

The MANA Sunset

February Issue, 2016

In This Issue:

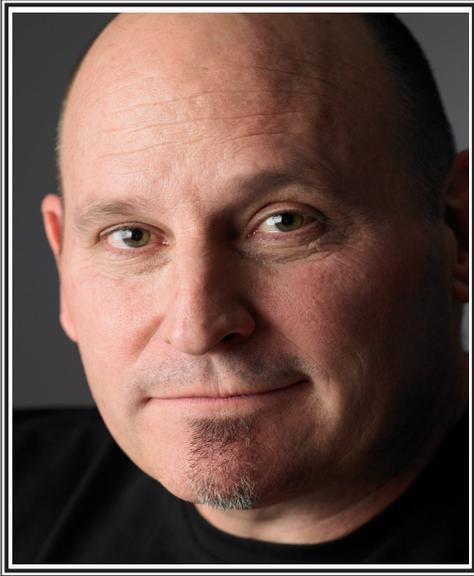
February brings another month of winter and another month of wonderful things happening at MANA. One of the great things we're doing this month is helping out our neighbors in Flint. In this issue, we have the usual tidbits. However, this issue will also feature works of non-fiction. The genre of non-fiction isn't a new one, but it gets less attention than fiction. We've included works from Cherisa Allen, Dr. Fairy Hayes-Scott, and Jeff Wheeler. We've also inserted a lovely poem by Rita Gitik. Enjoy!



Donate to the Flint Water Crisis

The 2016 designated charity on the MANA website is to provide aid and support for the citizens of Flint, MI during the Flint water crisis. So, beginning mid-February, a new Blog Continuing Short Story will be initiated. For every 20 posts of five sentences or more, MANA will donate \$10 to a Flint charity, specifically to the Flint Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, a public service sorority. For more information, visit the MANA blog. By contributing to the MANA blog you can work on exercising your creative writing skills while also helping out a great cause.

Quote of the Month



*“Read as much as you can
then sit down and write.”*

-Jon Scieszka

Grammar Wisdom

1) Affect vs. Effect

One of these words is a verb and one is a noun. Can you guess which is which?

Examples: *The tragic film had a lasting **effect** on me.*

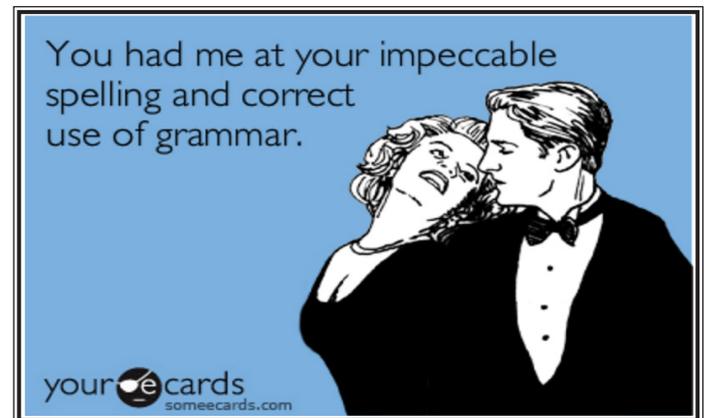
*The tragic film **affected** my mood for the rest of the week.*

2) Who vs. That

“That” is used for describing objects and “who” is used for describing people.

Examples: I’m someone **who** doesn’t cheat at cards.

The book was one **that** challenged me.



Featured Works of Non-fiction

Excerpted from *A Primer for a Principal's Survival and Success: Four Principals and a Teacher Speak*
edited by Fairy C. Hayes-Scott

Sandra: I have to share what was shared with me years ago. First, always follow the policies and do not bend to special interest groups. By doing that, you are treating everyone the same, and there can be no repercussions for decisions that you make.

The other point is—do not accept gifts from anyone. That includes free sports tickets, skiing trips, and other get-aways, etc. There is no doubt that anyone who gives you anything will be expecting something in return on down the road, and you never know what that person may want and how it will impact you.

The other practice that I have found that has been helpful is always to stand for what is right. Don't do anything unethical and illegal, regardless who is asking you to do it—even if it's your boss.

Always be prepared. Keep your credentials up to date and always know how to do more than one thing. Be versatile so that an employer will recognize you as an asset to the organization.

Lisa: Be confident in the values and standards that helped you become an educational leader. Know and understand the district and community culture you choose to work for before committing to serve that population.

Arlene: I believe my listening method can best convey my “words of wisdom”:

- 1) You have to build trust, create a vision and mission that is tailored to your school. Schmooze everyone!
- 2) The principalship is a journey that a degree in educational administration does not fully prepare you to be an effective leader.
- 3) You should be a servant leader.
- 4) You must be a fearless leader who is confident.
- 5) You must be visible—you cannot run a building behind a desk.
- 6) Set the tone for your school.
- 7) Make hard decisions fast that are well-thought out. This comes with practice. Teachers need to know that you have this skill set.
- 8) Be honest.
- 9) Be a good listener.

Denise: Remain balanced. It is extremely important to remain abreast and current within your profession as well as the world around you. You have to remain the leader and, therefore, knowledgeable of what is happening on a local, district, state, national, and international level. You have to be willing to humble yourself even when there are times when you feel as though you shouldn't.

In addition, there has to be a time to work, and there has to be a time to relax. Trying to do everything at one time will only kill you and, then, no matter what, you won't be around to complete whatever it was that you were trying to complete. You have to take time for yourself.

Excerpt from *Revelation, Resignation, Restoration* by Cherisa Allen

SUBSTANCE ABUSE: You see, I started to drink and smoke just to pass time when my girls and I hung out. As I got older, I began to enjoy drinking; smoking made me paranoid, and God knows I don't like being paranoid. Paranoia brings on other feelings, such as the feeling of "losing control"—okay, okay that is another story, back to this drinking thing!

Drinking always gave me a feeling of being in charge—feeling like I was on top of the world. I could drink and not feel, not be concerned about what others thought of me. I could say and do whatever I pleased. There were no consequences to my behavior, or so I thought! Those who had hurt me better watch out—when I am drinking I am the Queen of the Jungle and a rumble was sure to take place.

Then, there were times when drinking brought on a sense of calmness and good times. I would definitely be the life of the party. All eyes were on me. You see, I never felt pretty enough, good enough, never thought I measured up to my sisters. They were beautiful. They had flawless skin and long hair. They had rhythm. Boys and men flocked to them. They were mesmerized by them. People liked them—people everywhere. On the other hand, I had to work for all of that attention. A glass or two of Remy Martin, Hennessy, Martell, or a bottle of Corona or Miller Genuine Draft always did the trick. They brought out the best in me. I could be whoever I wanted to be. I actually believed that I liked myself. I would drink every weekend; ok let me be honest. There was "Wine Down Wednesdays" (CJ Barrymore's) and "Thirsty Thursdays" (usually at my crib). I guess I actually drank every day except Monday and Tuesday because Sundays I usually would drink to help assist with the hangover from the night before. (Wow, I did a lot of drinking).

I didn't have a problem, I was having fun. I worked every day, provided for my children, graduated with a Bachelor's Degree. This was the life, me and my girls hanging out; me doing me, whatever me wanted to do! Drinking was a way of life. I did what I did. I slept with whom I slept with—I was the LIFE of the PARTY. I had friends. I was liked, and I was noticed. I even prayed; talked to God, I was good...and then the morning came!

When the morning came, especially after those weekends of drinking, there was always a reason to make amends because in my drinking I would look for ways to be validated. As I stated before, I was the life of the party, and I was going to be seen and noticed which meant there were times where I sold myself short. I violated the trust between my friends and myself. I violated myself, and I gave myself to some man, someone who was undeserving to have the privilege of even knowing me, let alone waking up in the same bed with me. This behavior went on for many years—I partied like a rock star; I drank like a fish in a vast ocean; I worked; I provided for my children. I hung out with my friends, dated, fell in love (I guess that is what it was called), loved on my family (in the way that I could at the time) and yet I still felt alone, still looked to fill that void...never knowing what the void was, just feeling empty, always filling the empty space with friends, partying and drinking every chance I could get.

As I stated earlier, drinking took me to a place where I felt I was on top of the world. I felt that I was on an even playing field with my sisters and all the other women around me, but it's a sickness. This is what happens when your innocence is taken at such a young age, you continue to act out, hoping that someone somewhere will see you crying out for help and ask questions, offer assistance, direct you to that right person. I'm dreaming (wake up Cherisa) I am thrown back into reality and reminded that I never

told anyone what happened; I never shared that dirty secret. I kept it to myself. I am such a great actor, pretender, no one noticed; no one ever said a word...at least not to me!

So, I continued drinking, having fun, doing me...carrying all of this extra baggage, planning to take a trip going no where. I began to host the parties. Yes, they would come to my house. We would hang out all night long, playing cards, talking—me making plans on who would be my next victim, because at this time I began to feel in control. For some strange reason, I tricked myself to believe that I had all of this under control...mood altering substances in any form will have you believing anything. One thing is for sure. I wanted to leave this place. I wanted to escape. I became tired of doing me, carrying all of this baggage and going no where. But honestly, I did not know how to get out, how to move away from this life, this life that made me feel like a million dollars, if only but for a while! Maybe I was afraid; maybe I was comfortable. Maybe I didn't believe I could fly after all. I didn't really know what was keeping me there. All I knew was I had to get out; I had to begin to live! But how could I do that with broken wings and a heart that is torn to pieces?

THE LESSON LEARNED:

If there's one thing I've learned throughout this journey I've been on is that God is a Healer. Through the hills and the valleys, through the fire and all of the storms, climbing in and out of danger, crawling when I knew I needed to walk, scratching my head and skinning my knees, the cuts and the bruises, God has been right there in the midst of the storm with His Healing Hands, waiting for me to embrace Him.



Excerpt from *Where is Adam: Understanding a Father's Role* by Jeff Wheeler

A couple of years ago during one of our typical Michigan winters, we had about 12-15 inches of snow blow through one evening. When we went to bed that night we had about three inches on the ground, when we woke up there was well over a foot on the ground, it was actually quite beautiful if you like snow. One of Quion's responsibilities is to make sure that the driveway, porch and sidewalks are salted and clear, of course I do my fair share of snow removal, but the job is primarily his.

On this particular snowy day I woke my son up and suggested that he grab the old snow blower and go out and make some money because there was plenty to be made. Needless to say he got dressed, grabbed the blower and a shovel along with the keys to my GMC Denali and off he went in the wild white yonder. I was so proud of my son, he was out making his own money, he was learning to be independent. That meant that he could get out of my pocket for a minute, maybe even pay his own phone bill for a month or two (that's kind of selfish isn't it?) Anyway, Quion was gone all day, for at least 6 hours he was out in the cold working and learning to make his own way. Of course his mother asked me on more than one occasion if I should call him and see if he was hungry. I assured her that if he were hungry or thirsty or had to use the bathroom, he surely could do those things without her assistance. The first part was a Mother's love, the second part was a Father's love. Needless to say Ms. Wheeler didn't appreciate my sarcasm and continued to cook, a meal that had filled the house with a great aroma and had lightly steamed the kitchen windows.

I don't know to this day if his mother called him, but somehow it was if Quion had smelled the food that was cooking, and just as the meal was ready to be served, with perfect timing, he returned home, cold, tired and ready to eat. He kicked off his wet boots in the heated breeze way and took off his wet gloves. I saw that he was beaming from ear to ear with the money he had earned. He seemed really proud of himself for braving the cold and deep snow and making a mound of money.

I wasn't as happy as he was however. You see, before he left, he didn't take the time to shovel his own driveway. He was so focused on making money, he forgot that our driveway needed to be shoveled as well. Helping others is something that I've always taught my children. But I've also stressed that before you go off and do something for someone else, make sure that your family is taken care of first. You never do for someone else before you do for your own house. Unfortunately Quion forgot that lesson as he headed off that early morning on his shoveling expedition. Because he had neglected to shovel the snow in his own driveway, his mother and I had gotten stuck trying to get in and out because he had the truck. On a couple of occasions I had to push his mother out of the driveway because it was so full of snow.

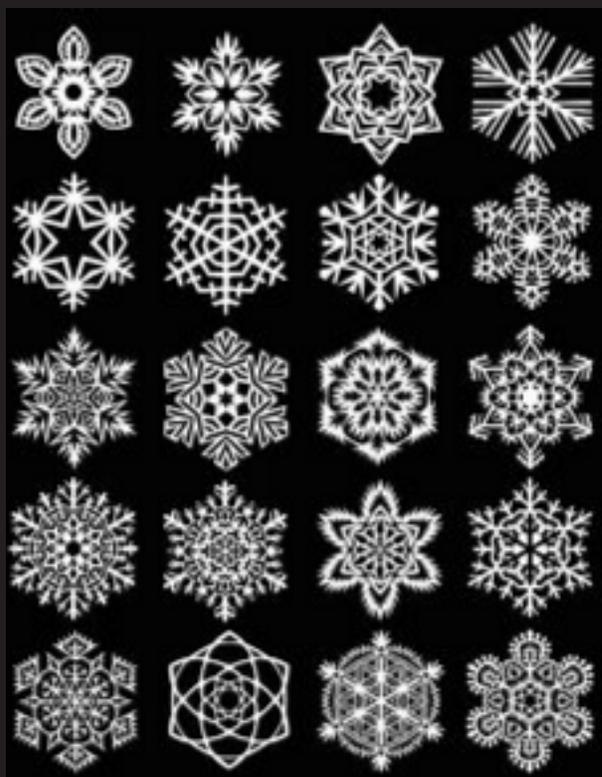
What I told him next was sure to be met with opposition from my loving wife. I told him to get dressed, go outside and take care of his responsibility. This took him totally by surprise; he looked at me and said but dad I'm tired from working all day. I then gave him the look. You know the look don't you? The look that says, "boy, if you don't do what I just told you, I'm gonna..." you know- that look! He got the message and grabbed a fresh jacket, a fresh pair of boots and gloves and went to work the driveway. As he was heading out the door I poured a little salt into the wound by telling him that if he would have shoveled before he left the house this morning when the snow was light and fluffy, it probably would have only taken about 15-20 minutes. But because we had been in and out of the driveway all day, the

snow had packed down and now had ruts in it, making it much more difficult it was probably going to take at least an hour or two. I told him not to stop until the job was completed.

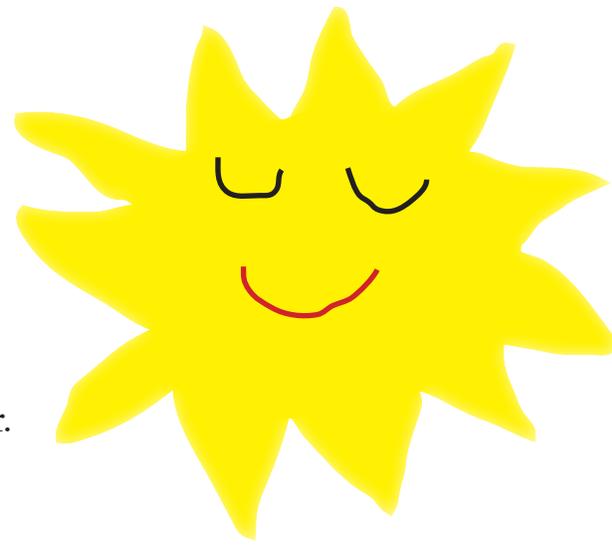
I was tempted to go out and help, but felt that it was a lesson he had to learn. I noticed that as he was shoveling I could see his attitude with every scoop of snow. It was as if he were talking as he shoveled. I could almost hear him. Who... (scoop) does he, think...(scoop) he is... (scoop) making.. me shovel... (scoop)he could have.. done this.. while I was. gone. (scoop) Well as you would have it, Ms. Wheeler, his dear mother told me that I was too hard on the boy, that I should let him do it in the morning, and let him come in and eat.

As lovingly as I could, I told my dear wife, and I quote, “ you be the mother, and I’ll be the father.” My son will learn this lesson tonight, not tomorrow! That didn’t sit too well with her at the time, but since then she has learned to appreciate my perspective and input as a father. Well after about an hour and a half, Quion was finally finished, and a great job he did. He came into the house huffing, puffing and starving; you would have thought that he hadn’t eaten in a week. He didn’t say much at dinner or for the rest of the evening, I don’t know if he was too angry or too tired to talk, but he showered and went straight to bed. He deserved a good night’s rest. Once again I was proud of my son.

The next day he approached me and said, “ Dad, I got the lesson, always take care of family first! ” We hugged and that was the last time this was mentioned until now. I’ve had to teach other hard lessons, but that one was understood without a doubt. So, when he is supposed to cut the grass he cuts it, when he is supposed to take out the garbage, he takes it out. When he’s supposed to do the other things that he is responsible for, he does it! And he does it well. He’s been trained to do those things. He’s been given an example of how to do them; he’s been given the opportunity to do them, now he simply does what he’s supposed to do.



To my children



A Drawing

A white sheet of paper.
A box of crayons.
A small child drawing.
What it will be today?

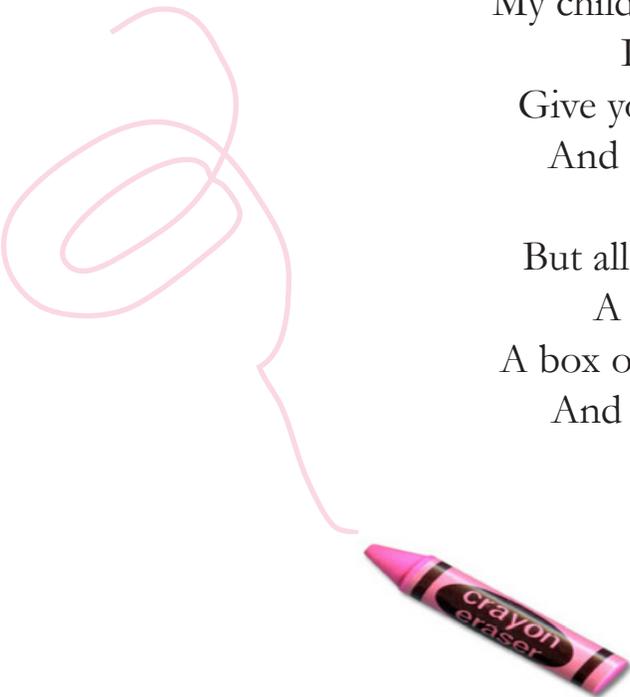
Bright yellow sun?
Pale yellow moon?
Bright red fire truck?
Pale blue butterfly?

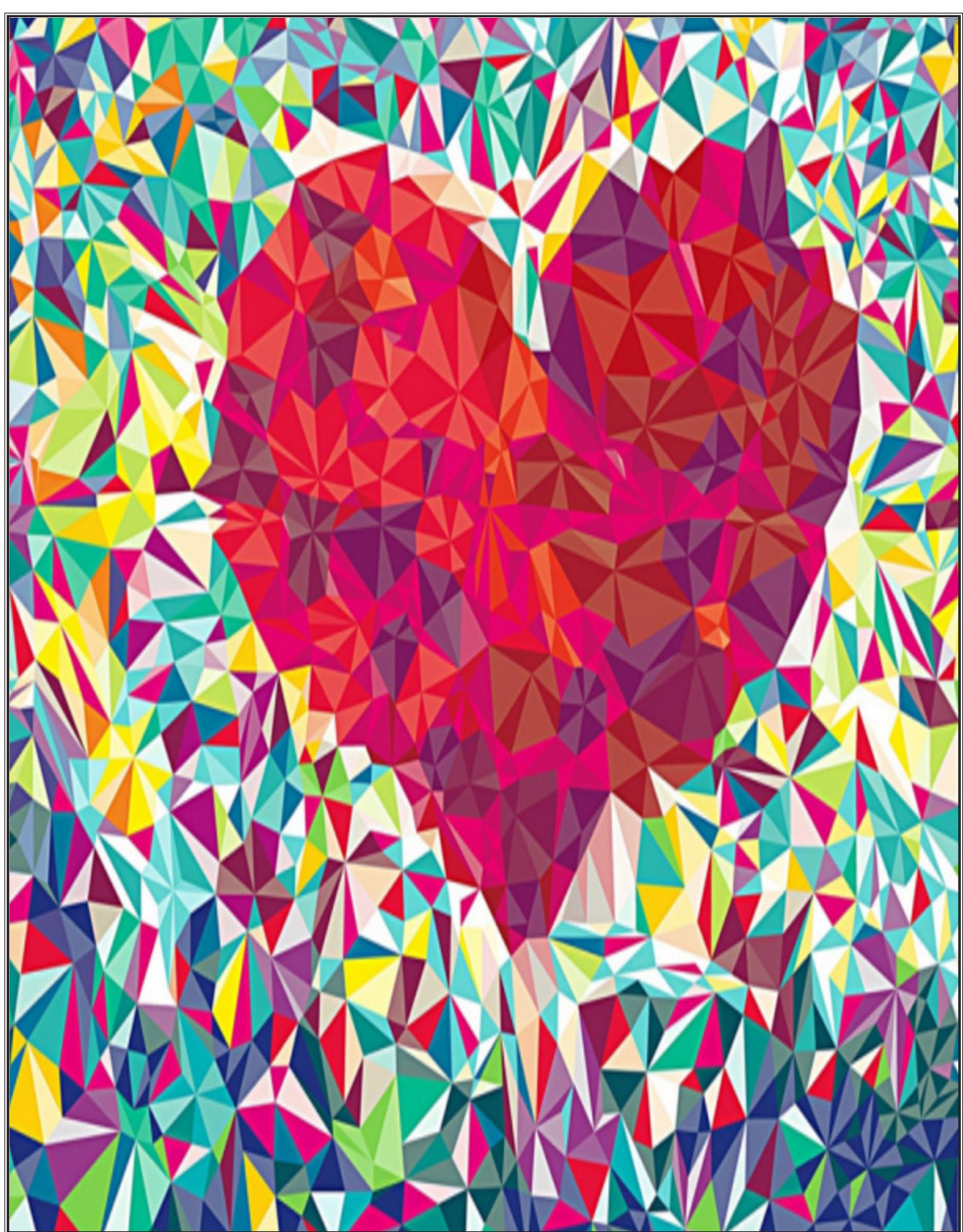
My child, can I draw your day?
Fill it with suns and moons,
Drive in a fire truck,
Bring you a butterfly.

My child, what your life will be like?
I wish I could draw it for you,
Give you the Sun and the Moon,
And a rainbow of butterflies.

But all I can give you is my love,
A white sheet of paper,
A box of crayons, a kiss and a hug,
And the desire for dreaming.

By Rita Gitik





A Sample of the Editor's Non-fiction Writing:

This short story first appeared in Issue 19 of *Midwestern Gothic*, a literary journal based in Ann Arbor.

I wrote it several years before it was published.

Excerpt from "My Momma's Belly" by Holly Taylor

My mom's saggy belly frowned at me as I brushed my teeth at the bathroom sink one morning. I was around ten years old. My sister Maria and I shared a creaky twin bed on the second floor. Our drafty farmhouse had only one bathroom. Sunday morning church preparations strained the small space—my mother showering, my younger brother Seth using the toilet, my sister Rebecca preening in the mirror, me scrubbing at my fuzzy teeth. Often acting as our second mother, Rebecca helped out my mom with us kids. She'd comb our hair, dress us for church, and play dolls with Maria and me. If someone was in the bathroom in the morning and I had to pee really, really bad, I'd run outside if it wasn't snowy—feet getting wet from the dew-slippery grass—and squat behind a lilac bush in the backyard. Shifting my weight from foot to foot, I'd inch to the left or right to avoid the stream of pee tickling my ankles. We had a family meeting that morning before church. My mom carefully explained how God had blessed our family with another baby brother or sister. Mom's belly swelled with Baby #13. She never gained weight anywhere but in her stomach.

My parents had fifteen children, but my mom didn't birth two of them. My mom and dad had both been married before they met each other. Mom had three kids with the aforementioned Dale Feldpausch and Dad had two with his first wife, Mary.

I'd seen kitten, puppy, foal, baby chicks, and bunny births before on our small family farm. I'd watched the mommas lick off the birth sacs and mucus from the faces of their babes. Horse births were dangerous, dog births gritty, and cat births slimy. But a human birth, with the help of another woman, sounded easy enough. When my brother Seth was born, the pain was minimal. Mom delivered him overnight in her king-sized bed. She was so quiet that all us kids slept through the entire ordeal and woke up to a washed and powdered pink baby brother.

"Mom...can I watch this time?" I asked her. She exchanged a glance with Dad then looked back at me.

"Holls...you sure you'd want to watch?"

Thinking back, I understand her hesitation. I didn't gracefully accept the beautiful changes of femininity. When Santa Claus brought my first pink Hanes Her Way training bra I'd hurled it at Mom in anger. I wasn't a feminist in training; I just didn't want to accept burgeoning breasts. My dad and brothers teased me, called me she-man. I refused to cross my legs when wearing a skirt or dress. My brother Dominic sat next to me in church and whispered in my ear, "Psst. Cross your legs. Now! You're a girl." He and my dad pressed on the sides of my knees and forced my legs to close into the prim posture of a lady.



Enjoy February and Happy Writing!