

# *The MANA Sunset*

*August Issue, 2016*

## *In This Issue:*

Happy August! Summer is winding down, and school will be starting back up soon. Soak up the last month of summer with all the great writing in this issue. In keeping with last year's August issue, this month we feature quite a bit of new writing. Authors in this issue include Tadeuz Hansoon, Tammy VanTol, Emily Sauer, Dr. C, and yours truly! Also, we've included information about upcoming events and opportunities at MANA. Be sure to check out the MANA Blog to continue following Dr. C's story! Enjoy the issue!



# *Online Resources for Teachers, Grades K Through College*

By the end of August these resources can be linked through the [MarketingNewAuthors.com](http://MarketingNewAuthors.com) website. The materials contained are color photographic images of various sites (excellent materials to serve as catalysts for different activities for all ages), sample research papers and research themes (excellent for high school and college students), various grammar exercises (excellent for grade school, high school, and college students), and podcasts covering grammatical and punctuation challenges as well as guidance for research (excellent for middle school, high school, and college students). The more creative the teacher, the more beneficial these resources. And, yes, this teacher resource can be helpful for aspiring writers, too!

## *Back to School with MANA*



At the start of August, MANA will continue to provide access to an online course: “Back to School with MANA.” Anyone who signs up for any of the lessons by August 31 will get 25% off the cost for any lesson/lessons. This is a great opportunity to get back in the swing of classes! Visit [marketingnewauthors.com](http://marketingnewauthors.com) for more info!

## *National Council of Teachers of English Conference 2016*

MANA/Robbie Dean Press will proudly be present at the National Council of Teachers of English Conference this November in Atlanta, Georgia! Furthermore, MANA/RDP will be accepting books to exhibit in Atlanta until October 30. In the next three months, if you are interested in having your book displayed at the Conference, be sure to contact [info@marketingnewauthors.com](mailto:info@marketingnewauthors.com) This is a wonderful way to expose your publication to educators from all over the country!



# *Quote of the Month*



*"We do not need magic to transform our world. We carry  
all the power we need inside ourselves already. We have  
the power to imagine better."*

*-J.K. Rowling*



*Fast, Free, Five-Minute Consultation From  
RDP/MANA's Dr. C*



Robbie Dean Press, the parent company of MANA, is celebrating 25 years of being in business and serving its customers! To celebrate this occasion, Dr. C is offering five-minute podcasts covering particular topics. Dr. C. is an author, editor, college professor, and owner of Robbie Dean Press and MarketingNewAuthors.com. The podcast series is one of many ways the companies are celebrating RDP's anniversary this year. These audios are 100% free of cost and rich with information! See below for a breakdown of what will be covered by each session:

**Monday**—For Serious Aspiring or Seasoned Authors—First topic: the issues of getting started;

**Tuesday**—MANA's Method of Madness for Successful Sandwiched Entrepreneurs—First topic: the age of the children that are a part of this sandwich makes a difference in terms of the part of the sandwich;

**Wednesday**—Online Educators Keeping Students On-the-Line—First topic: the first challenge is setting a positive tone beginning the course;

**Thursday**—MANA's Grammar Gotcha Corner—First topic: the challenge with past participle, irregular verbs: I seen it vs. I have seen it; I have went vs. I went vs . I have gone; and I done it vs. I did it or I have done it;

**Friday**—FYI Fridays—Send any questions you have that are related to authors, sandwiched entrepreneurs, online educators, or grammar inquisitors.

Writing:  
somewhere between  
torture and fun.

# *Prayer Cycle by Emily Sauer*

*God, I seek boldness,  
But all I find is fear.  
God, I long for answers,  
But all that I muster is doubt.*

*God, I want peace,  
But anxiety is what plagues me.*

*God, I want to trust,  
But all I hear are whispers of betrayal.*

*God, I want intimacy,  
But I am unable to be vulnerable.*

*Jesus, is this true?*

*[Try again.]*

*Jesus, I seek fear,  
So all I find is fear.*

*Jesus, I long for doubt,  
So all that I muster is doubt.*

*Jesus, I want anxiety,  
So anxiety is all that plagues me.*

*Jesus I want to be betrayed,  
So all I hear are the whispers of betrayal.*

*Jesus, I don't want to be vulnerable,  
Therefore, I am unable to be.*

*Jesus, that's more honest*

*[ok, now]*

*Lord, I seek boldness,  
Fill me with your Spirit.*

*Lord, I long for answers,  
Walk with me as a wrestle for them.*

*Lord, I want peace,  
Give me yours that surpasses all understanding.*

*Lord, I want to trust,  
Please give me the strength.*

*Lord, I want intimacy,  
Please give me the strength.*

*Amen.*



*Two Poems by Tadeuz Hansoon*

I see no borders  
Uttering in the dim of sound  
Below the clouds  
In broad daylight  
This is stolen by an admirer.

Blasted and firm as landing on water  
A mouth full of weed  
As we pick up the speed  
In the last of our hope.



## Yesterday

It's been a while now, since you left our lives forever. But, I remember it like it was yesterday. The look in dad's eyes when I learned of the accident, knowing what he would say before it was said, not wanting to hear it.

It's been a while now, since you left our lives forever. But, I remember it like it was yesterday. The sounds of the machines, the countless surgeries, and the unknown. It's been a while now, since you left our lives forever. But, I remember it like it was yesterday. The nursing homes, the endless therapy sessions, the hope and, then, the realization.

It's been a while now, since you left our lives forever. But, I remember it like it was yesterday. The hospital one final time, the doctor's question, and the decision we never wanted to make.

It's been a while now, since you left our lives forever. But, I remember it like it was yesterday. The funeral, the condolences, the heartache, and tears.

It's been a while now since you left our lives forever. But, you are always remembered and never forgotten as if it were yesterday.



Tammy VanTol

## *Dr. C's Blog*

**Dear Bishop (Day Five)** *Something embarrassing happened. Jimmy was right in his seat when I said to Meredith, "Is my slip hanging?" I felt sick all over.*

**Dear Bishop (Day Six)** *Saw a good movie at school. No kissing though. Some think Sister cut it out. I don't care. I heard some good jokes during the movie.*

**Dear Bishop (Day Seven)** *I saw Defenders [a TV lawyer show]. It was good. When I get older please help me to be clean in heart. And not sexy like some girls.*

**Reflections:** Oh, when I look back on my "embarrassing" moments, I realize that they probably meant only a lot to me. And when I went home and told my Mom, she said for me "not to worry about it." But I did. Yet, as I grew up, I learned that folks really do not give a good care. They have their own lives to live and their own "embarrassing" moments to deal with; mine were and are so unimportant in the scheme of things.

As I look back on these entries, I chuckle at my innocence. Unfortunately, I am very aware that the thirteen year olds of today would not worry about anything being "cut out of a movie" because they have probably seen the whole movie either at a theatre or on the Internet. And my lamenting about not being "sexy like some girls" would be laughable to many today. However, when I was a teen in a Catholic grade school, purity was pounded in our minds and became a real thing in our hearts. And if you did not get it in school, parents, especially moms with daughters, were very vigilant about our being "decent" and never do anything to embarrass the family name.

Well, it is a new day. And I am not one to give the "things-were-so-much-better-in-my-day" speech. I am very aware that I was blessed. I lived in a home with two parents who loved me and protected me when I did not even know it. However, I became aware as I became older that everyone was not raised in the kind of neighborhood I was. So, everyone did not have "my day." Their "my day" was filled with various types of abuse by uncles and, sometimes, even their fathers. The only difference in "my day" and today is that there was not the publicity about these despicable acts. Many girls suffered in silence. And this had a profound effect on them as they navigated through adolescence to adulthood.

Today, it is not a concern to be "clean in heart. And not sexy like some girls"; in order for some to survive, they see their moms working to be sexy to get "that man" to help them with their children. So, the adolescent girl imitates what she hears and sees.

So, for those who have been blessed and fortunate enough to live in an environment that allows some form of innocence for their children, they need not become too smug or unconcerned. In some way, if they cannot provide the support themselves by being a part of an organization or group that can provide change, they need to support organizations and groups that do provide the loving guidance that is so badly needed by our youth today. Or the consequences for their "innocent" ones may be that innocence may be removed even sooner than they even realize.



## *Last Ride by Holly Taylor*

I throw on a pair of ragged shorts, a cut-off cast shirt from *The Sound of Music*, and a sports bra sweat-stained yellow. The bra peeks immodestly through the slits on the sides of the shirt. Nothing scandalous, really—I'm flat chested. Cowboy boots lie forgotten next to the flimsy screen door. It's the moment between morning and midday when our neighbor, Mrs. Doyle, starts up the lawn mower and weed whacker to trim without the risk of a heat stroke. Low-flying insects buzz about. Squawks from laying hens resonate from the chicken coop. Beads of dew refuse to release puff balls—beautiful pearl earrings dripping from the ears of heiresses. My parents sip coffee and read *Faith* magazine on the porch. They don't look up when the screen door clatters shut behind me.

Travis waits behind the family farmhouse, tugging at dandelions and milkweed. A piece of Queen Anne's lace droops from a lip. Upon seeing me gallop down the hill, he releases a low neigh. The hum calls to mind a motorboat passing over when you're underwater. Overcome with excitement, Travis prances over to the gate, neck bobbing up and down with each long stride. White tail twitches, and swats spasmodically at deer flies. He digs furiously at the soft brown earth, digging a trench of mud with pointed hoof.

After pulling off the piece of twine keeping the gate closed, a long neck eagerly shoves me. I kiss the soft flesh between his nostrils, the cowlick on his forehead, the lower jaw. Wisps of long whiskers tickle my nose. Leaning forward, our foreheads pressed together, his icy blue eyes bore into mine. He shakes away from the locked gaze like a toddler growing tired of a mother's affectionate kisses. I gather his mane in my hands and inhale deeply. The fine hairs slip between my fingers. He smells of dirt, of sweat—like a patch of clover, like the sun.

After clambering up the rungs of the wooden gate, I spring onto his slender back. I inch out over his neck and swing the gate open. Travis bolts through, back legs barely keeping up with the front. I cling to his mane as up the hill we go. One of my dad's hunting hounds barks at us—the strange couple. As Travis slows, we approach the hitching post. He behaves like a middle-aged woman routinely sitting down for a daily manicure. Hugging his neck helps when sliding off onto the ground. Hot sand scorches my bare feet.

He waits patiently when I enter the horse barn and collect his bridle and grooming materials. The combs and brushes hang by leather strings on old horseshoes. He whinnies, reminding me that he's hungry. Ignoring the request for oats, I offer the currycomb, metal rasp, pick, and bridle for him to sniff. He snorts and shakes his head.

A slinky barn cat pokes out of the barn, circling Travis's legs in search of bits of half-chewed molasses. Its calico body creeps along the ground, paws erect and ready to flee if necessary. Finding nothing to eat, the cat gnaws grumpily at a chunk of horse dump. The lumps are old and crusty from lying in the sun. Each time our glances meet, green suspicion stares back. Its neck bobs up and down, not sure whether to run away from the possible threat or keep searching for food. Taking the easiest route, the calico stretches out and languishes in the shade of the barn door.

Travis falls asleep as I clean his hooves. The midday heat lulls him into dreams of apples, carrots, and sweet chunks of sugar. I push against his underbelly, forcing each leg to lift involuntarily or risk feeling off-balance. One at a time, fleshy bits of rind, clumps of dirt, and poop drop beneath the hitching post. My father used to scold me when he found hunks of hoof hidden in my underwear drawer. I collected them after the daily trimmings, finding strange happiness at collecting horse nails. They were my treasures. My brother Seth and I laughed when we imagined horses hiding human fingernails in their pasture, under rocks and behind stalks of wild asparagus. I love the rotten smell of the hooves, probably for the same reason that some people secretly enjoy smelling skunk spray or gasoline fumes.

Working Travis's feet back and forth with the rasp, I shape the hooves into smooth scallops of pink and gray. The ground becomes littered with old crusts and curling beige parentheses of hoof. Feeling satisfied, I place the hoof kit back in the barn and grab a thin blanket and Mexican saddle. The main difference between the Mexican saddle and English saddle is that the Mexican saddle has a horn and an English saddle doesn't. A horn comes in handy for my style of riding.

"Aww, shit!" I mutter, hearing the squish of the warm feces. Seedy clumps and stringy tendrils seep between my toenails, oozing onto the fronts of my feet. Weirdly enough, the sensation isn't awful. After all, the manure cools my hot feet. Carefully resting the saddle on the post, I half-heartedly rub my heels against a thick patch of grass. They're stained green now. The edges of my feet feel thick and callused—hobbit feet from never wearing shoes in the summer.

With the bridle in my left hand, my right hand creeps up over Travis's nose. He's still asleep. Cupping the edge of the snout, I edge my fingers into the corners of his lips and pull apart his jaws. Travis imagines a juicy mouthful of oats resting in front of his mouth. The jaw unlocks. He feels the cold bit slip over his tongue. He jolts awake as I'm pulling the bridle over his ears. Fooled again. Shaking his head, he snorts. The blast releases a spray of mucus onto my arms. I pat his neck gently by way of apology, wiping the snot onto my shorts. Travis groggily rotates the metal bar over his tongue and yellow teeth, adjusting to the intrusion. The pink slip of a tongue pops in and out as he feels out the metallic taste. A harsh sound from back molars grinding into the bar

makes me involuntarily shudder. I tie the chinstrap and loosely wind the reins around the hitching post.

Travis cranes backward at me as I approach him from the side with the saddle and blanket. Lifting them up, he hesitantly sniffs at the tack. Bits of hair and particles fly off with the sharp inhaled and exhaled. He makes no complaints—turns back around to face the barn. I'm his personal servant picking out an outfit for the day. I toss the blanket on his back and plop the saddle over it. Travis inflates his stomach, sucking in great gulps. Oh, how he hates the cinch strap. By sucking in air, a horse is able to prevent the strap from getting too tight. I swing the girth strap under his tummy and wind the cinch through the loop in a pattern of knots. I give Travis a few minutes to deflate his stomach and then cinch the strap even tighter. The force required to get the cinch snug is substantial. Standing on an overturned feed bucket, I push and pull at the strap till the spaces between my fingers are raw. I take extra precaution by tightening it a few times. Once the saddle slipped off because the cinch strap wasn't tight enough.

I duck under his belly and close the barn door. I remember walking underneath Travis's belly when I was so little that I didn't even have to bend over. Travis starts to whinny quietly and stomp in anticipation. I grab one more thing—ankle protectors for his back feet. Sometimes, Travis runs so fast that when he tries to stop he cuts the backs of his feet by dragging them against the gravel. I tightly secure the Velcro straps around the bony parts of his back legs and pat his rump. The sun really beats down. The whish whish of the sprinkler system kicks on. Cicadas and grasshoppers provide an accompaniment to the music of the water squirting. My shoulders start to prickle from the sun exposure, and a tickle spreads on the bridge of my nose. Freckles erupt over the curves of my biceps. I pull my hair up into a horsetail.

Shoving my left foot into the stirrup and pushing down, I fling my right leg over the saddle. I stand up in the stirrups and rock back and forth to test the strength of my handiwork. The saddle gives a little—not enough to worry. I lean over Travis's neck and unwind the reins, pulling them over his head. I pull the reins toward me saying, "Back, boy, back!"

Travis backpedals and turns toward the house. We leave the backyard and step into the driveway, his mane floating up and down with each step. His coloring resembles an albino rabbit, pale pink skin visible through a thin layer of hair. I see my mom's face appear in the kitchen window.

"Never take your feet out of the stirrups, keep both hands white-fisted on the reins," she always tells me. "Wear jeans, not shorts, a long sleeve shirt to prevent sunburn, and boots." She warns me not to ride too fast. Today, my mom merely shakes her head at my outfit and rolls her eyes.

The heat makes my legs sticky. I try to peel them off, but they suction to the

saddle. I'll probably get blisters on the insides of my thighs from wearing shorts. My toes curl protectively around the wooden stirrups. We trot through the front yard and pass by my father bent over in the garden in his Panama hat. He stands up and twists his waist from side to side, trying to crack his back.

Seeing us, he shouts, "OUT OF THE YARD!" My dad obsesses over keeping a pristine lawn. Unlike me, he hates stepping in horse piles.

I steer Travis toward the driveway. We leave my parents' property and cross the road into a bean field. There are certain circumstances and locations in which there is an understanding that we both want to run. Travis feels my urge as he begins to trot, then canters, then gallops. My eyes burn as we swiftly cross the field. We click between paces like a roller coaster making its way up a steep hill. I feel each muscle working in him as we pound through the homes of field mice and rabbits, churning up a cloud of dust in our wake. I reach up and yank my hair free, hurling the hair tie behind us in the dust. My knees hug the saddle, pulled tightly in. My butt sticks up and out, shoulders forward in the stance of a prizefighter.

I shout to Travis, "Atta boy! Faster!" His neck reaches out and we shoot forward at a ferocious pace, my eyes streaming tears from the force of the air hitting them. I scan the ground for snake and badger holes. Travis is faster than hell—but he's clumsy. We took a nasty spill once when he twisted his boney ankle. His joints snapped and cracked like a twig in a storm when we fell into that hole.

Reluctantly, I pull back on the reins, slowing Travis to a rolling canter. We're doing a two-step dance move. It's a sliding rhythm—an accent rolling off an "R" or a flame sputtering in the breeze. Strands of hair pitter pat against my back in tempo with the roll of the canter. We crest the hill at the end of the field, and Travis slows to a bouncy trot. I stand up straight to avoid the discomfort of feeling my crotch slam into the saddle. Travis's trot is particularly unsmooth. I tore myself when I was ten years-old. I had gone for a ride alone. I had run Travis very hard, kicking him in the belly repeatedly. He swerved to the left unexpectedly to avoid a tree branch, and my pelvis smacked down into the horn. A ripping pain coursed through my butt and legs; strange warmth seeped down my leg. I didn't know what the hell had happened—I hadn't even gotten my period yet. I sprinted Travis home and hastily tied him to the hitching post. I shut myself in the horse barn and pulled down my blue jeans with shaking fingers. A blotchy brown stain had stained my underwear all the way through. I thought maybe I was dying. The wadded-up pink drawers found their way to the burn pit. I didn't tell my mom or sisters.

Travis halts atop the hill. We turn around to look at the conquered ground. A hawk circles above us in the clear blue sky. Seeing the bird reminds me of that crazy barn cat. I've seen baby kittens picked off the ground by preying hawks and turkey

vultures. A thick layer of trees surrounds us from behind and to the right. The bean field stretches for about a quarter mile back to a line of box elder trees obscuring the view of my house. My hair feels wild and whipped into piecey clumps. I lay the reins over Travis's neck and turn him to the left. We follow the line of trees enclosing the field, taking a break from the sun in the shade of tall maples and aspens.

Reclining backward, my hands interlaced behind my head, I stare up at the fingers of trees reaching toward the sky. I cross my feet at the ankles and rest them against Travis's neck. The smooth motion sways my head from side to side on his rump. A scrawny black squirrel shoots out over the branch above me. I hear the busy chatter of a raccoon in the thick underbrush. Travis twitches his wiry tail at a horse fly and swishes me in the face instead.

"Hey! Watch it, mister," I warn. To avoid further whippings, I sit up in the saddle. I gingerly stand up, balance my poopy feet on the saddle, and stretch a leg out behind me. I hold the figure-skater pose and point my big toe gracefully. Travis walks calmly on. I drape my body over the saddle and hang there like a corpse. A balloon of blood rushes to my head.

Reassuming my position in the saddle, I click my tongue at Travis. We've crossed the length of the sprawling field and, now, stand at the base of a gravel pit. A hill looms in front of us. I kick Travis in the side with my heel. Leaning forward, I hug his neck and tightly grip the stirrups. He shoots forward like a spring and leaps up the mound with ease. We turn back around. The hill is much smaller than I thought—no matter. Summoning up all of my memories of cowboys epically riding toward their enemies, I place the reins in my mouth. The leather tastes sweetly bitter.

I scream, "CHAARGGEE!" and dig into Travis's ribs. He descends with fury. I clench his berth with my thighs and lean back. I toss one hand up in the air, grip the horn with the other hand, and bite down on the reins as though I'm having a leg amputated. Bits of the grainy leather come off in my mouth. When we reach the bottom, Travis breaks into a gallop. We follow the winding path that leads from the pit to the open road.

I let him go. The path looks as though no one uses it, full of potholes and overhanging branches. I duck occasionally to avoid getting clotheslined, making me feel like I'm chasing someone. The path turns into a grassy decline. We make our way down. I lean back in the saddle and move my hips in time with Travis's movements. My hair cascades around my face, lifting and rising as though it's a jellyfish swaying in the sea.

"Gooood boy," I whisper. His ears twitch backwards to acknowledge that he hears me. I pat his neck with loving thumps. We reach the bottom of the hill. Travis slows to a halt and stands in front of the path, breathing heavily. A puff of foam coats his flanks and neck. I reach back and smack his back with my palm. He cranes his neck

backward and our eyes meet. He looks toward the path and back at me.

Before us stretches a straightaway, a long tractor path. The path leads up into the gravel pit and also allows tractors to make their way into the bean fields from the road. He needs no urging from me. The sand flies around us in a tunnel. A herd of cows next to the path stares blankly as horse and rider thunder by.

I stand up straight in the saddle and slowly raise my arms upward. I'm terrified, but the liberation overwhelms me. My calves push into Travis, the death grip of a python coursing through my knees. I feel bald—my hair shoots out in a straight line. The loose cut-off flaps and cracks at my back. Our bodies sync. My belly button pulsates as though a magnet pulls it forward and back. I lower my arms from above my head and suspend them on either side, at shoulder height. A wave ripples through my hips and waist, working its way to my shoulders. Manure, sweet lilacs, my body odor, horse sweat, the afternoon sun warming my head, Travis's neck a straight line in front of me, and a white mane swaying—unbridled joy. I'm a tree, the human T, the conqueror of the wind.

...

“Hi sad news Travis died call Kaleb when you can really hard lots of memories.”

All I thought about in that first minute was how stupid that an important text didn't have any punctuation whatsoever. Floods of memories about Travis were betrayed by a simple and ungrammatical text. After a two-hour meeting with my thesis advisor, this run-on sentence popped up on my phone. I was rounding the curve of my final year as an undergraduate.

I cried in a bathroom stall until my head ached. Other girls who came into the bathroom probably wondered what had happened to someone that made her so hysterical. In the past, passing by girls crying in stalls always made me feel a sense of overwhelming guilt. As I'm sitting in the bathroom, I wonder if passers-by think my boyfriend broke up with me, I failed an organic chemistry exam, or my grandpa died. The moment feels cinematic. When I finally leave the stall, my face resembles an angry tomato—my eyes look like I've just had my clock cleaned, as my dad would say. Snot streamed endlessly in rivulets around my mouth.

I took care of Travis for my older brother, Kaleb, when he moved away from home in his late teens. Kaleb and I are about six years apart in age. Kaleb took Travis to live at his own house when I moved away for college about six years ago. My brother has his own place now, a happy family, cute little farmhouse in Amish land surrounded by willow trees and a millpond. Travis passed the last of his days grazing on a few acres of fertile land and being loved by Kaleb and his two children. I received a Christmas card from Kaleb's wife, Ericka, this past year. On it were photos of their two kids,

Avelyn and Matthew, posing atop Travis. Their little cheeks perpetually flushed, the little blondes cheesed for the camera with tiny boots and flattop hats.

The call went to voicemail when I called Kaleb. A few minutes later, as I walked home in the freezing cold, my phone rang.

“Hi, Auntie,” Avelyn said with an intonation of sympathy on the last syllable, “Auntie, are you cryin’?” I choked down another sob.

“Yes, Avelyn.”

“Aw, I’m sorry. I love you.” I heard Ericka in the background instructing Avelyn on what to say to her grieving aunt.

“Yeah, I’m ok. Is your daddy there, Avvy?”

“No. He hadda drive his friend home,” she admitted. Mimicking what her mom said, she added, “He’ll call ya when he gets back.”

We hung up. Slipping to the apartment on icy sidewalks, people glanced nervously when the crying girl passed. Upon reaching my own street, a memory of Travis biting into a crabapple filled my head. I broke into fresh hysterics. Bending over the sidewalk, I pinched the bridge of my nose and snorted out a clump of mucus. A girl swerved past me, hiding her disgust in a nervous laugh. I walked the last few kilometers and stomped up the stairs. My roommate, Liz, snored on the leather couch in the living room. She stretched out her legs when the door slammed shut and awoke to another round of weeping.

“What’s the matter?!” Leaping off the couch, she rushed to my side. Without getting a response, she pushed my head into her shoulder.

“Travis died.”

“Oh no, oh god. I’m so sorry. God I’m sorry.”

Did her sympathy make me feel better? Honestly, no. A videotape of images played through my head. Every time the video started up, I’d feel the tears creeping out and squint hard, forcing them back inside.

I sat at the kitchen table. My phone finally rang. As soon as I heard Kaleb’s voice, another round of sobbing sprang out of me.

“It was colic,” he told me, “Ericka went to feed him this mornin’. He wouldn’t eat. She called me at work, and I told her to walk him, loosen up his guts some. He was super bloated. She took him out of the barn and walked him around the driveway some. When I got home from work, I knew it was colic. His belly was super pushed out, and he wasn’t poopin’ or nothin’. Yeah. I tied him to a tree and left him there because I had to hook up a wood stove in the basement. I been puttin’ it off for weeks. When I came back, he hadn’t moved or nothin’. I tried gettin’ him to walk back to the barn. All of a sudden, he just fell over. He landed in the snow. His legs shot out like all straight and stiff; his eyes all bloodshot. I got down and shoveled out a trench in the snow with my

hands. I kept pushin' him and pullin' on him, but he wouldn't even try or nothin'. He just gave up. I actually got pissed. Ericka got mad at me cause I started smackin' him. I started yellin', 'You bastard! You're not even gonna TRY!' He tried standin' once, but he fell down. He died in an hour. I held his head in my lap when he tried takin' that last breath."

After hearing the story, Kaleb and I sobbed together through our cell phones. He's probably the only person who could fully feel exactly what I felt. "He was my brother. Me and that horse grew up together," he admitted. Though Kaleb's a tough guy—having survived third degree burns on his face, kidney stones, and a ruptured appendix—he has a hidden vulnerability for horses.

Kaleb raised Travis from a young foal, taught him how to pull a cart, how to carry a rider, which commands mean turn left, which commands mean turn right. He was 12 years-old when our dad brought Travis home. They made a pretty pair—two blue-eyed colts with calm dispositions. Most boys play video games and join the Boy Scouts at that age. Kaleb spent his adolescent afternoons in the back yard with Travis on a lunge line and a whip in hand. Sitting under the clothesline, knees tucked under my chin, I learned to love horses by watching those two together.

Kaleb taught me how to ride, how to tie the cinch strap, which commands to use, how to stand up in the saddle, how to clean hooves. We'd go on long rides together, me on Travis and him on Bess, a plump mare he trained later on in his teen years. After the training rides, we'd race home in the fading light of dusk. Arriving home over the long country roads, we'd laugh and argue over who'd won. Travis's pink skin would appear vividly through his sweaty fur. As the sun sank, we'd brush down the horses, remove layers of sweat and burrs, feed them their oats with molasses, and ride them back down the hill to pasture for the night.

"Dinner's ready! Come eat, kids!" my mom would shout.

Before we walked back up the hill to the house, we'd turn around and watch the beautiful beasts. Travis loved to roll in the dirt after an exhausting ride, smearing his glossy white coat with a layer of dirt. The dirt contrasted with the white, making him look like some spotted breed. He'd stand up and a tremor would move up his spine, releasing the dust and sweat back into the air. After giving himself the massage, he'd meander to the horse tank. Watching a horse drink is strange. Their lips don't move, but they're able to suck up great amounts of liquid, no problem. A thin line of spittle would drip from the edges of the bottom lip.

Kaleb and I would turn around and head uphill for supper, shutting off the barn lights and replacing all the tack on its hook. We'd turn around once more at the entrance to the house, hands resting on the ledge of the wooden deck, observing strips of purple sunset descend over the fields and pasture. Lightning bugs started up their silent

vigil, popping on and off through the wide expanse. Travis would sidle out to the open field. Sometimes, he'd look back up at us at the house and whinny once or twice. Kaleb would respond with a long, low whistle. Tall neck stretched out tight, ears perky, nostrils fluttering, Travis bid us goodnight.

Kaleb would punch me lightly on the arm or pick me up and carry me inside. The sounds of a family bickering and praying over dinner echoed out over the hill, down to the horses. We both provided comfort for one another, some sort of solace in knowing that we took care of each other in different ways. I always knew without seeing them that the horses grazed calmly down the hill. Darkness would blanket the field with dampness, tucking each flower and tree into tall shadows. The screech owl would swoop and duck down over the pasture, carrying home a shrew or field mouse. Chirruping tree frogs gurgled near the streams and mated in the warm summer night. All was well and quiet.



## *An Interjection from the Editor!*

I do hope you've thoroughly enjoyed this issue. In case you didn't notice, the sunflower panoply stemmed (pun intended) from my love of sunflowers and the delight I've had in the last couple weeks in watching them bloom! I won't say much more, only that I wish you a lovely August, full of writing, so, without further ado-

*Happy Writing!*