



Best



The Visit

Her visits were always painful. They were unexpected; leaving me little time to prepare myself for the countless embarrassments she'd put me through.

I pushed the door open. The two of us walked into CVS, hearing the familiar “ding-don't” as the glass door shut behind us. We stepped into my favorite store in the world, the Walgreen's of the East, taking in the therapeutic aroma of notepad, construction paper, Maybelline, and the newest issue of *People* magazine. Unlike most places she took me, I didn't mind being dragged along here. This 24-hour pharmacy was where I bought my first pair of purple glitter scissors, my first *Lisa Frank* notebook, and where I'd spend hour reading Hallmark greetings cards. CVS was a safe haven. She couldn't possibly take my love of CVS away from me.

Slung over her shoulder was an enormous flowered purse, her most prized possession. There was nothing elderly about the way she walked towards the make-up aisle. The white hair and wrinkles gave away her age, but failed to hide the youthful determination she carried.

Wandering across the aisles, I stopped momentarily at a magazine to see Pedro Martinez on the front cover. He'd pitched six perfect innings the night before; the entire Boston area was exploding with Red Sox fever.

My mind lost itself in a world of home runs and hot dogs. All of a sudden, my daydreaming was cut short. Across the store, the teenage cashier boy, her latest victim, was arguing at the register.

“I'm sorry ma'am, but these items aren't on clearance. You'll have to pay the full price for them.”

My face burned. *Not again*, I thought. Suddenly, the bag of peanuts in front of me became absolutely fascinating. I avidly read the ingredients in Planter's Trail Mix, trying to forget that I was related to the woman at the counter who wouldn't pay for her makeup like a normal person.

The cashier boy's irritated voice rang out once more, “Ma'am, they aren't on sale. You took the '50% OFF' stickers off of the clearance items and stuck them onto these!”

I looked up from my trail mix literature and stared at her in horror. She pleaded in what she thought sounded like innocent Spanish.

“What? Ah.. no hablo ingles.. solo español.. No eengleesh.” By now, other customers were peering over their shoulders, no longer able to restrain their curiosity. Before I could make my escape out the glass doors, she called my name, “Pau, ven.”

F Groaning, I muttered something under my breath about how normal people pay for their merchandise and leave. My feet grudgingly made their way to the counter, and I lifted my head, hoping that maybe, just maybe, the cashier boy was wrong.

There she was, clutching her handbag, proudly standing before her masterpiece. On the counter in front of her lay a tiny mountain of lipsticks and compacts. Each one had its own stolen sticker on it, clearly ripped off of its rightful owner.

The cashier boy, whose face now sported an angry hue of plum, kindly told us to pay full price for the makeup or leave.

We left. She'd done it. She'd gotten us kicked out of my favorite store in the world. I refused to talk to her for the rest of the day.

Today, I'm the one visiting her. The overpowering scent of urine fogs up her bedroom, robbing me of any kind of appetite. The purse she once cautiously carried now lays abandoned in the shadows of her tiny house, where it has silently been gathering dust for five years.

I sit down in the armchair next to her bed, where she silently rests her head on the stained pillow, and take her hand. Only then does she see that I've entered the house. Her eyes widen in surprise, but not a word leaves her mouth. However, the aphasia is the least of her problems. Today she doesn't remember that historic trip to the pharmacy. She doesn't remember my name. She doesn't recognize me when I stand in front of her.

Despite all this, I begin to tell my grandma about school, about my new baby sister, about anything I can think of. Occasionally, she smiles and nods, but most of the time she only stares blankly ahead. After a while I run out of things to say. The silence in the room, however, is only momentary. Her snores, almost deafening, have taken over the stillness of the room.

My grip on her wrinkled hand tightens as hard as the strength in my fingers will allow, as if doing so will squeeze the memory back into her. For a fleeting moment, I think I feel her hand squeeze mine back.

No, I decide. She's asleep.

Sighing, I lean in from my seat to kiss her goodbye on the cheek. I arise from the dusty armchair and show myself out the door, double-checking to see that it's locked as I close it. Only a month ago, someone broke into her house.

There really wasn't much harm done. She was untouched and nothing was taken from the house. It probably didn't take the burglars very long to decide that there wasn't anything valuable in the house.

But I know they were mistaken.

Kanwal Mehmud – Best

Excitement

Excitement, you're always awake.
You are the clock that doesn't want to tick,
but goes off every five seconds.
You are the bright yellow car that just crossed the red light;
A child right before a favorite fieldtrip.
Excitement, you are the butterflies inside my stomach
before a spelling bee.
You are the racecar that starts without waiting for the whistle to blow,
A lion that roars at the top of a mountain;
The sun that rises at three in the morning.
You are the drums drumming two hours before a parade.
You are a rooster cock-a-doodling before sun-up.
You are the cake whose icing has been licked off
before the party began.
Excitement, you are the writer with a mind filled with stories
but has no paper around to write them.

Kanwal Mehmud – Best

Longing for Pakistan

Every now and then I think about my home.
I miss it dearly for that's where I belong.
I long for my cousins, family and friends,
Thos who I could never play with because there came an end,
For I came to the U.S. while they stayed behind
To live where my grandparents lived
and stay put with their own kind.

I miss the roofless house where I would stay up all night
watching the stars that lit up so bright.
I miss the long days of May,
the month were gossip would take me away,
fill me up with "did you hears"
to the point where I was ready to rip off my ears.
I miss the calls of prayers given five times a day

showing the way to those who aren't led astray,
the golden smell of warm *halwa puris*,
watering mouths and forcing all to hurry.

I wonder when I'll return to this land I call home.
When will I embrace those I adore?
This longing will not go away
until the day when Pakistan will take me away,
grab my hand and tell me to stay:
"This is your home, live here night and day."

Kanwal Mehmud – Best

Feeling Trapped: Is there a Way Out?
An extended entry about Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

In seventh grade there was a girl in my class who would barely ever talk to me. I only had one class with her which happened to be a physical education class and we were partnered up for the first semester to get to know one another and do activities together. Her name was Aja Banks and I remember one day when we were playing volleyball, she wouldn't take off her hooded sweatshirt and it was early October and still hot outside. I saw her sweating and told her to take her hoodie off, but she kept objecting. I was curious why she wouldn't take it off, but I didn't ask.

As weeks passed by, I noticed that she always wore full sleeved shirts, but she was opening up to me, telling me about her favorite singers and other stuff. One day, as I was walking to my locker, I saw her walking alone and grabbed her by the arm so she could walk with me. When I grabbed her, she let out a little scream and pulled her arm away. I said sorry, and asked her if I had hurt her. She said no and started to walk away. I let her go, but I was worried about her. Later on, she pulled me aside during phy. ed. and told me that she had to tell me something very important. She let the words slip out very quietly: she was lesbian.

Aja told me that she was afraid to tell her family because, according to her religion, being gay or lesbian wasn't allowed. Then she burst into tears and pulled up her sleeves to reveal deep cuts on her arm which were swollen and red; she had been cutting herself to help her deal with her situation. I didn't know what to say so I just sat next to her and did the only thing I could do, which was to hug her.

Aja felt trapped because she knew that she couldn't be the perfect religious daughter her dad wanted, and also knew that she couldn't change herself. Edna Pontillier found herself in a similar situation in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Edna knew that she "was not a mother-woman" (16). She was not a "woman who idolized [her] children and worshipped [her] husband and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface [herself] as [an] individual and grow wings as [a] ministering angel" (16). She, like Aja, found a way to temporarily let go of her thoughts, even though their ways were different from each other's – Edna's was to "swim about with an abandon that thrilled and invigorated her" (82), and Aja's was to cut herself to get away from life for a while.

After feeling trapped and helpless for so long, Edna's pigeon-house pleased her. She felt "every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to 'feed upon opinion' when her own soul had invited her" (156). This passage, for me, means that she is doing something to make herself happy and she no longer cares about what everyone else thinks.

Throughout this book, Edna finds ways to keep herself happy, even when, at times, the choices she makes are selfish. When she gets pressured by her own thoughts about everyone in her life, the society, the men in her life and her children, she decides the only way she could be who she wants is if she gives up her life. I don't think that committing suicide solved her problem, though, if I think about how her husband, children and Robert must have felt after her death.

Aja got herself to tell her dad that she wasn't who he pictured her to be and a couple of weeks later she moved away to live with her aunt who accepted her for who she was.

A Slow Change

“Awww... open your mouth.”

“Awww...”

“Good... now let’s see how your heart sounds...”

When I was about eight years old. My younger sister and I would often play doctor. When my two-year-old brother wasn’t watching, we would sneak away to the basement; go into the brightest part of it where my mother kept her ironing board, and my sister would lay on it, our imaginations transforming it into a hospital bed so that another part of this play could begin.

During our game of “doctor,” I would be the doctor and my sister, Aisha, would get stuck playing the sick child’s part. The stethoscope was made with my headphones, a string, and a plastic cup, but that changed on my tenth birthday when my dad got me a real stethoscope that doctor’s used. That was also the day when my parents told me that they always wanted one of their kids to become a doctor, and they chose me to make this dream of theirs come true. Though this seemed like a far away fantasy to me, I felt honored. Since most of my paternal uncles were doctors, my parents wanted me to become the first female doctor so I could influence my other female relatives to become someone great. We all could grow up to help the women and children who need medical care in Pakistan and in other parts of the world.

Although I had many dreams of becoming a doctor, when I went to school, I cared mostly about what my friends thought of my actions, didn’t pay attention to what my teachers taught us, and as a result, I would struggle with my homework almost every night until my older sister finally “helped” me out. My grades weren’t bad, but that was only because the night before a test, I’d write the important stuff on my arm, which would help me pass. I thought of school as a place where everyone went because they had to and not as a place filled with opportunities that only some people were given. What I didn’t know back then was that I was turning my back on my parents’ dream, how I would be lost today if I did what my friends encouraged me to do (which was to drop out of school), and how fortunately I am for actually getting an education.

As I got older, my parents started getting behavior complaints from my teachers, and ended up giving me the same lecture on respect every time. I don’t remember the words, but I do remember the hurt looks in their eyes, which would stab my heart like a knife, but I didn’t know how to change myself back then. It’s when the thought of how I was shattering everything they believe in came to me, that I started to think about my educational beliefs. I realized how I was not only disappointing my parents, but I was also ending the hope of someday becoming a doctor, and that’s when I placed a change in myself by turning my homework in on time whenever I could, and giving my teachers the respect they deserved.

“Hey Kanwal! If you throw this pencil at Mrs. Trepp, I’ll give you fifty bucks,” Keisha whispered.

“But she’s talking and I’ve already been to the office today,” I replied.

“Stop being a baby. You’re in the sixth grade and you’re still scared to do a simple dare?” she snapped back.

“No, I’m not...”

“who threw this pencil at me?>” Mrs. Trepp yelled.

There was silence in the room and then, “Mrs. Trepp, Kanwal threw that pencil at you. I saw her,” snitched Rachel. And that was it. The teacher grabbed my hand and led me to the principal’s office, the whole time yelling at me as I tried to get my wrist out of her reach.

In middle school, I had many friends who thought that school was a waste of time and they couldn’t wait to turn 18, graduate from high school and leave education behind. One of these friends, Latisa, who had been my friend since third grade, wanted to quit school right then, in seventh grade. We used to hand out a lot so I guess she influenced me most when it came to hating school. I liked hanging out with her because we had been friends for a long time, but I also felt kind of nervous and scared when I was with her because her plans about her own future were about twenty degrees hotter than what had ever crossed my mind, and she usually ended up convincing me that yes, she was right. We promised each other that as soon as we were old

enough to drop out, we'd go for it and never thinking about education again. We knew that our parents would never allow this, so we promised to not tell them anything about dropping out. Our plan was that after we dropped out of school, we would go to the bus stop every day in the morning as usual, but instead of taking the school bus, we would take the city bus to Mall of America and hang out there until it was time to go home.

A couple of days after we made this promise, Latisa stopped coming to school. At first I thought that she was sick, but as time went on, I knew she was not coming back. I did miss Latisa, but I made a new, older friend when she left, and this person's friendship had a different effect of me. Her name was Roza and she was very optimistic about school. When I'd tell her how much I hated school, she'd give me a list of benefits I had here and would always encourage me to do well, and to take advantage of school because "school didn't last forever."

An example of when she tried to make me think twice about my actions was when I was in seventh grade and had just been to the office during first period for yelling at a girl named Felicia. When Roza saw me sitting there, she passed me a note that said, "Why are you in the office? I hear that you're about to get into a fight with Felicia. Think about it... is the fight going to make anything better? You two are going to stay made at each other for a long time and will probably get into more fights in the future. Felicia is a very nice girl; the rumors about her talking about your mom aren't true. Talk to her and that way all the misunderstandings between both of you will get erased. Kanwal, I'm serious; please put your mind to your school work and don't get yourself suspended. You'll miss three days of school and it isn't worth it. Just think about it."

After reading this a couple of times while in the office, I planned on apologizing to Felicia for what I had said to her earlier, and maybe I would become friends with her. The more I hung out with Roza, my thoughts and feelings about school changed. I paid more attention in class since we had all our classes together, and since she was three years older than me, I thought of her as an older sister and listened to her more than I listened to any other friends at school. As my grades shot up from C's to A's, I made a new promise to not let the old promise with Latisa turn into a reality.

A year later, when I went to Saudi Arabia to make pilgrimage, I met many people who helped me think positively about many things. A few of those people were three African sisters who worked at a hotel where we stayed. They were twelve, fourteen, and sixteen year old and we became very good friends while I was there. All three of them could speak a little English and we talked whenever we could, which was usually after meals at Jeddah Hotel. One time, I asked them if they went to school and at first they didn't know what school was, but after explaining it to them for a while, the sixteen year old answered something close to: "I want you to trade places with me for one day, and see how it's like to live a life like me. No one from my family has ever been to school; all we do is work, work, and work. School is just a dream that will never become true for us." I realized that I should be grateful for having this opportunity of getting an education, and should consider myself lucky. Once in a while, when at school, or even before going to sleep, I think back to those girls and wonder what they did during the day that just passed, and if somehow, by some miracle, they might be at school, learning how to read and write, rather than washing the dishes, and sweeping the hotel floor. I hope to go back to Jeddah someday, and see how they're doing, and maybe even bring some Dr. Seuss books for them, along with some pencils and notebooks as a silent "thank you" for teaching me the value of education through their sad and hopeless words.

These are just a few of the experiences that helped me realize how important school is. After these vents, a couple of lessons that I learned are: to put all my effort in school so that in the future I can wear the stethoscope that is still hanging in my closet, and make the fantasy that I once thought it was, come true, and, make better friends who will set a positive example for me and for others who are like how I used to be.

Shannon Morrissey – Best

An Artful Science

Writing is a deceptive passion – stealthily becoming a way of life, quietly consuming reality. Fervor intensifies as this casual hobby becomes an obsession. Each writer is faced with two

options: to write for an audience or to write for herself. The choice is crucial, the decision binding; the common call – to find a voice.

Children are never uncommunicative. Introverted children are either shy in person or shy on paper – seldom neither and never both. I was the former.

A family with three children and both parents working full-time guarantees as hectic and stressful existence. As the oldest, I was responsible for three tasks – follow the rules, set the example, help the nanny – which proved torturous and nearly impossible for my six-year-old self. I resorted to channeling all insults and frustrations into my first literary work: My diary.

Shuffled in with notes about kindergarten crushes, Tooth Fairy visits, holiday parties and snow days are a few entries I'm not so proud of. My earliest writings include such profound statements as: "I rilly rilly... rilly hate my nanny," or even, "My nanny is a stooped ideit." As a quiet and refined little girl, I quickly saw the appeal of these inappropriate rantings. My diary was the only acceptable outlet for my irritations. I was writing for myself.

Sitting all day at a desk was not in my nature. I would much rather have spent my time running outside with the neighborhood kids, collecting tadpoles from the creek, searching for toads in the window wells, and stealing from the raspberry bushes under our neighbor's kitchen window, but summer was over, the second week of fourth grade was underway, and I had a standardized writing test in front of me.

Each of us was assigned a gender-based topic and told to write for 30 minutes, continuing the stimulating storyline we had been given. I received a scenario in which my friend and I were playing tea party when one of the dolls came to life. Dolls. Audacious and annoyed, I chose my own subject.

I wrote for the full 30 minutes about a visit the infamous Mason Hodge, keeper of the neighborhood zoo. I had him to thank for my pet salamanders, bull frogs, and the occasional garter snake – Mason was my hero. Most of my essay consisted of detailed accounts of exotic little critters and their behaviors (all observations that I found intently fascinating), but this meticulous description of my childhood companions did nothing to improve my essay score. Most of the class was anxious to receive their test results, but I didn't care. I had learned how to write about my own experiences; I had finally written about things that interested me; I had come to realize writing could be fun. I was given a 9/15.

Yep, they were all here: the geek with his essay on nuclear fission; the rapper with scrawled copies of his best lines; the emo-girl anxious to share her dark, near-suicidal verses; the born-again Christian composing please for conversion; the lyrical artist; the sophisticated playwright; the closet poet; the silent novelist; the confused jock; and me. The other were quick to nickname me "Edina girl" even after finding out I was from Plymouth. Each day one of the others kindly reminded me that I was at the LOFT Literary Arts Center in Minneapolis, a "big city" far from the 'burbs.

Our instructor insisted that we call him John. He was a struggling playwright, an author of children's books, and a hobby-novelist, but most importantly, John was our "friend." He might have had more success in the diamond business, advertising his friendship via the Shane Company®, but his forte was writing, not radio commercials. John's intent was to help us connect with our characters and most importantly "find a voice."

If there was one thing John wanted us to get out of his class it was that "writing is an art, not a science." The art that John taught us involved no imagination or expression of self; it called for careful scrutiny of our audience. We could then sculpt our own writing style and content to meet their requests. It seemed more like a science than an art to me.

I learned quite a bit from the instructor and the class. Apparently I was writing to a very small audience. My insights and experiences were inapplicable to the greater population. And, above all, I was considered to well-off to have anything interesting to write about.

“Never start a sentence with ‘and’ or ‘but.’” Beginning in my Honors English courses, I was introduced to the correct way to write an essay. After turning in our summer writing assignments, we quickly figured out what teachers liked and what they didn’t approve of.

But these preference and aversions varied from teacher to teacher. (Too many commas are simply distracting.) Each had his or her own set of guidelines and told us ahead of time what to include, what to avoid, and what was needed to win approval, get the points, earn the “A.”

Once I had a feel for what each instructor wanted to see, I could get an “A” on any essay thrown my way. It was a simple matter of adhering to format, following guidelines, abiding by rules – trial and error, evaluating results, making observations. I had it down to a science.

The scientist in me observes; the artist feels; but the writer prevails because she can do both. An extrovert on paper becomes a rebel in ink as rules and guidelines are broken and crossed. This is my passion. This is my voice. I write for myself.

Shannon Morrissey – Best

A Word from the “Wise”

Solving someone else’s problems is *no piece of cake*. Often there is *little or nothing* you can do to help, but you’re still sought-out as someone able to listen to a problem and *deal with it*. You feel forced to *make your move*, obligated to *say something*. What do you do? You pull out the *old reliable* – you use the cliché.

Don’t worry!” is usually *what comes to mind*. “Could be worse,” “Things will get better.” All are *everyday phrases* you use constantly – voicing something, while saying nothing. “It will work itself out.” “Everything will fall into place.” In staying this, you’re safe; you’ve given them no *false sense of hope*, no insight into their situation that they could later blame you for. By telling your friend to “take it easy” you know you’re subtly making her feel better without dissecting the history behind the “B+” on last week’s chemistry test, her most recent early-life crisis. “Don’t sweat it.” “You’ll bounce back.” *Under pressure* or simply *on impulse*, anyone would do the same: *blow it off* with a common cliché, thinking one little phrase is enough.

But it’s usually not. *To your dismay*, they’re back again. You realize most of their other chose-advisors must have been smart enough to stay completely out of the situation, but now you’re forced to *see them through*. Whether a friend, co-worker, or random acquaintance, they’ve *got you pegged* as their *go-to guy*, and you’re stuck. *The bottom line is*, they’ll be *clueing you in* daily on the *current status* of their situation, giving you the most *recent low-down* on their problems. What now? You must avoid getting too involved. Giving *false hope* could lead to eventual disappointment, while being *brutally honest* could instantly shatter their confidence. You decide to stick with what’s safe: “Don’t read too much into it.” “It’s nothing personal.” You say whatever is necessary to *keep out of trouble*, secretly hoping they won’t ask for your advice again.

But, of course, they do come again, looking for another *daily dose* of encouragement. What do you say? What can you say? “You can do it!” “Step it up!” “Believe in yourself!” They thank you for the support; they’re glad to have a friend; they value your advice; you think you’re *off the hook*. But the next day the same blubbing receptionist shows up at your desk. Her online relationship hasn’t *turned around* yet; he hasn’t returned even one of her seven phone calls; she has no idea what to do. “Keep trying.” “You got it.” “It’ll turn out okay.” It’s just enough to satisfy. She’s gone again, with a teary smile and a wobbly, wet hug. But you know she’ll be back: *day after day, week after week, same game, same drill*. You’re careful to *stay on the safe side*: “It’s mind over matter.” “Put your best foot forward.” “Attitude is everything.”

You might hear *over and over* about the teacher who completely despises your friend, whose lack of organization is responsible for his every missing paper, who calls on him only when

his hand is not raised. But this time, you know *what it takes*. “Look on the bright side.” “Hang in there.” “Keep your chin up.” Three simple statements: *problem solved*.

After what *feels like an eternity* of late night talks, early morning discussions, and encouraging smiles, you recognize that *it's been a while* since the neighbor's confided in you about his lost tennis racket; you realize you've made it through a few dinners without a telephone call from your sister asking advice about her teenager's social anxieties. You're just about to *call it a day* when the doorbell sounds, the phone rings, or that familiar face *pokes out from around the corner*. You're at *wit's end*. But this time, *you luck out*. They've come with a final update, a happy ending, and a thank-you. *Mission Accomplished – free at last*.

She never could have *made it through* without you. He couldn't have done it without your support. She was happy you were there as a *shoulder to cry on*. And then, *the floor is yours*. But what do you say? What do we all say? “Good job.” “You made it through.” “I'm proud of you.”

What else can you say? Another *sweet nothing* – just what you've said all along.

Shannon Morrissey – Best

A Winter Escape

Facing the wind and bracing the cold, they're willing to travel miles for the chance to sit, surrounded by ice, on a brisk winter day. Why anyone would leave the comfort and warmth of home for the prospect of “a kiss, a nibble, or a bite” is beyond me. But there I was, about to mingle with the zaniest of them all. I looked out over the sea of camouflage and flannel. “Remind me again why we're doing this?” My mom simply rolled her eyes; she was no more eager than I was, and I owed her big.

Entering the arena 5'3” and apprehensive, I instantly found myself submerged in a looming ocean of unclean, unapproachable, and unsympathetic men. Against my better judgment, I had paid the \$7.50 entrance fee in order to peruse the manly merchandise with the Chucks, the Macs, and the Buds at the 14th Annual Ice Fishing Show. Sheer fascination (a.k.a. an interview assignment) was the motive that impelled me.

The exhibitors lining the perimeter were selling what looked like tents and mini-mobile homes. Seeing a quick escape route, my mom disappeared into the first little shack, leaving me to fend for myself. Awkward and uncomfortable, I continued down the aisles, determined to appear in search of whomever I'd come with, a father, uncle, brother – some other man. Staying true to my alibi, I continued to scan the crowd. All around me were middle-aged to elderly men engrossed in exhibitors' demonstrations, stupefied by the latest gadgets.

There were booths and displays selling ice fishing apparel including the required: long underwear, wool socks, warm sweaters, snow pants, and stocking caps (as with any winter activity, it's important to dress in layers). From what I observed of the men, they had maintained natural methods of keeping warm: beards were common, sideburns prevalent, but a minimum of three-day-old stubble was a requirement. Every other hand clutched a beer bottle, cushioned by its holder's belly – with this crowd, refreshments were going fast. Women made up no more than five percent of the customers, and of these, most were simply escorting a boyfriend or husband.

Lost in the masses and too insecure to ask for help, I sauntered through exhibits trying to listen in to conversations. I learned that ice fishing holds a singular appeal for each fisherman. For one, it's the challenge and rivalry of the sport; for another, a wilderness adventure; for a third, a chance to sit around a hole in the ice, telling stories and waiting for the fish to bite. If nothing else, ice fishing is a prescription-free medication for advanced cases of cabin fever.

Some of the more interesting conversations were of strange occurrences on the ice. One man told of a particular fishing trip when a fish pulled an unattended pole down the hole. Later that same day, a friend of his caught the missing pole with another and also managed to retrieve the fish. Stories like this merited gut-clutching, knee-slapping, and the occasional whoop. After hearing a few other glory stories of fishing, I proceeded to a row of exhibitors demonstrating various auguring techniques. At these booths, I was urged to use caution when going out on the ice. The safety of a lake depends on ice thickness and clarity. One fanatic was anxious to share his wisdom: “Thick and blue, tried and true. Thin and crispy, much too risky.”

I met up with my mom again and the two of us continued to wander aimlessly through the crowd, soaking it all in. The conversations we heard were generally about which particular brand of bobber is the best, as well as which bait is most successful. The vendors had realistic ice fishing simulations and demonstration videos playing by each other their products and the more aggressive salesmen were constantly rattling off their spiels to whoever would listen.

We came upon one particular booth where sat an older man wearing usual fisherman's attire – khaki pants and shirt, baseball cap, and boots – but unlike the rest, he had neither beer can nor belly and, from 20 feet away, could have passed for clean-shaven. He seemed to be selling a purple cleaning solution, and yelled out to my mom asking if he could clean her glasses for her. He promised it was completely free and solely demonstrational purposes, so she agreed. While cleaning her glasses and demonstrating their incredible resistance to fog, he outlined the countless uses of his purple cleaning solution. Apparently it could defog car windows as well as clean fine jewelry. I was about to ask why ice fishermen would have any interest in his product, when he asked if we had any fishermen in the family. When my mom and I both laughed, the misinterpreted our hesitation and responded with, "Oh, of course you do. That's why you're here." Awkwardness averted, we listened to him explain the de-fogging abilities of his solution on the windows of ice shanties. I took note of the word, "shanty," thinking that must be what they call the little houses and tents.

Realizing we had endured nearly four hours of boredom and discomfort, my mom and I decided it was time to go. Upon thanking the man, we took a final stroll around the vendors' displays: my mom, ogling at the expense of the equipment; me, straining my ears for any useful bit of information. As we rode the escalator to the exit, I took a last look at the fishing-obsessed shoppers. I left just as I had arrived: blank notebook, pen-in-hand, in need of an interview. Because of my innate sense of curiosity (or maybe just my English grade), I wasn't averting this crowd just get. A mere two weeks later, I'd be joining them on the ice.

Shannon Morrissey – Best

You Are What You Eat

Cold, cramped, complete confinement. At a single glance, the image in front of me invades the world around me. It comes alive in me, and I in it. I am one of them – the space around me defined by a cube of wrought iron caging. Beaks and feathers attack from all directions. The smell is nauseating, the noise deafening.

The wall-sized painting draws me first to its center. I stare down the narrow corridor that creates an illusion of infinity – still, I feel trapped. There are no visible windows or doors; any attempted escape would prove futile. Row upon row of chicken cages line the passageway. The endlessness spreads to the foreground as the number of chickens swells exponentially. Curiously, as I focus my attention to any single chicken, its distinction and uniqueness prove uncompromised. The concept of individualism among the chickens presents a fascinating contradiction to the perception of infinity.

Doug Argue's "chicken painting" attempted to conceive a vast population, exploring the challenge of creating infinity on a limited, two-dimensional surface. Argue first had to generate the distinct individuals that comprise the population. Testing his own ability to fabricate reality, Argue created an overwhelming image. At first glance, the distant focal point draws me in, but my attention is soon diverted to the overpowering number of chickens. I then recognize varying appearances and positioning among them that give each bird character.

Argue credits his idea for this untitled '93 work to a short story by German author Franz Kafka about a do-hose opinions closely follow his own: "The way I get my food reflects who and what I am." Ironically, this painting does not actually suggest a food source. Neither does it demonstrate how the thousands of chickens are fed, nor suggest how they are killed, prepared, and sent to grocery stores and meat markets to await their inescapable fates. These chickens are caged. But they, as our source of nourishment, are still capable of revealing something about us.

A chicken coop painted in bright, cheery colors would not merit the reaction of a passing college-age woman: "sad." A clean and idealized depiction would not warrant the quizzical lingering, the countless sideways glances, or the silent headshakes of the gallery's visitors. A careful examination of the scene reveals truths beyond my initial notions: the reality of the coop is as shocking as it is vile.

Wooden planks create two central walkways roughly six inches off the floor of the coop. A mere two inches lower and the wooden boards would be submerged in the stockpile of bird droppings. The forty-story cages are clearly designed to be maintenance-free; the fecal material of each bird simply drops through the holes at the bottom of each bird cage. Some feces are guaranteed to land on the tail, back, or crown of the chicken below, but the chickens learn tolerance – none of the birds has enough room to preen itself anyway. The three visible floor drains beneath the central walkways seem adequate to control the fecal loading. The chickens on the bottommost row should be able to survive. Their cages are at least three inches off the ground – the most they'll ever have to stand in is an inch of their and others' rotting scat.

The mood of the painting is determined only partly by the content and subject matter. Feelings of desperation and of ordered chaos are also provoked by the convincing reality that Argue created.

The simplicity of the shapes is imposing. The precision of each chicken is stimulating. The painting summons its admirers, drawing each down the dank, hazy passageway toward some imaginary endpoint in the graying distance. The illusion of endlessness created by this continually darkening hallway is deceiving – even infinity has its limits.

Looking down the corridor, I feel trapped; realizing I am trapped, I think of the cages; imagining the cages, I become a chicken.

Travis Panneck - Best

In recent times, the Iraqi conflict has become the catalyst for the discussion of the merits of reinstating the draft within the United States. Generally, the arguments come from people claiming that the United States needs more troops in order to sustain troop levels in the various theaters of war with which it is occupied. Rick Jahnkow, in his article "For Thos Who Believe We Need a Draft" works to debunk the troop level argument, as well as others offered for the activation of the draft. Jahnkow argues that reinstating the draft is the opposite of what United States citizens should focus on, as it would not reap the benefits claimed of it, and would only continue the militarization of society.

At the crux of Jahnkow's piece are the logical claims. First, he attacks the notion that the draft is critical for national defense by claiming that the draft is too slow. He states, "...it takes months to move people through the draft classification system, the induction process and military training, so it has no usefulness for meeting short-term emergencies" (Jahnkow 644). He attempts to establish the idea that all national emergencies would require immediate responses and thus a draft would not be useful for such emergencies. He does not take into account national emergencies that might not require immediate response to solve. He also disregards a function of the draft shown by the employment of the draft during World War II: that it can be done in peacetime. If draft were activated during peacetime, troops would easily be on-hand and easily deployed.

Second, Jahnkow argues that the current military does not require a draft. He claims, "...our military doesn't really require conscription to maintain its current force levels..." (644). He tries to establish that the draft is not numerically necessary for troop levels. However, he fails to do so by not providing any statistics regarding retention or recruitment rates. Additionally, he ignores the fact that a draft traditionally established by the Selective Service Act would draft as necessary according to military statistics. Sustainment of troop levels is provided by military statistics, and Jahnkow fails to show that the military is meeting all of its recruitment and retention rates in the status quo.

Third, Jahnkow attempts to establish that the draft would provide no check on the military. He claims, "...a draft would not protect us from the dangerous influence of a professional military class... the military is not a democratic organization, and with or without conscription it is

the office corps and politicians who set and control policy, not the lower ranks” (645). This argument is intended to show that the military is inclined to form this “Professional military class” and that a draft would not prevent this from happening. This claim is also intended to respond to those that believe that the draft would break down some sort of ideological conformity within the military and allow for a real check up on the military. It does not however give any reason to reject the drift – it does not demonstrate how the draft is a poor idea for society. Additionally, Jahnkow ignores that the Supreme Court of the United States is capable of placing checks upon the military. Even in an age of judicial deference to the military, the Supreme Court can effectively prevent a totalitarian military and has conducted hearings on the post-9/11 decisions of the military – demonstrated by the *Hamdi* case.

Fourth, Jahnkow argues that the idea that the draft prevents illegitimate wars is flawed. He first claims, “Draftees are picked young and have the least understanding of the political policies...” (645). He intends to establish that because the draftees have little understanding of politics, that they are incapable of challenging the military. Jahnkow claims [later] that because the draftees are the most obedient, they would do little to prevent a war. He says that, “[Draftees are] the most obedient because... they want to get out of the military” (645). This is a convincing claim, given that draftees tend to have the largest turnover rates, but again lacks hard evidence to prove his point. Additionally, he offers up that, “most of the organized resistance to the Vietnam War within the armed forces... came largely from volunteers...” (645) and that “It took more than 10 years of body bags coming home before resistance and general opposition grew strong enough to finally force an end to the [Vietnam] war” (645). This further emboldens Jahnkow’s point using empirical anecdotes from a previous war with an instated draft to prove that the draft had little to no effect on the prevention of such engagements abroad. The only problem with Jahnkow’s analysis here is that it is based off a previous war and does not take into account the current political and cultural climates. Additionally, he makes the claim that because it is political suicide to belittle the troops, and presidents will be able to wage wars regardless of whether or not there is a draft. He states, “...no politician will ever want to be the one who says that U.S. soldiers die in vain. This means that if a president wants to launch military action, he can do so with confidence that both Congress and the public will back him...” (646). He intends to show here that politicians that are set on waging wars will likely be able to do so regardless, and thus a draft would not prevent such wars. However, in the society of today, this could be different, because of people like Jahnkow himself speaking out against militaristic action; not everyone will promote an adventurist war.

Fifth, Jahnkow makes the argument that the ground combat force will always be disproportionately non-white and poorer. He claims, “Even with a draft, people with privilege would be able to get the medical deferments and conscientious objector status that would keep them out of uniform, and if they failed to stay out of the military, their education would put them disproportionately into non-combat jobs” (646). These examples are supposed to show that the ground force is always going to be primarily composed of minority groups. Most of the evidence is sensible, but Jahnkow provides no facts to show that the percentage of minorities is much larger in the ground force than the percentage of whites, nor any evidence that whites are more likely to get deferments.

Jahnkow also employs the usage of strong language and characterizations to create emotional appeals. While Jahnkow attacks the idea of militarism, he states, “We have wars because people have been brought up with a predominant value system that encourages people to solve disagreements with violence. The general population is indoctrinated in this value system from an early age, and our governmental institutions support it” (647). He uses words like “indoctrinated” to again give the feeling that these values are not only forced upon the general population, but also that they are implicitly bad values. Such characterization of the militarization of society allows Jahnkow to give off the feelings that the populous is being brainwashed by the government. Jahnkow continues, “Military training is the extreme form of pro-war indoctrination, which is why people like Napoleon, Hitler and the militarists of today have wanted to universally subject young people to conscription” (647). He again uses the term indoctrination, and combines it with the phrase “pro-war.” This again gives the feeling of this omnipresent state that is brainwashing its citizens to become war machines. He only furthers this image by making the comparison of the modern day militarism to the reign of Adolf Hitler. This has a few implications.

Given that Hitler is irrevocably tied to the Holocaust, and therefore the extermination of millions of people, this type of comparison can only invoke fear within the readers as Jahnkow notes that these ideas are being inculcated in “young people” using militarizing agents like the draft. Jahnkow states, “The draft is a quick and effective way to indoctrinate more people and then send them back to civilian society to spread the authoritarian value system they have learned” (647). He completes this image by portraying the draft at the heart of the militarization of society and noting how it is able to spread authoritarianism -- placing the final touches on the totalitarian image of the modern day state that Jahnkow worked to create through these various comparisons.

Rick Jahnkow also finds the time within the article to call for an ethical approach to certain issues. First, while critiquing the disproportionate ground force claims, “The most important thing that we can do today to address racial and class imbalance in the military is to demand a more equitable economy and an improved, demilitarized educational system, while also working to shrink the war budget” (646) Jahnkow is calling for the rejection of three major ‘isms: racism, classism, and militarism. The first two are commonly rejected by people in society, so all Jahnkow has to do is group the point he wants to advance with them to evoke similar feelings about, in this case, militarism.

Second, he makes his entire arguments against the idea that a particular group must get more exposure to risk based on ethics. He states, “The logic that we need a draft so that more members of a particular group can be killed or placed at risk in order to bring home to the public that war is wrong has serious ethical implications. Aside from being a form of hostage-taking, it’s like saying people should become drug users to learn about the harmful consequences of using drugs, or that we should support another nuclear arms race, because more people would feel the threat of annihilation and that would then lead to the elimination of war...” (646). His entire argument is based on the idea that the draft should be rejected entirely – as an ethical issue. He continues, “Instead, we should demand that NO one be drafter, and NO one be recruited to fight for the economic and political exploitation of the rest of the world by the U.S.” (646). This allows Jahnkow to frame the entire debate as an ethical issue – not just something based on pure logic or emotional appeals, but something that deserves absolute rejection. It becomes something that is not only logically flawed, but something that is *defined* as “wrong.” It should also be noted that Jahnkow employs the pronoun “we” accompanied by “demand,” showing that Jahnkow believes that this rejection of militarism is the higher standards that should be conformed to by society.

Jahnkow attempts to sound reasonable throughout the piece and generally sounds credible. First, he establishes a great deal of credibility showing that he knows the topic well. This is demonstrated primarily through his use of anecdotal evidence, like such: “most of the organized resistance to the Vietnam War within the armed forces... came largely from volunteers...” (645). He uses historical examples from the Vietnam War to show that he is somewhat knowledgeable on the subject. Additionally, he attempts to highlight some shared values among the readers when he calls for the rejection of racism and classism. He states, “The most important thing that we can do today to address racial and class imbalance in the military is to demand a more equitable economy and an improved, demilitarized educational system, while also working to shrink the war budget” (646). It can also be noted that he uses the “we” pronoun to attempt to build some common ground with the reader. However, he does put a few readers on the defensive when he claims that, “...the memory of this lesson is not as fresh as it once was, and there are both liberals and conservatives who are now taking advantage of the post-9/11 climate of ear to make people think that a draft would be good for the nation” (644). This could put a few readers on the defensive as he blatantly states that both groups are taking advantage of a tragedy. However, this might work to his advantage when people of neither group read the message and dislike the other two groups, or if the reader is a part of one group and can acknowledge faults. It certainly runs the risk of alienating a large portion of the audience, though.

Rick Jahnkow presented a compelling argument for the rejection of a reinstatement of a draft. Although much of the argument was composed of logical appeals, he lacked the hard evidence necessary for the presentation of a more complete argument. Even though the complete rejection of militarism and its propagators is not likely to happen soon, Jahnkow manages to give a few reasons why a world with less militarism is more feasible in today’s society while still giving a convincing argument to reject the reinstatement of the draft.