forever. The bus gets to my stop at 3:27 as it always does and I practically run home. I just want to know the results.

I get home and my mom and sister are both at the kitchen table, both with their computers out and doing work. “Did you get the results from the test?” She looks at my sister and says “They are pretty sure she has Lyme Disease.” I don’t know what to think. I was really hoping they would have a diagnosis for her but I really did not think they would. We have been trying to get a diagnosis for over 2 years and we finally got it. “Isn’t that the thing people get from ticks?” I ask.

“Yes. But she might not have gotten it from a tick. They couldn’t find one so we will never know.”

I don’t know what to say or do so I just go up to my sister and hug her because I know now that there is a possibility of her being healed.

December 2017

Despite my sister getting the diagnosis she still has bad months. Just about every half year, she has one month where it is back to like it was 2013--2015 where none of her medicine works and she just lays in bed. Those months are really hard for my whole family but I would take it anyday over what is was like before when I would never see my fun and energetic sister. All I can ask is that she just keeps getting better, like she is every day.

The Happiest Hour
Deena Karger

As we walked toward the volunteer center, we were stressed, discussing our schedules for Junior year which we received the night before. It was just a normal Israel morning; we went to volunteer like we had done so many other times. But this time was different. This time was special. We got closer to the volunteer center and the property looked pretty ordinary, with a gate and a medium-sized building. A minute later, some workers opened the gates, and our faces lit up. Beyond the gates were around twenty young children playing outside. The second they saw us, their faces lit up too, as if they had just seen an ice cream truck. Some of the kids began to run toward us but the caretakers held them back as we walked into the building. It was obvious that this was a happy place based on the bright colors of the property, the toys lying around, and the smiling children. I knew, the second those gates opened, that I was going to love this next hour and I was eager to go meet the children.

We weren't given much information before we arrived, so we really didn't know what to expect, as we had some bad experiences at other places we volunteered. The volunteer coordinator described to us the amazing things which the program worked to do to help children with heart diseases around the world. We watched a video about the organization, Save a Child's Heart, and I quickly teared up as I began to understand what a miracle this place is and the smiles they put on children's faces. Two minutes later, the coordinator gave us instructions for how to act around the kids and play with them without hurting them. I was in awe realizing how this organization does everything they can for a child who needs surgery, and more, and it is all free for the patients.

I ran outside, eager to go play with the children and just have fun. At first, I sat down with a group of interns who were holding some babies and younger kids. Although I tried to interact with them, there was not much response. After a few disappointing minutes, a little girl, about nine years old, came up to me and grabbed my hand as she pulled me toward her toys. She was wearing a bright colored dress, had

very short hair, and was holding a few blocks in her other hand. I didn't expect for anything like this to happen, especially for a child to decide to play with someone older and looking bored. But she did, and it touched my heart. An intern informed me that the little girl's name was Winnie. The children there didn't speak Hebrew or English so we had to find different ways to communicate. They were all flown in from different countries, and they were only in Israel for a little before and after their surgery, so they didn't learn Hebrew or English.

At first, Winnie wouldn't make a sound, and instead she quietly, with a sad face, played with the blocks. I tried to ask her a question in English and she chuckled. A young boy was sitting near the toys and as we sat there, so she whispered in his ear and laughed, over and over again. After a few times, her laugh became contagious and we all laughed with her too. I was amazed by how happy and silly she was being, considering she was alone in Israel, without family, and was getting surgery in a few days. Here, I saw a new side of her, as she joked around with a big smile on her face. She then decided to bring the toys over to me and come sit in my lap. As my friends and I started to play with Winnie and her friend, the children became more outgoing and fun. Winnie stole my phone and after I opened it, she took a picture on Snapchat with a funny face. She then drew some lines over her face and looked up at me with the biggest smile. I loved how happy she was just from this one funny picture she took. It amazed me how she laughed at almost everything and had a constant smile on her face, when people weren't doing anything extraordinary to make her have fun.

It was so hard to imagine that these kids were patients with heart disease who were receiving surgery. They just seemed like normal kids, laughing and playing with other people. All of these kids were flown in from far away countries, away from their families, to receive heart surgery, yet they were still smiling and having fun like any other kid would. It was amazing to feel the love from the children who we were supposed to be receiving our love. I may not have been able to talk with them, but they definitely knew how to get my attention. With their big smiles, their enthusiastic hugs, by passing us their toys, they found ways to make us happy, too. It was my job to entertain the children and make their day fun, but really, they were the ones making me have such a fun time.

Another little girl walked by and as I began to try and play with her, she quickly turned away. When she came back, I jumped in front of her jokingly. She chuckled, and just like Winnie, she pulled me over to her toys. Her friend called her Betty. I heard Betty singing some song in her language, so I decided to try and sing along. She hesitated when she heard me singing but then continued, and paused for me to join her. As I joined her, her face lit up and she sang, clapped, and danced with the most joy I could ever imagine. We laughed and danced for what seemed like a week, but was only ten minutes. It was the happiest I've ever been. All that joy came from that girl's smile, positive attitude, and ability to make anything fun. Together, we created a space where we were both just little kids, genuinely happy and carefree again.

Realizing that we had to leave was devastating, as I was so happy in Save a Child's Heart, making other kids happy, and getting happier from the smiling kids there. When she realized we were leaving, Winnie ran up to me and give me a huge hug. Betty then waved continuously as she smiled with unlimited joy until the gates fully closed behind us. She ran after us, but was pulled back by the caretakers who knew that she needed to be held back or she would hang onto us forever. She wanted to hold onto that moment, and so did I. I never wanted that moment to end.

Whenever anyone asked me about my favorite part of the trip, my immediate response was always "the hour I spent at Save a Child's Heart which was definitely my favorite hour of my life". Before that day, whenever I thought of hospitals, I simply thought of children lying in beds with tubes attached to their bodies, looking sad and bored. This organization does everything to make sure that the kids experiences are anything but that. I could not be more thankful to have gone there an experienced such pure bliss and joy, even if it was only an hour. From then on, I have constantly wished I could just go back and stay there forever.

The Final Countdown

Nadav Kolodner

The first time Andrew heard *The Final Countdown* by Europe, he was on the top of the Empire State Building, dangling off the edge by the corners of his jacket. About a thousand feet below him the city was hustling and bustling paying him no mind. Most of the sounds made it up to Andrew's ears, which along with the music, made what a large angry man who was yelling at Andrew barely audible, "Where is my money man?" The angry man yelled at Andrew, dangling Andrew a little farther over the traffic.

"I-I-I don't know! What are you talking about. Put me down!"

The angry man just grew more cross at this, starting to shake Andrew yelling even louder, "WHERE IS MY GODDAMN MONEY!"

Andrew was scared by this, and started to squirm and try to scream. He clenched his fists, and closed his eyes… and there was silence. None of the angry man's heavy breathing, none of the cries of fear from the onlookers, not even the beep of a horn or screech of a horn from the cityscape far below. Andrew, partially perplexed, and partially afraid, tried moving free. The angry man's arm gilded with ease out of his way. When he inspected the man, it seemed as if he was moving, but very, very slowly. Andrew put his hand on the angry man's heart, it beat up, not stopping. It was a full fifteen seconds before the beat was over. Andrew couldn't believe what he was seeing. He realized that time was moving much slower. Doing some mental calculations, Andrew realized that time was moving 1200 times slower!

Hurriedly, Andrew proceeded inside the building and headed straight to the elevator to push the button. Nothing. Around 30 seconds later he could see the elevator call button start to illuminate, and a ding start to emanate from the small, round, speaker grill. Andrew had freaked out. Andrew sat down to think. He had an idea. Andrew closed his eyes once more, and clenched his fists. Nothing happened. Andrew was put off by this, and was put in a rage. From a nearby table he picked up a glass, and proceeded to throw it to the ground. As soon as the glass left his hand, the glass slowed to the infinitesimally slow pace of time. Andrew watched in awe and utter amazement as the glass seemingly

floated there, suspended in mid-air. Andrew proceeded to do this to many other things, a table, some chairs, a few bottles, and even an elderly lady's hat. Then, it dawns on him, maybe Andrew must replicate his fear. Andrew sat down, closed his eyes, clenched his fists, and thought about how scary it was to be hanging outside of the Empire State building. And just like that, time resumed. He saw through the window to the observation deck that the angry man, grasping at air, was now red in the face and blazing mad. The elevator finally chimed, and Andrew stepped in, but not before the angry man sees him. Andrew frantically mashed the door-close button, just barely avoiding the man.

Andrew was still processing what had happened before. Being thrust off a building, nearly freezing time, it was a lot to take in. The elevator chimed once more "street level" an automated female voice chimes. The door slowly opens, and there was a man in a black suit, wearing non-descript sunglasses and an earpiece, "are you the man that was being dangled off of the building?", the suited man said in a monotone voice.

"Umm," Andrew said before, once again, closing his eyes, clenching his fists, and thinking about fear. Andrew ran past the suited man, through the lobby, outside, to see a slew of black SUV's with covert police lights, some stuck on red, some blue. Andrew took off, heading north. This was the last day of Andrew's normal life.

The Jellyfish Sting
Dasia Kostinden

When I was around 8 years old my family and I went on a vacation to Florida. Florida was always a vacation destination that brought warmth and happiness, the perfect escape from our frigid New England winters. One of the most popular vacation activities for my family was tanning beach side. As an 8-year-old however, I could not sit still along with my mom, dad, and older sister.

One beach day, to pass the time, my twin and I decided to collect rocks. I grabbed my bright pink sand bucket and Sky grabbed her matching purple bucket and thus began our competition to see who could collect the prettiest rocks for mom and dad. Running around the beach innocently, breeze gently hitting my face, I was certain I was winning this competition. As a precaution to secure my win, when Sky went to the bathroom, I took the prettiest rocks out of her bucket in hopes that she would not notice. When Sky returned from the bathroom, our parents insisted on cooling off from playing in the blazing sun, and take a refreshing swim in the ocean. We put our bright pink and purple buckets away and hopped right in.

Kicking my legs around and salt on my eye lashes, I spotted what appeared to be Sky's purple bucket in the water. I assumed that I just took so many rocks out that the bucket became too light and got swept away into the ocean by the strong Floridian breeze. In a hurry, I jumped out of the water and yelled at Sky to grab her bucket before it washed away, I wanted a fair competition and was not going to win by default. As soon as Sky heard me, it was apparent that she was worried about her purple bucket and the possibility of never seeing it again. With determination, Sky ran to the bucket's rescue.

When she went out to reach for what she thought was the bucket and grabbed it, she realized that it was not actually her beloved purple bucket but instead, a giant Man-o-war. Sky's shriek was heard from miles away. The Man-o-war had stung her legs severely making her barely able to walk. My family and I ran to Sky, got her out of the water and immediately called for help. As Sky was brought out of the

water, the Man-o-war's tentacles were still attached to her leg and were spread about 40 feet across the beach. That image alone was terrifying on top of not knowing what was going to happen to my twin. Lifeguards quickly responded and came to her rescue. Jetting down the beach on their dirt bikes wearing the classic red lifeguard uniforms, I felt a sense of relief and comfort in knowing she was going to be taken care of.

I still could not help but feel so guilty. Did I ruin our Florida getaway? Did Sky think I did this on purpose? With all these thoughts running through my little 8-year-old brain, I began to burst out into tears. Still hysterical, my family and I went to the hospital with Sky and I refused to leave her side until I was certain that she was not in any more severe pain. Once she stopped crying, I stopped crying. Needless to say, the competition became a futile memory and I was enthralled in making sure Sky enjoyed the rest of our Florida vacation, with no more surprises.

Cold-Hearted Betrayal
David Mekler

The freezer door wasn't supposed to lock behind me. That wasn't part of the plan. I'm getting ahead of myself. My name is Brandon Moratory and I run a failing restaurant along with my older brother Gram. Our family business wasn't always failing though; before the incident we were actually doing quite well. The incident led to all of this. The loss, the betrayal, and now my impending doom. Now, what is the incident, and what does it have to do with me? Well that is a story I wish to share and document before I pass.

It all started on a cloudy rather polluted summer day- July 23rd, 2036 to be exact. Business was booming as usual in our diner when suddenly breaking news from the diner's hologram reported that bees were officially extinct. Little did we know that moment would lead to the greatest worldwide depression in recorded history. Without bees, our whole agriculture and food chain slowly collapsed, which made the

food industry barely sustainable. Everywhere from fast-food chains to supermarkets shut down. And due to the collapse of the food industry thousands of people worldwide lost their jobs causing the world's economy to collapse.

Paper currency became obsolete and the exchange of calories took its place. This huge economic transition led butcheries to gain more value than banks and cooperative food industries to replace all pre-existing forms of government. Luckily for us we had a locker full of meat, which quintupled our business' worth. For the following couple of months only the rich could afford to eat as they had, while everyone else reverted to eating bugs due to their high nutritional value and easy accessibility.

Although we were making the more money than we ever had with roughly one customer a week, Gram and I knew our restaurant was going to shut down due to the diminishing inventory. Without the option of finding a new job because of the harsh search for employment, we had to come up with a plan in order to feed our families and keep our homes. The incident changed Gram. He lost his wife to looters the first week after the incident and has never been the same. He rarely ever speaks to anyone apart from his daughter. It's as if he blames everyone for his wife's passing. As for me I live happily with my wife and 12 year old son.

One day as I was closing up the diner, which hadn't had customers in weeks, from the back of the kitchen I heard Gram yell, "I got it. I figured it all out. We're set I tell you". It turned out that his plan was more criminal than I would have liked but it was the only option we had. He had come up with a plan to rob the national meat reserve, which held billions of dollars worth of frozen meat. After five weeks of figuring out the details of the heist we were ready to execute it.

The plan was to order a shipment of meat from the reserve for the diner. However, once the armored freezer truck started getting ready to leave we would jump in. When we got inside the meat reserve via the truck we were to stealthily make our way to the meat locker and drag boxes of meat outside. While all of this is occurring, we had Trish

our hacker shut down the reserve's security system and we had Bruce our driver wait at the entrance. The plan was difficult yet possible for us to pull off. The plan was to split the money four way. The plan was to steal enough meat to be set for life. Yet that's not how the plan went down.

The plan was working perfectly fine. We had gotten into the reserve and had dragged most of the meat outside without being noticed. It wasn't until Gram and I went in for the last box of meat when things went south. As I was pushing the last box of meat out of the freezer Gram stopped me at the door and said, "forgive me brother". The next thing I knew, I was half-unconscious in the freezer. My own brother had betrayed me for the sake of money. Now I am slowly losing feeling of my fingers as I carve out my story onto this wall. If this is ever read, please tell my wife and kids that I love them and if you meet a man named Gram Cain Moratory report him to the police.

Falmount Mountains
Alex Ring

My mother broke every dish in the house that day. There's a reason for this, but to understand it let's go through my day. As my alarm blasted "Fireworks" by Katy Perry to wake me up, I immediately smacked the snooze button. Little did I know that I didn't press the snooze button, but I actually pressed the off button. About an hour and a half later my mother came banging on my door screaming "Rick!!!!!!!!" I responded with a groggy answer of "what?" She retorted "it's 10:30 you were supposed to meet your grandmother at Golden Corral an hour ago!" I jumped out of bed picked out a wrinkled collared shirt and khakis, hopped in my blue Honda and took off. After I rushed to Golden Corral we had a mediocre brunch - Golden Corral was her favorite restaurant. It was good to see my grandmother, but she didn't look great. She was diagnosed with arthritis in her left hand a couple months back and it has gotten really bad.

My grandmother, whose real name is Betty, is already a very short women around 5'1, but because she hunches and that makes her look even shorter. She was wearing a dark blue dress that was covered with faded white polka dots, jet black leggings, and white Sketchers. She claimed that Sketchers made her walk better because of the "advanced soles."

After I got back to my house it was nearly 12 PM. I decided that I should go for a run. I walked up the blue carpeted stairs and opened my white door to get to my room. I changed into bright orange spandex, dark blue shorts, and a puke green tank top. As I stepped outside I could instantly tell it got hotter from this morning. A heatwave must have come through because it felt hot as hell outside. I went back inside because I forgot my water bottle. As I was getting my Camelbak the unimaginable happened.

I will never forget what happened next. The phone was buzzing and it was from "Falmount Mountains." I was pretty confused because I had no idea what Falmount Mountains was or why they would be calling

me. I picked up the phone and they said in a very concerned tone "umm, is this Marcy Kane?"

I responded instantaneously "no that's my mother, but what's-" the man cut me off.

"I have some bad news," the man said very quietly.

I thought this was a prank call or the guy is mixing up my mom's name with someone else, so I said, "I think you have the wrong number bud."

The man said, "Do you know Jason Fer."

I paused for a moment, then in a concerned tone I said "Yeah, that's my biological father."

The man responded, "I have some troubling news regarding Mr. Fer, there was an accident toda-."

I hung up the phone and grabbed my iPhone. I texted my mom "I think dad died."

I had a weird relationship with my father. Around ten years ago, a few days after my sixth birthday, my dad left. He and my mom got into an argument about finances and he stormed off and left, never to be seen again. At least that's the story my mom told me. From what I can remember, my father was 5'10 and had sandy blond hair. He had a skinny frame and bright green eyes. He had a scar just underneath his right eye from when he got punched in a bar fight. He was quite tan and used to brag how he could never get a sunburn.

Growing up, I tried not to think about my Dad much, but that was impossible. As much as I wanted to forget him, I couldn't. I felt anger towards him because of how he made my mother feel. His departure really messed with my mother. She got depressed when he left, and had never been the same since. My mother started taking up smoking, and as much as she tried to hide it from me, I heard her crying almost every night. I thought that if he tried to come back in our lives, I could accept him. It hadn't been easy growing up without a father. I felt like he abandoned me and my mother. I sat in my bed and turned off

my phone. I took out my old MP3 player and listened to "Cat's in a Cradle" by Harry Chapin. I just laid down and started crying. I don't even know why I cried, because my father was pretty much dead to me, anyway.

A few moments later, I heard the sound of my mom's 2007 green Honda pull in. I looked out my window and I saw her screaming at someone on her phone. I then saw her press "end call." I watched as she stormed up the red bricked stairs into our mudroom. Then I heard "CLINK!" I immediately ran downstairs to see what was going on. I saw my mom holding china that she received on her wedding night. Then I looked at the ground and saw shards of porcelain everywhere.

A Glass Half Full Kind of Day
Liana Suttin

The freezer door wasn't supposed to lock behind him. Steve woke up Saturday morning to a brisk wind blowing in through the window. He swiftly got out of bed to shut the window before walking into the kitchen. He knew that they had no food but decided to peer into the fridge, freezer, and pantry with the hope that maybe food had appeared miraculously throughout the night. Unfortunately, they were all like he had left them last night before going to bed. Empty. The kids would be up soon and he knew that his father wouldn't do anything about the lack of food, so he decided to take action himself. Steve had a friend of a friend who worked at Costco so he decided to head there in the hopes of getting food. He left the house with nothing but his clothes on, completely empty handed, and no money. He wasn't planning to go grocery shopping. He was going to steal food.

He had been to Costco a couple times before. They had large quantities of food for low prices which was good when you have 5 younger siblings and very little money. He rode his bike with a bin attached to the back so that he could carry home whatever he managed to gather. He arrived in about minutes and entered the store, heading directly for the back. He planned to take the identity of this friend of a friend he knew, in the case that he was noticed, and just claim he had forgotten his name tag. Fortunately, he was not noticed and continued towards the back of the store with ease. He knew there was some sort of extra storage unit in the back where the excess goods were kept, and that was the only way he could manage to take things and avoid being noticed. He continued forward, entering a door marked "Employees Only", and looked around at the ample amounts of food surrounding him. He took a moment to observe the room, which to him only seemed like a continuation of the store. Crates upon crates of food and beverages. As he turned the corner of the room, Steve spotted a silver door with a long wide handle. He had seen a walk-in fridge once before and assumed that this was one of them. Maybe he could manage to grab a couple cartons of milk and a dozen eggs or so. He approached, but once he had put his hand on the door handle and walked inside he quickly came to the realization that he had just entered a freezer.

Without a jacket or any sort of outer layer Steve quickly grew cold, developing serious goose bumps up and down his body. Although he didn't really need frozen goods, he decided to make the best of the situation since he was already inside. He planned to grab a couple frozen meats and then head out and look for a fridge before heading home. As he approached the opposite side of the freezer where he saw the meats stacked in heaping piles the metal door slowly closed behind him, making a giant thud as it shut and locked. Steve grimaced at the sound, and turned around only to realize what had just occurred.

"Shit" Steve remarked as he looked at the door which had just violently shut before him. He briskly headed for the door where he used both hands to jostle the handle for a steady 30 seconds. "Shit shit shit shit shit shit." Steve shuddered in pain as he slammed his own body against the metal door. He felt a shiver down his spine, a result of the increasing amount of cold air entering through the vents. Steve finally gave up once he began to feel a significant amount of pain on his right shoulder on the side of his body he had been slamming against the door. He lifted his sleeve to reveal a purple and black bruise. At this point he gave up, leaning against the metal door and letting his body slowly slide down onto the floor. He looked around at the various frozen meats and vegetables surrounding him, at least he would have food to eat if left in here long enough he thought. It felt to Steve as if the freezer was getting colder by the second, if that was even possible. Steve laid his head back on the cold metal door behind him, wondering if and when someone would find him, and what they would say once they did. Getting in trouble at this point for trespassing was the least of his problems. His real worry was that he would freeze to death, and be found days later by an innocent employee who had been sent to grab a package of frozen steaks. Steve thought about the scarring image this employee would be left with after seeing his frozen body propped up against the door. More importantly, he wondered what his siblings would think or who they would depend on once he was gone. The thought of his good-for-nothing father wasn't much of a help settling his growing angst. Steve sat in that same spot for about thirty minutes, which felt like hours before he felt a rumbling behind him.

Was he having a stroke? Was this it? His last moment on earth? The door creaked open, leaving the bottom half of Steve's body inside the freezer as the rest of his body flopped onto the floor directly outside the freezer. He looked up to reveal a startled employee starring down at him. "What the" remarked the confused employee. Despite his apparent delirium, Steve felt the upper half of his body starting to reheat and scrunched the rest of his body up the best as he could with his limited energy in order to get his body out of the freezer. Just as he started to regain some of his body heat, Steve realized the employee was no longer there. Steve, with limited energy at this point laid outside the freezer regaining his heat and strength. The employee returned moments later, this time with his manager. The manager handed Steve a blanket and put out his hand to assist him off the floor. From there Steve proceeded to follow the manager to his office, where he would awkwardly explain how he ended up in the freezer at Costco. From there he expected to be escorted out by a guard, or worse, arrested on the spot for trespassing. But instead the manager took pity on Steve and his pathetic reason for ending up stuck in a freezer at Costco, and so he gave him a 100 dollar gift card to Costco to use at he pleased and let him go.

Despite his run in with the manager and trespassing experience that potentially resulted in prison time, Steve came out of Costco without an understanding of how he could have prevented the situation.

Instead Steve left with a new appreciation for the life he had. He had already spent more than enough time pitying himself for the difficulty of his home life was. Steve had dreaded ending his back to back shifts at work only to return home to his alcoholic father still asleep at 5PM. He had often stayed up far past dawn wondering why his mother had been taken away from him at only the age of 6. There hadn't been a day that went by that Steve hadn't pondered what his life would be like if instead of a selfish father, he had two fully functioning, loving and caring parents to look after his 5 younger siblings so he didn't spend all his waking hours doing so himself. However, after his traumatic experience at Costco these weren't the kind of things Steve

was thinking about anymore, and instead they were replaced by his gratitude for the things he did possess.

Moments with My Father
Reena Zuckerman

Hi,

I want to share stories with you, as it is the anniversary of his death. I know in order to do this, I need to give a little bit of background. My father was a Navy man, and was killed on December 25th, 1991, in the Gulf War. He left me, and my mother, and right now just me, as my mother suffers from Alzheimer's disease.

Here are the stories of my father.

Story 1:

My father had started in the Navy when he was in college. His family was not able to pay for him or either of my two uncles to go to college. He decided to do ROTC, my uncles decided to go into trade school. If my father had not done ROTC, I would have never been born. My father met my mother while away at college, Penn State to be exact. They were in the same psych class. My father always told me that he noticed my mother because of her more outlandish clothing choices, and because she was the one that made the most noise. The professor apparently hated her, but loved my father. He always told me, "Hey kid, I got an A in that class. Your mother, from an upper middle-class family, she got a B-, a fucking B-, you should be so proud." After that psych class, they hung out more and more, and then one year after the graduated, they got married in Pittsburgh, 1975. It was on February 2nd, indoors, and the backdrop was snowy. Due to the snow, a lot of people could not make it, but I am told it was so beautiful. I have seen pictures.

Story 2:

When I was born, my father was over-seas. I did not even meet him till my second birthday. He came home on my birthday, I do not remember, but so my mother has told me. He brought home a stuffie for me, an eagle, to represent both America, and also Germany, where he was stationed when I was born. The eagle though was purple, so as not to choose sides, per say. My father taught me how to ride a bike at the age of three. Some might say that it was ambitious but, military spirit at work! He bought me a German-made bike, it was red, white,

and blue, to make him feel more patriotic. I rode in a park near my house, small town USA, or to be more specific small-town Pennsylvania, about 12 kilometers from Pittsburgh. The park had a basketball court, that's where I learned, a playground, a baseball field that most kids used for soccer even though they were explicitly told not to, and open grass area. I ended the day with lots of Band-Aids, but also a trip to my favorite ice cream shop, and a chocolate covered cone filled with Oreo ice cream. My father indulged me with many bike rides over the years, and I still bike now, though with a different bike then the one he gave me that day in the park.

Story 3:

One of my fondest memories of the three of us was at a Steelers' playoff game, the AFC Championships, when I was ten. That year the Steelers were giving out sweet seats to service members and their families. My father, mother, and I got to watch a game with the Steelers' owner, and after the game I got a signed jersey from number 82 himself, John Stallworth, he was inducted into the hall of fame in 2002. He went to the pro bowl that year, as the Steelers did not go to the Super Bowl that year. Going back to the game, even though the Steelers lost, it was an amazing game. The Miami Dolphins won that game, and went on the Super Bowl. The game was super loud, and I ate a lot of hotdogs and popcorn. Each time the Steelers scored, the whole stadium, or at least the Steelers fans, did a wave, and the cheerleaders waved their pompoms. Before the game started, during the National Anthem, the camera panned over to us, and everyone in the stand saluted my father. The camera then went around and showed other military families that were present. During halftime, the big TVs in the stadium showed pictures of service men and women, and there was a firework display that included the phrase "Thank you troops and your families". The Steelers went all out, as it was the last game of the season they were going to be allowed to celebrate their military fans. I still have the terrible towel that I swung at that game, the last my father and I went to together. I still try to go to a game every year, but sometimes it is too expensive. That terrible towel, I framed and is hanging in my room. That game was one of my happiest memories, and

because he was only really in my life for ten and a half years, though he was my father for 14.

Story 4:

This is the hardest story to tell, the last time I talked to my father before he was deployed in 1990. The day he left, was my birthday, he left the same day that I first met him. I drove with him and my mother down to the base, the Naval Support Activity, in Mechanicsburg, PA. From there, he went on a helicopter to Fort Bragg, where he met up with the other Navy airmen to fly out to the war zone. During the drive, my father and I sang songs from musicals the whole way. Tt was one of the things my father and I bonded over along with sports, and Shakespeare. When he got out of the car, I forgot to say all of things I would have said if I knew it was the last time I was going to see him. However, of course, I did not know, and I regret everything I did not say to him. How many "I love you"'s did I miss, how many, "I am so proud of you, the fact you defend this country, and that I am proud to call you my father"'s did I not say. He never got to see me in my prom dress, or my graduation gown, and he will never be there when I defend my thesis. The only thing I did was that I decided to major in biomedical engineering. My father always said, "Kid, if I did not have a career in the military, I would have been a scientist." He loved biology, he took multiple classes at Penn State, even minored in Biology. Even though, at first, I hated science, and sometimes I still do, I went, and am still in bio, because that is what I am doing for my father.

All I have now, on this, the 26th anniversary of his death, are the stories in my head. I do not even have my mother's stories anymore, so these nuggets are all I have. This is why I am sharing them with you, Story Corps, so my father's stories and his legacy can live on.

Thank you for letting me share these stories, I do have more, and I would love to come back and continue to share them.