

Echoes

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WORDS

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This place they call home

She's the queen of her house. She just watches the television in her room, happy. It's hard to tell what she's done in the far past, but now; she takes care of one child at home, her husband and her two grown up sons who can't seem to stay away from the nest.

A long time ago, she wasn't called Maytinee Mayo nor was she a queen. Instead, she was a young girl growing up in Thailand, a far place from here. She lived with her mother, father, and two older sisters. Kind of. Her father only came around once a month and her eldest sister ran off one day. Then, her mother died.

All she had were her sisters and her father. Then he died too. She grew up fast, fending for herself. She met many people, had a not-so-happy relationship, had a son and moved to Germany. That's where she met him. Her king. Joe Mayo wasn't royalty nor did he have a lot of money under his belt. They met, they argued, they fell in love.

Together, they moved to Oklahoma, perhaps not the greatest setting for a fairy tale, and had a son. Then a daughter. When they went back to Germany, they brought her son from a previous marriage into the family.

Time went on. The two sons each rebelled, straightened out and always come back to visit. The daughter is still there, but that doesn't mean the king and queen don't count how many more months until she is gone. For now, they wait.

She watches television in the bedroom and he programs on the computer in his office. Sometimes, he'll head down the stairs as she comes out of the room.

"You can't go downstairs without your queen," she says, walking over to join him. He just smiles sheepishly and they head downstairs, arm in arm, in this place they call home.

Jennifer Mayo

Feet on the ground

It's family night in the Deneui household. Jeff, his wife Tiffany, and their four little children gather around a board game, and the bond between the family grew stronger with each roll of the die. In five minutes, the living room is cleaned up, and the kids are making a mess preparing for bed. Their dad needs his rest, because the next day he will be back at work, selling carpet to provide for his family.

Family time is important to the Deneui folks. When Jeff was little, he never spent much time with his family. They never were together, mostly because of their busy schedules, always running in opposite directions.

Then, his dad passed away from a heart attack when he was twelve.

He grew up missing his dad, and wishing he got more time with him. He worked hard as an athlete, knowing his dad was watching him somewhere. He excelled, and got a scholarship to play soccer at a small seminary school in California.

It was there that he met his wife, Tiffany, and married her after "falling head over heels in love." It was also there where he tore his rotator cuff and was told he wouldn't be able to play sports anymore.

He got a job out of college to be a youth group pastor in Colorado. He spent a lot of nights counseling, consulting, and guiding the children he came to love. But the church split and he lost his job.

Now, he works at Mohawk Carpet Sales. He is a sales representative, and is slowly working his way up through the ranks. Maybe one day, he'll own the store. But for now, he needs his sleep. He's got a hard day of work tomorrow.

Mac Orlady

Living to give back

It all happened so fast.

The incredible pain shocked her body violently as the pressure in her head became unbearable. The twenty nine year old, Mary Buster, knew she was having a stroke. She pulled her car over to the side of the road and waited for help, "I laid on my horn just praying for someone to come."

Help shortly arrived after a trucker found Mary in her car, the man responsible for saving her life. After waking up at the hospital Mary learned the terrible news of her diagnosed vasculitis. The disease gave her a 5% chance of living for five more years and made it difficult for Mary to recognize her disabilities positively. The stroke took all motor control on the left side of her body and restrained her to a wheelchair for seven months.

The once active nursing graduate that became the manager of A1 Paramedic Services right out of school was now learning to walk and write again. The once licensed practical nurse for flight for life, now had joint pain, circulations issues, two knee replacements, back surgery, and three toes amputated from the vasculitis.

This disease has kept Mary from her passion of nursing but not from the gratification of giving back. Now at the age of fifty three, Mary works as an accountant for her church and joined the organization, Hospice, which helps families mourn over the lost of a loved one. Living beyond the 5% of vasculitis patients has allowed her to overcome these obstacles without slowing her down. The opportunity of being alive has allowed her to do what she's always loved, helping others in need.

If you ever pass by the First Methodist Church in Littleton you may find a kind woman, limping on a cane, singing in the choir. Most people who do attend the Sunday morning service see her as she greets you at the door, but they know little about her and why she always has a smile on her face.

Tia Totura

Waiting for the lost cause

She opens her eyes each morning to the same cold face, always angry and always bitter. She fixes him breakfast each morning, always asking if she can have some, and always receiving a harsh denial.

She does his dishes and his laundry each day, she shops for his groceries, and she sacrifices her relationships with her family members.

All for a boy, 18 years old, who will never return the favors.

Bridgett Higdon is 20 years old. She is kind, outgoing, generous, loving, and protective. Her life was on track, save for a few bumps along the road, until she met her boyfriend-to-be, Carter. He is a rebel, a bum, an arrogant addict. He frequently sends himself to the hospital for his substance abuses, and treats people as playthings.

Bridgett is no exception.

She is one of the many girls he's been with in the past year, and despite the advice of those who surround her, she has no intention of leaving him.

Why?

Because all of her life she has been helpless.

Because she had a father similar to Carter, who overdosed and drove off the road on her 5th birthday.

Because all of her friends are in jail, dead, or sent away to military academies.

Because he gives her just enough inspiration to carry on with the one-way relationship.

Because she believes she sees the angel inside of the demon.

Because she loves him.

Each day, she toils hour after hour to give him everything that she can. And each day, she receives no reward or acknowledgment.

She was supposed to be a doctor. A lawyer. A vet. Anything but a servant to a boy who refuses to treat her justly.

Many in her family believe her to be a lost cause. They believe that Carter has damaged her so severely that she is beyond salvation.

Bridgett, however, will continue to wait for the day when the boy inside of Carter decides to become a man.

Kat Donegan

An epiphany

It was just moments ago she felt happy.
Just moments ago she had what she was missing.

Just moments ago nothing could get in her way.

Just moments ago she felt complete.

But now a swarm of emotions tickled down her body, down her spine and into her stomach, leaving her with a heavy heart and a numb mind. Inch by inch she was drowning, but she knew she had to stay strong; not only for herself, but also for her family. She had to conquer her emotions before it enveloped her and drowned her in its shallow depths. So she took a deep breath, hugged everyone, nodded in agreement with everything they said, and stepped out of the house and into the car. Hours later she landed in Colorado, a place she called home.

Saying goodbye had never been harder. Family is something Jenny never thinks about. She has always thought she could do just fine without them, until she felt their warmth and love. She now understood what she longed for: being with her family. She craved spending time with people like her, who were not only connected by a relationship, but also by the deep crimson colored blood running through their veins. With them, Jenny found that sense of belonging that every part of her body craved for. It was that feeling of protection, strength, and love that completed her, and made her feel so euphoric, she was about to burst in happiness.

Never before had it been so apparent that this was what she needed.

This one trip changed her perspective and she realized that it wasn't worth staying away anymore. She discovered her new self, one that knew where to nourish her heart and soul and stood ready for the big changes that were underway.

Priscilla Philip

Youngest of five

William McGavin is the youngest of five boys. He isn't entirely the youngest – as his twin brother James shares the title with him – but he sure feels that way.

James has beefed up in the recent years, and William often finds himself on the bottom of a scrum, but he doesn't care, and he doesn't quit either.

Will might be the smallest, but in no way is he the faintest of heart. He's out there in the middle of the game, he's in the battle over the television remote every Saturday morning, and he's often in trouble for breaking his glasses.

He doesn't care if the odds aren't in his favor, or how many pounds his opposition has on him. Even if Will isn't favored to win, he grinds through it. He's a trooper.

In a large family there is little that you can call your own, but Will has one such thing. He has a knack for artistry. He is less than a decade old, and already produces better illustrations than all of his older brothers combined.

One of his water-color paintings is proudly displayed in his father's office, and is envied by the whole floor. It puts a smile on his father's face to tell people, "That was actually my son's work."

Will is something special. He's not so much different from any other boy. He loves going to the pool in the summer, he loves playing with the neighborhood kids, and he loves rolling around in the grass with his dog.

Being the youngest of five boys is something that he has learned from and can take from for the rest of his life. He learned early on that life is rarely fair, and it hasn't slowed him in the least.

He will be ready for what ever life throws at him, and he will take it by the horns.

Matthew McGavin

Playing the music loudly

Jacob Dawson, a slightly overweight but undoubtedly lively kid, sat sobbing on the park bench near his house. He was tired and confused. He had been running – in more ways than one.

It happened every night, but it was usually only his mom. On the somewhat rare occasions that it was his dad too, he was left to fend for himself.

It was usually too much to handle.

On this particular night his parents had gotten very, very drunk. They began yelling at him and each other, screaming about his grades, which had steadily been declining for the last three years.

“I just can’t handle the stress of school on top of it all,” he said with a heavy sigh.

Two months ago his outlet, a girl named Rebecca he had been dating for about eight months, cheated on him and left him. His way of letting it all out was gone.

That park bench he is sitting on, was their bench. They would come and chat, and she would cheer him up. Now he sits alone, while his phone rings over and over. It’s his dad begging him to come home, tears also flooding his eyes.

His mom is passed out by now. After a few hours he wanders home, his favorite Stevie Ray Vaughn tunes playing loudly in his ears.

When he creeps back into his house it is quiet again. For now the yelling and cursing has stopped. He checks on both of his sisters to make sure they are all right, then climbs into bed without changing.

He leaves the music on. Stevie will keep him company again tonight.

Dusty Ellis

Living her dream

It’s a tough game. It’s been back and forth the whole time. This is unusual for the team, but she loves every second of it. She gets the ball and goes for the three. Time seems to freeze for that split second while the ball flies through the air towards the hoop. Swish! On the court everyone gives high fives and says “Nice one Meagan!” (She secretly thinks high fives are weird). Off the court, the crowd cheers. What the crowd doesn’t know is she has been preparing for this moment her whole life.

Meagan Fulps picked up her first basketball at age three, when her older brother got a hoop for Christmas. She was immediately interested in the sport, carrying the small ball with her everywhere around the house. She started actually playing basketball with her neighbors when she was about six, along with other sports, only for the fun of it. As she got older, her love for the game grew, along with her dedication for it.

The basketball season never ends for Meagan because she’s on a club team. Once school ball ends, club ball begins. She has spent every summer for the past six years traveling around the country meeting new people, playing the game she loves, and working to improve. It’s not easy though. She spent her 16th birthday on a plane, she missed her first prom, and she didn’t get one last goodbye to her grandma. In order to be the best she can, she misses out on a lot of memories.

After the game, she’s at home watching a movie with her family, drinking a chocolate shake. On Sundays, the only day she doesn’t have regular practice, she can be found at Bennigan’s with a few friends eating dessert and harassing the bartender.

All her hard work is shown by three state trophies and many scholarship offers. This summer she will be painting houses in her spare time to earn money to pay for the club expenses (It can cost thousands of dollars). She also plans to go to a few basketball camps and visit colleges. Other than that, it will be a lot like the past six years, playing b-ball, living her dream.

Ellie DePue

Heaviest burden

The cars fly by on I-27. A man walks past the construction site supervising. He limps but he walks on. Raymond Lee Powell works throughout the day trying to fix what is broken.

Soon it will be time to wrap up the day and drive back to his home. His home, which has held six children and over twelve grandchildren. A house in which he comes home, grabs a plate of dinner and sets down to do the daily cross word puzzle.

Not once does he complain. Not once does he show his burden.

Oldest in a family of ten, Raymond learned at a very early age life is not always kind. At the age of 4 the doctors diagnosed him with polio. A year later a cure was developed, but it was too late.

In and out of surgery for five years, the doctors were not able to fully reconstruct the leg which the polio spread to.

High school started, and Raymond joined gymnastics. The rings and horse were his events; this is where he had power.

Two years later a marriage took place and a year later his first child came into his life.

Thirty-five years of coaching basketball, coaching soccer, leading boy scouts, white water rafting, work and challenges passed him. But now he sits in his quiet living room with his wife by his side.

Raymond still cracks a joke and most of the time you can even believe he does not notice he has a disability. Never would he admit it.

On Sundays his grandchildren tumble into the house waiting for Grandpa the alligator to play outside and put them up in trees. He can and will hold their weight.

God places the heaviest burden on those who can carry its weight.

Corrin Powell

An unusual proposal

He stood by the Christmas tree anxiously watching her reach for the small, alluring present. He'd had it planned for weeks. Everyone was in on it; even her. She just didn't know it yet.

When she opened the little black box, after removing the wrapping paper, a look of shock crossed her face.

"A golf ball?!" she exclaimed half joking, half in anger.

Jonah Baker feared for his life as his girlfriend winded up, ready to pitch the golf ball towards his head, but stopped when something caught her eye. On the back of the golf ball were four hidden words.

"Will you marry me?" he repeated after she'd read it. Tears swelled in her eyes as a smile consumed her face.

"She wouldn't stop crying for like 10 minutes, and she hadn't even given me an answer yet. I actually had to ask if that was a yes. She said 'of course it is.'"

Baker and his fiancé, Jessa Rae, met in Cody, Wyoming in 2002 when they both worked for the same doctor. The two quickly became friends, yet as the friendship grew stronger, he felt a connection with her and eventually asked her out.

After three years of dating, it had been a running joke between her friends and Baker that she wanted something round and shiny. He always said that if she really wanted a golf ball, all she had to do was ask.

Although he laughs about it and pretends to be unemotional, the idea of a wife and starting a family is still sinking in. It was the biggest step he'd taken in his life up until that point, and it marked the beginning of a new chapter for him.

As Baker sits at his desk doodling, throwing out his usual sarcastic comments, he can't for once, when it comes to the future of him and his wife.

"Marriage is a pretty big deal."

Suzie Wagstaff

A hole in her heart

Her name was Lisa, his name was Mike. It started out as your average, everyday typical love story. Boy meets girl. Girl falls in love with boy. Boy and girl get married, and boom; end of story. Or was it?

Was the pain that Lisa endured that was caused by Mike a part of the typical quality in this love story? Were Lisa's tears due to happiness or regret when she found out she was pregnant after eight years of rocky marriage to a man she felt a one-sided love for? Lisa loved Mike with all of her heart, but after she became pregnant, it "seemed as if everything changed all of a sudden," she whispered.

Mike was going through two different jobs a month, getting fired from all of them, so anyone could tell he was stressed. Some people just can't handle stress in the mature way others can, Lisa observed, and Mike is one of those people.

He sought relief in the bottoms of bottles and the last few crumbs of white powder on the kitchen table. Little did Lisa know, the money Mike was using for his "stress relievers" was coming straight out of their joint bank account, in which she had been depositing money to help raise their unborn child.

When little six pound, eight-ounce Kaiden was born, Mike was overwhelmed with responsibility, and in the next few days was missing in action. Lisa has heard from him since.

She said he has "started to become a better person," and joined the military. He is stationed in Alaska, so he does not get to see his son very often, but he is busy enough with his new wife, but still finds time to send his ex-wife child support money. Lisa says that there will never be anyone that can replace the space that is left empty in her heart by Mike, her one true love, but there is one man who comes very close to filling the hole: Kaiden.

As they say, a mother's love is unconditional, and Lisa's love for her son will never be one-sided.

Katelyn Nook

Gone baby gone

It wasn't just any other typical day. June 26, 2007 to be exact. The clouds were thinly plundered into the aqueous blue sky, the wind was gently curling through the bristles of aspen trees, and the sun's rays swept warmly across the mountains' surface. Perfect day, perfect weather, perfect time to hang-glide.

A couple hours later, the news leaked out; but within minutes a family of four sped off to the hospital. The ride was eerily silent as fear lingered in the air.

Brittini was just like any other 17-year-old girl butting heads with her parents. Instead of fighting a double-headed war, however, she only had distress with her father. They barely talked anymore, on occasion she would go over to visit his house, and the words "I love you" were close to never mentioned. Unfortunately, these actions could not be taken back at this point.

"When we got to the hospital, he was already dead. His heart stopped about two hours after the crash. We were allowed to see him, but I barely recognized him. His fingers were missing, his face was torn apart, and... he was missing part of his leg. Why'd it have to be my daddy? Why did it have to be now?" Brittini's tears soaked into the shoulder of my shirt as she continuously questioned "Why?" the night it happened.

Now, close to 11 months after the accident things are looking up for Brittini although a big part of her life has now departed. Before she leaves her mom's house, she makes sure to say "I love you," and kiss her mom on the cheek. She wears a smile constantly.

"I wish I could take things I've said and done back while I had to chance to sit with him face to face. I miss him, but he's always here with me." As she whispered this final statement, her fingers fiddled around with the trinket around her neck; a gold heart filled with some of her father's ashes. On the backside "R.I.P Daddy" was gently engraved.

Jaquia Respass

Looking on the bright side

Addison Valdez is currently attending Rock Canyon High School in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, but not by choice. A life of partying led to the unfortunate result of being kicked out of her house and sent to live in a completely different part of the nation. Just over a year ago-weeks before her sixteenth birthday-everything and everyone she had known was taken from her.

After a shaky upbringing in a rough Las Vegas environment with only a single mom to care for her, Addison's life turned upside down. One Sunday morning, following a house party her friend had thrown, she was given a single suitcase for her belongings and told that she was going to Colorado to live with her father. Before it even hit her what was going on, Addison had landed in a place she knew only through pictures and the occasional visit. Now, she is forced to call this place home.

Life is easier now, but the pain of leaving her friends and home city will never leave. "The hardest thing is not having my friends that I grew up with to support me, like most people do here." She said with a single tear forming in her eye. At least an hour a day is set aside to catching up with old friends and hearing the latest news from her old high school.

But life will never be the same for Addison Valdez.

Slowly but surely she has learned to adjust to her new surroundings and those surrounding her. In fact, she has even found her passion in life: snowboarding. On any given day in the winter, she is up in the mountains with her newfound friends tearing it up with the best of them, and it is only her first year.

This aside, life will never be the same for Addison Valdez

Nothing will ever erase the pain of leaving the life she loved, but as she is always heard to be saying, "Hey, it coulda been worse."

Scott Branson

The song plays on

Lois paced her living room floor slowly, her slippers making soft, shuffling noises against the dated, brown carpet. Beyond the lacy window hangings night had settled in, encapsulating the suburban house in black.

"All right! All right everyone, settle down now," said the stereo, a gift from her three grown children one Christmas. She still didn't know how to work it well, but she had figured out how to play the tape. "If you're real quiet for us, we'll go ahead and sing ya'll another song. How bout that?" The noise of the tape was crackled and faint, though still discernible. The tape was a recording of an old record that her kids had made for her on her last birthday.

Lois picked an aged and yellow photograph up off the coffee table. Four smiling girls looked back, each one young and beautiful. The Harmon Sisters.

The voices on the tape began their song. Four voices, strong and sweet. Lois recognized the deepest one as her own. It sounded soulful, the perfect compliment to her sisters' higher tones. It has been a long time since the Harmon Sisters traveled from town to town, singing. They had been a popular commodity once, in small-town Ohio.

Lois set down the picture and ran her hand through her thin gray hair. She looked at the hand. It had long since twisted under the influence of arthritis. It didn't look like the hand of the young, vibrant singer that serenaded her now with a song about love.

Love. She thought of her first husband, who died in the war only shortly after they were married. She thought of her second husband, whom she had watched deteriorate before her eyes, a victim of Alzheimer's. She thought about how the disease would soon start affecting her, too.

Lois sat down on the floral sofa, and felt her age.

Maria Lawson

Something to count on

Tuesday and Saturday afternoons are baking days at Frank's Diner.

It's a small restaurant, with eleven tables and a bar, lying obscured by trees off the side of a roaring highway outside Baltimore. But somehow, they make a profit. The best seller? Caramel Cake.

Tony, the freckly, 17-year-old waiter smiles revealing a retainer. "The Caramel is my favorite," he says. "We can sell up to six or seven of those a week." And when the only regulars are highwaymen who frequent the motel next door on their way passing through, that's a lot of cake.

There is only one thing Tony likes better than Caramel Cake: Kayaking.

His first experience with the sport was just over a year ago, when his step mom remarried a man from Durango, Colorado. It was love at first paddle. Last Wednesday he got back from Connecticut, where he'd spent a week on the water with his older half-brother. "It's 30-40 degrees colder there than it is here, so it's intense."

And as soon as school finishes for the year, he's going kayaking again.

Merely mention white water and Tony grins. "Yeah, it's hard-core," he says, with a hint of giddiness.

Maybe some day there will be enough money for him to buy his own gear. Until then, Tony works two jobs – at Frank's on weekends, and weekday afternoons at the local Subway.

Maybe some day his friends from school will stop chain-smoking long enough to take up a hobby, like kayaking. Until then, Tony conscientiously throws out the cigarettes when he finds them.

Maybe some day his parents will find a spouse they want to stick with. Until then, Tony promises to stick to – or at least respect – his own love, a girl named Teresa.

Maybe someday life will work itself out. Until then, he can always count on kayaking.

Maria Lawson

Just who she is

Alyse thought she was just an average, everyday teenage girl.

She had a younger brother to bother her, parents to nag her, friends to comfort her.

She had never attended the same school for more than two years and was in advanced programs since eighth grade, like many of her friends, like her parents wanted.

Alyse moved from Tampa, Florida to Highlands Ranch, Colorado between her sophomore and junior year. A move that was sudden and unexpected. One day after coming home from two weeks in Spain.

"We're moving to Colorado in six days,"

Junior year she was alone once again: New house, new neighbors, new state, no friends, no outlet but herself.

Like in anyone's teen years, there were things that she regretted, things said that hurt her.

Alyse had a hard time adapting to the new school, but she went at it as she always had. Alyse let friends take her to parties to get to know the kids around her at school.

But instead of acting how she thought others would want her to, she just stayed herself, and things all fell into place.

She met people with similar interests. People with goals. People who put effort into their work.

Senior year was just tough to go to school and try to keep her grades up. She learned a lot about herself academically and socially because she was open to new things.

After surviving the move, college was upon her and, once again, she stressed over everything.

Then graduation came into focus and she had to fight to come to school for three classes, let alone an entire day.

High school had its drama, its letdowns, its setbacks. But the best thing that she learned was to put her guard down and be herself.

Once she made herself do that, everything worked out.

High school was hard for Alyse Strampel, but the memories she gained and the life experiences she has are all a part of who she is and who she has become. In the end, it wasn't the hard parts, but what got her through them.

She was herself. Alyse was true to her own identity. It is what got her through the move, what supported her in the rough patches and why so many people want to get to know her. There is no Tampa Alyse, no Diver Alyse, and no Girlfriend Alyse. Alyse is just Alyse. That is what really matters and what gets you through.

Daniel Mead

Please don't worry

Mr. Bill still wore his pants pulled five inches higher than anyone else in the room, but they looked baggier than before on his smaller frame. He still had his brown tweed jacket with dark leather pads on his elbow and three buttons lined up one above the other, but it seemed to hang limply on his thin shoulders, more like on a coat rack than a living being. He still had his magically white hair, which hadn't seen brown in ages, but it was now barely noticeable with only small amounts remaining.

He stood up slowly from the cushioned chair in the back of the room and quietly made his way to the front, leaning on the desks where the students sat in order to make the distance. Forty children watched in utter silence.

After catching his breath, Mr. Bill told the class in a weak and scratchy voice, "I have pancreatic cancer."

His body trembled slightly and he coughed into his shoulder. He continued excruciatingly slowly, it all went slowly, "I don't want any of you to worry, because Jesus promises us life in Heaven with Him after death."

He had taught the lesson of eternal life in the Jesus BFF unit dozens of times. Boomed to the class about the grace of God. Described passionately the wonders of Heaven's streets of gold. And assured confidently that death is nothing to be feared.

This would be his last time and it was barely audible. Finally, he whispered to the class that this would be his last Sunday teaching and he wanted to share a personal song with them. Reaching a shaky hand, he pressed the little black button on the stereo.

"I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by Your side...

"I can only imagine, what my eyes will see, when Your Face is before me!

"I can only imagine. I can only imagine...."

Tears flowed freely down his deathly yellow face.

Sarah Linke

An eye-opening drive home

She slammed the door and started up the engine. The digital clock glared 9:35. A few other cars occupied the parking lot, but other than that, the night remained undisturbed. Inside, the music was blasting as to drown out the silence. Her and her younger sister, Tiffany, never talked on the long drives home from dance. They had nothing to talk about anyways; the age gap was too big.

However, the age difference was becoming a realization to her. Soon she would be going to college, and perhaps Tiffany and her would talk less than they do now. Perhaps there would be no more days that she could make fun of little Tiffy who twirled around trying to copy her dance moves.

Tiffy loved her big sis even if she did make fun of her all of the time. She had laid out the floor, and Tiffany was following behind with small footsteps. By now, the 11-year-old knew it was expected of her to do so. Everyone said they looked like identical twins even though one was older. It made Tiffy feel proud.

Yet the girl that she looked up to would soon be gone. The idea of how long her older sis would be gone for wasn't quite clear, but she did know that her sister was leaving her. Her sister was going to college.

She glanced over her shoulder at the girl with her head pressed up against the seat belt; sleeping. Her dark brown hair rested against the seat while her long lashes closed her eyes. Come to think of it, the young girl did seem to resemble her. Maybe she would miss that annoying little pest after all. Her eyes started to water at the thought of it. "Nah, it's only because I yawned," she confirmed.

She peeked back again and smiled.

Alexi Theodore

Jaja and Busha

The couple smile at each other as they knock on the door of the apartment building, both a bit excited, and nervous at the same time. The door creaks open to reveal a still very pregnant looking daughter holding the day old granddaughter. Rylee.

“Eight pounds, eight ounces. Can you believe it?” Sammie, their daughter and now first time mother, asks as she lets them both inside, out of the unusual bitterness on the April day. Mary, the now grandmother, slips inside and starts to coo over the new bundle of joy, who had to wear winter clothes home and is now cuddled in a pooh bear blankie. Robert pulls aside a bit and talks with Harley, the proud daddy, about how the dogs are taking to the new addition.

“So I guess this means that you guys are Busha and Jaja, now, hm?” Sammie asks as she adjusts the babe in her arms and does the ‘baby shuffle’, bouncing her a bit to keep her calm.

Both Robert and Mary chuckle a bit at this. Busha and Jaja are the Polish words for Grandma and Grandpa. When Sammie was little, she was confused as to why she had two Grandmas who weren’t the same person. So, on the polish side of the family, Sammie started to call her grandparents Busha and Jaja. Being the proud woman that she was, Grandma Sislow would not take to being Busha. That made her an old woman, one thing she vowed never to be. But now, long after the last Busha had passed on, the name had been passed on to a new grandmother, this time an Irish one, a slightly ironic situation.

Robert and Mary both look down at the small bundle that is cuddling in her mother’s arms. Busha and Jaja. For some reason, the title seems fitting. They both smile.

Katherine Sislow

He kept at it

The Korean War: A conflict that tore families apart, a conflict that tore the nation apart, a conflict that tore my grandfather’s life apart.

James Douglas Wiley had just finished his first college semester, the first semester in his family history. The “letter” tore him away from this great achievement. It gave him a date of departure, and other trivial information. His mother was torn apart by his deployment to Korea.

Jim was an Assistant Plans and Training Officer in the 10th Army, one which first occupied Korea. His brief education had set him apart from the thousands of others in the war. He was spared the role of a GI. He was torn apart from American life for four years, except for the letters that his family and typewriting professor sent him periodically. He was isolated from everything he had known.

Soon, he was able to return home with the expiration of his service. He had to leave all of his new “war buddies” behind. He didn’t know whether to be excited about his return, or mournful of “deserting his ‘war buddies’”.

The GI Bill then allowed Jim to go back to school. He was merely seen as a “damned average raiser” or a DAR for short. He was away from home long enough to lose his “civilian dignity” because he was treated as an “ignorant buffoon.”

He finished college with an economics degree. His classmate, seeing his potential, entreated him to apply at a local bank. He got hired, and had his talents and skills overlooked. He was torn between standing up for his dignity, or allowing the criticisms just roll on by. The latter attracted his decision.

Promotions found him in the banks as in the ranks. The culture of America had changed without him, and he was caught trying to catch up. He was torn away from family, friends and dignity, but his perseverance and hardship was just the prologue to the pleasures and benefits he reaped, the family he began, and “Papa” to everyone.

Kyle Mead

Getting the part

The theatre, those who enjoy it have a slightly different experience than those who live it. Or so Emilia would say. She has been learning from her early positions as a common understudy to her now confident roles as the leading lady.

Theatre is a fickle business, “You either got it or you don’t, it is all a game of winners and losers. For those people who think athletes are the only ones who suffer the anguish of defeat, they are dead wrong”, says Emilia.

The life of a high school actress is stressful to say the least but unfortunately, if this is a career Emilia wishes to pursue, high school will be the simplest her life will ever be.

The journey really got started for Emilia on an August afternoon in 2005. The small, yet confident Emilia emerged into the echoing theatre. The words, “Welcome to auditions for the fall play!” bounce through the theatre, from the lips of the enthusiastic director.

Audition materials are handed out. Suddenly Emilia, usually calm and collected, begins to panic, the grim reaper is here. The director calls for the first names to read lines.

And Emilia prays.

Her name has been called; she takes her now crumpled sheet of lines and bravely gulps down her nerves. The stage is hers now. Passion flows from her very words as she reads the lines. She stops, her heart beats like a hummingbird’s.

She has done the audition, the hardest part. But has she made the cast?

Emilia prays again, and she holds her breath as the director tapes the cast list on the theatre door.

The air escapes her as she reads the word over her name, Kate.

And sure enough that only means one thing: the lead.

Abby Roberts

In Loving Memory

Day in and day out Gary Davis wakes up to something that is still hard to conceive. Something he is constantly reminded of when he looks in the mirror.

A tattoo stares back at him, but Gary sees much more than just a tattoo.

He sees a man that would always love him and care for him.

A friend that he could always confide in and talk to.

A person to look up to; a role model.

They were so close, but now he seems so far away. He used to be in the office down the hall from his bedroom. Now that walk is a little further than that.

For Gary, this instills a sense of motivation.

He has grown up faster than most, and he believes that it is all for a purpose. However that purpose has not yet been revealed. He has had to help support his mother and his two younger brothers everyday.

You won’t hear him complain once.

Gary is one of the happiest kids you will ever meet. He has dealt with the cards that life has handed him ever so gracefully.

Gary lives at his grandparents’ house now with his mother and two younger brothers. He has competed at the varsity level in wrestling as well as baseball since he was a freshman.

He is constantly pushing himself to get better.

As Gary takes the field – or the mat – he is filled with an inner strength, and a determined attitude; a personal legacy that has been handed down to him.

“I just play my heart out and live each day as it comes,” says Gary, “that’s all you can really do.”

That man will always be there to Gary. The man within Gary, and the man that helped raise Gary.

As he turns from the mirror, his tattoo glimmers.

In loving memory of Dad.

Daniel Gilbert

Love

What is love? Haddaway asks this question in his famous song from 1993. This is a question that has plagued the minds of humans for centuries. Love is a strong feeling for someone, caring about them and their well being. Love isn't something that should be declared right after you meet someone. Just one look at someone doesn't mean that you're automatically in love with them, that's infatuation according to Lisa Dragan, which I believe too!

Lisa met Mike Dragan at Heritage Christian Center in Aurora, where they were both attending at the time. Lisa had just moved to Colorado and was new to the church. She had worked in the youth group at her old church in Kansas and wanted to get involved again here, in Colorado.

Mike was the youth pastor at Heritage so, of course, she wanted to meet him. The first thing she thought when she met, Mike, though was how sad his last name, Dragan, was because, "nobody would marry him with a name like that!"

She thought that it sounded demonic, which wasn't a good thing considering that he was the youth pastor. She was totally turned off by his last name yet, she ended up falling in love with him and getting married. How could that be? This happened because love comes softly just like my favorite book, "Love Comes Softly," by Janette Oake states.

As Lisa spent more and more time with Mike, she began to feel a connection, an attachment, that she couldn't explain considering that she didn't want to. This undesired feeling had crept up on her and it took her aback though she would never take any of it back. She had fallen in love with the man that she thought she could never possibly marry, let alone love at all, but she had become enchanted by him, enraptured.

Falling in love takes time and doesn't happen all at once. You have to know the real person before you can be in love with them and getting to know someone takes time, and plenty of it!

Brittany Dragan

Beneath the man

He is stubborn, a man who knows what he wants. "If you want money, then you have to work hard. There's no short cuts and you're gonna have to take some risks if you want to be successful," he once told me. He is, after all, a man who started his own business and knows very well that it takes money to make money. He can be mean when he has to, and nice when he wants to.

He is my father.

A normal kid growing up, he played sports and went on family road trips. He had a girlfriend and had good grades. He had a life of a growing boy with all the intention of a bright future.

When he turned 16, he did not have the birthday every 15-year-old kid dreams of having. He never got a car. He never got a huge party or a pile of birthday presents. Instead, he spent his birthday at a funeral.

His mom's funeral.

The following years my dad did not care about school. He got a job, got a dirt bike, and did whatever he pleased; his father had better things to do than worry about his son.

And before he knew it, his life was spiraling down. When he turned 18, his dad kicked him out of the house. He had nowhere to live. No mother to take care of him. No father that made sure he had a future. He had nothing. What he once had was all gone.

For a while, my dad felt sorry for himself. He got a welding job and spent some time by himself trying to make a living. He knew that if he wanted to be happy, he had to change.

When he turned 19, my dad changed. That year, he got into a community college and he worked to transfer to UNC. At UNC, he created the future he always wanted. He became a man, but I will never forget that beneath the man, there is a confused boy.

Jason Hobby

Learning the truth

Donald Walker, one might say, was a handsome old man. At age seventy, he still had jet-black hair and was six feet, six inches tall. He was the caretaker of a wonderful family of six, and when all his kids were grown up and out of the house, he sat around the with his eight beautiful grandchildren. By the year 2000, the only thing he did was sit around the house.

“Remember the Titans” was a movie just released that my grandpa had been given. He watched that movie maybe five hundred times or so and continued to just sit around the house. At first he would watch it once every month, but then he started watching it once a week.

Eventually, he was watching that movie twice a day. From one room away I always heard a loud chuckle on the same part, every time the movie was watched.

On the same parts every time, I would also hear him yell to my grandma, “Hey Grace, take a look at this fine team. My guys were that good back in the day.”

Every time, those same exact words. In time I, along with the rest of my seven other cousins, were growing to be so awfully tired of the movie. There was nothing else we could watch; he wouldn’t even change it to a great cartoon or a classic movie from his era.

One day I decided to investigate the situation. I finally asked him, “Papa, why have you watched this movie over and over so many times. Shouldn’t we watch something else?”

That’s when his reply was startling. “What are you talking about, Blondie?” he said. “I can’t remember the last time I saw this movie. I love it but haven’t gotten the time to watch it.”

I had gotten to the bottom of the investigation not knowing that a year later, Alzheimer’s disease, would take the life of Donald Walker.

Maddie Wallingford

First job

She stands there. Out of place, yet oddly fitting in. Her black pants, white shirt and black apron match others.

She stands there. At the end of a check out counter, she waits for the first customer to have their food scanned.

She stands there. An elderly woman comes up with a cart full of groceries. She braces herself as the food comes rolling down the conveyor belt.

She’s busy. She tries to keep the eggs and bread on top. Wait, here are some cans, those go on the bottom. New bag. Set back in the cart.

She takes a breath of relief as the woman walks by her smiling. She got through her first customer. She braces herself as the next items come rolling down toward her, smiling confidently, because she knows she can do this now.

She is walking outside of the grocery store. It’s bitterly cold, but she pushes on as she collects carts. Her fingers are freezing off as she struggles against the snow on the ground with rusty, ancient carts. She is pushing a stack of ten, trying desperately not to let them slide off into cars.

She pushes them into the row of carts waiting for customers. She smiles, it’s close to the store closing time.

As she checks herself out, her body is aching. She is tired. Her first day of real labor. It was everything she had thought it would be. Busy and tiring. Yet, as she walks out of the store and the five blocks home, she is smiling.

She is smiling because she just made seven dollars and 15 cents per hour. Her first day on her first job. It is a great feeling. The sixteen-year-old has finally found the feeling of independence.

Libby Bridges

A delayed union

His car was hit by a bus at the peak of his life.

In a single moment he was stopped short in his tracks, literally.

He became a paraplegic and told the woman of his dreams to leave him so she could find a better life.

She wouldn't leave him; they got married, danced their first dance, and bought a home together.

He didn't let his wheelchair stop him from traveling across the world, experiencing new things, and hanging out with friends and family.

The one thing missing in Brian's life was a child. A source of joy, someone to pass on family traditions to, one to call his own.

Just as he had not let his disability stop him before, he wouldn't let it slow him down now. He and his wife found an adoption agency, and very soon a baby girl from Kazakhstan entered into his life. Although he didn't know her, she lit up his life, he already loved her more than he could have ever fathomed.

Because of his disability, this time he didn't go with his wife when she went to pick up their little girl.

Kim went to Kazakhstan and picked up the child, her name would be *Amanda-loveable*.

The day before his dream would come true, the day before he would get to kiss the face of this blessing, Brian died.

Never to hold his child, never to wipe away her tears, never to give her to her groom.

But someday, he'll hold her, someday she'll know him, someday he'll tell her how much he loves her.

But today, he experiences eternity unrestricted by human flesh, untainted by pain, sorrow, and grief, unsoiled by sin, a life with God.

Madison Lian

Going the distance

A soccer ball from Italy. A plastic Eiffel Tower from France. A pair of earrings from Kenya. A kimono from Japan.

Amazement slowly turns into inspiration.

Krissie Rivera and her father have never gotten along. They weren't apart of what you call a functional family. She is not the typical daddy's girl. Behind that inevitable smile is a girl screaming within. Krissie wants freedom. As a preteen, she often thought of going to college, leaving at 18 years old, or joining the Navy. The Navy seemed perfect. It was time consuming and far away. But why would she want to leave her mother and two younger brothers alone with her father?

Her motive was mistaken. She started to think that her initial reason for wanting to enlist was immoral. She loves her family, even though they don't quite fit her taste. What other reasons could have geared her attention towards the Navy?

Krissie has recently realized how much she loves the idea of traveling the world. The gifts she received from a good friend of her mothers helped her grasp her true motivation. She loves the small toys and accessories from exotic cities she has never heard of. She loves to sit through the stories April, her mothers close friend, would come back to tell. Krissie, too, wants to become a raconteur. She wants to inspire people with her tales of travel and experience, of exploring and hard work.

The Navy offers such great heights. Krissie gets the chance to meet new people, travel around the world and be a reasonable distance from her father.

A simple, giggly girl Krissie realizes she will miss her family dearly, but she cannot wait for the day she can go from continent to continent, country to country, and city to city.

Inspiration slowly turns into patriotism.

Emily Rhodes

The unopened post office box

Down in Littleton about fifteen minutes from Highlands Ranch is a PO box. It goes unused and unopened except for three times a year. Birthday, Christmas, and Easter. Those are the only times Taylor hears from her biological father in California. That is three times too many, in her opinion.

Thirteen years ago, Taylor's mother Pam left Joe Curado once and for all. He had a heavy dependency on cocaine and meth along with alcohol and was not a man Pam wanted in her, or her daughter's life any longer. The final straw came one night when Joe threw a lamp at Pam, resulting in a brief electrocution. The proof is still visible on her right leg. Taylor was three.

The mother-daughter duo moved to Colorado where Pam's sister lived. Three years later Pam found Mr. Right and Victor Curci became Taylor's third parent and is who she has always considered "dad." He took her in entirely and raised her as his own; he even tried to adopt her, but because of the signatures needed, was unable to do so.

Meanwhile, Joe has not made a single child support payment and knows Taylor only by the photos Pam sends to his parents. Taylor's idea of him is also only as deep as an image. "Last Christmas he sent me three pictures of himself. My mom said I could see them if I wanted, so, of course I did, and now I completely regret it. Seeing him disgusts me." Ever since receiving the prints, his letters remain unopened.

A year and three months from now, Taylor will be leaving for college. She will also legally change her last name to Curci. But most of all, she will no longer be making a fifteen minute drive out to Littleton with her mom to a PO box that has only brought her things she doesn't like or want to see. Instead, it will go unused and unopened.

Sarah Classen

One day at a time

Born five weeks early at Glenwood Springs Hospital in Colorado, Matthew King was immediately put on a Flight for Life jet to Children's Hospital, while his mother Belinda King also suffering from complications was rushed to Swedish, where they both fought to live.

After a week, Belinda was finally able to see her son who was suffering from an irregular heart, and weak lungs. Her baby boy only 4lbs 11ozs and 16 inches long, was attached to a heart monitor, and oxygen for six weeks at Children's before he had gained enough strength to go home.

Walking out of the hospital a doctor stopped Belinda, he asked her, "Is this baby here for Craniosynostosis?"

This miracle doctor saved baby Matthew's life. Had he gone home from the hospital that day, he would have died within a week.

The doctor had discovered Matthew's fibrous joints between the bones of the skull were closing. This caused his brain to swell and put extra pressure on the front of his head. Matthew was immediately prepped for a twenty-six hour surgery.

After twenty six hours turned into thirty two, the doctors finally told Belinda her baby had successfully made it through surgery, but unfortunately he would be paralyzed on the left side of his body. Not only that, but the doctors had little faith that baby Matthew would live to be older than six.

Just happy her baby had made it through surgery, Belinda helplessly watched him knowing there was nothing left she could do but love him.

For day's baby Matthew fought for his life, when suddenly he started to move. Not just the right side of his body, but the left as well! It was a miracle no one expected. From then on he started to grow stronger one day at a time.

After six months of living at the hospital baby Matthew finally went home. To his home, to his room, to his big sister.

Matthew, who wasn't expected to live past six, will be twenty-one this week. He now works as an EMT saving lives, one day at a time.

Alita King

Overcoming all odds

As she walks out of school after soccer practice, Allie Boatright makes a phone call to her mom asking her to change her neurologist appointment. She says that she can't afford to miss her AP European History class that next Wednesday...again.

This is just an ordinary phone call between Boatright and her mom; it's all a part of keeping a balance between school, soccer and a series of doctor's appointments. When she was in the 7th Grade, Boatright began having serious migraines. Over the years her migraines have become worse and worse to the point that she has been forced to sit out from soccer and has even been admitted to the hospital because the pain was so unbearable. She has missed countless days of school and spent hours in bed praying for the pain to cease.

"There have been times where I just start crying in class and I can't even help it. It's all just a result of my head and I lose all control," Boatright says.

To deal with and migraines, Boatright attends regular Neurologist appointments. It is rare to see her at school Wednesday mornings because more than likely she is at the doctor of home sick with a migraine. However, when friends do see her around school they will never see her without a smile on her face; sometimes hiding that fact that she may not be feeling so great. On top of everything she still manages to make good grades and remain in advanced classes.

"I just try to stay positive and relaxed about everything because if I let myself stress out and worry about what I have to do I only make things harder on myself," Boatright said.

Erika Berens

Finding a new home

Sometimes we take what surrounds us for granted. That's surely the case for Nick Wright. One day he's enjoying a beautiful Oregon day, the next he's flying his belongings to whatever beholds him in Denver.

The anxiety sets in from the beginning. The beginning of a new chapter of his life, when his mom declared to the family "we're moving to Colorado." Everything changes once you hear those words. He couldn't concentrate anymore, but only think about what life was like in the Rockies.

It's hard to approach the idea that your life, your friends, your memories will be left behind, while you are fifteen hundred miles away. It's hard when the idea of moving becomes a reality, forever changing in one instant.

Nick tried to overcome the embarrassment and fear that accompanies a new face in a new school. He tried to fit in from the onset, joining the baseball team, where he hoped the camaraderie within the team would lead to friends. But even the trying didn't succeed as planned, cause deep inside the loneliness remained.

But it just takes time. Time heals all wounds, and Nick knew that friends would appear to rescue him from that loneliness. Friends that would call, friends that would help with school work, friends that would be there when needed. And sure enough, they did.

Nick is no longer that nameless face, wondering to classes, bumping into kids. He's no longer the shy new kid, looking for acceptance. He's one of the guys, hanging out on the weekends at parties, or heading over to the Baskin Robins to talk to the cute clerk. He's learned to accept Colorado, and he may even decide to keep a few of its memories.

Brad Salus

A hope come true

As a child, Cheryl lived in a world she wished not to call her own.

It was in Kansas that she spent the first twenty years of her life. Engulfed by the vast fields of rolling grass, flat landscape, and dampening humidity – this was the quaint land she called home.

In school, she was the quiet one. The girl who had regularly occurring asthma attacks and the outcast who played with the boys at recess.

At home, she was rarely indulged with affection. Nor did she ever witness connection between her parents- not even a gesture as small as a hug.

Even as a young child, Cheryl felt there was something missing. When she was eight years old she ran away from home, determined, in the back of her mind, to get some sort of reaction out of her parents. However, after realizing she had nothing to eat, she returned- her failed attempt for affection.

Cheryl was like any other teenager. Her room was her refuge. The first Michael Jackson CD was the consistent background music with exception to the times she would flip through radio stations. On occasion, the receiver would pick up a station coming out of Colorado, and it was at those times that Cheryl would dream of life outside her hometown bubble.

She anxiously awaited the day she could leave Kansas. There was a better world out there; all she had to do was find it.

As soon the opportunity arose to leave, Cheryl was gone. Her destination and the place that held the key to her new life was Colorado. The same place that set off her hopes and dreams as a child.

Now, as an adult, a mother of two, and wife of eighteen years, Cheryl remains in Colorado. Her life now, is just what she had hoped for. She is free and the world is her canvas.

Sean Keough

A family miracle

It all began with tragedy.

The diagnosis, the treatment, the unanswered prayers, and the loss. How could this be happening? Where to go from here?

The family had been torn in shreds. This undeserving, blossoming family. This mother and wife was now gone, and it seemed as though God was nonexistent. But these broken souls continued to pray and continued to push forward. Many lonely years went by full of indescribable pain and suffering, but there had to be hope on the horizon. The family began to get stronger, and the three of them were all each other had.

Little did they know another family was longing for answers.

The loss of a father had left a widow, two daughters, and a son. The same disease had torn apart the hopes and dreams of these four individuals. But he was able to beat the odds and witness his eldest daughter's graduation in the limited time. Still, a son would never be able to play catch with his father. A daughter lacked a father's protection. A wife's love would never end.

As the years passed, so did their grief, and a blessing was in the near future. These two broken families were soon to be united. There was a plan that could never be seen at first. That could never be seen through the tears and heartache.

The heads of each family were united in holy matrimony. It took time for the two groups of people to bond and accept one another. New relationships were formed, and a larger, stronger family was wielded out of two unique but similar stories. Two sons now shared a loving and caring mother, and three daughters now shared a compassionate and driven father. The puzzle was now complete.

It ended with a miracle.

Tyler Zabor

A single tear

They sit by her bed, as her body lay lifeless. Her husband breaths in and out, unable to do anything else, emerged in the moment.

A single tear dribbles down from his cheek.

Her two son's sit by her bed, unable to speak, just sob. The pain in their hearts echoes, it seems as though you could hear them from three states away.

"She always was a winner," her best friend recalls. "The first time I met her we were in college. She seemed so eager to get out into the world. She was ready to explore, to be crazy, and to make a difference."

Then, the drinking began. Life was too difficult to handle. Her precious life drifted away, she became unnoticeable. It seemed nobody could help her.

All the times she cried, and her husband never knew. All the nights she lay awake, as the bottle lay by her bed empty, no one ever knew.

A single tear dribbled down from her husband's cheek.

She was killing herself, yet everyone was confident that in her soul she would get through this difficult time.

As the years went on, she began to love life itself, and love the alcohol less and less. The damages done seemed to be over with, or at least the family thought...

Her first child was born, and she was ecstatic to be the luckiest mother and wife alive. Years went on, she seemed happy. She had the "white picket fence," the "perfect family" and the "perfect life."

But, now she lay lifeless. Her son's cries become louder.

The disease has spread. Now, she lay dead, never getting to explore the rest of her life, never again being able to see the beach, the sky, the sun, the world. All of the hopes and dreams she had tried to acquire vanished.

The cancer and drinking had won the battle of her life, but not her family.

She lay lifeless, as a single tear dribbled down her husband's cheek.

Kaitlyn Clure

Prom preparation: priceless

Simon's first prom preparation experience with his daughter:

1 junior year prom that seemed to be the center of his daughter's world.

219 miles of driving around California, aimlessly searching for the store that held the perfect dress.

7 malls visited from top to bottom.

71 dresses tried on by his daughter who tilted her head and asked, "Do you think it's cute?"

70 times Simon said the dress was cute only to have his daughter say, "I don't think this one is it".

22 times Simon wondered if this was the last store he would need to endure.

71 times Simon thought to himself that his baby girl absolutely should not wear something that would grab a teenage boy's attention.

13 different aromas filtered from the food court that called Simon's name after hours of shopping.

7 sport stores in the malls that Simon was longing to enter and see who was winning the basketball game.

267 times he checked the time on his phone, every minute felt like an eternity, as if this prom frenzy had slowed down time.

15 times, at least, when Simon couldn't believe his precious little girl had grown up to be a young lady with a blink of an eye.

1 time when Simon heard, "I think this dress is the one!" Relief!

1 priceless moment of a father watching his child growing up, soon to leave the family and go off to college, soon to have her own career and family, she was slipping away quickly, and was becoming an adult faster than he thought.

1 priceless moment when Simon realized that these experiences with his daughter were limited and valuable; these moments of chaos should be cherished.

Then, Simon heard from his daughter, "...but I need cute shoes, a clutch purse and sparkling jewelry!" Ugh.

Lauren McDaniel

Boy meets girl

It was freshman year, and Ann had the brightest eyes. Scott had a bright orange backpack with hair to match. They met in math class, and from there on out they'd be inseparable.

Girl goes crazy.

Crazy for him that is. On the days when Scott thought no one cared, she did. When no one would wipe Ann's tears, he would. They were each other's best friend, and in the beginning of their sophomore year, they became lovers.

Boy and Girl fall in love.

Scott had never been kissed. Christmas of 2006, Ann showed him the heart pounding, electric shock that he waited for. They were faultless, soul mates maybe. Nobody doubted them, and everyone wanted what they had. But as the story goes, nothing is perfect forever.

Girl goes away.

Three months later, Ann would stand on a doorstep and say goodbye. But their hearts were strong; they could conquer anything. Ann fought back tears, until she'd see the sweetest sadness in Scott's eyes and the ground fell beneath her. The entire world froze in that second; they'd have to survive without one another. Living one thousand miles away from Scott was something Ann had to swallow. This was the toughest trial of their adolescent lives.

Boy and Girl fall apart.

Suddenly the distance wasn't quite enough room. Ann hated him; she wasn't enough to wait for. Scott cheated, 4 times. Ultimate betrayal. No more phone calls, she wouldn't write to him every day as she had since she left. Scott broke Ann's heart into a thousand sharp pieces that made up her life for the past ten months. Ann trusted Scott with her soul. Scott became nothing more the dirt beneath Ann's feet. Actually, the dirt's was probably worth more.

Boy loses Girl.

I dare you, ask Scott what his greatest downfall was: It was losing her. Ann was the most important thing in his life, and she still is. But Ann won't see it, she wants him out. It's a fight Scott will never give up, but someday he's going to have to move on with his life: minus her presence, comfort, and friendship. She made him, he broke her.

Brittni Haggard

You had me at hello

Walk through the French doors of the barn and it opens up into a haven for horse lovers. Seemingly endless rows of horses are curiously peeking through the open slots of their stall doors in hopes of seeing something or someone of interest. For one horse, she, Sara Barthrop, saw just what she wanted to see. Just a whistle from Sara and a nicker of recognition from Winter and you know that they share something extraordinary.

Well, there *is* something extraordinary:

Beginning on Sara's ninth birthday, it was her mom who gave her riding lessons, not realizing that it would become Sara's life, the one constant in her life, the one addiction that could save her.

Sara grew up without a father, abandoned in a sense, but it led her to gain an independence that was unusual for a girl her age. This independence helped her to find her way to the principles office, to parties and ultimately down a path of destruction.

One fateful day at the barn, Sara met Winter. Abandoned, weak and unkempt, but Sara saw something in Winter. Taking the initiative and using a newfound determination, Sara took it upon herself to care for Winter. It was Winter who became a positive outlet for Sara, her lifeguard and it was Sara who became Winter's guardian, her angel.

Maybe it had to do with their similar backgrounds, abandoned by the one person who was supposed to always be there, but it became a pure love that is enviable. Relationships come and go, but this is more. It's a bond and it is an obvious passion that can be seen as soon as the two are together.

As Sara walks up to Winter, the horse buries her head into Sara breathing in her smell, comforted in the fact that they will always be together.

Emily Schoblaski

The secret

He had a secret.

A secret he should have told someone but was too embarrassed to. Instead, he kept all his emotions, thoughts and pain in his head.

Because of this secret he would have seizures in the middle of the night causing his parents to have to take turns watching him sleep so they could wake him when he started shaking violently.

Because of this secret he lost vision in his right eye temporarily, causing him to have to pay visits to the eye doctor regularly. It was beyond all doctors why his vision kept failing.

Because of this secret he lived a lie. He came home from school everyday pretending to be happy, when really behind his brown eyes and blonde hair he was miserable and scared.

Nathan, a freshman at Ponderosa High School, was a victim of many bullies.

He woke up every morning wondering what they would do to him that day. Would they push him down the stairs, throw him at lockers, give him a bloody nose, or even steal one of his books?

He would go home and pretend like he had a great day. "I was embarrassed to tell my parents. I didn't want them to think I was a wimp," he says. So instead of telling his parents, Nathan, went through torture everyday and kept it all to himself.

Searching for answers to his medical dilemmas, he went to different doctors daily. They determined that the health problems were results of stress. No one thought it was possible to have so much stress just from high school and that's when Nathan decided to come clean, to share his secret.

He told his parents he was being bullied and horrible things were done to him everyday. They were in shock and immediately pulled him out of school.

It has been 8 months now. Nathan is happy. He is healthy, has his vision back and made the varsity baseball team at Lutheran High School.

But he will remember all the suffering and traumatic things he had to go through in his life forever.

Hannah Streich

Never let the dream die

Early Saturday morning in Avon, Indiana, the birds were just beginning to chirp, the dew was still being set and the sun was just about to rise. The one dirt road running through the town, Country Road 36, was vacant. Not a soul awake – except for Jordan Miller.

17-year-old Jordan Miller was partaking in her daily routine. After waking up and eating breakfast, she immediately went to the basement, turned on the music, and began to dance.

And every morning, as Jordan walked down to her 'rehearsal studio,' her father walked downstairs with her. She spent two hours dancing, perfecting, and performing dances that she had choreographed herself. Her father admired her dedication and devotion for living up to her fullest potential. He could see her dream in her eyes, the dream she conceived after seeing the Nutcracker ballet at the Murat Theater downtown, the dream that she cherished above all else – to be a dancer. And every morning, as he watched her grace, her poise, and her desire in her eyes, he fought back tears.

Because he knew that dancing was her passion. It was what she lived for, even though she wasn't able to learn from the best of the best.

Because he knew that every day she would continue to pursue her life-long passion, prevailing over the obstacles in her path.

Because he knew he couldn't help her with dance financially, but could by supporting her as she chased her dream.

Because he knew that even with his two full-time jobs at the nearby grocery store and at the hardware store would not give him the money he needed to send her to a college that provided opportunities, such as a school of dance.

Jordan Miller received a full-ride scholarship to Julliard School for dance this past year.

Her father claims that all of her early mornings of hard work, commitment, and persistence earned her one of the few scholarships that Julliard awards each year.

But Jordan claims otherwise. She acknowledges that her scholarship was all because of her father and his constant motivation to never let her dream die.

"I couldn't have done it without him."

Brittany Allen

Close call

Rafael came to the United States to study Economics at Colorado State University. He had lived in Burundi, Africa – where he had gotten his bachelor’s degree – for 22 years, prior to his move to America.

While he studied to achieve his PhD, Rafael was persistent about maintaining contact with his family back in Burundi. Every time the telephone labeled a call “out of area,” Rafael took a deep sigh of relief; it meant his family was alive.

One day, about 3 weeks into his second semester, Rafael called his family after waiting for two or three days to hear from them. There was no answer.

He tried three, four, and five times more, but still, no answer. He began to worry. The last time his mother called, she told him about the Hutu attacks on Tutsi villages – burning them down, torturing innocent Tutsi families. U.S. news reports confirmed that Hutus were raping and pillaging. When Rafael contacted Burundian authorities, he was told that, upon checking his family’s residence, his worst fears had become reality; his family had been murdered, and their home burned to the ground.

Rafael grieved the loss of his entire family, feeling guilty and remorseful that he had been spared his family’s suffering.

Five days passed before Rafael received an “out of area” call. His mother’s voice trembled on the other side of the phone.

She and Rafael’s three siblings had been in hiding for those long passing days. They slept by day, and walked by night, through the jungle, leaving behind their village, their home, their loving grandmother – all to be destroyed by the slaughtering Hutus. “My grandmother knew the family wouldn’t make it with her being so weak. My mother had to gather my brothers and sisters and leave her behind. I pray that God took her before the Hutus did.”

Now, a 36-year-old father of two sons, Rafael hopes to bring the rest of his family to America. “I want them to be blessed like I have been – with health, safety, and happiness. In a war torn country, these things can be difficult to find.”

Olivia Kraus

Making a difference

Tyler Munro is a math teacher at Rock Canyon High School. Monday through Friday he stands in front of the class teaching trigonometry identities and geometry proofs, throwing in an occasional joke to hear a class of high school students arise in laughter.

Before the students leave the room at the sound of the bell, he reminds them of the baseball game “tonight at 4” – a game in which “Mr. Munro” will become “Coach.”

Tyler moved to Boulder, Colorado when he was only two months old, after his mother ran away from an abusive husband. Tyler grew up going to school – as any other kid - but seemed to always find himself getting into trouble. Tyler was kicked out of two high schools and was sent to an all boys school in Connecticut - counting down the days he had left in school and promising to himself that he would never even think about college. Finally, Tyler’s senior year, he met his future wife, Christina.

After meeting Christina, and deciding to continue with college; Tyler finally graduated with a Business Major and an internship with the Rockies baseball team. After the baseball team went on strike in 1994, Tyler decided to give coaching a try.

“Through coaching I realized I could connect with teens – I could empathize with what they were going through,” Tyler stated. Because of this, he went back to school to become a Math teacher – something Tyler Munro never dreamed of doing.

Tyler has now been a math teacher for 10 years and a baseball coach for 14 years – a career he truly loves. In 2004, his son, Cole, was born and Tyler became “Dad.” Through Tyler’s hard upbringing and rough teen years, he wants to help teenagers and give them a mentor that they can look up to.

Whether he is “Dad,” “Mr. Munro,” “Coach,” or simply “Tyler,” Tyler Munro wants to make a difference. His new zest for life and desire to help young people has sparked the inspirations of many high school students and will only continue throughout the years.

Alyssa Karr

He's no Superman

They grew up three houses down from each other with the perfect fairy tale story. They met in 2005, on their way home from school. As the sun burned her very fair skin, they both walked down the hill from the bus stop.

Come 2006, she turned 15. It felt like true love. She told me the stories of their relationships. They would lay outside on the grass and gaze up at the stars. Both of them would watch Rush Hour 2, laughing at Chris Tuckers Japanese jokes. He loved her orange and brown shirt with a tiny bit of yellow on the flowers, and loved it when she would come and support him at his games. He would hold her hand as she tickled her thumb between their palms, wishing that time would stop. She said that he was her "Superman." They were in love.

Come 2007, she turned 16 and learned true love is undying. Unfortunately, for her, the "bloom of her love wilted" she said. Unfortunately, for her, the bloom of his love was strong just like a new spring flower. She unexpectedly found her Superman's kryptonite, his anger. They broke up the day after Christmas.

The maze of confusion was chaos.

He truly was her Superman or perhaps, as she found out, the Hulk. She paused and bowed her head at this time to hide her tears.

February came around; it would have been close to their one year and two month anniversary. He came at her, and showed the strength she originally wanted in her Superman. She ashamedly admitted that she said nothing. She did not fight back. How could she? He was her Superman. He was supposed to be there to save her.

Kayla and her ex boyfriend do not talk anymore. She says that she has "never been more afraid of Superman" in her life. He had everything that she wanted in a boy. Fortunately, for him, he also had the victim, a similar Lois Lane. However, unfortunately, for her, he also had the strength of Superman.

Julie Claar

The Not So Classic Cafeteria "Lunch Lady"

She's the one who serves our lunch day in and day out. She's the one who says, "Two dollars please," or "is that a meal deal?" She's the one who has ended up at the age of 47 working as a cafeteria "lunch lady" at Rock Canyon High School.

Her name is Brenda Emelo. Brenda started her journey in De Moines, Iowa. She said she liked De Moines. Life was slower, and everybody was friendly. After graduating high school Brenda met a nice young sailor by the name of Randy Emelo, who had joined the navy not long ago. The two married and had two children, a girl and a boy, now ages 26 and 28. By this time Brenda was leading a pretty normal life, however, that was all about to change.

Her husband, being in the armed forces, was required to travel frequently and to various places. This is where life got interesting for Brenda. From Des Moines, Brenda and her family of four moved to South Carolina, then San Diego, and then Scotland. Brenda remarks about her time in Scotland as being the best period in her life. She absolutely loved Scotland and its people. After a long while in Scotland, Brenda and her family moved back to the states, specifically Connecticut. From Connecticut, the family moved to Ohio, Indianapolis, back to Ohio, and finally Colorado.

By the time Brenda had arrived to Colorado she was divorced, her kids had left, and she had found herself once again in a foreign place she knew nothing about. For the past 25 years Brenda had been living anything but the ordinary life. So naturally, she was ready to settle down and find a place she could call "home."

That is why Brenda looked for a job that was easy, laid back, and had just enough hours for a person who had been living a hectic life and was ready to slow things down. That is why we are able to see her face, her ever-smiling face, everyday. And maybe, just maybe, that is why we are able to hear the classic lunch lady call of "Two dollars please!"

Garrett Hales

The short narratives in this publication were inspired by Brady Dennis, from the St. Petersburg Times, and his series of 300-word narratives. Two samples are printed to the right.

After the sky fell

By BRADY DENNIS

Published January 28, 2005

The few drivers on this dark, lonely stretch of the Suncoast Parkway in Pasco County pull up to the toll booth, hand their dollars to Lloyd Blair and then speed away. None of them knows why the old man sits here, night after night, working the graveyard shift.

Well, here's why:

Because years ago, on a freezing winter night at a party in Queens, N.Y., he met a woman named Millie.

Because he fell in love with her brown hair and wide eyes and 100-watt smile.

Because they got married, moved to Staten Island, had a son and worked for decades in Manhattan; she as an accountant, he as a banker.

Because it had been their dream to retire to Florida, and so they saved all their lives to make it possible.

Because, just as they began to talk of leaving New York and heading south, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and they spent their time and money traveling to New Jersey, San Diego and Mexico in search of a cure.

Because, in the end, they came to Florida anyway.

Because they finally bought a house in Spring Hill, although she was too weak that day to get out of the car.

Because she died nine days later on Jan. 5, 2002, a day "the whole sky fell," he says.

Because, after she was gone, he found himself alone and \$100,000 in debt.

And so he took a job collecting tolls. The drivers who pass by see a smiling 71-year-old man with blue eyes and a gray mustache who tells each of them, "Have a great night!"

They don't know the rest of Lloyd Blair's story, or that he keeps Millie's picture in his shirt pocket, just under his name tag, just over his heart.

The man in the mirror

By BRADY DENNIS

Published May 14, 2005

He's standing there in front of the mirror, dressed in more pink than he's ever worn in his life. He's 17, a senior at Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg.

Josh King can't stop staring into that mirror. The seconds pass. He poses. He pauses.

The boy stares out at the man. The man stares back at the boy.

And there they are.

The man in him paid for this tuxedo – pink shirt, pink socks, pink shoes – with the money he earned mowing lawns. The man paid for his haircut and the tickets to tonight's prom. The man is paying for dinner.

The man in him helps look after his younger brothers. The man will graduate later this month and yearns to escape Florida. He's the one who will head to college in Virginia. He's the one who will study business, then find a job, find a wife, find his way in the world.

And then there is the boy in Josh King.

He's the one who still has baseball trophies on his dresser and a Porsche poster on his wall.

He's the one who feels nervous tonight, the one who will feel a shiver creep down his neck when he picks up his date - a girl he thought was out of his league.

The boy in him will forget to open the car door for her. He will play his music too loud and be too shy to say much during dinner.

The boy in him still doesn't know how to tie a tie. So his father shows him. And as the father slips the tie from his neck and puts it on his son's, he smiles and says, "This is a classic moment."

They both look at the mirror, knowing how soon the boy will disappear.

Editor's note: 300 Words provides glimpses of everyday life that often go unnoticed.