

WE CAME TO THIS CITY



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Poems on June 20th

Merciless Siege

By Rebecca Navarro

They've arrived. Over the hills and
Through the valleys, they've arrived.

Through days of rain they persisted.
Only to reach Perugia. Only to reach us.

Mother didn't hesitate. She blew out each lamp
And smothered the fire. The pot was almost at a boil.

Mother hushed me and she hushed the baby girl.
She cleared a space among the closets.

Her face told me time was running out.

She placed us between bins of food
And covered us with burlap.
She pat my head and scurried to hide herself.

I cuddled baby girl while silencing
My own whimpers. I could hear
Footsteps coming closer, closer.

Drunken soldiers stumbled through
The kitchen. I could hear them bite
Into the hard crust of our bread.

They ate like pigs.

I barely breathed.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard
Their heavy boots starting for the door.

“wait”

The two pairs of boots paused.
One pair slowly clomped towards the fireplace.

Through the crack in the door and through
The stiches of the burlap, I saw his hand reach out
Towards the pot that had been almost at a boil.

He felt the remaining warmth.

“someone is in here.”

Haikus on June 20, 1859

By Joe Yank

Pius sent soldiers
When Perugia sought freedom:
Storm of papal wrath.

Rain pounds Swiss troops
Who pound monastery wine
Then Perugian doors.

The Perugians hid
When the Swiss guard came knocking.
Sorry. No one home.

A patchwork defense
Stood against the cruel Pope's dogs.
Courageous rabble.

Less eight hundred—
Joined the king; wet rifles failed.
Mistakes yield martyrs.

Papal cover-up
Thwarted by a damn cowboy
Who didn't fear god.

A gold medal won
Because they were massacred.
It sounds like they lost.

And about this gold:
What type of contest was it?
And who got silver?

Forget the medal.
They fought fiercely to be free.
Quiet American.

Always the short end
Of the stick. Perugia, act

Two? Twenty nineteen?

Invasion of my Home

By Olivia Vastola

Sitting on the floor I hug my legs.
Hoping that no one will open the door.
There is nowhere to run.
I am trapped in this castle on a hill.
These men that fight for the country we share
Are pillaging a piece of their own puzzle.
Our little town will never fit like we use to.
Do these men want to kill the innocent?

I hear screams from my neighbors.
Soon that will be me.
Deep breaths and a sound mind must keep me calm.
My day has come and I still stand with pride.

The door opens.
That figure will be my doom.
I pray internally.
I know June 20th will be remembered,
For better or for worse.
One swift swing,
The kiss of death is upon me.

Letters From Perugia

My Invitation to You

By Irene Rellini

Perugia, January the 22nd , 2014

Dear Ammadi,

as I wrote you in my previous letter, I found a job in Perugia and, since it is quite far away from my hometown. I moved here in September 2013.

Now I live in a big building just outside the city center, in the neighborhood of Monteluca. Considering that most of the buildings of the city date back to Medieval times, Monteluca is quite a recent area, since it was built around the Sixties. My apartment is on the third floor (we have no elevator so you can already imagine how tiring it is to climb up the stairs with heavy shopping bags) and it is very spacious. So different from the small flat in which we used to live when we were in Malta!

When I got into the apartment for the first time I was disgusted: there was an intense smell, a mix of mold and cigarettes. That smell reminded me of my childhood, when my old-tobacco-addicted-aunt Lucianella wanted me to kiss her cheeks. I used to do that, just not to be rude, but that strong tobacco smell would make me sick. In the beginning I thought that living there would have been horrible but, luckily, I was proven wrong. After a good cleaning, my apartment turned, in fact, into a very decent place.

My bedroom is quite small but very cozy. The walls are painted in light blue and the curtains match them. When I lay in my bed and watch the ceiling, it looks like one of those summer days, when there are no clouds in the sky and the sun beats so hard that one feels weak but relaxed. I personalized my room, with some posters and photos and I also hung up a cats' calendar. You know how much I like them and you can also imagine how immensely I miss the ones I have left in my hometown!

While the first impression of the apartment was not so positive, I can't say the same thing about the city of Perugia. The atmosphere is unique, and strolling around its alleys is just amazing! I go jogging almost every day, in the early morning. I wear hat and gloves, since at dawn it can be very cold in this time of the year. After running for some minutes, I stop at the public garden which is behind my building to do some exercise. The ground is still wet and I enjoy watching the dew dripping down from the leaves. Before going home I stop at a pastry shop to have breakfast. How can I resist the smell of croissant and espresso coffee coming out from it?

Perugia is very interesting also at night. After dinner, especially during the winter, there are not many people in the city center. This is the best time for me to enjoy walking among its narrow streets. Some of them are so tiny that a car cannot fit. These high and thick walls give me a sense of mystery and unknown. Walking there can also be scary at certain times. Wouldn't you have the feeling that there's no escape?

Now you could probably wonder why I enjoy so much walking around the center of Perugia if I get scared. Actually, I don't get scared at all, I rather feel myself immersed in a fascinating story. I feel like I'm living in the Medieval times, when the city doors needed to be shut at night, in order to prevent attacks from neighboring cities. I also imagine that behind those thick walls there's a woman, making bread and all sorts of food for her kids, and waiting for her husband to come back from a war in foreign lands.

Since then many centuries have passed, but a precious portion of History is written in every brick of Perugia. This city is the living example of how the past can be kept alive through emotions and feelings. My dear friend, I hope you will come to visit me soon because I can't wait to enjoy this fascinating city with you.

A big hug,

Irene.

Dear Angie

By Jessica Weldon

Dear Angie,

I wish you could be here with me in Perugia. The pictures on my blog and the stories that I call home with could never do justice to this experience. You will never know Perugia until you get yourself lost in the maze of little back alleys swelling with family run shops and local color and burst out onto Corso Vannucci breathing hard from the hills. Until you know the relief of finding your way home you have not explored the city.

I want you to take a walk to the center of town, sit down on the steps of the Duomo, and close your eyes. Just breathe deep and know Perugia by the way she smells. Smell her perfume like the campfires we had when we were little. Fires of necessity that burn and protect against the damp mist that seeps through the windows into my socks and frizzes my hair. This scent mingles with aroma of the Nutella bomboloni wafting to my apartment from La Accademia around the corner. Sweet and smoky swirl around in the fog and get lost.

Take off your blinders and really see the life around you. Perugia is the quilt on the bed in our guest room, old and a little tattered from being handed down for generations but still intact enough to keep you warm. Centuries-old Etruscan stones intermingle with modern red bricks, new stitches in the fabric of this refurbished city. Look down from the overhang at Porta Sole and you will see where Perugia outgrew her ancient roots and then her medieval city, spilling out into the countryside, coloring the hills with the fringes of her skirt. Watch the people as they go past. The old and the young mingle like the stones in the foundations of the buildings in which they live. See their fashion and the way they walk.

Open your ears and find the pulse of the city. Listen to her babble like a bubbling brook, voices spill out of the fountain in the Piazza, shouting to be heard in their different tongues but making very little sense. Find with me the moments of clarity that dart out like the rays of the sun from behind the heavy clouds: precious English that drifts through the air and strikes like a gong on the senses. Finally, capisco. Hear the lyrical quality of the many harmonizing in the streets and let yourself be swept up in the crescendo.

Reach down and touch the street. Run your hands over the ground and feel the texture of Perugia: rough like the uneven cobblestones that scuff up my boots. But take a moment to get to know her and this harsh exterior will crumble away leaving her soft and warm like the old women all dressed up in their makeup and furs that smile at me and help me in the grocery store. Feel the heartbeat of the people and the streets. Perugia is like the string on a guitar that keeps falling loose. Feel her struggle to slow down and rest as she is tightened by the chiming of the town bells keeping the city in tune. Fast and slow push back against one another in this dueling city.

Take a taste of the city and let yourself be overwhelmed by new sensations. Perugia is heavy like the pasta that sits in my stomach after a big Italian cena, sweet like the baci from Bavicchi on my afternoon walk home, and salty like the prosciutto we buy from the Parma brothers. She is a blind taste test of spices and flavors that come together in a hearty Umbrian stew. Paired with some unsalted bread, she's the perfect meal.

To Home with Love

By Justine Reale

Dear Jill,

You asked me how I'm settling in, if I like it here in Perugia. When it comes to my temporary home city, the words wet and foggy come to mind, if I'm not thinking too much about it. The weather though, also temporary, is by no means significant enough to describe a place. Perugia is so much more than a rainy day or a city covered in clouds. It's bright with beautiful, ancient buildings and winding medieval streets, and its renaissance walls and art are rich with history.

When I walk through the streets and up a giant staircase on the way to class, I see pigeons and cars swerving around the corner. There's a man selling umbrellas when it's barely drizzling, and another man begging for coins if it's not. I pass that small little bakery that I've always wanted to try, but haven't stopped in yet. When I pass the fountain in Piazza IV Novembre, I wish I could skim my fingers through the water. A large iron fence blocks the citizens from enjoying this—although now assume it's a precaution so that the ancient monument won't be destroyed by a pack of careless teenagers, or littered with cigarette butts. One of my favorite things about the city is that I can be walking down the main street, turn a corner, and go back in time. The cracked, fading paint and stone on many of the houses and shops isn't in need of restoration. The history is kept there as a reminder to the people, and as the best kind of art. Perugia's walls tell its story.

Perugia smells like baked goods in the morning and something burning later on, like the hayride bonfires we used to have as kids. You would love it here, I'm sure of it. I can picture you smiling, staring around in wonder because you've never seen a place like this, so full of views and twists and hills to climb, and that makes me love the city more every day. When I get down because of a bunch of clouds or because it's raining again, I imagine your voice in my head. "I love the rain," you'd say. "The rain is so pretty. It makes the whole city smell good." And then I smile, remember where I am, and keep walking. In my head, I make a list of important places to show you when you come visit me. The sandwich shop around the corner, the best place to get chocolate, and the bookstore I know you would love, even if you can't read a word of Italian.

Perugia sounds like ringing bells and the echoing of cobblestone streets. It tastes like strong coffee (that I'm going to make you try by the way, if you claim to like coffee so much) and, sometimes, like cold air. Even when it is, my favorite sight here is climbing and climbing until I reach as high in the city as I can go, or at least until I'm sure my legs will still hold out, and look at the city from there. It's so much bigger than I think it is, most of the time. It's beautiful, and discouraging, because how can I hope to ever to come to know this place? I just have to accept that while I won't be able to see every crevice and street of the city, there's still so many things about Perugia that I can learn and remember to tell you and Mom and Dad about when you come here.

I've seen Rome and Assisi, but to me there's something special about Perugia. Every day I try to look around me and to learn new things about the city I'm in. And even though I sometimes sigh when I see rain or fog outside the window, or because I have to trek up the 200 stairs to get to school, again, I think that's what love is. It's being able to look at the world with new eyes, and be in awe of this new place, but also to recognize the things that may annoy you or overwhelm you. It's loving something or someplace despite its flaws, or what it makes you miss about home. Because for these four months I'm here, in this enchanting, medieval city, Perugia is my home.

A Day in Perugia

Pets, Poo, Perugia

By Joe Yank

As I trudged through the streets one day, I saw, among the faceless masses of the citizens, a man dragging his right foot behind him as he walked. Despite his obvious youth, he stepped with the weight of a great trauma. From his right foot I saw a trail of brown along the pavement. He continued limping as his eyes scanned desperately from side to side. Water. He needed water. But it was too late. He had already become another casualty; another victim to the booby traps of dog shit that dot Perugia's streets.

At times, I feel as though I live in a city under occupation. Student? Soldier? The line between the two blurs as I slog through the minefields of dog feces that span the streets of Perugia. I timidly place one foot before the other, inching my way along the treacherous battlefields of the city's sidewalks. This simple act of necessity, walking as I knew it in another lifetime, becomes a daily entanglement with fear. As I march from post to post, between my duties to bars and classrooms, I am aware that at any moment fate can pick me off with a well hidden turd.

I am experiencing a timeless sort of war, one against an enemy that hides in the shadows and walks among us. These enemy combatants—pet owners ignorant or apathetic to the dangers their dogs leave—employ the weapon of improper pet etiquette in a brutal guerrilla campaign against any and all from the high fashion heels of the diva to the humble boots of the workingman.

They say the first casualty of war is truth, but this war has shattered that timeless adage. The true first casualty of war is the sole. Each day I join the scores of civilians as we walk in fear for our soles, silently praying for their safety. We seek to preserve our soles, trying desperately to keep them from plunging into the brown abyss.

Leaving our internship at the Monimbò Fairtrade store one day, my friend Breanne and I crossed the no-man's land of Corso Vannucci. We passed by a patrol of dog owners with their unleashed enlistees. As Breanne played with the blue notebook in her hands, she shook her head, causing her single, long braid to wave along her back. This movement stole her gaze from the path before her, and she failed to see a brown foot snare left by an enemy dog. I reached out to her as her left foot came down, hurtling straight towards the shit. Urgently, I put my hand on her shoulder and shoved her out of the line of fire. In a jumble of flailing limbs, we tumbled to opposite sides of the poo. I landed hard on the pavement and rolled. Breanne lifted her arms to protect her head. She looked up at me.

"Did it get me?" She asked. I shook my head.

We got lucky that day. But walking in Perugia isn't just a collection of heroic feats. Weeks earlier, I was walking to my morning Italian class. My boots produced a strong thud each time they made contact with the

pavement. One step landed softly. I looked down to see my boot atop a still warm trap. Heat crawled up my pant leg as I desperately pulled my foot from danger. I began looking around. A few feet ahead I saw a puddle. I dragged my foot to the water and plunged my sole into the cleansing liquid. I struggled desperately to rinse the shit from my shoe. I looked at my watch. I was running late. With no other choice, I continued walking to class, pulling my foot behind me. I felt isolated from the other people on the street, all moving in the opposite direction. I became keenly aware of the ghostly stench of a dead man walking rising from my sole.

A Way to Unwind

By Justine Reale

Stifling and stressful are two words that come to mind when I think about grocery shopping in my temporary city. In the United States, I go grocery shopping with, if not excitement, at least a certainty that I'm going to get what I need and get it without too much trouble. Sometimes I go grocery shopping to unwind for a while, to do something mindless but productive, and to relax from the other demands of my week.

Not in Perugia. My usual grocery store, the Coop, is small. It has tight corners and minimal space for people, and if you don't know where to look for something you're mostly out of luck. I enter the store at 10:00 on a Monday morning, and the place is jam-packed with bodies snagging fruits, cheese, and jars of tomato sauce. I say "scusi" more times than I can count, and try not to get in people's way while I pick up my food for the week. I weigh my apples and tomatoes on the scale, something new to me. I don't mind this addition though, and I actually think it's kind of fun, even though it takes a few minutes out of my shopping to wait in line. If I want bread and cereal too, and I have to remember to grab it from the shelves while I'm standing in line for the cash register.

Once I finally have all my food, a red basket filled to the brim, I prepare for the most stressful part of the whole experience. The cashier rings up my items with practiced speed, and I struggle to remember the word for bag—I ask for "una busta," and the man hands me my change at the same time. I juggle the change in my left hand and give up on putting it back in my wallet. I stuff it unceremoniously into my jacket pocket and start throwing my items into the bag. He's already gone on to the next customer, and the next after that, and I go faster. People are staring at me, at least in my head, and it's not until I get my bag stuffed and escape out the door that I can start to breathe again. I take a deep breath. I look down at my shopping bag and realize I should've asked for two; the cereal is nearly falling out and my sauce can is going to split the bottom open. I just hope the bag won't explode as I set off for home, because there is no way I'm going back in there. At least, not until next Monday.

Perugia: A Secret to Share

By Katie Tozer

Only trash collectors and committed dog-walkers are out with me for the sunrise. Last night's winter rain pools in the cobblestone streets that haven't seen the sun in almost fourteen hours. The pre-dawn darkness relents only to the sun and the streetlights. Closed green shutters line the street; lights off, gates locked, but the bakeries open their eyes, blinking away sleep. This morning, like every other, the sky pales imperceptibly and then all at once. Perugia cherishes the horizon. Away from the four-story buildings, the sun pokes out behind Piazza Italia. Mt. Subasio bows across the fog soaked valleys and Assisi comes out of the shadow. Perugia feels like a cleared chalkboard before class, ready for the day to be written down. There will be rain, evidence from the dogs' walks, and a cheery "Ciao, ciao!" from my friend at the alimentari. During my first week in Perugia, I hid in the center like a worm in a hole, wondering where I was and if grass still existed. As winter has warmed up into spring, I have warmed up to Perugia.

The bells over Piazza IV Novembre ring every fifteen minutes; old and spacious, clanging without urgency; noting the casual passing of time. Watches are fashionable—like anything made of leather—but you hardly need them. Not only do the bells keep time for you, time isn't something that needs to be kept. But fashion is important in Italy. The display of scarves and bags outside Furla changes every day. Women wear heels, too, despite the stones that pave Perugia with cracks and holes.

The streets are almost all one-way, like many other cities, but in Perugia, that's about the only rule drivers follow. People park wherever they want to, especially during weekends and festivals. Since Perugia was built before cars were, space is really tight. Once, a utility truck tried to pass through my street and six men had to lift and shove a compact car closer to the wall to make room.

Back on top of the city there are two different feelings. Corso Vannucci invites anyone and everyone to walk along arm in arm and admire Perugia's beauty; this view belongs to the tourists. The streets running off the main channel are the Perugians'; it isn't easy to distinguish the owners of bars and pizzerias from the regulars. The shutters of apartments above the shops are flung open in the morning, and across the narrow streets the inhabitants could hold a conversation. Coffee and cigarettes stain the air. The feeling and ownership of a space in Perugia depends not only on where you are, but when you are there. Behind the duomo on sunny weekends, in the backwater of Piazza IV Novembre, souvenir tables and ceramic displays claim the land for the tourist. At night, the same place houses the Perugian nightlife. People stand there smoking, drinking, and meeting each other.

From the center, at least four different streets lead down to Piazza Grimana. The Università per Stranieri looms over this regal piazza and the six-way intersection reminds the pedestrian that Perugia is connected to a wider world. Take a step back, wriggle out of your hole, because the further away you get, the more sense it all makes.

Here, We Remember

Talk to Me

By Francesca Frittella

Clara woke up at 6:30 sharp, as always. She had a shower, put on make some up, and wore one of her suits, in a pale yellow solid colour. She tiptoed into her bedroom, grabbed her bag and then quickly sneaked out of the house trying not to make any noise. He always got very nervous when she disturbed his sleep. Actually, he usually woke up at the ring of her alarm clock, but he didn't like to talk in the morning. Not even to wish her a good day or to say goodbye before she went to work. They never talked in the morning. As a matter of fact, they never talked much at all... She never talked much with anybody. It is not that she didn't have friends. But she seemed to have been assigned the role of listener, rather than speaker. She was indeed a very good listener! That's probably the reason why everybody seemed to prefer talking to her, rather than with her... You should see her: a little girl sitting down tight-lipped at the table of a bar for hours, with her melancholic eyes wide open and the ends of her hair turned up on the shoulder-pad of her jacket, while her friends pour their thoughts out to her.

That day, she entered the call centre building at 7:45, as always, murmured a timid greeting to the man chewing donuts at the reception desk, who hardly answered back, as always. Sometimes she wondered whether people noticed her. Clara wasn't a very outstanding person. With her washed-out suits, her pale skin and uncombed ash blond hair, she seemed to disappear in the colours and noises surrounding her. And her voice was so feeble that reading her lips was the only way you had to decipher what she said. And every time she spoke she had a kind of scared look in her eyes, as if she were afraid that the words coming out of her mouth could provoke terrible reactions in her interlocutor. Clara went up the stairs and then straight to her little cubicle. She put on her headphones, adjusted the microphone and cleared her voice, ready to answer calls for the following 8 hours.

The owner of the call centre is a short cheesy man who always smells like mint, since he's always sucking up mint candies. He had just unwrapped the first one of the day when the phone started ringing...

“What sort of bad joke is this supposed to be?!”

His puffy cheeks flushed with anger, his temples swelled and glistened with sweat. He grabbed the telephone and started listening to the internal calls, rapidly switching from one line to the other, in search of the culprit.

“Whoever is trying to ruin my company's image, is going to pay!”

He was almost going to skip Clara's line, and yet one single word coming out of her lips was enough to make his red face turn white as a sheet- No! It couldn't be Clara! He couldn't believe his hears. And yet it

was her line that he was overhearing. Maybe there was somebody else sitting in her box. He jumped off his chair- no, that couldn't be her- and quickly strolled to her cubicle. As he got closer to her, he came in earshot of her voice, but still the words remained indistinguishable. Clara was greeting a new client with:

“Durusdra, kuru Clara! Wiri kiyii ihren dresen?”

He turned her desk chair around. Clara had been working at the call centre for 5 years, and she had never given him a single problem. She never took a day off, nor did she have the guts to ask for a fairer pay. He didn't want to fire her. He was ready to forgive her, as she would have thrown herself at his feet and begged for his pardon, bathing his shoes with her tears. But none of that happened. Clara stood up, pointed her finger to the man's chest and, looking straight into his eyes, assertively argued her innocence:

“Strau gadràge yichsi arl! Kuru igru dichste ang! Kéyisi làus!”

All the personnel burst into laughter. In so many years, I had never seen that meek man lose his temper like that. Nor had I ever heard Clara talk with such a fierce voice...

As my work day finished, I went looking for her. I found her in the park. She was sitting down on her suit jacket, on the grass. She was leaning back against the trunk of a big weeping willow, with a smile in her large glistening eyes. She was staring absent-minded at the lake in front of her. She seemed not to notice me when I sat down next to her. She kept staring straight, as if bewitched by the fleshy surface of the water, reflecting intermittently the sun light. She was so absorbed by her thoughts that it seemed nothing could disturb her, nor wake her up from her daydreaming, as if there was no room for reality in her tranquillity. Then, suddenly, she started talking, without turning her head at me. Words were floating out of her mouth, her voice had never been so calm, so mellifluous. I don't know what language that was. Probably it wasn't even a real language. And yet she spoke so rarely, that I felt privileged to be the addressee of those words I couldn't comprehend. I opened my ears and tried to grasp every sound, to follow the thread of her speech... Her mother dropping her to school every morning when she was a child; that book she had read; her boyfriend, probably still sleeping in her bed; faraway countries she had visited when younger... I have no idea of what her words meant. But I could understand her, as I had never done before. Africa, Chile, India or New Zealand... These unknown words made my thoughts float and drift away... Far away... To places I had never been taken before...

You Are My Father

By Irene Rellini

It was dawn and the train was running fast through the South of Umbria. It was approaching the Terni station and Marco was sitting all alone with his head leaned against the window. He was observing the industrial landscape offered by the city. The white and fat columns of smoke coming out the factories' chimneys made him think of a futuristic movie.

He was tired, since that morning he had woken up very early, but he was also excited because he was going to visit his father for the first time. Actually, he used to live with him but, when he was three, someone had taken his father away. Obviously, he couldn't remember anything of those times, he was too young to remember, but in the following years he had always tried to imagine how his father could have been, how his life could have changed if they had lived together.

Suddenly, Marco recognized the view of the steel plant where his father used to work. That was probably the cause of his departure from home. It could have been the reason why he had to leave his wife and his two sons, or maybe it was something else. His mother never wanted to give him a clear explanation. Actually, she had always hindered his idea of visiting his father but, at that point, she couldn't do anything more to stop him, because Marco had eventually turned eighteen.

The train finally got to the Rome central station. Marco went off as quickly as he could and headed to the bus terminal. Actually, he had no rush since it was quite early, but he was almost running. In the previous days, he had meticulously planned his travel and he knew he had to take the bus number 5 to get to the outskirts of the city. His destination was the nursing home where his father lived.

While he was waiting at the bus stop, an episode of his childhood came to his mind. He was at school, playing with his friends when, suddenly, one of them said:

«Someone told me your father is crazy! Is that true?»

«No, it's a lie! My father is working abroad!»

«Even Lucia's father works abroad but sometimes he comes home! Why does your father never come? I know why, it's because they keep him tied in an hospital bed!»

«No way! My father has an important job in a steel plant in Germany!»

That day, when Marco went home from school he asked his mother if what his schoolmate had told him was true. She was very evasive and, for him, it was the proof that those words were, at least, partly true. In that same day his mother had given him some more information about that mysterious man. His father was a

worker in the Terni steel plant but then he had lost his job because of a fall in the levels of production. Marco, in spite of his young age, had then caught a sense of sadness and desperation in his mother's words.

The travel in the bus was even more stressful than the one by train. The moment of their meeting was approaching and Marco could feel his heart beating faster in his chest. His hands were sweating and almost trembling. Finally he saw the sign "Casa di Cura Rossi" and the bus stopped there. Some other people got off with him. There were people from all ages: women with children, young men, but mostly elderly people. Since he understood they were all going in the same direction, he started following them.

The group arrived in front of a big black gate and, naturally, it was locked. A woman rang a bell and, after less than a second, it automatically opened. Marco was looking at those white high walls made of concrete. It was absolutely impossible to see inside and vice versa. His first thought was "In all these years, had he ever had the chance to go out from there? Had he ever had the chance to see something else than those horrible walls of the nursing home?" Marco chased away those thoughts because he could feel the tears coming out of his eyes and he didn't want to cry in front of all those people. Moreover, he was going to meet his father, so he wanted that day to be happy.

Once they got inside of the walls, they had to walk through a clean and neat green garden. There were benches and chairs everywhere. Marco was a little bit relieved: that place didn't look as horrible as it seemed from the outside. But once they got into the building Marco's relief was immediately replaced by terror. There were screams and moaning all the time. The long corridor after the entrance door looked empty but the presence of people was revealed by those strange noises. Marco thought "What if my father is really tied on a bed? How would I react to that view?". He was totally absorbed in his thoughts when he heard a voice calling his name:

«Mantini Marco! Follow me, please.»

The nurse started walking with a speedy pace through so many corridors and she turned so many corners that Marco got immediately lost. He was feeling like they were going nowhere. Finally they reached a door where there was a sign saying "Visiting room". The presentiment of his father tied to a bed started to vanish in Marco's imagination, since in that case the meeting would have been scheduled, perhaps, in a private room.

The nurse, told Marco that the visit couldn't be longer than an hour and went away, leaving him with his excitement. Marco opened the door and saw some tables with a couple of chairs each. Since it was still early, the room was empty, except for a man of about forty-five years. He was sitting, looking outside the window. The son recognised immediately that man as his father, actually he hadn't changed much from the pictures of him he had at home. Marco had feared that he may have been completely transformed but he had the same dark hair, and the same medium weight. Marco had the sensation that the time had stopped for all those years they hadn't spent together, in order to allow them not to lose a moment of their lives.

When the man heard the door closing he turned his head and, before Maco could even say a word, he shouted:

«Father! How long haven't I seen you!»

Marco couldn't believe his ears and said:

«But... Daddy... It's me, Marco, I'm your son!»

«Father! I missed you so much! I thought you were dead!»

«Daddy... Your father is really dead. I'm your son, Marco!»

«Daddy don't joke! I know it's you! My son Marco is only three!»

Marco figured out that his father's mind was blocked at the time when he had the nervous breakdown. It might have even gone backwards in time. An intense sensation of discomfort took the place of happiness. For years he had been waiting for that very moment and when it had finally come, his father couldn't even recognize him. He was about to turn himself and go back home but his father started speaking again:

«Daddy, how are you? And how's my family? Are my sons growing up? Please, tell me about them!»

The heart of Marco jumped and an idea came to his mind. At least this man was very interested in his family. No matter if he believed Marco was another person, he was sincerely concerned about his family. In the long and boring days at the nursing home, he had surely thought of his family as Marco had thought of him. So he deserved an answer. Possibly one he could understand.

«Well...» said Marco, «my broth.. ehm... my grandson Alberto is a good boy. He gets good grades at school, even if he's a little bit too fiery. His mother sometimes slaps him but he just doesn't care»

«Ah I'm sure of that, I remember him teasing everybody! And what about Marco?»

«He likes playing with his friend and... and he misses you so much!»

Marco went on telling him stories about his family for the rest of the time and his father was listening to him as if he were entranced. He asked a lot of questions. He wanted to know which subjects their sons liked better at school and which ones they liked the least. He wanted to know if they obeyed to their mother when it was time to go to sleep and if they helped her with the house chores. After every answer that Marco gave him, his father's eyes were sparkling more, and the expression on his face was becoming happier. Marco knew that, in his father's confused mind, there was still a place for him, and that was enough. No matter if he couldn't recognize him. Knowing that he was always in his thoughts was for him the biggest gift.

Leave The Lights On

By Justine Reale

Memory is the last bit of life you hold on to after someone is gone. Even little trinkets saved—a piece of jewelry, photographs, a letter—are all just memories of the person who has left them behind. Still, these things are a comfort. They don't lose meaning for you. You still look at that necklace and think of him, and stare at the pictures and his messy handwriting until the ink blurs together. There's probably someday when you can look at these things and smile, when you can be glad that you had anytime at all with him, but for now these things just make you ache with loneliness.

There are memories that don't hurt as much. People who are still with you at reunions every year, who celebrate their fiftieth and sixtieth wedding anniversaries with smiles, even though your grandpa can only sometimes remember your name. Family videos shot with shaky camcorders, videos of you and your sisters as toddlers, running around the living room and screaming every time a song came on. Memories of Christmases and Thanksgivings and First Baptisms, and memories that everyone remembers with barely suppressed laughter. Every few months your sister comes home, she digs through the old tape set, looking for new memories, and begs your dad to set up the video camera so the whole family can sit around the living room and watch home videos. On the rare occasions he does get the camera to play the tapes, it's an all day affair. You watch tape after tape of you and your sisters in tutus, or crawling around the floor playing dinosaurs, and realize it's no wonder you three turned out to be such good friends.

Memories like all the old videos and photos your dad put together for Noni's birthday one year, the kind that make you smile too hard. There are scenes from movies and pictures of her wedding, her childhood, and recordings of her children and grandchildren (you). It scares you sometimes that you don't know who some of the people in the videos and pictures are. Your dad and your Noni explain, and you feel slightly better—at least someone remembers who they are. Sometimes you get scared and try to ingrain the things you love in your mind—the smell of the fresh rolls that only your mom can make just right, your sister's obnoxious laugh, your dad sneezing so loud he shakes the whole house. You don't want to forget them, even when you're old and wrinkled.

Memories are the emotional imprints produced by others. The things you made other people remember about you, and the history you left behind. Once you're dead, you can't control what people remember about you. Will they think about you and smile? Will they cry for just a little while, and then laugh to remember when you were kids and threw water balloons in each other's faces? Will you be just a weak flutter of memory, a passing thought?

This fear of being forgotten is one of the reasons why people fight so hard to live, and to leave a memorable impression on the world. The only thing that can be controlled is the right here, right now moments, so you try to make them count in any way you possibly can. You hold on to pictures, family, and the memories you still have of this life. You leave a light on for the people that are gone, so someone will remember them.

Lessons We Carry

Part I

Mannaggia La Miseria

By Katherine Tozer

In the beginning of the 20th century, an Italian subculture sprang up in Orange Valley, New Jersey, less than half an hour from Ellis Island; strong, brave immigrants who bought the American Dream. They worked in the hat factories, opened grocery stores, bought houses, sent their kids to work after sixth grade, and sat down for homemade pasta with their families at night. When the Great Depression struck the nation that had promised a new start, the hat factories moved and the *minestra* thinned to feed more with less. Virginia Jandoli married James Cerone a month before the stock market crashed and they had Jimmy and Ginny a few years later. The four of them moved in with James's parents from 1937-1940, making twelve at the Cerone table. Grandma Cerone was up to the challenge. Cursing in the language her progeny didn't know, she mastered the art of making the most of what you have. Watching his beloved Grandma closely, Jimmy picked up on her strength, as well as her Italian phrases. He hardly uses the Italian, but the strength of his body, mind, and spirit has defined him his whole life.

Jimmy, my Pop, worked for everything he has and gives a hell of a lot back. Everywhere he goes he makes a family. In Orange Valley, most of the neighbors were family, but then he explored the uncharted territory of college at Rutgers University on a full scholarship. There, Pop was the President of his fraternity, Beta Theta Pi—though they called it Beta Tomata Pi because all the brothers were Italian. It's sixty years later now, but time can't touch the ties of family. Even though Pop moved halfway across the country after Rutgers, he kept in touch with his roots and his brothers, simply stretching the family to include Chicago. It's no surprise that Pop's Beta brother, Bill Francke, flew all the way to Chicago this fall to lift his spirits. It makes sense that his caretakers have met his extended family, that his doctor will accept our calls at her home.

Humble mathematical genius that he is, Pop did very well as an actuary for insurance companies. When that started paying off, he began to pay it forward. He and Kathi, my Gramy, volunteered in Ford Heights, giving generously to this neighboring hub of crime south of Chicago. They both served on school boards in their own town, Flossmoor, too. From those respected positions, they could keep an eye on their children as well as the community. Once, the teachers were threatening a strike that had the whole town arguing at a meeting hall. My Pop gave a speech admonishing the teacher's union for being too proud and not valuing their community highly enough, and admonishing the administration for being too proud and not valuing their teachers highly enough. It left both parties feeling like their voice had been heard and hoping to shake his hand.

Pop knows everything about numbers and love, but he is just learning about modern medicine. In all the stories, I can't recall a single problem my Pop couldn't solve, but medicine is a puzzle with missing pieces. He has Parkinson's Disease. It disconnects your body from your brain, starting with trembling hands, a shuffling walk, progressing to a paralysis of more and more vital operations. When I was volunteering at a mobile clinic in Tena, I saw an animalistic fear in the eyes of an indigenous Ecuadorean farmer who did not know he had the disease. He could not walk without assistance and his trembling lips betrayed a mouth that was trying to move. His eyes pleaded in a way I'll never be able to forget, desperate to prove there was a working mind inside that body. The hospital admitted him and prescribed the same medication Pop takes. My clinic checked it off as a win, but the fight doesn't end there. The pills have side effects that lead to more pills that lead to more pills that wear away at the stomach lining, leading to more procedures, a new diet, and lots and lots of pain. Which can be combatted with more medicine, of course.

Pop is the life of the party, but he missed Thanksgiving dinner at his own house last year. The head of the table belongs to him and his story-telling, thoughtful questions, and loving jibes over Christmas lasagna, birthday pizza, summer grills, and Thanksgiving turkey.

Watching my Pop, I'm picking up his ability to make the most of what he has. If he can't get up, we talk in his bed. While the hospital sent him in and out, back and forth for weeks, he still found a beautiful gift for Grammy's birthday. Golf, baseball, and basketball are all behind him, but he pours over the finances of the country club and keeps up with his grandsons' sport seasons. No body could keep up with a mind and spirit as strong as his. No body could keep him down, either. The love and attention Pop always showered on everyone around him shows in the time his daughter takes off work, the flowers she brings Grammy, the miles his sons drive to see him, the nights they stay awake at his bed, and the members of the community who go out of their way to do what they can. My Pop is a long way from Orange Valley, but all the neighbors are still family.

Infinite Love

By Irene Rellini

I have no doubt that my grandfather has been the most important person in my life. He died few months ago and he left, inside me, an emptiness which is sometimes very difficult to fill. His name was Albino and he was born on January 14, 1923.

In his long life he suffered a lot, for many reasons. First of all, he was forced to leave the school at the age of eight, in order to work as a farmhand. His parents were very poor and they couldn't afford the cost of education for their six children. Then, at the age of nineteen, he fought in the Second World War, and he was kept prisoner for some years. Finally, when he became an adult, his life had more challenges ready for him, like the death of a son and the long illness of his wife.

However, my grandfather was never sad or discouraged. He would face problems, analyze the situation and always find a rational solution. Even if he was the lesser educated of the family, he was the one to whom everyone would turn to ask for suggestions. His knowledge was not coming from books but from the many experiences he had had in his long life. This is the reason why, for me, he was a model and an example to follow.

He took care of me when I was a child. My parents were working the whole day. Sometimes they would leave home at 7 am and come back at 8 pm and my grandfather was in charge to wake me up, bring me to school, and help my ill grandmother to prepare the lunch. He also checked my homework, since he didn't wanted to leave this duty to my parents when they would come home very late and tired.

My grandfather is probably the member of my family with whom I spent most of my childhood. I remember the summer morning at the playground of my village. Sometimes I was too hyperactive and I wanted to play dangerous games like, for example, going up on a tree. In those occasions he was absolutely strict and, as soon as he said "No, you can't do that!", I would immediately calm down and understand that it was something forbidden. My grandfather had the precious gift of communicating something with very few words and in a remarkably effective way.

Even if in his last years of life he was forced in bed, the picture of my grandfather I have in my mind is that of a very strong man, with big arms and shoulders. In fact, he had always been an hard worker and he stopped only when his forces abandoned him. He had a large knowledge of agriculture and, once he had retired, he planted a vegetable garden behind his house. Every day he used to go there in order to take care of his plants. He did that in a wonderful way, therefore we could eat self-produced fresh vegetables for most of the year.

My grandfather was a cat lover. He enjoyed sitting near the stove with the cat on his legs. One of his favorite cats was Pallina. She was all black and she was a great hunter. Every time Pallina caught a prey she used to show it to us. In those moments I remember seeing my grandfather happy and proud of his beloved

cat. When Pallina got pregnant he filled a box with an old wool pullover, to make her feel more comfortable during labor.

I can honestly say that he was a particularly good man. In fact, I jealously keep in my memories an episode that had happened during one of those days at the playground. It was a hot sunny day and I was playing with other children. We were used to go there with my small red bicycle. However, that day, I was entirely taken up with picking up pine nuts and my grandfather was helping me. Suddenly, we realized that my bicycle had disappeared! He started asking people and he soon found out who had taken it. He took my hand and we went quickly to the house of those people. When they opened the door he talked quietly for a couple of seconds and the bicycle was again in my hands.

While passing again through the playground, in order to finally go home, one of his friends came close to us and didn't hesitate to tell me immediately "You are lucky because Albino has an heart so big that I've never seen another one in my life". At that time I couldn't completely realize the meaning of those words but today that I'm an adult I know how simply but extremely sincere they were. Exactly like him, my grandfather, the most important person in my life.

Our Fonzarelli

By Jessica Weldon

“Faaannntastic” that’s what my Uncle Mark will say every time you ask him how he is. Like Arthur Fonzarelli’s “Heyyy,” Uncle Mark’s “fantastic!” has become more than a catchphrase. It is his trademark stamp of approval on life. And on all of us.

Uncle Mark does not look or act his 52 years. For most of my childhood he had a salt and pepper ponytail and a full beard. He rides a motorcycle to work when it’s nice out and bikes and runs dozens of miles a week to stay in shape. He skis like an Olympian and plays street hockey with the best of them. He has climbed some of the highest peaks in the country and camped out in the back of the aqua blue VW Bus he bought and then rebuilt himself. He is our adventurer.

Eight or so years ago he invested in a rundown cabin in the middle of nowhere New Hampshire with a leaky roof and no heating system. With the help of a few friends in return for a couple cases of beer, he refurbished the entire house with raw materials and years of hard work. True to his rustic nature, the cabin, nicknamed the Easton Valley Lodge, has virtually no modern conveniences. Cellphones and other electronic devices are strictly banned, as are all forms of “artificial entertainment,” with the exception of the classic cassette tapes of bluegrass music he uses as a wakeup call and the floor to ceiling shelves of board games and old books. Uncle Mark has a way of stripping down life to the bare essentials and rebuilding it with beauty and skill in such a way that you appreciate all of the things you did not notice before. He is our craftsman.

Uncle Mark is also my godfather. He is two years older than my father and lived until the summer of 2013 in the apartment behind my house. He is the father to Evan and Janice who grew up more as my siblings than my cousins. He always treats my sister and me as his own and takes us along on all of his unconventional outings. Uncle Mark is the guy that wraps your Christmas present in Sunday comics and builds pressure powered potato launchers. He can spin a pizza on one finger and knows the perfect way to layer a sandwich. He will teach you to play poker and how to build a canoe. He will fix your tractor, walk your dog, and drive two hours to change your tire. Smart, full of life, compassionate, Uncle Mark is the life of every party in his Hawaiian shirt and Jeff Gordon hat. He is our rock.

One summer, Uncle Mark hosted our family reunion at his cabin. Since his parents passed nearly a decade before, most of the large Copeland family gatherings had stopped. Occasionally, individual people would stop by our house on their way through town but really no one kept in touch. Uncle Mark reached out to Copelands around the country and brought them together for good fun and great food. For the occasion he fabricated a grill out of an old oil drum large enough to barbeque chicken for the entire extended family. To top it off he mounted it on skis and dragged it around the yard. He mixes practicality with the absurd. He is our inventor.

Uncle Mark is the kind of person everyone needs in their life; he is the best friend, the fun uncle, the protective brother, and the kind neighbor you wish you could have. More than anything knowing Uncle Mark will make you a better you. He will push you to be creative and inventive, find ways to help you try something you've never done before, and teach you how to make your life truly, Faaannntastic.

Lessons We Carry

Part II

The Boy in the Swimming Pool

By Francesca Frittella

I met him in the swimming pool of a 4-star resort in the middle of the Egyptian desert. The sun made things in the distance appear to shimmer, as if they were part of a mirage. I was looking distractedly at the torrid landscape, enjoying the fresh water, when two small hands grabbed my arms.

“Hey, who are you?”

Judging from his small round face he might have been 8 or 9 years old. His skin was very pale despite the strong sun; his wet curly brown hair covered his eye-lids. He was blind, but his eyes were certainly less blurred than ours. He couldn't see the world we see, but his imagination, his inquisitiveness, enabled him to create a world of his own. And since there was so much space for love in his small fancied universe, I wondered whether it wasn't better than the boundless dirty one we live in. He loved so many things. He loved the seaside and meeting new people. He didn't choose me. He literally bumped into me.

“I was playing with mum and dad and then I started swimming and I got lost, and then I found you!”- he said, giggling, with his hands still on my shoulders - “I wanted to be away from her for a while. You know, she never leaves me alone!”

He had gone hunting. He was hunting for treasures. The small treasures each one of us harbours inside without being aware of it. Somehow he managed to detect them and bring them to light. And then he would make them his own. People's stories and ideas provided him with the raw materials for his factory of images. Through the people he met he gained an outlook on reality. That's how he got the bricks and the concrete to build up his imaginary world. Now it was my turn to give my contribution to his ambitious project: with my answers he would have furnished his rooms.

That same night I thought he had already forgotten our conversation. And that's when that little stranger gave me the greatest gift I ever received. He had told me he loved singing. But when that night he went on stage and sounds started floating out of his young lips all the spectators gaped. It wasn't quite clear whether he was made for music, or music belonged to him. It had become his pupils, the colours and the nuances in his world made only of light and shadows.

I had one further reason to gaze at him astounded: the song was dedicated to “the girl in the swimming pool”. He couldn't see the way everyone else sees, but he could see a better one. And in that moment, he was trying to show it to me. He had come looking for something to take, but what he gave me was much more

valuable than any of my meagre answers. He taught me that glass sparkles in the sun, while gold nuggets look like earth; and that it is pointless to keep your eyes wide open, if your heart is closed.

I was 15 years old when I met him. Almost 6 years have gone by. I can't even remember his name. But it doesn't matter: "that which we call a rose. By any other name would smell as sweet"; the only thing that counts is that the boy in the swimming pool keeps reminding me to look beyond my eyes.

The most beautiful things in life are the small ones, and therefore the easiest ones to overlook, as well. Luckily he keeps pointing me where to look at.

My Bright and Shining Star

By Olivia Vastola

She saves people. She is a miracle worker. Her job is to help people even when they don't think they need any help. Her name is Lindsey Shrayer and she is my hero.

Lindsey has been the alcohol and drug prevention coordinator and a counselor at Endicott College for seven years. Through out her career at Endicott she has 'rescued' hundreds of students. Everybody on campus knows and loves her. She has a contagious smile and her witty personality has a way to brighten even the grumpiest people's day. I have never heard someone speak poorly of Lindsey Shrayer. She even charms the most stressful people into relaxing.

Growing up Lindsey didn't have the best childhood. At every age she had a new obstacle to overcome. She wasn't close with her father, who had alcohol problems, her mother was out of the picture and her brother had problems of his own to overcome. She was left to fend for herself. Then Lindsey met Chris, he changed the way she lived her daily life. He encouraged her to be active, meet new people, spread love to those in need and create an environment that inspires people to be better versions of themselves. They stayed friends for years. Lindsey met her husband, had a beautiful baby boy and then Chris became sick. His illness took him faster than planned and Lindsey felt as if her backbone had been stolen from her. She has taken Chris's death as well as the pain in her life and put it towards helping those who struggle. Instead of making her students feel like she is shoving book smarts to try and fix them, she uses her real life experiences to connect and relate.

The best thing about Lindsey is that as much as her students need her, she needs her students. Once Lindsey decided to do thirty days of thankful on Instagram; she loves her students so much that she posted a picture of a couple of them and said how grateful she was to have them in her life. I was lucky enough to be one of those students.

Lindsey first came to Endicott in 2007 and she realized how divided the campus was. She wanted to bring students together to create an environment where they felt safe around other students. But she also wanted to give them the courage to act as their true selves. Lindsey and her co-worker James Albuquerque created a group on campus called LIGHThouse, which stands for learned to inspire, guide, help and teach. This group has been wildly successful at Endicott to the point where the eight facilitators have now taken over the group completely.

She also went on to create two other programs that unite the campus in a unique way. One is called REACH peer education where students talk about different societal problems that effect Endicott's campus and Grant Me Serenity, which is a student oriented group that meets once a week to talk about how drugs and alcohol affect their daily lives.

Anytime I have had trouble in school Lindsey has had my back. She never doubts my word because our relationship is built off of trust and the same can be said about every relationship she has. I have gone to

Lindsey for many problems that I have faced over my time at Endicott whether it be familial, sexual, social, educational, work and internship difficulties.

During freshman year I met a girl who became one of my close friends, soon after she was diagnosed with spine cancer. Before sophomore year started my friends and I realized that she was using drugs. She was constantly dragging me into her drug induced wild adventures that honestly put my life in danger numerous times, but she was my friend and I didn't want her to be alone during the adventures she decided to partake in. Finally I had enough. When I couldn't talk sense into her I went to Lindsey. After talking it over with Lindsey she made me see the situation in a whole new light. She looked me in the eye and gave me the cold hard truth even if it was hard for me to hear. This girl had been lying about having cancer the whole time. She was using cancer as a way to get people to like her. Lindsey staged two interventions and helped us to realize what we could do for our friend in need. The girl didn't take well to the interventions though and needless our friendship is nonexistent. Lindsey knew how hard we all were taking our friends disappointing reaction to our help, so she would text and email us to make sure we were doing well. She always was thinking about our mental state and how we were being affected, even if she was at home making dinner for her family, proving that she is always putting others before herself.

Lindsey is the most confident, strong and loving person I have ever gotten the chance to meet. The best part about her is that she lets students get to know her personally. I know I can take her hand or give her a hug when she feels stressed. I know that as much as she is there for me I can be there for her. I never have doubted her ability to guide me in the right direction and I never will. Her strength is what gives others the courage to stand up for themselves. Lindsey Shroyer is a knight in armor not only to me but also to the hundreds of Endicott students that have been touched by her shining light.

Taylor

By Rebecca Navarro

Taylor, stuck to her word, wound up and punched him square in the face.
He stumbled back and landed on a few girls that had been gossiping on the couch.

Let me rewind for a moment. It was New Years Eve, 2012 and we were both in the bathroom of our nice little apartment at 250 River Street. Taylor was sitting backwards on top of the toilet seat facing the wall while controlling the music on my iPhone. She played an eclectic variety that afternoon from Fleetwood Mac to My Chemical Romance while I stood behind her with a paint brush that she'd stolen from her art class in with my plastic glove covered hands, and dyed her freshly bleached hair the natural color of, punky fresh indigo.

It was a good thing I had told her to pick up two tubes of hair dye earlier that day, because if she'd only gotten one she'd be walking around with a head of hair that was only half blue. And a head of hair that was only half blue looked twice as silly as a head of hair that was all blue. (Also, her mother being a hairdresser herself would have been even more mad.)

We started the end of 2011 by finishing the remnants of the white zinfandel box wine we had bought the night before and with only her sheer black tights, nude bra, and towel dried blue hair she knocked on my bedroom door...

"I have nothing to wear."

So, I opened the right side of my closet. While she shopped I proceeded down the hall to her room and rummaged through her dresser drawers until I found the most perfectly torn t-shirt. Then, I peaked my head into her closet and grabbed her little black mary-jane shoes.

The air was sharp with cold as we walked down the street, past the barbershop and towards the subway. She took out two cigarettes from her pack and handed me one.

The party was as full of people as a small apartment in the Allston could hold and everyone was feeling it. After making our rounds of saying hello, we made our way to the living room, which happened to be the dance floor.

Taylor tossed her blue hair back and fourth. We danced under the colored Christmas lights that were sloppily hanging from some water pipes that stretched across the ceiling, spending most of the night not paying much attention to anyone or anything.

"Here, give me your cup!" She shouted leaning in so I could hear.

I handed her my plastic cup and she left to go fill it with more booze. It's almost as if she could sense my drink was getting low before I even noticed. Taylor was always making sure I was comfortable and enjoying myself.

However her absence was taken as an invitation to a friend of a friend's who was overly confident and clearly drunk.

My new dance partner was sloppy and annoying. I was enjoying my night much more dancing like a Spice Girl with Taylor, however I continued to dance with my sloppy partner while I scanned the crowd for her. I didn't see her and kept step, or should I say tried to keep step. I got creative with my moves and tried multiple graceful ways to shimmy my way away from him and dance on my own as I was doing before. But although my partner was intoxicated he was very persistent.

Finally, I saw Taylor's blue head bopping towards me in the sea of the crowded living room. She had two drinks in her hands. When she approached she could immediately see the look of relief on my face. She returned a puzzled expression and then noticed the mosquito that had been buzzing around me all night.

"Hold this." She instructed, handing me the drinks.

Politely she turned to my partner and said, "Do you mind? My roommate doesn't want to dance with you anymore."

"You know she likes it." Were the words that spilled from his drunken mouth.

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me."

"Say that one more time and I will punch you in the face." She replied with a dull expression which read as, are you serious right now?

"She. Likes. It."

I stood there with the two drinks still in my hands and my jaw hanging wide open.

Immediately there was a swarm of people around us in the living room. Girls were pouting on the outskirts of the circle complaining about how we were ruining the party. Soon after, Taylor and I got kicked out.

Now we were out in the frigid cold January air.

"Where should we go next?" She turned to me with a wide grin.

"I'm sorry!" I said looking down at my feet, feeling badly about having to leave the party.

"Don't worry, next time just punch him in the face!"

With this response she made my bad feelings fade instantly and instead I felt elated. There was nowhere else I'd rather be than walking the familiar streets of that dingy Boston neighborhood with my friend, protector, and hero on New Year's Eve.

As we walked she pulled an unopened bottle of Champaign from under her jacket that she managed to steal from the bedroom that was holding our coats. We laughed as we popped the cork in the street and hailed a taxi.

We shared swigs from the bottle in the back seat of the cab. She looked at me with bottle in hand and used it as if it were her pointer finger, "You know, there's times when being polite just doesn't work." Then took a large gulp of Champaign and let out a big burp from all the bubbles.

I am not a supporter of violence as an answer to solving issues. However, what Taylor taught me that night was not an unhealthy alternative way to deal with my problems. She showed me that by being a passive person, I was going to put myself in vulnerable situations. She taught me a lesson that I couldn't have learned in a classroom, that I couldn't have learned from my mom and dad, and that I couldn't have learned from anyone else. She showed me what it was like to not be messed with. On New Years Eve of 2012 Taylor Mackinnon taught me how to be a badass and for that I love her.

Meet the Writers



My name is Olivia Vastola, but I prefer to be called Liv.

I grew up in Manchester, Vermont and I attend Endicott college on the North Shore in Beverly Massachusetts. I am an English, creative writing major and I have been published in my schools annual literally journal. I am one of eight facilitators that lead the LIGHThouse Leadership Society; we lead, inspire, guide, help and teach students and our community members how to be leaders in their daily lives. We give people the opportunity to get to know others on a deeper level then just the boring questions such as what is your name, age and major. I became an English major because I want my voice heard by the unexpected reader; I want to inspire others without my personal story.



My name is Joe Yank and I don't photograph

well. I live in New York, but go to college in Virginia where I major in English and Global Politics. I enjoy tree climbing, changing the subject, and making people laugh. Liv (see above) says I'm a total flirt, but that's just because she's in love with me. I don't know how to summarize myself in just a few sentences, but a friend of mine says that everything about me becomes clear when you find out I am a middle child. I am the second of three children.



My name is Rebecca Navarro. I am from

Rochester, New York. I am a student at Suffolk University in Boston and I study Public Relations and Advertising. I am the daughter of two of the most selfless parents in the world and wouldn't be anywhere without them. I am the youngest of three and am definitely considered the black sheep of the family (which is just the way I like it.) Since having been inspired by a super cool and super smart high school English teacher, Mr. Lincoln, I have grown a deep love for the English language. I enjoy reading and photography and am working on my skills as a writer.



They say...

Name: Francesca Maria Frittella

Birth date: 5th August 1993

Birth place: Termoli (CB); Molise; Italy

Distinctive Marks:

“Gracious and delicate like an elephant in a glass shop”.

Remarkable ability to break things: “If Osama bin Laden had had you in his army the US would speak Arabic today.”

Great passion for travelling: “Well, what can we say? Of course, we would like you to stay at home with us... But I guess we can't prevent you from leaving: you were born free.”



My name is Katie Tozer.

I am an English Writing major at DePauw University from a south suburb of Chicago. I don't have a minor because I tried to minor in everything: history, sociology, philosophy, literature, language, education, music...you get the picture. Hopefully aspects from some of these disciplines come out in my writing; I like to write because I like to think and I like to make other people think, too.



Justine Reale

was born in Chicago, Illinois and raised in St. Charles, a west suburb of the city. She has always wanted to come to Italy, ever since she knew she could, so she could hardly believe it when she got the chance. Other than traveling, she loves writing (especially fiction), reading, New York City, and dogs. Her goal is to write books and also work in publishing, while running a kennel for dogs (a “dog hotel”) with her dad. Or maybe have a

flower shop in New York. Who knows. But for now, she is a junior English major at the University of Missouri.



My name is Irene Rellini, I live in Perugia but I was born in San Venanzo, a small village in the Umbrian countryside. I studied foreign languages at the high school, then graduated in International Communication at the University for Foreigners of Perugia. After graduation, I spent two years in the island of Malta, where I attended an English language course and worked in an Italian restaurant as a waitress. My following experience abroad was in Florida, USA. During the first part of my stay, I worked in Orlando as a hostess in one of the Disney restaurants. Then I was a server in Miami Beach. At that time, I was writing a thesis in Business Communication, in order to obtain my second level degree. Cinema and creative writing are my two greatest passions. In fact, I would like to become a film director or a screenplay writer.



Jessica Weldon is from a very small town in Southeastern, MA and is pursuing a double major in American Studies and English at Connecticut College. Currently she is spending the semester in Perugia, Italy and is having very mixed feelings about returning home. Jessica loves to read and watch movies and her hidden talent is making friendship bracelets the art students she teaches at summer camp. Her favorite Italian word is piacere because it sounds so much better than “nice to meet you.” Jessica has thoroughly enjoyed her time abroad and is grateful that she had this creative outlet to record her experiences.