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The Forum: Spring 2002

Joshua Tangen
University of North Dakota

Justin Baesler
University of North Dakota

Shawna Widdel
University of North Dakota

Bethany Roel
University of North Dakota

Erin McCleary
University of North Dakota

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Joshua Tangen, Justin Baesler, Shawna Widdel, Bethany Roel, Erin McCleary, Joshua Tangen, Amanda Licht, Curtis Jefferson, Seth Christman, Amy Gieske, Justin Baesler, Sue Trnka, Martine Natasha Johnson, and Dustin Kouba

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BOSP Chairperson: Dan Wellcome
Phone: 777-9812

Justin Baesler

Some Things I Can Recommend

Do not question beginnings,
Or what brought us all here.
Dream of a horizon that will continue
And if you turn around
Will still be there when
You walk the other way.

Never wait for an answer
Longer than it takes to draw
The breath with which to speak it.
Search only for questions that
Have answers that can be seen
In the small movement the eye makes,
A look into your own, or a look away.
Small actions answer everything.

Have a beer while you wait
For the sun to come up, and then
Go back to sleep. The sunrise is
The only beauty a morning can bring.
There actually are other beauties but
Dreams are much more interesting.

Create summer in your mind
But don't spoil it with overpopulation.
Remember, a beach is more beautiful
In the lonely evening than it will ever be
During a hot busy day.
Linger in your creations longer than
You are supposed to, they will
Bring you more happiness than
This world will ever provide.

Distance yourself from others,
But only for small periods of time,
True loneliness will drive anyone mad.
Come back unexpectedly and somewhere different,
New beginnings will change the world some day.

Believe there will be a constant
Springtime in the world around you.
Never let friendships stagnate or
Emotions rot, the earth has enough pollution.
Make snowflakes fall when everything is
Springing up, it will surprise everyone.

Imagine that a day can last forever,
Love will find a better answer,
Cancer will run out of steam and eradicate itself,
Purity is in everything we do,
Carelessness is the worst mistake,
Breathing can calm you down, and
Not breathing will create chaotic feelings,
Falling down will make others laugh,
Or will scar you forever,
Words can sound feeble in a poor poet's hands,
Words can make beauty with a few simple syllables,
Words can tear down and words can build up,
And Words can heal almost anything.

But never believe a poet's answer,
Just look at their eyes, and
Let everything else pass you by.



Shawna Widdel

Bethany Roel

Women Under Fundamentalist Religions

When reading a book which depicts a less-than-desirable world, people tend to be thankful they live where and when they do, rather than in the setting of that book. Every once in a while, though, a book like this hits too close to home because the events it describes are actually plausible in a way or have some basis in reality. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a society based on Christian fundamentalism which has been taken to extremes. Radical religious groups like the one in Atwood's novel do exist in the world today, both in the Middle East and here at home.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* (hereafter *Handmaid*), Atwood paints a frightening picture of the not-so-distant future as it could be if trends which she saw in her time continued. The United States is no more; in its place is the Republic of Gilead, a country under the totalitarian rule of an all-male, radical right-wing fundamentalist group. The change from America to Gilead had happened very rapidly. The leaders of those people who wished to take over the country initiated the swift downfall of the United States government when "they shot the President and machine-gunned the Congress..." It was not known how this had come to pass, but the revolutionaries had accurately predicted the public's response to such a horrific event and swiftly moved to take ruthless advantage of the stunned country's state of disorientation. The Constitution was suspended, but no one seemed to notice as they were still in shock over the swiftness with which the government had been decimated.

Then another major blow sent the country reeling: it was suddenly declared illegal for women to hold jobs. The bewildered citizens could not understand this at all. Then came the ruling that women could no longer be in control of any amount of money or hold property of any sort. Now the true objectives of the insurrectionists became apparent: they wanted to set up a patriarchal government in which women would have no power whatsoever. Each new law and regulation they passed increased the authority of men and diminished women until they had only a very few, strictly defined places within society.

Frighteningly, the Republic, or at least the ideals, of Gilead are not entirely fictional. Probably the most notable and infamous example of a modern-day Gilead-like power structure is the Taliban regime of Afghanistan. Margaret Atwood visited Afghanistan in 1978, only weeks before it was

invaded by communist Russia. At the time, the country had not yet faced the hardships of the Russian occupation nor the suffering that would be caused by the Taliban, a fundamentalist group that would rise up in retaliation to the Russians and "re-take" Afghanistan. There were noticeable differences between pre- and post-Russia and Taliban Afghanistan; before the insurrection, women were not forced to wear the chador, or burqa, an all-enveloping garment which left no area of flesh uncovered, but some did out of respect for old customs. Women walked down the streets alone or in small groups, sometimes, but not always, in the company of males. The males of the city addressed Atwood through her husband, because according to one of their customs, it was impolite to speak directly to a woman not related to you.

Shortly after Atwood had left the country, the war broke out. When the Taliban rose to power, the burqa became obligatory; no man was to look upon a woman whom he was not directly related to through either blood or marriage. Women were no longer allowed to walk about the cities without the escort of a close male relative, which the Taliban claimed was for their own protection. Males still did not speak to females to whom they were not related, but out of compulsion of the law and a chauvinistic view of women rather than respect for them. Women were forbidden from receiving an education, holding a job, or even seeing male physicians when they were ill. Considering that under the Taliban's strict laws women were no longer allowed to be physicians, ailing Afghan women had nowhere to turn. Atwood was influenced greatly by having seen the changes in Afghanistan unfold with her own eyes, and six years after returning from Afghanistan, she wrote *Handmaid*. In her own words, "Would I have written [*Handmaid*] if I never visited Afghanistan? Possibly. Would it have been the same? Unlikely."

Both the Republic of Gilead and the Taliban are based on extreme fundamentalist forms of religions. According to the author of "Religious Fundamentalism and Human Rights" Johan D. van der Vyver, "Fundamentalism in the broadest possible sense may be said to thrive upon a belief that God sanctions attitudes and behavior developed and executed in strict obedience to what the faithful observer perceives to be holy commandments." He goes on to state that, while fundamentalists assert that they are upholding standards of correct behavior and beliefs while professing to be instrumental in safeguarding religious traditions, they in fact "embark upon ideologies, practices and organizational structures that are quite new and unprecedented in established or mainstream religions." Both the fictional and real governments use their "basis" religions, Christianity and Islam respectively, in some way to control their citizens.

The society of Gilead is based on a perverted form of Christianity. The Commanders, the male leaders of the people, use their authority to obtain the use of Handmaids, women whose sole purpose in life is to produce

healthy offspring so that the human race may continue in Gilead. The Commanders justify their use of the Handmaids' bodies with Biblical text, specifically the story of Rachel and Jacob. Rachel desperately wants a child, but she is infertile, so she pleads with her husband to "go in unto" her maid Bilhah and sire a child upon her that Rachel might claim as her own. A special training center is even created for prospective Handmaids called the Rachel and Leah Center after two prominent female figures of the Bible. There, women are taught subservience, how best to conceive and bear children, and other such "skills" that their next Commander will find useful. The students of the Center daily recite the Beatitudes to remind them of how they are to conduct themselves. However, according to the Center's version, not only are the women to be meek and pure of heart, but also silent. This last is not included in the original Beatitudes, but has been inserted into them because it will serve the Commanders' purposes. The Handmaids' training is based largely on religion, such as texts like these from the Bible, but much of what they are taught has been made up by the government to manipulate their thinking.

The Taliban also uses a twisted version of a religion to keep its citizens in line. Other Middle-Eastern Islamic countries condemn the Taliban's travesty of Islam, but none have the power to stop the Taliban's deliberate misrepresentation of their religion, nor do the citizens of Afghanistan. According to the internet site *Buried Alive: Afghan Women Under the Taliban*, "[T]o ensure their dictates are followed, religious police, part of the Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice constantly roam the streets...often [they are] teenaged boys and [they] carry electrical cabling to whip women they decide are not properly observing the regulations [of the Taliban]." These young Talib boys make the decisions to punish disobedient women at their discretion and are backed by authorities and their "religion." True Islam does not condone such casual violence.

An obvious example of the Taliban's misuse of the Islamic religion can be seen in these young boys' views and treatment of women, and in their upbringing as well. Most are graduates of religious schools, where they have been kept isolated from all women, even family members. The highest rank they can achieve at these schools is that of qari, which they can attain by memorizing and reciting the entire Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. According to this book, men and women are equally important to God. Women have as much a right to an education as men do, and while modest dress for women is strongly recommended, only the Prophet's wives were required to veil their faces. Unfortunately, the Taliban's versions of the Qur'an are all in Arabic, a language which the young Talibs have not been taught and therefore cannot understand. As a result of this "oversight," they have no idea of the rights given to women under true Islam. According to the Qur'an, "Be you male or female, you are equal to

one another." Sadly, as in *Handmaid*, the Taliban chooses to use only the parts of its religious basis that it sees fit and discards the rest.

While it is easy to look at the political situations in *Handmaid* and Afghanistan and think there is no chance of any of the events within it ever taking place here in the United States, elements that are reminiscent of Christian fundamentalism in America do exist within the novel. The United States was founded on both the principles of Christianity and the idea that all people were created equal and therefore have equal rights. However, in reference to gender, these two standards come into conflict with each other when Christianity is taken to its fundamentalist extreme.

In his article "Religious Fundamentalism and Human Rights," Johan D. van der Vyver provides the reader with a general idea of the ideal goals and purposes of fundamentalism and conjectures as to what might cause people to turn to this type of religious order:

[Fundamentalism] enhances a spirit of reparation: condemnation of contemporary perceptions, institutions, and conduct, coupled with glorification of the past and endeavors to restore the ways of the supposedly 'good old days.' It derives its main support from the victims of suffering and deprivation, or those frustrated by an underdeveloped personality of unfulfilled aspirations. It seeks to develop a strong sense of solidarity amongst its flock and...fosters a sense of self-sufficiency.

Those who are "victims of suffering and deprivations" may feel they need structure to return to a sense of normalcy; thus, they may seek out something like fundamentalism to be a foundation for their lives. Van der Vyver's description of fundamentalism makes it out to be something noble, rather than the harsh, repressive form of religion it appears to be to many outsiders. In *Handmaid*, for example, the women are told that they must wear clothing which exposes no skin whatsoever so that men are less likely to be attracted to them and lust after or assault them. The original fundamentalists may have had only the best intentions in mind when they attempted to bring back the "good old days." However, as is the case with so many idealistic organizations, there is a plethora of ways in which devious-minded people can use organizations like this to their own advantage and exploit the people whom they are supposed to be protecting.

Most definitely, there are varying degrees of fundamentalism, but all seem to have at least a few things in common, and the most obvious of these is the suppression of women. Christian fundamentalist leaders often attempt to justify this by saying that women are weaker and more susceptible to harm than are males, and thus must be protected. To support this opinion, they allude to the passage in the book of Genesis in which Eve is beguiled by the serpent to eat of the forbidden fruit, and then convinces

Adam to try it as well. In extreme cases, women in fundamentalist groups grow accustomed to being thought of as weaker than males and many times even believe it themselves. These women find the males' "protection" of them to be more important than the fact that they must submit completely to the wills of their husbands and males in general. In *Handmaid*, Atwood discusses the differences between "freedom to" and "freedom from." What this really comes down to is a question of how many freedoms are people willing to give up to be free from other things. Some people value safety over freedom; however, as a song from Disney's *Pocahontas* states, "We all must pay a price to be safe, we lose our chance of ever knowing what's around the river bend."

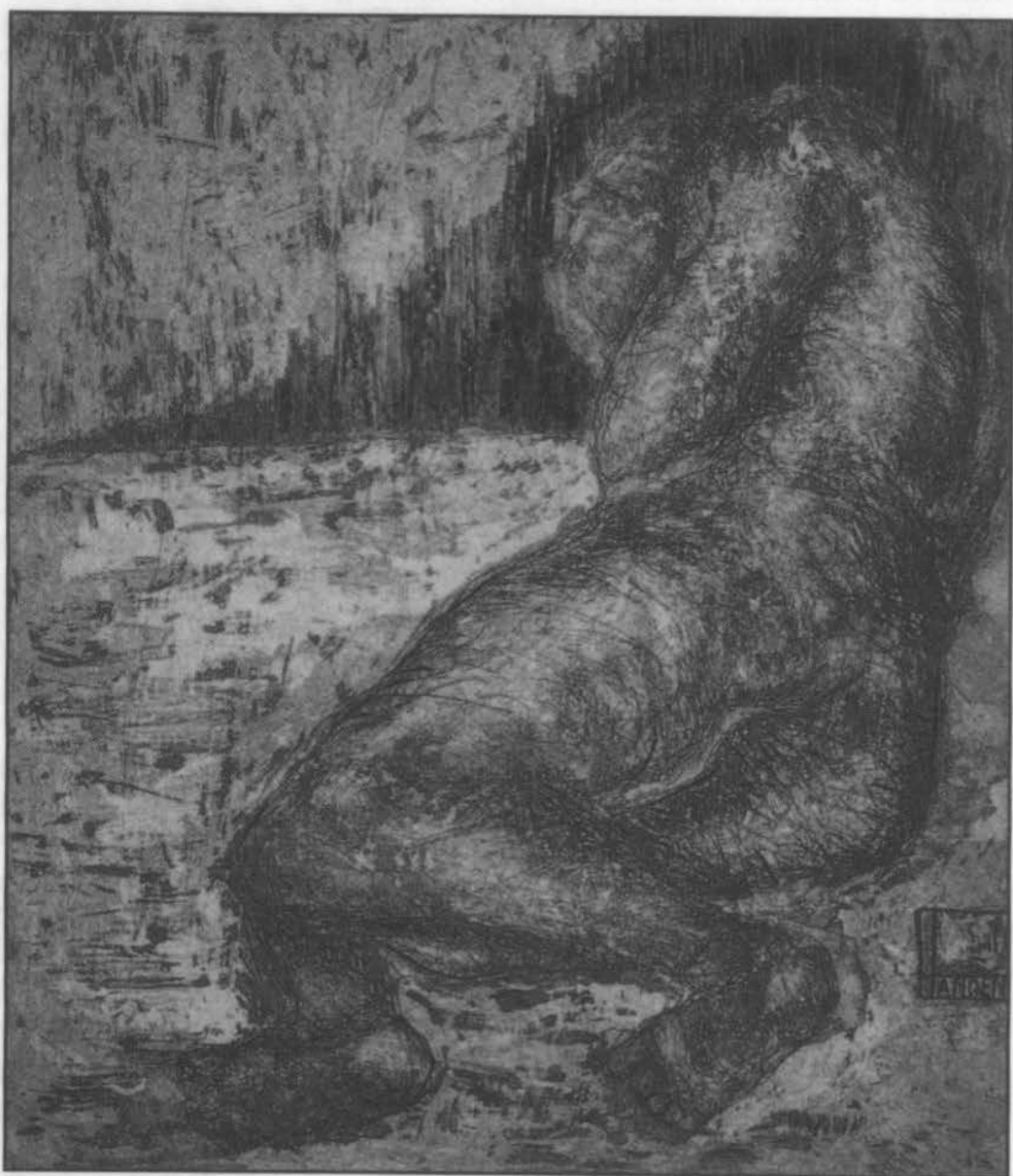
Another basis fundamentalists cite to justify the oppression of women is that they do not deserve to be in positions of power because the Bible has deemed them unworthy. While it is now becoming more common to have a woman as the head of any Protestant church, for many years this was unheard of. In 1998 a mere five percent of all conservative, Anglo Saxon-based churches, and only twenty-one percent of Protestant congregations specifically, were led by women. This obvious bias against having women in the pulpit mainly stems from scriptural roots. The Biblical book First Timothy, chapter two, verse twelve, reads as follows: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." The same idea is again stated in First Corinthians, chapter fourteen, verses thirty-four and thirty-five: "Let your women keep silence in the churches.... It is a shame for women to speak in the church." This concept may be viewed as outdated, as these words were written nearly two thousand years ago, but even today men seem to shy away from churches under female leadership. Julia Duin suggests that the reduction in male attendance in congregations led by women can be partially attributed to the presence of female clergy because the men may believe that the messages and ideas presented might somehow not be as valid if a woman, as opposed to a male clergy member, is delivering them. Feminist theologian Mary Dale wrote nearly thirty years ago of her belief that as long as God is perceived as male, men will be perceived as closer to god-like status than will women. This is exemplified in Atwood's society of Gilead in that any person in a position of power must be male; women are regarded as inferiors in all cases, simply put on Earth to be vessels for the Commanders' children.

Looking at the Christian fundamentalist components in the United States, it is clear that they have not been taken to the extent that the Islamic ones have been in Afghanistan. However, when the sequence of events that lead to America's downfall in *Handmaid* is examined and compared with the inner workings of a fundamentalist society, one hopes that Margaret Atwood was only writing a novel and not predicting for the United States the same situation she saw in Afghanistan.

Erin McCleary

In The Garden of a Day

As the sun rises to meet the waking world,
metallic snow falls to the garden of uncertainty.
Only the unbearably loud silence of one holding his breath
could foretell this sheeting.
A glass lily—I have no color.
The dandelions interrupt, the roses pierce
and the lily is left scarred and wilted.
How can crystal clear compare to red and blue?
Children collect the rainbow, their faces bright.
Bouquets are gathered sparing none—
save a flower that only takes up space.
Left amidst the weeds and insects,
the lily endures the cold sun
and holds up the weight of the air.
Suddenly, the singular bloom is wrenched from its security
only to be replaced by a thistle.
A held breath—and all glass shatters on the pedestal.
An evening frost, turned bitter
then lays waste to “Eden.”



Joshua Tangen

Amanda Licht

Customer Service

The two-way radio's burst of static startled Nicka out of her day-dreams. Dave's garbled voice picked up just as the white noise died: "Nickole! Are you going to answer the phone, or not?" She pulled the radio from her apron pocket and pushed the button with her thumb, "Yeah yeah, sorry boss." Nicka grabbed the receiver. She sighed and summoned up the sugary phone voice that got her promoted to service counter.

"Hello! Big Deal Foods, this is Nickole. How may I help you?"

"Yeah, what is the Big Deal?" a familiar voice mocked her. "I was beginning to wonder if you'd died over there, kid. Not in the mood to answer phones tonight, huh?"

"You know, this place sucks enough ass without you always bugging the hell out of me, Chris."

"Yeah, you love me. So how's the counter treating ya tonight?"

"I've got a two foot tall stack of envelopes to run through store postal, and at least twenty more rolls of film to run. Pretty sure it's gonna be raunchy porn-style photos too. This greasy loser with a beer gut dropped them all off like half an hour ago. Plus I haven't even started my homework, and there's no way that Dave's letting me out of here before 12:30. I think this store is trying to kick my ass."

"What kinda fool would try to take you out?" Chris laughed. "You're the baddest black belt in Minnesota."

"That's right. State Champ and don't you fucking forget it." Nicka sighed, rubbed her eyes and glanced around the store. The fluorescent lights above the automatic door were flickering again. They'd been doing that all day and it was driving her eyes nuts. Dave only had two tills out of twelve open and the cashiers were sitting back flipping through magazines and tossing M&Ms at each other.

"God it's slow tonight. I wish I was still checking, then I could sit on my ass. But no, I had to take the ten cent raise."

"Gotta get the gas money somehow. I'll let you get back to your shit though. See you in bio tomorrow?"

Nicka hung up the phone and tossed an envelope on the scale. She waited for the digital readout and converted the weight into a price, scribbling both figures down on a check sheet. Dave had instituted a new policy

that said she had to weigh every single envelope in store postal and document its weight before pricing it. Apparently she wasn't as good at guessing as she'd thought she was, because the post office was sending Big Deal's mail back. She typed 34 cents into the meter machine and lined the envelope up. The machine sucked the envelope in and spat it out on the other side. She picked up the next envelope, weighed it, swiped it through.

"Hey. Girlie."

Nicka looked up, feeling her face tighten with annoyance. There was a man lounging against the counter, his head tilted away and a baseball cap pulled down low over his eyes. She didn't notice his approach; she must have been zoned out again. The man thumbed his nose, sniffing sharply, and swung his face towards her. Under the cap, dark hair curled over his ears and forehead. His eyes were bright blue and shifty. He winked. *Gross*, Nicka thought, *why do the old guys always hit on me?*

"May I help you, sir?" she asked, making her voice light.

"I want to send a Western Union."

Nicka pulled a drawer open automatically and thumbed through the forms. "To the U.S. or Mexico?" she asked.

"Texas."

She smiled and pushed a green form across the counter. "If you could just fill that out for me... and I'll need your payment before I begin the transaction. Store policy."

"Sure sure, gotta be careful these days, honey. Never know what kinda bums'll try to rip you off." He reached into his jacket and pulled out a creased leather billfold. "You take money orders for this?"

"Cash," Nicka said, with practiced regret.

"You drive a tough bargain, but I think I can cover it." He snapped two hundreds at her, but held them out of reach when she tried to take them. Nicka sighed and leaned back. She let the politeness drain from her face.

"Look, buddy, I've been here for eight hours and I'm not even close to done with my work. I just wanna go home."

"Whoa, whoa, no offense cutie, just trying to liven you up a little." He dropped the money into her outstretched hand and shoved his fists into his coat pockets.

Nicka smoothed the bills with two fingers, avoiding his eyes.

"Yeah, no problem."

"So... just how old would a pretty thing like yourself be?"

Nicka looked up. "Sixteen," she lied. "I'm a sophomore this year." She pulled the Western Union bag out of a nearby drawer, unzipped it and dropped the bills in. "There'll be a fee as well, but I'm just supposed to get the amount you're sending right away."

"Sixteen!" The man whistled. "That's jailbait, baby."

"Only for sickos," she smiled. "It's not a problem for my boyfriend."

He's a minor, too."

"Spoken for, even. Well, shit, looks like I'm out of luck."

"Looks like." Nicka pulled the zipper shut and moved to drop the money bag back in its drawer.

"Hey, actually..."

Nicka froze at the touch of his hand on her shoulder. She looked up slowly, biting back her anger. The man grinned and pushed his coat aside to reveal the handle of a gun stuck in his belt.

"Now, I don't want to pull anything ugly on such a pretty kid. So, why don't you just drop that in a bag for me instead?"

Nicka tilted her head and looked into the man's eyes. He was leaning far across the counter; she knew that she could slam his head into the Formica hard enough to knock him unconscious, or jab him in the eyes with a stiff finger, jump across and disarm him. She had a black belt with a state championship under it, but she specialized in street fights. This would be cake. The lights over the door were still flickering. She smiled.

"Sure, man, do you want paper or plastic?"

"Funny kid, just give me the damn bag."

Nicka dropped the money into a plastic bag and handed it to the man.

"You have a nice night now," she smiled as he stuffed the bag under his coat and walked out the door.

Curtis Jefferson

Your Face

What am I looking at?
What do I see?

What is that expression
Looking back at me?

Is it hatred?
Is it sadness?
Is it melancholy
Or eternal gladness?

Is it happiness?
Is it anger?
Is it concern
That I am in danger?

Is it longing?
Is it hope?
Is it nothingness
Or don't you know?

I'm wondering as I look
And I ask the stars above:
"What is it I have done?"
For that is NOT a look of love.

Seth Christman

Knocking on Death's Door...And Nobody Is Home

“**B**reathe! 1,2,3, Push! 1,2,3.”

“It’s not coming, it’s too big!”

“She’s been in labor for six hours!”

“We’re going to have to do a cesarean!”...

“Okay let’s bring the baby out and sew mommy back up!”

“He’s not breathing! My God! He’s huge!”

“We better get him on a respirator, I don’t think his lungs can handle it on their own.”

And so, in an overcrowded birth ward of a halogen-halled hospital, my life began. I was a fat child, nearly 12 pounds at birth, and my vital organs were designed to service a much more petite body. The doctors didn’t know if my little lungs could breathe enough air into my oversized body. The odds were against me.

When I was a toddler, my mother often told me that story when she did not think that I was correctly utilizing my time on earth. I would sit on her lap and she would dramatically replay the trauma, exaggerating and stretching the truth to make the story more three-year old comprehensible. After drilling me with guilt over how lucky I was not to be six feet under, she would say that rather than whining about having to eat my cauliflower, I should be glad to be alive enough to eat at all. She also threw in the bit about how there are “poor people in Africa who don’t even have cauliflower to eat.” I guess she thought this story would make me fear death and I would sentimentally realize the value of parents and decide to obey my mother. It didn’t work.

It would not always be so. I mean, I still hate cauliflower, but I wisened up in the department of life appreciation. When in kindergarten, I got a freckle. Now, this most euphorically cute of all dermatological afflictions may seem extremely innocent, but in my case, this one little freckle would change the course of my life forever. The meek little freckle began to grow, and my parents became concerned. A visit to the doctor’s office, however, was to no avail, as they had never seen such a freakish occurrence. They sent me to a dermatologist, who sent me to a plastic surgeon,

who sent me to another string of doctors until I finally ended up in a cancer clinic. It was there that fear was struck into my six-year-old heart. I exploited my newly acquired reading skills to make out the word "cancer" over the sign on the clinic door and wanted to turn and run. My grandfather had just died from the terrible disease, and I assumed that I would soon suffer the same fate. Passing through the doors of the cancer clinic, however, did not mean a signed death certificate. After several experimental medications and numerous visits to countless doctors, I was diagnosed with sporotrichosis, a rare, cancer-causing disease contracted by an infected sliver or thorn imbedded in the skin. Fortunately, it was controlled by medication before the cancer spread and I am left only with a scar on my left cheek as a reminder that life is not a right but a privilege.

After this brush with death, what was a child to do but live in fear? I went through a phase in which I became a recluse. I refused to go outside, would not eat hard foods that may cause me to choke, and even threw fits about riding in the car for fear of accidents. I would not participate in any activity in which I felt my life could end. To me death was around every corner and the fear of the unexpected, the fear of leaving life, was too much to deal with, so I developed an avoidance response. This basically left me with the sole practice of television watching. I accepted this practice whole-heartedly and spent my days on the big red beanbag cuddling up with a box of Twinkies. One day the television show *20/20* was on (I know, I am a nerd for watching a news magazine when I was six but Barbara Walters has a brain-washing effect on small children!). This particular episode showed instances of children who had gotten brain tumors from watching TV and even been killed when their television sets exploded! It was then that my puny little mind realized that even watching "The Smurfs" could result in death. Even at such a naïve age I was able to realize that avoiding everything that could result in death was impossible. I continued to be cautious, but avoiding death was causing more discomfort than death itself.

The fact the death is an inevitable and very significant part of the human life cycle keeps it constantly active in human neurons. It wasn't until about six years later, though, that my major death crisis occurred and the old fears came back to haunt me once more. I began to pass out. Once while showing a 1200-pound 4-H steer (dangerous), once during my cousin's wedding which I was in (embarrassing), and in front of the entire church at my confirmation (painful—I hit my head on the pulpit). I was sent to the doctor. After a series of tests, it was determined that I was severely hypoglycemic and would need to maintain an awareness of my blood sugar levels for the rest of my life.

My twelve-year-old mind reacted differently to death then it had previously. Instead of resisting death, I accepted it. I assumed that death was coming soon and there was nothing I could do about it. It wasn't that I

wanted to die; it was just that I assumed it was my time to go. The dramatic kid that I was, I turned a common affliction into a death sentence and stopped enjoying life while waiting for death to take over. I assumed life was over and I should just let death come. This was not a suitable state in which to live. With parental guidance (a swift kick in the butt), I realized that I could live a normal life and that maybe it wasn't yet my time for extinction.

Two years ago, I again began having fainting spells. This time, though, it was endangering my life. I lost consciousness when I was running in a cross country meet and laid in a golf course sand trap for nearly ten minutes before anyone realized I was gone. Even worse, I passed out behind the steering wheel of my tanker of a car and careened into a snow-filled road ditch, fortunately unharmed. Luckily, my parents were right behind me and took me to the doctor. They assumed it was due to low blood sugar, but my amounts tested high. Then they gave me a heart monitor to wear for a day. For a day I walked around in fear of what the doctors may find. I had a family history of heart disease! What if this was the death of me!

It was not my heart causing problems, though, it was my lungs. My underdeveloped lungs as a baby came back to haunt me as an adult. Not only were they slightly smaller, my chest cavity was significantly smaller than the average person of my size, plus I had an indentation in my chest that made my chest cavity even smaller. After a growth spurt of mammoth proportions, my lungs were unable to handle the oxygen needs of my lengthy body. They told me that I could no longer take part in sports and that I could not lead an active life style because of this condition. My reaction this time was not fear, dormancy, or a refusal to endure life, but quite the opposite. Instead, I realized that at any time I could be gone and this inspired me to live, not to get ready to die. Despite doctor's orders, I ran cross country and track and showed that I could overcome my obstacle. I went scuba diving, and spent time with friends, and put myself before homework and chores, something I had previously neglected to do.

I look back on my life and I am happy with what I have been through so far. These life lessons that I have learned are an integral part of who I am. When I was seven my grandpa died of cancer. At such a young age, the concept of death isn't clear, but the pain can still be felt without the understanding. This made me grow up faster. When I was ten my other grandpa, whom I was very close with, died. He had been sick a long time, but the finality of his death was still very difficult. This made me stronger. And then, when I was 12, my Grandma Edie died. She was young and vital, and an unexpected heart attack sent her to her grave. The sudden pain and overwhelming shock of the situation left me empty. I realized that I had forgotten to tell her so many things, and at a very young age, I learned not to go to sleep on an argument and to live with no regrets. My constant contact with the seafoam walls, chafing paper sheets, and powdery rubber

gloves of the hospital proved a constant reminder of how fortunate I was to be alive. Now there is my Grandma Blenda, 85 and still kicking. I never take her for granted. Every time I say good-bye to her, I take in everything about her, and realize that this could be the last time I see her. I've learned my lesson, and will not soon forget it.

The point of my fable of a life? Death is a part of each and every one of us. It is part of our system of morals, it is part of our religion, our family, our personality. It affects how we are brought up and who we turn out to be. So, it is a very huge part of every person's life. Every life ends in death and therefore every lifetime is spent thinking about the end of its span. It is not possible for any human to go through life without ever once thinking about and fearing death. It is how we handle this fear that determines whether or not we can lead a productive life. Throughout my life death has overcome me at times, but through contact with the concept of death and by facing my fear, I am able to live with it.

Now what? That pretty much brings us to the present. Now I am off on my own, living the high life, happy and content. True, but that does not mean that death never enters my mind. When I get going a little too fast down University Avenue and a passive student steps out into the street and I skid on the icy pavement to avoid hitting him, death scares me. When I get sick from the cafeteria's poisoned chicken potpie, death scares me. When people die in a terrorist bombing, or a school shooting, or from cancer or AIDS or old age or from falling down the stairs, death scares me. I often think about how I will die. Will it be sad lonely death, freezing slowly in my car in road ditch? Will it be dramatic and publicized in a heroic effort to save another life? Or will it be of old age, slowly slipping away, failing health, failing life. When it comes down to it, I don't care how or when or why I die. You see, I can't care. Because if you spend your whole life dying, you can't spend it living.

Age Ten

Portrait of a Boy



Amy Gieske

The boy in the portrait is a young boy, about ten years old, with short, dark hair and a slight smile. He is wearing a light-colored, button-down shirt with a dark bow tie. The portrait is set against a dark background. The text below the portrait is a description of the boy, written by Amy Gieske. It describes the boy's appearance, his personality, and his interests. The text is written in a simple, straightforward style, typical of a child's writing.

In the portrait, the boy is looking directly at the viewer. He has a friendly expression, and his eyes are clear and bright. The lighting is soft, highlighting his features without being harsh. The overall tone of the portrait is warm and inviting.

Justin Baesler

Endless Work

Time, a crescendo of
minute constructions
working endlessly to destroy me.

In a furious pace,
they linger on the brink
collapsing into another tic of the tock.

Forging a terrifying
destruction
with their passing, a ghostly sound.

A train can move
faster than time,
but training can't make time move faster.

Time has only one way
to go, but if I learn
how to swim in it, can I bend time my way?

Or will time only bend me?

Sue Trnka

Forgetting...On Purpose
Remembering...For a Reason

They did not understand why Trudi Montag wanted to dig in the dirt, as they called it, didn't understand that for her it had nothing to do with dirt but with the need to bring out the truth and never forget it. Not that she liked to remember any of it, but she understood that—whatever she knew about what had happened—would be with her from now on, and that no one could escape the responsibility of having lived in this time. (Hegi 450)

Can we simply pretend that a particular event in our lives didn't happen at all—no matter how badly we want to forget that it did? Can we force ourselves to believe that our part in history was trivial or didn't matter simply for the sake of comforting our conscience? Do we—can we—ever truly forget?

Some of the most horrific attributes of humanity were demonstrated in Germany during the Holocaust era. Good and decent people shunned and persecuted others—family, friends, children—for the sake of politics, religion, propaganda, personal safety, even their lives. Atrocities took place by and large. Jews were led to slaughter, imprisoned in work camps, left to starve or freeze to death because of their ethnicity, their beliefs, their wealth, their *difference*. Germans that assisted Jews or would not pledge allegiance to the Nazi regime were imprisoned—taught a lesson in order to serve as an example to others who were non-allegiant. This was a terrible time in our world's history, a time that clearly demonstrates how cruel humanity can be.

Most intriguing is the aftermath of this era: the denial, the avoidance, the silence. That as if by putting something out of mind or refusing to discuss it we can alter the past and eliminate its ever having happened at all. Conceivably this is a defense mechanism triggered by guilt, remorse or fear—the fear that we could allow something this lurid to happen. However, by *remembering* we are allowed to learn from history, to appreciate the diverse world we inhabit, and in effect prevent anything like the Holocaust from ever occurring again.

In Ursula Hegi's epic novel *Stones From The River*, our dwarf storyteller is wise for her years. She understands the importance of remembering, even

those things that we do not wish to admit or acknowledge. Trudi has an innate ability, a sense perhaps—from the time of her birth—to see beneath the surface and understand people and events on a deeper level.

Trudi lives in Burgdorf, a small German town, and is intrigued by its unspoken secrets—that Anton Immers never served in World War I although a portrait of him in uniform hangs in his butcher shop, that Franz Weiler's wife denies her husband's state of drunkenness when he disappears into the Rhein so that she doesn't have to recall her stepfather's drunken sexual advances when she was a child.

Through Trudi's eyes we are afforded a glimpse of how history turned during those pre-WWII years. She describes how the changes snuck up on Germany causing reasonable people to blindly follow as greed and glut spawned evil that could never be undone. "How much damage could the Nazis really do?" Even as Stars of David became required markers for all Jews, even as they were urged to leave Germany, stripped of their valuables, beaten in their own homes—good and decent people looked the other way or even worse—obediently justified these things for the sake of a better Germany. "Though they would have never voted to kill the Jews, they felt justified in expressing their resentment against Jews, in letting them know their place."

As Trudi experiences a personal awakening to her own history and accepts her body as it was created, her quest for the truth—those under-the-surface-and-long-forgotten histories—becomes increasingly important to her. "No one else of that generation had deemed it important enough to keep alive by retelling it. But Trudi Montag had brought the pharmacist's secret back." Trudi could not change her own history, her own *self*; she had to remember these things and live with them.

At times Trudi is carefully selective in her storytelling, giving her listeners what they want while not giving away too much information. Her sometimes-acute focus on what is true and accurate seems to insist to Burgdorf that events, history—*things in general*—must be remembered no matter the cost. "It felt essential to Trudi to get the correct news of what was happening, and to distribute it even if many of the people who used to wait for her stories were afraid to hear the truth about the war."

Trudi senses early on—long before the end of the war—that Burgdorf will trade truth and remembrance for comfort and grace. This fuels her desire to dig deeper, to remind, to sometimes shock and invoke fear and displeasure in others. Although Trudi revels in gathering and sharing Burgdorf's stories, she has the wisdom and foresight to realize that someday her stories—particularly those of the war—will not matter to some. She understands that there is a desire to deny individual actions and prejudices for the sake of conscience. Could Burgdorf ever possibly heal such hurts...such evils...or was it perhaps easier to forget they ever

happened at all?

She tried to tell herself that she'd be able to release those stories after the war, that she was only postponing them until then; and yet, part of her already sensed that those stories would never flourish, that after the war she would find few who'd want to listen because the people of Burgdorf would be immersed in changing what had happened into a history they could sleep with, *eine heile Welt*—an intact world they could offer to the next generation.

It is truly amazing to what lengths some would go to purge themselves of the memories that would forever frame this period in history, as though by cutting the *Hakenkreuz* flag and Nazi insignias from wartimes photographs they could rewrite it. "More than ever, she understood the people's need to protect one another with silence."

It is imperative that we are honest about our history—that we remember the atrocities and cruelties as well as the advances and successes. From a young age I was taught to learn from my mistakes, large or small, and apply those lessons throughout my life. If we forget, we lose the lesson; if we do not learn, we repeat the mistake. Trudi knows what must be remembered. She has not learned this from her father or her friends or her neighbors, but from the ever-present Rhein. How could a river ever be anything but a river? The Rhein could never make excuses or change its course on a whim; it could only be the river, *an essence of life*.

Over the years, she had learned more from the river than from any one person, and what she'd been taught had always come with passion—intense pain or joy. It was the nature of the river to be both turbulent and gentle; to be abundant at times and lean at others; to be greedy and to yield pleasure. And it would always be the nature of the river to remember the dead who lay buried beneath its surface. (Hegi 500)

Just as the river remembers, so should we. Each day we embark on creating history, be it good or bad. We should embrace it, whatever it is, and hold it dear to us. Let us not forget our histories but let us appreciate them so we can welcome what lies ahead... because our future is inherently connected to those footprints we leave behind.

Martine Natasha Johnson

Architectural Masterpiece

He was thin, a black line against the sea of dirty city and traffic. He was the angel of the alleys but he never knew that the aura he cast in his little corner lit up my world. His hands were the hands of a fallen god. Sometimes he could encompass my entire broken body in his warm hands and other days they were cold and small, like those of a hypothermic child. He calls me up sometimes, lets me know that he's okay. In between ten minute phone calls and nostalgia, I torment myself, inducing headaches, diluting dreams. I think he hated my vocabulary, my feet, and my Midwestern philosophy. He was always a man of the world and I was just a hometown girl. He was the architect who built cathedrals in my heart. He was the vandal who disfigured my shade. He was my hero, he was my villain, he was my savior, he was my antichrist. He was my mistake.



Dustin Kouba

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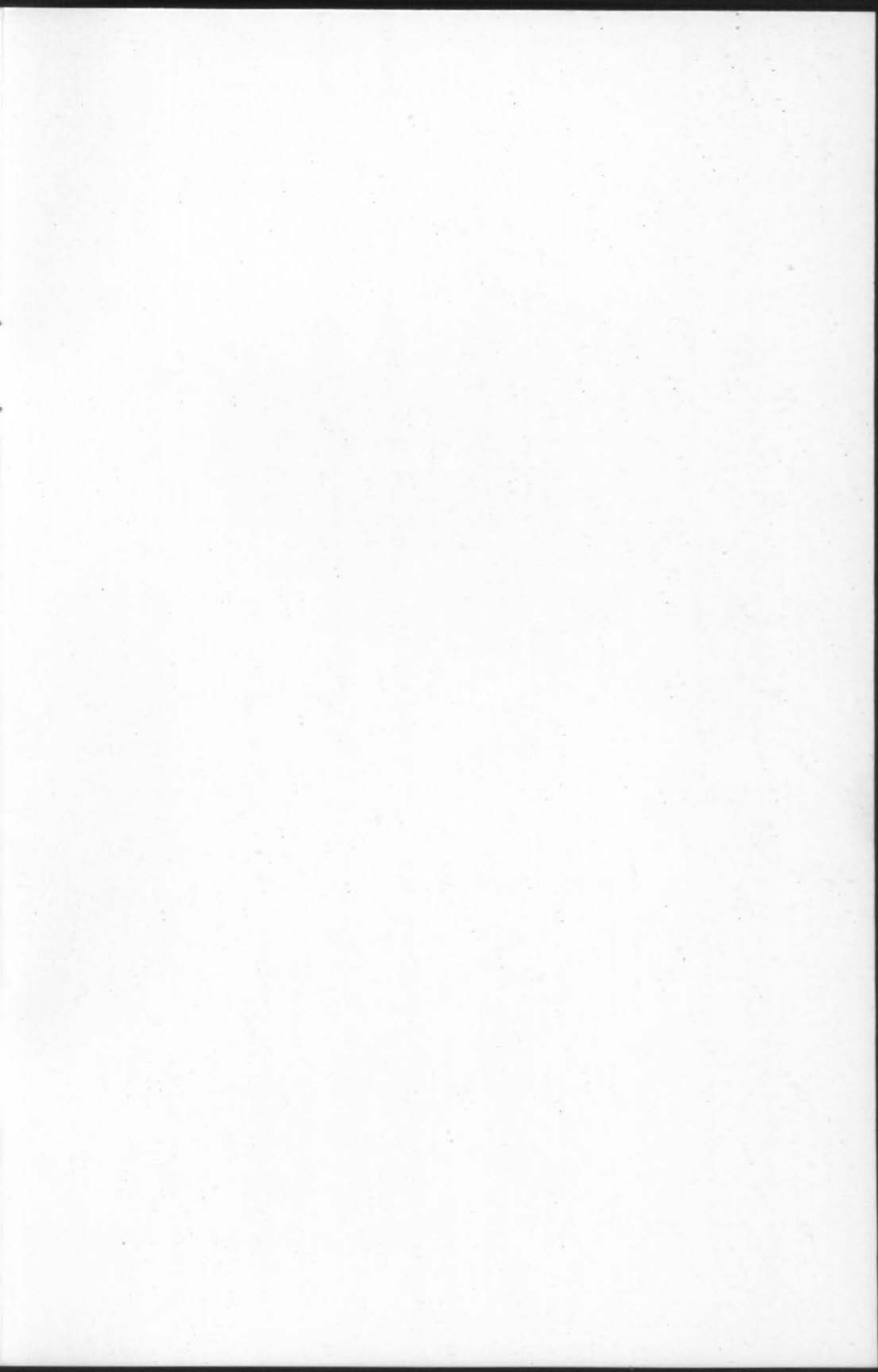
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University of North Dakota
Honors Program
Robertson-Sayre Hall
Box 7187
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7187

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