

# REVISIONS

Best Student Essays of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

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*ReVisions: Best Student Essays* is a publication designed to celebrate the finest nonfiction work composed by undergraduate students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. This issue was copyedited, designed, and produced by the students in PRE 345: Computer-Assisted Editing and Publication Design.

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All submissions must be nominated by a UNCP faculty member. Students who believe that they have a strong essay for submission are encouraged to ask a faculty member to sponsor that essay. A nomination form is included on page 23 of this issue; forms are also available in the English, Theatre, and Languages Department in Dial Humanities Building. Forms may be photocopied.

Papers may cover any topic within any field of study at UNCP. We do not publish fiction or poetry. We encourage submissions from all fields and majors.

All submissions must be accompanied by a nomination form. Students should fill out the nomination form completely and sign it, granting permission to the editors to edit and publish the essay if accepted. Faculty members should comment briefly on the merits of the essay and any other elements that make it an excellent example of student work. Students and faculty should sign the form and submit it with the manuscript.

Manuscript requirements: no more than 3000 words in length, double-spaced, and conform to the MLA style manual. Do not include any names or identifying information on the essay itself; use the nomination form as a cover sheet. All essays will be read and judged in a blind selection process. If a submission is chosen for publication, the author will be notified and asked to submit an electronic version, a photograph, and a brief biography.

Submissions to be considered for publication in the Spring 2007 issue will be accepted until December 8, 2006. For further information, contact Dr. Susan Cannata, ETL Department, 119 Dial Humanities Bldg., (910) 521-6806, [cannata@uncp.edu](mailto:cannata@uncp.edu).

The cover photo shows a detail of UNCP's new observatory adjacent to the Oxendine Science Building. It was taken by Jennifer Diana Key, a junior Biology major and Art minor and Editor-in-Chief of the 2006 *Indianhead* yearbook.

The inset photo, taken with the help of UNCP students Jason York, Justin Hall, and Bineyam Kassahun, is a monochrome shot of the Orion Nebula, about 1,600 light years from the earth and shows a very turbulent cloud of gas and dust, which is the creation of new stars forming in this region. This was the first picture taken from UNCP's observatory at around 9 PM on 9 Feb. 2006 using an SB10xe CCD camera through the 16" Meade telescope with an exposure time of 2 seconds.

# REVISIONS: BEST STUDENT ESSAYS

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# ROBO-COP-SOLDIER

Anthony Adams



Anthony Adams comes from a big family of four brothers, three of whom, so far, followed their father's footsteps and joined the Army. He joined the National Guard as a Combat Medic shortly after moving to Fayetteville from his hometown, Lewes, Delaware and spent 2004 in Iraq with the first infantry division in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The United States Army has always been at the forefront of a rapidly evolving technological era. Generals and top advisors have followed the mindset that whoever has the coolest toys wins. Modern combat has evolved from days when soldiers stood on opposite sides of a field and took pot shots wildly. Now, smart bombs can lock onto specific targets, medical equipment can sustain life considerably longer than before, weapons are designed to wound rather than kill, and uniforms are designed more for functionality than fashion.

Having served in the US Army in a combat zone, I am quite glad that I was not a soldier serving in the previous few centuries. I cannot imagine wearing a bright red or blue uniform that not only mocked the idea of camouflage but also was not exactly designed for comfort. The modern army uniform has progressed in leaps and bounds, not only incorporating the idea of camouflage but also becoming a functional weapon in combat. Currently, the US Army has just begun issuing the newest version of the Army uniform. SFC Jeff Myhre, the NCO in charge of clothing and individual equipment, claims over twenty changes were made to the new uniform to include a new less discernable digital pattern and removing the less common color black (Triggs, 2004). Having been fortunate enough to be able to test out a prototype of the new uniform in combat, I can say that I

am quite pleased with the progress that was made. The most noticeable differences were that all of the buttons were replaced with easier to use Velcro and zippers, pockets were adjusted to accommodate the use of body armor, and pouches were added for built-in knee and elbow pads. These changes may seem minor, but anything to make life easier in combat is always appreciated.

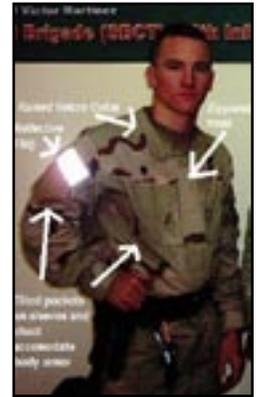


Photo courtesy of DefenseLink. Reprinted with permission.

Many questions about futuristic improvements have arisen from these improvements in combat technology, but what will the next progressive step have to offer me as a modern Army soldier? The answer comes from MIT's Dean of Engineering Thomas L. Magnanti, after 50 million dollars was granted to MIT from the Army. "Our goal is to help greatly enhance the protection and survival of the infantry soldier using nanoscience and nanotechnology," claims Thomas at a news conference (Army selects MIT, 2002). The prototypes (right) of the new uniform depict larger than life semi-mechanized soldiers who bear a striking resemblance to the 90's action hero RoboCop.



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Astounding progress had been made to improve everything from combat protection to soldier comfort. The new suit is made from a blend of polyethylene glycol and small glass particles that not only allow smooth fluid-like movement but also offer rigid protection. (Jewell, 2004). Pictured at right during testing, an attempt is made to puncture a single layer of treated Kevlar fabric with an ice pick. Another benefit that makes me smile as a



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medic is that if a bone is fractured the suit will be able to not only stabilize the bone with a rigid cast but inject necessary medications to assist in medical treatment. However, I feel the pinnacle of the combat effectiveness of the suit lies in its additions for hand to hand combat. When fighting, soldiers are augmented by the suit's ability to form rock-solid protection for extremities to use for protection or to attack an enemy. Having not only completed the Army Advanced Hand to Hand Course but having unfortunately been put into a position to utilize its training, I can attest that this protection can save lives.

As far as comforting benefits are concerned, the overall soldier load will be reduced from approximately 145 lbs to a target weight of 45 lbs. Not only will the load to bear be decreased but actuators will be integrated to allow the soldier to carry 2-3 times his body weight (Army selects MIT, 2002). Another benefit to ease the workload of a soldier is in the navigational system. Not only will soldiers be able to locate teammates by icons visible within the visor, but maps, missions, and transmissions can be projected onto the ground or on a small electronic scroll pictured above (Jewell, 2004).

Another tremendous breath of fresh air for soldiers serving in the Middle East is that the suit will furnish an internal temperature regulator. This feature will allow the soldier to stay warm or cool in the most extreme of climate. As pictured (left), the suit is being designed to charge when attached to a Humvee (Jewell, 2004).

These drastic improvements promise to bring many benefits to the modern soldier. The protection offered could not only save countless lives, it could enable soldiers to accomplish missions never before thought possible. Also, the amount of manpower needed for assignments would sharply decrease. Not to mention, the casualty rate of combat assignments would drop drastically.

All of these things speak measures for the leaps and bounds of progress that are being made for the well-being of American soldiers. How-

ever, with advancements in technology, there always comes a price and not necessarily a monetary amount. One problem that may arise is that this technology may not solely be available to the United States. If this technology fell into the hands of a foreign power, or even worse, a terrorist cell, the results could be catastrophic. Recall if you will the two gunmen in California who engaged an entire police department wearing only standard body armor. The gunfight lasted for quite sometime and inflicted many casualties simply because law enforcement officers were not able to take down the suspects. With this advanced system in their possession, the results could have been far worse. Also, after a fairly frustrating mission that left us helpless after our tracking system failed, my platoon leader commented, "Technology is only helpful when it's working." Even operating a simple computer in my home without a system failure or some sort of glitch occurring seems impossible. Although I doubt the suit will randomly play music as my computer does, it will inevitably suffer from the bane of technological error. What if these glitches were to happen in combat? Equipment failure is simply not acceptable in a combat environment; it costs lives.

The bottom line is that technology and combat are very closely intertwined in their evolutionary process. As combat moves away from archaic methods such as swords and shields, so must the technology to suit that. These advancements in Army uniforms are a prime example of just that. The technology is adapting for our safety. Unfortunately, I feel that simply not going to war will not be probable in our country's future. Therefore, we must do everything in our power to ensure the safety and homecoming of our troops.✿

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Tony's recent personal experiences as a Special Forces medic illuminate innovations in military uniforms. Tony writes with flair and a strong personal voice, and his essay smoothly integrates written sources.

—Monika Brown

# THE EFFECTS OF HIGHWAYS ON BIODIVERSITY

Will Allred



Will Allred is an avid hunter and fisherman from the town of Waxhaw, NC. He spends almost all of his free time enjoying the outdoors, and plans on a career where he can spend time in nature helping the environment. The recent development of two large highways on his family's old farm led to Will's writing this essay for his Conservation Biology class.

Not long after Henry Ford began mass producing cars, they became an integral part of the United States. Cars require roads, which take up land, and over time highways have come to dominate our landscape. North Carolina is no exception; in fact, it currently has the largest state-maintained highway system in the United States, with 77,400 miles of roads (North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State). Unfortunately, highways tend to be detrimental to ecosystems. This is obviously evidenced in the form of road kill and the simple matter of loss of physical habitat to inhospitable roadways. The full effects of roads on biodiversity are less simple, however, and have only recently become a major topic of study in the scientific world, a topic now known as road ecology (Forman 2004).

Through the establishment of such groups as the International Convention for Wildlife Ecology and Transportation, or ICOWET, we have come to acquire a better understanding of just how detrimental roads are to our ecosystems (Turbak 2000). Roads and highways not only lead to animal deaths due to vehicle impacts, but they also fragment habitats, pollute rivers and streams, disrupt natural hydrology, damage air quality, and allow influx of invasive exotic plants. Fortunately road ecology is establishing a number of solutions to these problems, and North Carolina is beginning to utilize

some of these solutions to minimize highway impacts on biodiversity.

## Roads as Barriers

Highways serve as barriers to wildlife, and as a result isolate populations and fragment habitats. Highways divide up the land, leaving habitats of reduced size. This divides up and isolates populations, thereby reducing the size of the gene pool, and the smaller habitats provide less space for feeding, bedding, and other activities necessary for fauna and flora. Small animals, such as small reptiles and amphibians, are particularly vulnerable to loss of dispersal capability by highways. A recent study by Matthew J. Aresco (2005) on herpatofauna demonstrated just how severe roads can be to such creatures. In his study, turtles were observed trying to cross a four lane highway to get to a new pond, after losing their pond to a drought. Out of 345 turtles observed, 95% were killed by cars upon entering the first lane of the highway. The remaining 5% were killed in one of the other three lanes, meaning that none of the turtles crossed safely. Aresco constructed a simple drift fence, which blocked herpatofauna entry to the highway and forced them to use beneath-road culverts to travel to the adjacent pond. This simple solution reduced turtle mortality to less than 1%, making clear a potential solution in instances where culverts are available for travel (Aresco 2005). Unfortunately, in cases where culverts are not available, populations are isolated, as attempts at dispersal are imminently fatal. Further, it is reasonable to assume, given the odds of a turtle safely crossing the road, that many other small, slow moving animals such as snakes and insects would have little or no chance of successfully dispersing across roads.

Despite their relatively improved capability to cross roads, large animals such as cervids and large predators are forced to cope with habitat fragmentation due to highways as well. Due to the often times perpetual disturbance created by cars traversing highways, many of these large animals choose simply to stay away from highways all together (Turbak 1999, Forman 2004). Of course, animals that do choose to cross highways run the risk of being impacted by a car, thereby meeting

the fate brought upon approximately one million animals a day. They can become road kill (Turbak 1999). Interestingly enough, in spite of this huge number, road kill in most cases is considered to be of little ecological importance with the only exception being in cases of rare animals, or in cases such as that of the turtles above, where devastation is so bad that the species risks disappearing from an ecosystem.

Large animals that are forced to live around roads often struggle; large animals require greater space for day-to-day living. They eat more food than small animals, and travel more, and reduction of habitat due to highways simply takes this away. Efforts are under way to find means of avoiding habitat fragmentation due to highways.

The most prominent solution world wide is the establishment of connective corridors, traveling over or under highways, which give the animals a way to take advantage of larger areas of land without risking their own lives and creating dangers for humans. Such overpasses and underpasses are a relatively new idea, however, and only a handful exists, mostly as case studies. Other less drastic efforts could prove feasible as well; construction of large fences alongside highways that limit animal crossings to a single, well lit area could cut back on accidents and prove cheaper than creating passageways for animals (Forman 2004).

### Noise Pollution

Highways and roads cause problems well beyond their physical areas. Almost anywhere one can go, cars can be heard traveling along roads. While this noise pollution seems rather superficial in nature, it is logical that in some areas, especially those too small to offer true escape from this noise pollution, natural processes could be damaged. Many birds and insects, for example, rely on their calls to locate each other for mating and general social behavior. In areas troubled by constant road noise, the behavior of these birds and insects could be greatly inhibited. Many animals also rely on hearing capability to escape predation or to capture prey. In all of the above cases, excessive road noise could potentially affect biodiversity.

### Artificial Light

Artificial lighting is detrimental to ecosystems, and therefore biodiversity, and often results

from highways in the form of streetlights and headlights. A subject of relatively recent interest in the scientific community, the effects of artificial lights on biodiversity, has gone largely unstudied (Harder 2002). However, it has been discovered that artificial lighting causes problems for many animals, particularly nocturnal species. While the harmful effects of artificial lighting on moths and other night-dwelling insects is well known to most people, the full extent of the harm done by their Icarus-like antics (Icarus is the mythical character whose wings of wax melted when he flew too close to the sun) is not well known. Arthropods are not the only victims, either. Research has shown that frogs stop both feeding and mating behaviors, sometimes for hours, when exposed to artificial light during the night. Salamanders, when subjected to artificial light, lose their navigational capabilities and are forced to wander aimlessly outside of the water, leaving them vulnerable to predation and over-exposure (Harder 2002). In North Carolina, sea turtle hatchlings have been killed by cars after traveling in the direction of headlights (Lyons 2005). Many species of fish are affected by artificial light near water, such as lights along bridges. Simply walking along a lit dock at night illustrates that the water around lights comes alive with fish, and indeed fishing around lights at night tends to be much more productive than fishing unlit areas. Unfortunately, the tendency of fish to gather around light makes them vulnerable to predation. The problem of artificial light impacting the water worsens when analyzed on a microscopic level, as it has been found that many small aquatic invertebrates stop feeding around the surface in the presence of unnatural light (Harder 2002). The stronger the light, the less they feed, and their lack of feeding contributes to unnatural algae growth. Even plants fall victim to artificial lighting; anecdotal studies have shown that in the presence of artificial light, photoperiodism is disrupted and deciduous trees may be delayed in their shedding of leaves (Harder 2002).

### Road Edges

When simply driving along a highway, it is clear that almost all highways feature edges consisting of neatly mowed grass, sparse small trees and shrubs, and patches of planted flowers. This

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Automobiles and highways are integral parts of our lives, but, as Will deftly points out, the very transportation that we depend on daily has very negative effects on the environment and the state's flora and fauna. Will is an outdoorsman with a penchant for writing and a knack for putting together words in ways that make their meanings readily understandable.

—Lisa Kelly

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is seldom ever consistent with the area's indigenous biodiversity. Unfortunately, the disadvantages of such edges go well beyond the small loss of biodiversity to the roadsides. Road edges can be extremely detrimental to an area's flora in another major way. They provide easy access for invasive exotics. Due to the large number of travelers along highways each day and the long distances traveled, it is unavoidable that seeds from foreign plants come into contact with road edges. Unfortunately, the low cut grassy nature of roadsides allows for easy growth and dispersion of invasive plant species (Jones and Parendes 2000). Proof exists almost everywhere in North Carolina, as kudzu is abundant along roadsides and beyond into what was once mature forests. Roadsides and forest edges, a byproduct of roads, are favored habitats of this infamous exotic. North Carolina has fallen victim to other roadside invasives as well, including Chinese silver grass, itchgrass, garlic mustard, and coltsfoot (Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Control Council 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; United States Department of Agriculture 2005).

### Solutions

While the invasive plants are a difficult problem to solve, there are relatively simple potential solutions for the problems of noise and the artificial light problem. By either building roads below surface level or building large, shrub covered walls around them, the ecosystem could be shielded from the edge effect (Forman 2004). Combining fences, as described earlier, with "hidden" (built below area's ground level, or with high berms around it) roads and allowing succession to proceed as close to the road as possible would greatly diminish the edge effects due to most highways today. Establishment of native biodiversity alongside roads would also help to alleviate the invasive exotic plant problem, as increased vegetation growth would reduce sunlight availability and nutrient enrichment, factors that favor the establishment of exotics.

### Effects on Water and Wetlands

In addition to habitat fragmentation, roads disrupt many ecosystems by disturbing or destroying wetlands or water bodies. This aspect is very significant given that wildlife problems are most prevalent along coastal and riverine ecosystems (Mangun 1995). Highways disrupt the hydrology

of wetlands both by diverting water flow through drainage ditches and by blocking streams, essentially damming them. Altered water flow through ditches rearranges wetlands, flooding formerly dry areas and draining established ponds, leaving many water-dependent species high and dry. The damming effect of new roads on streams can lead to an increase in wetland size. Unfortunately the new wetland area often consists of stagnant water, which is less than ideal for maintenance of biodiversity (Wilson 2001).

The harmful effects of drainage ditches go beyond the hydrology issue. Rain and other precipitation are the highway's enemy, thus highways are engineered to resist water. This amounts to a lot of water runoff from highways, which is diverted into drainage ditches and culvert pipes, and then in many cases on to natural wetlands and streams where it is absorbed by the water or soil. Unfortunately, in addition to roadside litter, this runoff contains numerous chemicals associated with transportation, including toxins such as asbestos and lead, and even herbicides (Forman 2004). The effects of toxins entering streams and wetlands are devastating. Both fauna and flora are poisoned, and this is detrimental to the entire ecosystem. In instances involving fat-soluble non-biodegradable chemicals, small amounts of the chemical existing in prey species are consumed by larger animals. This allows the chemical to work its way up the food chain, becoming more concentrated as it goes. This process, called biomagnification, nearly led to the demise of the bald eagle and is one key danger associated with pollution of ecosystems.

Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus enter wetlands and waters through runoff as well, resulting in enrichment of these ecosystems (Forman 2004). This often leads to the establishment of harmful species such as some blue-green algae, which tend to overpopulate and deplete oxygen levels in aquatic ecosystems, which kills many fish. Additionally, these harmful algae have a negative aesthetic impact, smell bad, and can even spread toxins, which can harm clams, fish, and humans, while blooming (Olding 2000).

Salt, used to prevent freezing of water on highways during the winter, is another major detriment to ecosystems. This road salt uses iron cyanide as an anticaking agent; upon being washed away, or

blown away, it simply biodegrades. Unfortunately, light breaks down the iron cyanide, and this adds toxic cyanide to the ecosystem to some degree but so far has gone largely unresearched (Dzombak et al. 1999). In any case, the addition of a toxin as volatile as cyanide to an ecosystem is a problem that should get attention as soon as possible.

Not all of the road-based pollution entering wetland and aquatic ecosystems is poisonous. In fact, sedimentation is the number one source of stream and river pollution in North Carolina. During highway construction, and then over time under the wear of precipitation and wind, highways tend to break down. This leads to sedimentation, which is extremely detrimental to rivers and streams. Sediment washed off bridges and their surrounding soil structures leads to loss of bottom structure, particularly underwater holes downstream of the bridges (Forman 2004). The excess sediment simply sinks to the bottom and gets caught in holes and along rises, eventually filling in the holes and leveling out the bottom. This effect is harmful to fish, as they rely on holes and other natural bottom habitat for ambushing prey, resting, avoiding powerful currents, and spawning.

Fortunately, the terrible effects of roads on wetlands and streams have not gone unrecognized. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, created in 1990, establishes guidelines for wetland mitigation throughout the nation (Schiller 2001). The trend is one of compensatory mitigation: for every area of wetland destroyed, long-destroyed wetlands are restored, or new wetlands are created. North Carolina falls into Region 4 of this act because it is in the Southeast. Wetland mitigation is practiced in North Carolina by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) on state-maintained roads and by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on federally maintained or aided roads, in accordance with Section 404. The NCDOT has a very elaborate, three-part system for wetlands mitigation. Two of the parts, the In-House Program and the Full Delivery Program, rely on the guidance of NCDOT Division of Planning and Environment staff for wetland mitigation around right-of-ways. The two programs differ with regard to who runs the actual road construction, who buys the road

site, and who heads interagency coordination. A third part, the North Carolina State In-Lieu Program, is rather different from the previous two. Also known as the Wetlands Restoration Program, it was initially established in 1996 as part of the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources (NCDNR), and joined with the NCDOT in 1999 through a Memorandum of Agreement between the NCDNR and NCDOT. This program identifies eight river sub-basins in North Carolina, encompassing approximately a third of the state, and works to restore streams and wetlands in these sub-basins. As established by the Memorandum of Agreement, the NCDOT must work with the NCDNR to replenish these sub-basins as part of their required wetlands mitigation compensation (FHWA 2000; Schiller 2001).

The FHWA is no slouch in the department of wetlands mitigation. In a 1996 report, their goal was simply stated as a "no wetlands lost policy," wherein a 1:1 ratio of lost-to-gained wetland was targeted. In their 2000 report, this had changed to a much more ambitious goal of a 50% net increase in wetlands from 1996 to 2006 (FHWA 1996, 2000). The report for the year 2000 alone indicated that in the Southeast, 5,378 acres of wetland were added as compared to 840 acres lost. This resulted in a 6.4:1 ratio of gained-to-lost wetland, putting them well ahead of their target for the year 2000. Cumulatively on a national level from 1996 to 2000, wetland acreage had a net increase of 23,675 acres, as compared to 8,829 lost, resulting in a 170% favoring of gained wetlands (FHWA 1996, 2000). Clearly the FHWA is doing its part to ensure that the biodiversity of wetlands is maintained, if not increased, in the future.

Unfortunately, these new wetlands may not be as ecologically viable as natural wetlands. Wetlands take time to develop, requiring a time-perfected mixture of fauna, flora, and geological structure. Because of this, the success of wetlands created through mitigation is questionable. A solid general estimate is that only 40 percent of mitigation projects are successful (Forman 2004).

With the growing human population in the United States, it will be necessary that highways and wetlands coexist. One way to ensure this coexistence could be through better design of water flow around roads. In North Carolina's Great Dis-

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mal Swamp, logging roads disrupted hydrology and led largely to much of the swamp's draining (Wilson 2001). Recent utilization of water control structures, placed to maintain natural water flow beneath and around roads, has led to the replenishment of natural hydrology and therefore the wetlands as a whole (Wilson 2001). Such structures could be used along highways to maintain stream and wetland hydrology and to minimize wetland loss in the future. Huge culverts are another solution; large half-pipe culverts, placed under highways, could allow room for entire streams and even provide areas under which wildlife, such as fish and terrestrial animals, could pass safely, just as they always have (Forman 2004).

Solutions exist, too, for the runoff problem, and they are being practiced to varied degrees. Establishment of depressions in drainage flows helps to keep pollutant absorption well away from wetlands and natural water flows (Forman 2004). These work by pooling water for extended periods of time in depressions relatively near the highway, giving the water time to lose chemicals to both soil absorption and air evaporation in an area of less significance with regards to biodiversity. Such pools can be used to resolve the eutrophication problem as well. By establishing pools with populations of algae, nutrients can be used up well before arriving in natural waters and destroying biodiversity. Natural ponds can even be used in tandem to reduce effects to either pond, as the increased water area simply dilutes nutrients more. Interestingly, research on this subject has shown that development of harmful algae can be prevented in these ponds by maintaining consistent water flow, which ensures that the algae have no time to develop (Ewing et. al. 2005). These findings suggest that future run-off drainage ponds could be engineered to ensure minimal effect from highways on an area's biodiversity, as these pools could all but eliminate the problem of chemicals, nutrients, and harmful algae. It seems logical that such pools would reduce the effects of sedimentation, too, although reduction of sedimentation from bridges could be difficult.

### Highways and Air Pollution

It is well known that cars emit greenhouse gasses as they travel along highways, gasses which

destroy the ozone. On a more regional level, where effects could pertain directly to nearby highways, issues such as acid rain and photochemical smog are more prevalent (Forman 2004). Smog is most noticeable around large cities where it detracts from air quality to the extent that, on hot days, people with breathing conditions are warned against going outside. One seldom-discussed form of pollution is dust. Driving a car daily down one mile of dirt road for a year generates about one ton of dust (Forman 2004). Even on paved roads it is plain to see, during dry spells, that simply driving past a dirt driveway sends up swirls of dust. On dry afternoons these little clouds of dust can stay airborne for hours, finally settling under the weight of heavy, cool night air, possibly in rivers and streams (Forman 2004). Given copious amounts of dust collection in any area, the bad effects are clear. Breathing in dust is harmful to the respiratory system, and landscapes or waterscapes may even be harmed by settling dust over time. The answers to the chemical portion of the air pollution problem are clear and already being tackled through the development of electric cars and other fuel sources. The dust problem is a whole other issue, however, one to which the only clear solution would be to pave every dirt road and every piece of driveway near paved roads.

### Conclusion

The harmful effects of highways on ecosystems and diversity are numerous. Fortunately, through the establishment of groups such as the ICOWET and thanks to the establishment of plans such as Section 404 of the EPA's Clean Water Act, the future is looking up. While road ecology is a new science, it has offered many interesting and effective solutions to the problems faced by conservation biologists when dealing with highways. North Carolina has already addressed a major issue regarding highways through the establishment of a plan to combat wetland loss. Hopefully, additional work in the way of wildlife passages over and under highways, road design with attention to harmful noise and light effects, and carefully designed drainage systems will follow in the very near future to ensure a minimal effect of highways on biodiversity.♣

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## THREE'S A CROWD: MY BATTLES AS A MILITARY WIFE

Kristen Grimes



Kristen Grimes is an English Education major originally from Colorado. She is completing her student teaching this semester and will graduate with honors in May. Kristen actively participates in spouse activities for her husband's squadron at Pope Air Force Base and is not as bitter about the military as this essay may make her seem. After graduating, Kristen hopes to start her career as a high school English teacher.

Most people are surprised to hear that my husband is married to someone besides me. It came as a shock to me when I realized it, but I have come to accept it. Unfortunately, my husband does not practice a polygamist religion. I should be so lucky if it were that simple. The “someone else” in our lives turns out to be his job. My husband, Russ, has an intimate relationship with the military as a pilot. And when I married him nearly three years ago, I never imagined how big an impact his demanding job would have on our lives.

As much as Russ hates its influence, the military is ever-present in our marriage. I do not run the show at our house so much as Russ's job dictates how our household operates. Russ doesn't answer to me but to his commander. Somewhere along the way I have come to accept that my husband's career runs not only his life, but my life as well. It determines everything from what time we eat dinner, when we go to the movies, if we go to Honolulu in October or July, to whether or not we spend Christmas together. The military is a major authority in our lives, making it difficult sometimes to function normally (or at least what Russ and I consider to be normal). We try to close the door and lock it out, but the military always gets its big giant boot in the door before we can slam it shut.

Take dinner for example. When I was growing up, my family sat down to dinner every night promptly at six o'clock. By seven, the kitchen was clean, and we would all assemble around the TV. I laugh to look back and think that I actually had visions of carrying this routine over to my own household. That was back in the day when I thought my word would rule, before I knew I would have to compete with another spouse's demands. These days, I'm lucky if Russ even makes it home to have dinner with me. Not only do we not sit down to dinner at six o'clock every night, but I have been known to make dinner at two in the afternoon or eleven at night, depending on Russ's schedule. I am not even so lucky as to be given 24-hour notice; no, I could take meat out of the freezer the night before only to have it go to waste because Russ finds out the next afternoon that he has a two-thirty report time. And that is AM, not PM, meaning he will need to be in bed before the sun even sets. That means my lovely dinner plans get thrown out the window, and I have a bowl of cereal for dinner while watching *Wheel of Fortune* all alone. Ah, but if dinner frustrations were my only woes!

It is almost impossible for me to plan a vacation. If I call Russ at work to ask if he will be home on such-and-such a date, he always hesitates for a minute before saying, “Well, Kristen.” (It is a bad sign when he uses my name.) “You know I don't know my schedule three days in advance. Can't you wait a few more days to book our flight until I find out what the rest of the week will be like?” Then I remind him that it is Tuesday and I am trying to make flight reservations for Friday, and I have already waited, like, four months to see what his schedule will be. I know Russ hates the uncertainty, and he always makes it up by letting me choose the most expensive hotel I can find and not getting impatient while I look for amenities such as feather pillows, telephones in the bathroom, mini-bars, and complimentary night caps. It is stressful having to deal with a husband who is married to someone else, and what can I say? Sometimes I need a little something extra in the evenings to knock me out until the morning.

Before I married Russ, I was organized and punctual. I liked to plan out my weekends in advance, making the most of my free time. I can just hear the military laugh as it speeds down the highway, with the pages of my Day Runner flying out the windows. That is because even when he is home and not gone on some trip or deployed overseas, Russ periodically gets put into alert status. I like to say it is an excuse for his other wife to keep a short leash on him and ruin his weekend. Russ is put into alert for things like hurricane evacuations, relief aid, or backup in case a crew becomes sick or delayed in trying to complete their mission. (I know, I am a horrible person for not wanting my husband to deliver medical supplies to children affected by natural disasters, but, hey, I have my own needs, too.) If Russ is on alert and gets called up, it is usually guaranteed that he will be gone at least one day, sometimes longer. The times when Russ is on alert, he has to be fully rested and ready to spring into action on a moment's notice. Once the phone call is made, he has to be dressed, at work, and ready to fly within an hour. This means if I want to go buy mulch at Home Depot, Russ has to have an overnight bag packed to bring with him. If we go to the park for a jog, we have to make sure our cell phones get service. Heaven forbid we should actually drive to Wilmington if it is a sunny day; the two-hour drive would most definitely exceed the 60-minute radius he has been instructed to stay within. If I take him grocery shopping when he is on alert, I can guarantee I will always find Russ in the beer aisle, drooling. Because, of course, he can't drink either, since he has to leap into action once that other woman snaps her fingers. Some days I go crazy not being able to make a plan, or worse, having to stray from one I have already carefully made out.

Did I mention that Russ's other wife is constantly calling him on the phone? It is not unusual to be woken up in the middle of the night by a piercing ring so loud I half expect the neighbors to complain the next day. The sound used to scare the hell out of me, but nowadays I find I cannot remember if I actually talked to someone the night before or if I only dreamed it. The people Russ works with are constantly calling the house looking for him, all of them with the latest and greatest

information that needs to be communicated that second, even if that second is midnight or three in the morning. Fortunately, I am off the hook at night. Any time the phone rings, I now get to roll over and pull the covers over my head and silently curse that damned other wife. This is only a recent occurrence, as I switched the phone from my side of the bed to Russ's. But during the day, it is my job to field the phone calls. I can make up excuses and alibis for my husband as fast as I can snap my fingers. Someone needs to man the duty desk on Sunday? Sure, Russ doesn't have anything better to do this weekend than sit around and scratch his ass at work, and he'll return the call as soon as he walks in the door. Why hasn't anyone seen Russ at work today? He's at the gym, of course. He stayed up late studying about the hydraulics system in the plane, and he needed to let off some steam so he would be ready to study again tonight. Volunteers are needed to work at the squadron fundraiser Thursday night? Russ already has plans to play bridge with some of the elderly ladies in the neighborhood; they really do think he is a fine young man. I can say these lies with such truthfulness that I have to leave the room for fear that the person on the line will hear Russ laughing in the background. I always feel a bit smug after these small victories, like I am the dominant wife and finally get a say in my husband's life. If it means having to play dirty, I will just make sure to roll up my sleeves.

I think I am pretty tolerant and forgiving towards Russ's other wife. I have learned to accommodate crazy schedules, answered countless late-night phone calls, given up planning vacations, and sacrificed relaxing yet productive weekends. But there are some instances when it takes me longer to forgive; those are the times when Russ is gone for what seems like an eternity. Currently Russ's squadron is on a four month rotation cycle: they are gone to the Middle East four months, home four months, and the cycle repeats. For the young pilots such as my husband, there is also additional training that must be completed during the four months spent stateside. So that four months turns into something like three, two, and sometimes only one measly month at home. And to make it worse, when Russ is in the Middle East, he is only allowed

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Kristen submits an excellent example of creative nonfiction. Revealing the military's omnipresence in her and her husband's lives, she shares one of the truths of their lives.

—Kim Gunter

## THREE'S A CROWD

to make a fifteen-minute phone call two times per week. There he is, standing around in 130 degree weather, dead on his feet because he has just come back from a flight to Kandahar that somehow managed to take 18 hours once all the delays were added in, and he has to wait in a line that weaves halfway through the bleak living quarters known as Tent City, all to talk to me for a few stingy minutes. If he wants to use the Internet, he also has a fifteen-minute time limit, waiting in that same awful line for his turn. Only this time, there'll be a sand storm, and he has to cover himself from head to toe, yet when he gets back to his room he will still find sand in his ears, nose, boxers, and socks. He tries to break the rules as much as he can, such as going to different phone tents so the attendants don't recognize him (this usually works and I can at least talk to him once a day) or pretending to be checking weather conditions in the local area while discreetly typing a hasty email. The Internet has become a favorite form of communication because Russ always appreciates not having to wait his turn in line with fifty other guys just to tell his wife how his day went.

When Russ is deployed to the Middle East, I worry about him. I curse the military for taking him away from me and putting him into a war zone. Yes, I am lonely when he's gone, and I have to manage the bills, the yard, the house, basically both of our lives while he is over there. I get angry with his commanders for enforcing telephone limits and wonder how the hell the chow hall gets away with serving food that gives everyone the runs. I threw a fit last year when Russ called to tell me his Fantasy Football league had been cancelled because it was not upholding the standards the military was trying to convey to the host country. I know Russ is miserable over there and it is times like these he is almost certain he will be getting a divorce when he gets home. I can see him marching right up to Colonel Jackass to take advantage of whatever early separation incentive is being offered at the moment; he'll turn in his papers and tell him that he will not be able to hold him back anymore on his weekends, during dinnertime, and that he most certainly only has one wife that he takes orders from: me.

But there is one thing that Russ's other wife

will never take away from me: my pride. Every day I am continually amazed by my husband and what he accomplishes at work. I cannot believe this twenty-six-year-old guy standing in front of me was only hours before in charge of a crew of five and a multi-million dollar plane. I cannot believe that when he does finally come home at night, it is to tell me that my parents and siblings met him out at his plane when he landed in my hometown in Colorado, and he gave them a tour of the cockpit. Or that next week he will be taking a day trip to Virginia and could I please pack the camera for him because he will be doing a low-level fly-by of his parents' house and wants to capture them jumping up and down on the ground, waving wildly. And I cannot help but laugh when he calls home to tell me excitedly that he has been recognized as Top Performer of the Quarter. Is this my husband, the guy that I cannot even get to take out the trash on Monday nights without a reminder?

I am even more amazed that my husband can be trusted to command planes in combat zones while he is in the Middle East, planning out flight routes and evaluating threat levels before flying into an area. But he does it, and maybe that is why Russ's homecomings from his deployments are perhaps the times when I am most proud of him. I always feel like a cheesy military wife waiting with my fellow spouses in a crowded and sweltering hot cardboard box, because at the time that is what the hangar we have all gathered in feels like. I somehow always manage to find myself clutching a mini American flag, and I always break the tiny little stick or get a splinter in my palms by the time the plane actually arrives. I will never forget the loud buzz that signals the plane coming in on final approach, the swell of pride in my chest as the giant Hercules rolls forward towards the anxious and excited families waiting at the ramp. As the people in the cockpit come into focus I can see that it is my husband at the controls. Yes, that's right, *my* husband. His face is familiar but at the same time it is not; it always takes some time for me to claim that smile, those eyes, nose, lips, as mine again. He and the other pilot wave at the families standing there, but it is I who is waving so hard my arm practically falls off because I know Russ is really waving just at me. My face hurts from smil-

ing so hard, and, when the door to the side of the plane finally swings open, I can feel the tears in my eyes, but before I have any time to even so much as waver in my smile, Russ is in front of me. I feel as if I might faint, and it is not because I have been waving and smiling so much, but because Russ hugs me so tight I am surprised my lungs don't collapse. People are running all around us, shouting greetings and crying happily. I just stand there with Russ, grinning from ear to ear until someone breaks into our reunion and tells us to get his bags and go home. That is the way these arrivals always happen, and I am just as proud of Russ on the fifth homecoming as I was on the first.

For the pride I feel towards my husband, I reluctantly have to give credit to the military. He has been provided with opportunities that many people cannot brag of; he has set foot on four continents, traveled in countless countries, flown dignitaries all over the world, and worked around the clock to transport medical patients out of combat zones to a safe hospital. As much as I hate seeing

the good side of this other marriage, I am forced to recognize it when I realize Russ's accomplishments at such a young age.

Being married to Russ means I am married to the military. I will let her have control over just about every aspect of my life—I'll share my husband, and I won't complain (loudly) when I cannot plan a decent vacation. I do not mind sharing because I know one day that long-awaited divorce will happen, and with it will come peace of mind and a normal life...not to mention a nice chunk of alimony paid in monthly installments. So when the phone rings tomorrow morning at five AM, I will stand in the doorway and silently wave goodbye to my husband as he heads out for the day. I will swallow my words when he calls to tell me his plane is broken in Salt Lake City and he is not sure if he will make it home for my birthday. I will play the role of the good wife in order to make his other one look bad, silently counting the days until those divorce papers are served, and we are rid of that other woman forever.♣

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## AS EVERLASTING AS A TATTOO

Annette Hagans



Annette Hagans is a senior Elementary Education Major, concentrating in English. Her passion is writing poetry to those that she loves and whenever she is inspired. She hopes to pass on this love of writing to her students.

Imagine a childhood where you felt alone. You did not like or respect your alcoholic and verbally abusive father, and all you saw your mother do was cry, work, and sleep. Imagine that your closest sibling is eight years older than you, and you feel as though she hates you and that you are a burden on her because she has out-grown Barbie dolls and playing in the mud. This was my life before we moved out to the country. But in the countryside of the Burnt Islands, I found a friend that I could trust with my innermost thoughts and feelings. I found a friend that I could talk to, build a playhouse with, and catch tadpoles with in the flood water that filled her front yard when we had heavy rains. Despite the fact that she was three years younger than I was, for along time she was my best and dearest friend.

After the initial childhood anxiety of first-time introductions, we spent a lot of time together. When I stayed over at her house, I would cook grilled-cheese sandwiches on the stove for us for breakfast. We would get dressed and go out in her front yard and work on our playhouse or walk down to the chicken coop and peek in on hatchlings to see how they were doing. Sometimes we even went upstairs to the attic of their “storage” barn and sat talking in what used to be her brother’s space. He never really liked us invading his space and snooping through his things, but he

was no longer there to stop us.

Melissa’s brother John was about sixteen years old when he died. He was a ladies man and always had a girlfriend. His last girlfriend, Myers, was a pretty mysterious person. Before he met her, he was a bright, happy, and spontaneous kid. Once they were together, her darkness took him over. The last time I saw them was the day that they died. They had come home from a beach trip, and I saw them go into Melissa’s house to do whatever they do. The next day, there were a million cars across the street, and Melissa did not come home until late that night so that I could learn what had happened. Only John and Myers really know what happened between them, but it is suspected that it was a double suicide, for the police found their bodies lying on the ground as if they had been facing each other when they were shot. Before his death, life was chaotic but cheery at the Barnes household, but, after, you could feel the death that hung in the air like a thick fog that seemed to hover over them wherever they went.

After a few years of coping with her brother’s death and Melissa growing from an innocent kid to a rebellious teenager, she began to over use the power that had been bestowed upon her. Her parents feared losing her, and she took advantage of their fears by going out of her way to make their lives difficult. If she did not like something they had said or done, she would scream and yell until she got exactly what she wanted. It was during this span of time that she did all sorts of things I had thought about but would never have dared to do. She would sneak out at night with her boyfriend and come back just in time to get up for school. She also partied hard and started using drugs. Whenever I had a free moment and could catch her at home, I would go and visit her, or we would go out riding in my little 1987 Ford Escort station wagon, or the car I would later flip, the 1992 Ford Taurus station wagon that I bought from her mom. She would tell me about her latest boy toy, how well equipped he was or how much he was lacking, and how well he did his job. She seemed so carefree on the outside, but it took a lot of digging for me to get her to talk about the pain she was feeling inside.

I never could quite believe what my little

buddy was doing. It seemed like only yesterday that she was in third grade and I was brushing her hair before bed, or she was forever trying to make me play with Barbie dolls. But she had grown up, just a little bit, and was running wild through the streets, doing whatever she could to help herself deal with the pain from losing her brother that still ran through her. And all I could do was shake my head and listen.

During my high school years and my freshman year of college, I would stay over a few nights here and there, and she would catch me up on what was going on in her life. And then on the fifth anniversary of her brother's death, she had me ride with her to Wal-mart. She got a white rose and an "I miss you" card for her brother, and then we drove out to his grave. We drove up to her brother's headstone. I stayed by the car as she walked over and put the card under the flower basket that sat on top of the stone and placed the rose nearby. I watched as she stood in silence, waiting for her to say something. I soon walked over to take a glance at the stone and reminisce about what I knew of her brother. She told me that she was going to let him go. She told me that her brother was hooked on drugs and that his drug of choice was cocaine. Then she casually mentioned that she did a bump for him on his birthday every year. I knew she used, but I did not know she was hooked and had been trying to play it off with his birthday bump being a decent excuse for her to do so. I could have cried for her on that night, but, because I had assumed the role of her older sister, I was just there for her.

Melissa had many milestones to cross, and year after year, she made me proud. It took her a long time to let go of the pain she felt and the drugs and alcohol that she used to try and hide her feelings. But once she was finished, she was done. Now that she is almost eighteen and only smokes cigarettes, I can be the proud big sister that her brother never had the chance to be.

Melissa and I have gone from giggly little girls camping out under the stars in tents made from her old and worn out cartoon comforters to young women with ambitious goals. Now we are older and seniors at two different levels. She is a senior in high school ready to graduate and pursue a degree in photography. I am a senior in college and ready to pursue a career in education. It seems

as if we are always on the verge of something new in our lives.

One day she decided that we should get matching tattoos. Having four already and her proposing a new and matching one, I was game. She chose a butterfly which seemed to catch me off guard, but once she explained her choice, I was okay with the idea. See, Myers loved butterflies, which made Melissa's parents detest them. Getting a butterfly, for Melissa, meant that she was letting go of the hatred that she had for Myers and making peace with the death of her brother. As a side note, she added that butterflies are a symbol of friendship.

A tattoo seems appropriate for us. With her brother dying while she was young, all of the arguing at home, and her alcohol and drug abuse, she needs something that can remind her of the times when she could have whole-hearted laughs and be free from the pain that constricted her soul. For me, this tattoo helps to push away the memories of an abusive and threatening father, and a mother whom I love that disappoints me with every memory I have of our past.

By getting this tattoo, should I ever get to thinking about Melissa and cannot get in touch with her, I can just look in a mirror at my shoulder and remember the day that we were both in pain and made a deeper bond between ourselves. Should she ever miss me, she can do the same and hopefully end up calling me or coming to see me so that we could pretend we were kids again and walk back down to the chicken coop that no longer bears chickens, just over-grown weeds.

A lot has happened in the nine years that we have been friends. She went from being a perky, red-headed third-grader to a full-grown adult who has overcome her alcoholic and drug ridden demons and has positive goals and ambitions that include college, a family of her own, and a career that will make her happy, while I went from an eleven-year-old that lived in an almost-broken home to an adult who is ready to spread her wings and fly away from what has haunted her for her entire life. In a way, we are both like butterflies. We have grown from scared and helpless caterpillars that can only live on the leaves of plants where they are literally plopped by their egg-laying mothers to beautiful and determined butterflies that will soon fly away to make new lives for themselves.✿

Throughout the semester, Annette labored to produce this excellent piece of creative nonfiction, writing close to the bone in this short piece of memoir.

—Kim Gunter

## BEAUTIFUL CAROLINA

Eric Hatchell



Eric Hatchell is an English major who enjoys sports—both watching and participating—and enjoys spending time with family and friends.

There is something paradoxical in naming a public housing complex a park. The positive connotations and the life-evoking images that normally arise when one hears the word “park” would disappear should they catch a glimpse of their park. Unlike central park in Manhattan, there are no beautiful lakes with lively waterfowl on display for those out for a stroll, only mud puddles that have collected in holes in the pavement and dirt caused by overuse and erosion. There are no scenic paths in their park. The only thing that comes close to resembling such would be the shortcuts they have constructed that are repeatedly trod upon day after day by weary feet, shortcuts that wind and intersect with each other throughout the whole project. Overturned milk crates serve as their park benches. There is no room here for any personal space, as the families are all stacked one on top of the other, packed tightly together like the lead balls in a shotgun shell. Because of this overcrowding, children are forced to play in the street. I believe these people have a right to argue that for them the grass will always be greener on the other side. Naming this place Carolina Park seems so absurd. It is surely no paradise.

Directly beside their park, separated by a six-foot tall chain linked fence is another subsidized

housing complex called Pinewood Apartments. The appearance of this complex is drastically different when compared to its neighbor, although it is subsidized just the same. The apartments look nicer, the landscape is better designed with lots of trees and shrubs, and they even have a jungle gym on one side for the kids to play on. There is one other slight difference, though, in that mostly whites occupy the nicer complex, while Carolina Park is predominantly black.

I lived in Pinewood Apartments as a child, with my younger sister and mother. We stayed in Apartment 12B, which is located almost directly beside that fence I mentioned earlier. My mom raised us both on what little she earned working a dismal, low-end job at a plant in rural South Carolina. Every day she would make the long drive back across the state line after working her long shift and still find time to attend nursing school at night, all the while managing to make it back home in time to see my sister and me before we would fall asleep for the night. Many nights, my sister and I would have to stay at home alone, cook our own meals, do our homework with no assistance from anyone, and get ready for bed by ourselves because of this busy schedule that my mom had to maintain.

I vividly remember that one night while my sister and I were playing Nintendo, I heard shouting coming from the direction of Carolina Park. Peeping through the blinds, my third-grade eyes saw what appeared to be waves of black people flooding through the fence that was supposed to be there to keep them out, and one old white man standing in front of them, trying his best to keep our complex from being infiltrated by the newcomers. It was not enough anymore to just see; I had to hear what was going on. I quietly opened the door and stuck half of my head out. The old man was pointing a crooked old finger at them and ranting about how they were trespassing and would be forced to pay for repairs to the fence. But really, how could they have been trespassing? How could anyone claim ownership to such a small area when there were hundreds of us on both sides of the fence living right on top of each other?

When my mother got home that night, my

sister told her of the exciting incident that she had witnessed compliments of her older brother's inquisitiveness. At eight years my mother did not believe in "sparing the rod". This incident called for nothing less, and that night I endured the beating of a lifetime for breaking one of the ground rules we were given for when we were alone: never open the door for any reason. The next day my mother went out and inspected the hole that had been cut in the fence. I was expressly forbidden to ever step through that hole. I could not understand why she wouldn't want me to go over to their side because I had played with some of those kids before when they came over to our side, and they seemed all right to me. It seemed as though my mom feared some danger that she could not physically see, but only envisioned because of what she had heard somewhere before, or because of the people she saw over there. When we got back into the house she told me, "The next time you hear anyone fighting outside just turn the volume up on the T.V. so you can't hear it, and don't stick your head out there to sneak a look."

If that fence had never been vandalized, I probably would have never met Terrance. He was a young black boy living with his parents in Carolina Park. His family life was a lot less structured than my own. His parents did not seem to pay much attention to him or what he was doing, as long as he did not disturb them. For whatever reason, he was allowed to hang out really late, even on school nights. He pretty much did whatever he pleased, and this troubled my mom. But she warmed up to him and eventually allowed me to hang with him as long as I stayed on our side of the fence. She even invited him to eat dinner with us at night, seating him at the fourth seat of our small, fold-up table. This worked out great, for that chair was always empty anyway.

Our friendship grew while my mother's financial situation improved. Soon after I met Terrance, we moved out of our complex and into a house on the south side of the city, and, as easily as we had met, we were now taken away from each other. As is often the case, we drifted further apart as the years passed. Terrance and his family remained on their side of the fence. As absurd as it may sound, I believe that in some aspects they

were in fact proud of where they lived. When you live in places such as these, a different kind of pride grows within you. It is not that we were proud of the material things we had, because we had little. Instead, we embraced the fact that we had little and we were proud of what we did have, such as love and close family ties. I could see it in the way that Terrance would wear his hat turned to one side and walk with a swagger even as a child. I could hear it in the loud exhaust system that nearly dug the ground behind our small, snot-green colored, two door car as the four of us sputtered around town, happy as could be because we did not have to walk everywhere we went like so many we would see back home.

During high school we hung out with different people. When we would see each other in the hallways, uttering the words "What's up?" or "How's it goin'?" seemed to be impossible to do. I could not understand how changing locales could alter a friendship in such a way. Despite the alienation that life had pushed upon us, I still found it heartbreaking to learn that during our senior year Terrance and two accomplices had robbed two people at gunpoint on the other side of town, broke into the victim's home, and stole some things...and then shoved them into the trunk of a car and transported them across the North Carolina state line into a neighboring state. He and each of his "friends" were charged with numerous felonies. The last I heard, Terrance was about to be carted off to prison. He would now be leaving the park for the first time since I met him when we were kids.

At the age of eighteen, his life was about to change drastically. I can only imagine the lifestyle he is had to adapt to while living on the "inside". I think of him often. On my way to school, I wonder that while my car is taking me to class how loud it must be on the bus that transports him from one litter-filled highway to the next. I think about why it is that thick shackles are what weigh his feet down during these rides, while the desire to learn and the need for an education are what pull my foot down on the gas peddle. Or that while I am sitting in class during the week or the bar on the weekend with my friends, he is laying in a cell somewhere with not even so much as a window to

Eric grapples with big issues in this piece of memoir: fairness, racism, classism, justice. Ultimately, he reveals how he has inherited both stigma and privilege in an inequitable world.

—Kim Gunter

## BEAUTIFUL CAROLINA

look out of. An orange jumpsuit and slippers are a long way from the baggy clothes and Jordans that he used to wear. Sometimes when my family is eating dinner I still think of him and how that seat he used to occupy is once again empty.

I cannot comprehend how that when all that separated us was a six-foot tall chain linked fence, one of us could right now be in his third year of college and the other be in one of the worst places in America. I know that everyone has the opportunity to choose what they want to do with their lives, and that we all must make decisions and then have to live with the consequences. But I also know that what he did that night was not characteristic of who he was when he and I were best friends, when we were younger. I suppose time has a way of changing people. I have also seen the effects that poverty and living in poor communities can have on an individual. I can not help but think that maybe if he had lived on our side of the fence that life may have led him down a different path. I wonder that if I had tried harder to keep in touch then maybe I could have been a better influence in his life, that positive influence he obviously needed. Or maybe if he had been white instead of black...maybe then his life would have been better. Maybe then he and his family would have been admitted into Pinewood Apartments. I remember vividly seeing his light-skinned face under the street lamp one night as he was leaving

and noticing how that under the right light at the right time, his complexion almost resembled that of a white boy! For me to remember that distinct moment in our relationship while writing an article on race and public housing only proves my point, that even a poor white family has it better than an African American family in the same position. I feel it also says something about the society in which we live. It is depressing, but it seems to me that you are either on one side of the fence or the other, you are either white or you are black. The latter seem to have to fight harder to survive and if they slip through the cracks no one seems to notice. Tupac had it right when he shouted in one of his raps, "It ain't a secret don't conceal the fact/the penitentiary's packed, and it's filled with blacks" ("Changes"). Visiting him in that place he is in now, having to look at him through that thick glass and speak to him through a phone, would no doubt be too much to bear, even though I have not seen him in years. The sad thing is that no bolt cutters on the market could cut through that glass and allow him to walk out of there a free man, like the way they cut through the fence that separated our two complexes. Things are not that simple anymore.✿

### Work Cited

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## HAPPINESS COMES IN A FIVE-POUND BAG OF GRITS

Jacqueline R. Roberts

When I was eighteen, I packed up and left Georgia for the first time. I had been so happy to get away, and I was still happy. Looking out over my balcony in Italy every morning made me aware of just how different everything was. I had taken the chance to see new things and experience a different kind of life. I had many new friends, but when I was alone in my apartment or when I was tired and broke from touring, the one thing that always came to my mind was how much I wanted to be back in Grandma's kitchen. When I had moments of sadness or loneliness, or a wonderful week that would have ended with a family dinner had I been home, I realized that something was seriously missing. The only thing I needed to make me feel truly content was a full plate of home cooking. I did not know then how important food would become.

I called my Grandmother to tell her what I was missing. I had expected her to sympathize and make some comment about how she would have some of my favorite dishes waiting when I made the return trip home. Instead, she offered to help by mailing some of the ingredients on my wish list. It took about two weeks for the grits, corn meal, cheddar cheese, boiled peanuts and Crisco to arrive on my doorstep. She was thoughtful enough to send recipes along with the fixings. It was not long before the cooking began.

I was a little nervous at first; to me, this was not the kind of food I should have alone. So to make it feel more like home, I invited a party of people to share my cooking with. As the room filled with friends and everyone began talking and playing, it got hot and loud. We were all gathered in the kitchen, and, suddenly, just like that, I started to feel like I was home. I realized that what I had wanted was not only the food from home, but the comfort that came with it. I realized for the first time that sharing good food is one of the best and simplest joys in life. For me, the communion of food and people is the best recipe for true happiness. The special ingredients that were mailed to me brought with them a real connection to my family at home. I felt like I was keeping with me a



real, living part of my Southern culture.

Traveling and living abroad have become my way of life. Throughout twelve years of foreign addresses, I have been the lucky recipient of many more of those care packages. Vidalia onions come to me at the same time they make it to other Georgians. The only difference in my onions is that they have covered a few more miles to get to the kitchen.

Now when I cook, using those special family recipes, I know what is going to happen. I put on my crisp, white apron with the Battenberg lace, and settle into the mood of cooking. I slow down a bit and take control of my world. When I turn on the oven, it feels like turning back to the place I came from. Hot, fresh biscuits filled with cheese still make everyone happy. I can be anywhere in the world, but I do not feel far from Granddaddy as long as I am eating oysters with saltines and Tabasco. I know it must be Friday night if there is a big glass dish filled with steaming bar-b-que chicken in the oven. Arranging the pears and cherries neatly on a plate for pear salad always makes the world seem orderly, and I recall how it was always a team effort with Cousin Carrie that got it done at home.

I now have a family of my own, with two

Jacqueline Roberts is a transfer student to UNCP and brings with her a life-long love of reading and writing. She has been traveling around the world with her family for many years and looks forward to settling down in North Carolina—long enough to earn a nursing degree and learn how to make fabulous bar-b-que.

## HAPPINESS COMES IN A FIVE-POUND BAG OF GRITS

While living in Italy, Jacqueline began to miss her Southern grandmother's home cooking.

Here she skillfully explains how, with the help of a few ingredients from home, she came to realize that she could once again experience the love and warmth of her grandmother's kitchen.

—Dayle Bailey

little girls that have never lived in America—were not even born here. When we sit at our table and share meals, I realize that my efforts to remake my childhood foods are not just about the food. It is my way of sharing the family they do not get to grow up with. I know my work is paying off when they fight over who puts the last cherry on top of the pear salad, even more so when they scream in disgust as I sprinkle that little dash of Tabasco over an oyster.

I did not know it then, but it was a gift that Grandma did not let me whine about missing

cheese grits and fried onions. She made me realize that the food we grow up with can sustain us for far longer than it stays in our bodies. The food from my childhood is a gift that can never be lost or broken, as long as the memories and ingredients do not fail me.

When I move into a new house, in a new country, it is not really home until the first batch of fried chicken has been made. Those tiny, shiny grease spots cover the stove top, telling me that no matter where I am, it is the food that makes it home.☘

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