

Composition Awards Journal

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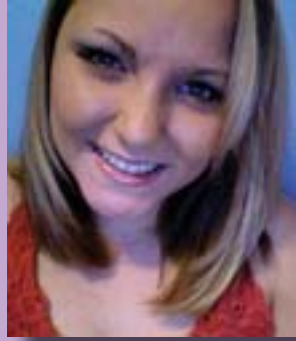
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Pose, Press, Flash

First Place Essay



Samantha Kirch
Major: English

Florida Gulf Coast's Composition program is truly a one-of-a-kind gem. Students are encouraged to question generic instructions and integrate their own mind, creativity, and soul into their work.

I am not a photogenic person. I never have been. It's like a circuit fried in the connection between my body and the camera. Pose, press button, release button—horrible. With such an incapacity to take decent photos, it's no wonder there are hundreds of miserable pictures lying in my trash can, a monster that generously consumes my “oops” moments. Still, over the years I have begun to swallow my pride and allow certain “Oh my god so THAT'S where I store all those donuts” photo moments to keep their place in my life. In fact, some of these photos fascinate me. There is something woefully eerie about seeing yourself from the perspective of another. Does the interior being reflect as easily through a photo as it does through a conversation? Does it even reflect at all? A candid photograph is unlike a mirror in that you cannot position it in your most flattering light. Shutter clicks, light flashes, it's there. It's history and it's capable of mass-production. It's the truth, and it's right there.

Thousands of them. I must have thousands of them. Thousands of those Technicolor, Kodak-paper-backed snippets of lost memories. A tangible manifestation of the ridiculous trends from my childhood, or a brooding look in my eyes enough to feel the hangover all over again, a smile on my face that screams elation I simply cannot deny-- the picture shows it all. Not only does the picture show it all, it shows it all from a new perspective. The bewilderment stems from mechanically and emotionally operating my body, only to look upon it from the view of a

horror movie killer's eyes. I see the outline of my motor-oriented hands; the vertical view of my bodice, stomach, feet; a bird's-eye view of my squirming toes; the face a mystery. My nose a peach blur in the middle of my face, visible only if I squish my eyes hard enough. The disconnected, decapitated perception that has come to completely embody the reason we take photographs—to see.

I always told mom she took too many pictures. Years later, her “do-it-yourself home photography” kits have created immeasurable laughter and nostalgia. With so many photographs of my childhood intact, I do not have to settle for a faded memory and a forgiving concept of time. I can see the fire that ignited in my eyes as I blew out the three candles on my birthday cake. I weep as I study photographs of my grandmother combing my hair. A collection of talent shows and bad hair days, my childhood photographs lend a reliable view to the times that have long come and gone. Photography is a perfectly real phenomenon of time travel, whisking the viewers away from their current lives and back into a time of memory and comfort. Photography encourages the ability to laugh at oneself, the ability to reflect upon the past, the ability to take the most out of life. Patching the break between the camera and my body is the gratitude for the memory. Pose, press button, release button—Well, at least we'll get a laugh out of this a few years down the road.

With so many photographs of my childhood intact, I do not have to settle for a faded memory and a forgiving concept of time.

Make Time to Spend Your Heartbeats

Second Place Essay

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Allison Gagliardi
Major:
Communications

I wish I was required to take a Composition class every year.

In Brian Doyle's essay "Joyas Voladoras" he speaks about the speed in which a tortoise and a hummingbird spend their heartbeats. He brings about the notion that heartbeats can physically beat fast or slow. "Every creature on Earth has approximately two billion heartbeats to spend in one lifetime. You can speed them slowly, like a tortoise, and live to be two hundred years old, or you can spend them fast, like a hummingbird, and live to be two years old."

We, as humans, live our lives too fast. Our hearts do not beat too fast, no-no; we allow them to pass by too quickly. We let ourselves become enthralled in the larger picture and forget to slow down and enjoy the little things. Science has allowed us just enough heartbeats to live our childhoods, acquire knowledge, turn into our parents, have our hearts broken and discover that the world is, sometimes, an ugly place. Yet, we are constantly on the move, constantly fulfilling, pleasing, negotiating and busily hurrying off to the next unimportant task on our list.

Science is not to blame--we have created mankind to live in a busy environment, it is merely habitual; "I must run these errands honey", "I'll see if I can fit you into my schedule", "I'm late, I'm late, maybe some other time." Our society moves at such a fast pace that we seem to get lost if we slow down. We feel as if we are not accomplishing anything, that we are not moving forward. We have become so enthralled in the frivolous details of our lives that we forget to

look at the big picture. We forget to see what is really important. Would it really make a grand difference if you pushed off your To-Do list until tomorrow? Why not spend the day finger-painting and getting in touch with your creative side, reading a classic novel under an umbrella in the sun, or expanding your horizons and going to the opera with a long lost friend. We need to feed our souls and get away from the things that we feel we must do. How about slowing down and actually living our lives?

Toby Keith, a renowned country artist, explains this understanding best in a song titled "My List" where he realizes that his To-Do list is insignificant. He comes to the conclusion in his song that he should be spending his time, or heartbeats, on more significant things. "I won't break my back for a million bucks I can't take to my grave, so why put off for tomorrow what I could get done today; Like go for a walk, say a little prayer, take a deep breath of mountain air, put on my glove and play some catch, it's time that I make time for that" (Keith, 2006). We are busy creatures. But we have become engrossed with petty fascinations; image, money and success, they get in the way of the simple pleasures in life that bring about a smile across our faces.

You can do so much in a lifetime. You can accomplish great things and overcome great obstacles. But are you living your life if all you do... is do? You should enjoy your life, take delight in the little things, seek answers to questions that have never been asked, make a legacy for yourself, and give your children a hero. You only have two billion heartbeats to do so. You can use those to accomplish, accomplish, accomplish, or you can use those to simply live and enjoy living. We should all try to live a bit more like the tortoise. As Toby Keith would say "start living", make that the next thing on your list.

Works Cited

Toby Keith. "My List." Show Dog Nashville, 2006.

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Life as an Outsider

Second Place Essay



Shelley Postle
Major:
Criminal Justice

I learned a lot by taking Composition at FGCU. I had a very good teacher who taught us by giving us broad topics to write about and basically let us write about what we wanted, while also having us stay in the spectrum of the broad topic she chose.

Being included as a popular crowd insider during high school allowed me to witness firsthand the shallow, close-minded nature of my social group. They frequently made fun of the “not so cool” kids-- not just behind their backs, but to their faces as well. In all honesty, I’m sure that I also made fun of these students once in a while. Looking back now, I am definitely not proud of my behavior at that age. Fortunately though, the following event changed my life.

Several of my popular friends and I were at the mall one day when we noticed a heavyset girl walking in front of us. I recognized her, as we had been best friends in middle school. This girl wasn’t dressed like us -- wearing cool clothes, such as Abercrombie, Hollister, or American Eagle. She also wore thick glasses. My popular friends targeted her and used her looks as an entertainment opportunity for themselves, yelling “fatass” within earshot of my former friend. At that moment, I immediately realized that I was genuinely embarrassed along with her. This self-realization caused me to question why I chose to hang out with girls who made fun of everyone they deemed inferior to them. I adamantly told them that what they had done and said was not right. As my former friend’s eyes welled up with tears, I walked over to console her. Something awakened inside me and I wanted to do what was morally right, which would leave me empowered and better about myself. An onlooker may ask, “Why did you feel compelled to come to the defense of that girl? Weren’t you afraid of being ostracized by your popular friends?” Truthfully, the thought never occurred to me that the popular “insider” girls would immediately begin to make fun of me for turning against them, but when they did, I wasn’t fazed at all. On that day, I felt truly relieved to leave that judgmental group of popular girls.

Ultimately, as it turned out, I began hanging out with my ex best friend again, and discovered that she had become an incredible artist. One room of her home had been transformed into a gallery showcasing her unique abstract paintings and drawings. Every

original oil painting exhibited a vivid color palette with bold, expressive brush strokes. Each distinct charcoal drawing was characterized by powerful, dark lines contrasted with subtle shading, displaying the artist’s depth of emotion. I lamented to myself, “This girl has such awesome talent and deserves friends who appreciate and understand her passion for art.” It wasn’t a feeling of pity. Instead, it was a faint feeling of envy mixed with guilt because I had ignored our friendship for so long. Recognizing her talent, I felt that I had actually been the one inferior to her all this time! It was then that I realized how much more I admired her than all of those popular girls with whom I used to hang out. To this day, she and I remain close friends who together embrace being considered outsiders” by the status quo crowd.

In high school, the popular students – who consider themselves as the “cool kids” or “insiders”-- commonly label the unpopular “geeks” as “weirdo’s” or “outsiders”. In my opinion, this traditional social hierarchy merits a reversal. In reality, many of the popular students are intellectually shallow and close-minded; whereas, most of the “geeky” students are the more intelligent, creative, and open-minded students in the school. Consequently, they are the true insiders destined to contribute more to our world than anyone else and are deserving of our respect.

Undoubtedly, there are various possible reasons why many popular kids need to cause unpopular kids to feel inferior. One reason could be that many of the popular students are actually insecure. They justify criticizing the unpopular students in order to make themselves feel superior. While this rationale may provide a temporary boost in the self-esteem of the antagonist, it can spread a contagious epidemic of judgmental wrath in our society.

Vincent Van Gogh once said, “It is only too true that a lot of artists are mentally ill – it’s a life which, to put it mildly, makes one an outsider. I’m all right when I completely immerse myself in work, but I’ll always remain half crazy.” This futile statement by Van Gogh expresses his belief that being an outsider should not be considered an insult; but as a compliment on a person’s creativity. Many of our contemporary world’s talented artists would likely profess to be outsiders, just as the renowned Vincent Van Gogh. Likewise, many of the unpopular students in high school, the “geeks”, consider themselves as outsiders because they are labeled and treated as such by the popular students, or the “insiders”. These open-minded unpopular students fail to associate their designation as complimentary. Hopefully, someday more outsiders will become more transparent and walk proudly as open-minded, intelligent, and contributing members of society.

How One Decision Saved My Life

Third Place Essay

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Betsy Alvarado
Major: Biology

Composition at FGCU has improved my technical writing skills a great deal. My writing has become more clear, sophisticated and more interesting, overall.

Throughout my life, I have been faced with problems that my age group will probably never endure within a lifetime. I have been raised to be a fighter and swing at the punches life gives me. Attempting to sum up my life would be completely impossible because I am a very complicated, young woman. However, there have been turning points that have resided fresh in my mind, almost as if it happened yesterday. From a sociological aspect, one of the most difficult and best times of my life was going from a reserved and quiet girl, to an outgoing and friendly young woman.

It is hard to distinguish the main reason why I decided to change who I was, into who I am today. I do not know if it was the mere fact that I wanted a good challenge or the contrary, if no change was made, I may have not been alive to even consider these thoughts. For the majority of my adolescents, I was always considered the heavy-set girl in my age group. I was not just overweight; I was considered morbidly obese at a whopping weight of 265 pounds. It sounds so unrealistic that I actually could have weighed that much, but I have pictures and scars to prove it! It was a long process, taking over 3 years to actually reach and complete my goal, but it has been one of my greatest achievements to date.

Let's get down to the main source of my initial problem: my eating habits had always been bad; there were many underlying issues that most likely caused the path I went down, until I was

14 years old, but that is another chapter in itself. I had, and still have, a very loving family, but we definitely went through some extremely personal and difficult times, and eating was our means of escape. Problem-eating was a subconscious action that was repeatedly abused in my family, but it was a common bond, so it never was halted. Trying to fit the "social norm," I started dieting around the age of seven and attempted the majority of the diets out on the market, but I could never keep the weight off. Twenty pounds here, fifteen pounds there, and in the end, I would gain the weight back and then some on top of that. It was a battle that I was losing.

Being heavy in school was not easy, in the least bit. I was a nice girl, but cruel and immature teenagers would not look passed my waist line. I was put into many difficult positions because I always had a personal opinion to share. If someone did not agree with my point-of-view, I would be brought down by offensive remarks aimed towards me. Words were my worst enemy. Hurtful words did a lot of damage to my heart and to my mind. I reached a point where I became very quiet and secluded during the day, and once I was in the comfort of my own home, lock myself in my room until the next day. The breaking point started when I began to fake illnesses' and stay home from school. I was emotionally drained and did not want to see my classmates and peers because it was sheer agony and grotesque embarrassment to go to school. Finally, when I thought all hope was lost, the love and support of my family, and true friends, pushed me through the toughest obstacle of my life.

My mother noticed I had become more withdrawn and secluded from the world; I was even starting to drift away from my family, the people who love you no matter the circumstance. My mother intervened and I finally confided in her. It was one of the best decisions I could have made because immediately, I received the help I needed. I had weekly visits to a psychiatrist and was prescribed a small dose of anti-depressants. I loved talking, discussing, and then addressing my personal problems one-on-one. I felt invincible when I was sitting on that couch; I knew I could

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How One Decision Saved My Life Continued

I was the person I wanted people to see, finally. I could show the kind heart and beautiful soul underneath all the extra weight I used to have, without being discriminated upon. It still pains me to know that I had to change my outward appearance to attract the proper attention and be treated with respect that I had always deserved, but I could not be more grateful to be living the way I am today.

confide in my doctor without judgment or criticisms. This was the first step in accomplishing my tough journey.

After working on my emotional state, I had finally become stable enough to attack the physical aspect of my life. I knew it was one and million chances that I would actually surpass the average amount of weight I would usually lose, but I had never been more determined. I changed my lifestyle during the Winter break of 2003 and continued losing weight until the spring of 2007. I changed the way I lived; I sorted out my priorities and my health was moved to the top of the list. I stopped indulging on food when I wasn't having the best day. Most importantly, I started working out and maintained a routine five times a week, for an hour and a half each day. Even though these were just small changes, it was very difficult to maintain my composure and strength. I went through fluctuations and plateaus over the years, making some wrong choices, but I always found my way back to the right course. Although, only small changes, in the end, those changes accumulated into one accomplishment that I will always be proud of.

At the end of my personal journey, I had lost over 130 pounds and the healthiest I had ever been. The day I went shopping for a new wardrobe, I had an epiphany. I was in a

euphoric state of mind; I had never been able to shop in the junior section of the store. It was such a ridiculous moment, but a humbling one for me. I knew I worked my ass off to look beautiful while standing in front of that mirror. I could not have been more thankful for my health and the people that supported me through that chapter in my life.

I was the person I wanted people to see, finally. I could show the kind heart and beautiful soul underneath all the extra weight I used to have, without being discriminated upon. It still pains me to know that I had to change my outward appearance to attract the proper attention and be treated with respect that I had always deserved, but I could not be more grateful to be living the way I am today. My life has changed completely and for the better. I found a social and enticing woman at the end of the path that I could not be more proud of. I can confidently say that I am a fighter and I go after what I want!

Your Best Friend or Your Worst Enemy

Third Place Essay

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Alexandria Brisc Major: Biology

I have really enjoyed my Composition II class with Professor Cox! She was not only a helpful and inspiring professor, but a great mentor! Taking Composition II at FGCU in Fall '08 was probably the best experience I've had throughout my English journey in school!

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?" (Snow White). This question, originally from the Disney movie, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, has become a popular question that many people have asked themselves when they look in the mirror. The mirror is one of the most private, if not the most private, ways to check one's reflection. However, have you ever thought about what the mirror sees, instead of what you see when you look into it? The poem, "Mirror," by Sylvia Plath is a short, lyrical poem that uses personification to express the mirror's point of view when "looking" at the person staring at the mirror, wanting a response, but hearing nothing at all.

"I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions." (1) In this first line, the mirror sets out to define itself as exactly what it is. It has no preconceptions because it has neither feelings nor memory. "Whatever [it] see[s] [it] swallow[s] immediately" (2). It does not judge a person by the way he or she looks but takes one in the way he or she is. Whether a person is looking and feeling great while looking into the mirror, or whether he or she is dreading the person they see in the mirror, the mirror is "unmistaken by love or dislike," and it is "not cruel, only truthful—" (3-4). The mirror is extremely blunt about what is there and is unaffected by emotion; it tells the truth as it is.

Often, when people look into the mirror they want the mirror to just come out and say ex-

actly what it sees. More often, people want to be told they look good so they can go on about their day. These first few lines let the reader know exactly what a mirror would think: "You are what you are. What you see when you are looking into me is exactly what you look like or what you are." It is an "eye of a little god, four-cornered." (5) A god is usually an omnipotent being for most people, and the mirror is the "four-cornered" god in this case.

The next few lines provide the reader with even more detailed imagery about this mirror: "Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall. / It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long / I think it is a part of my heart." (6-8). The first clue that we get about this specific mirror is that it is positioned in a young girl's room. The walls are "pink" with "speckles." Women or girls are most likely to analyze how they look more than men or guys do.

What is ironic about the eighth line is that earlier the mirror is given the characteristic of being blunt and emotionless. Now, it mentions that it has a "heart." It is probably a way to say that the person, most likely a young girl, looks into the mirror so much that she has become part of the mirror and when the person leaves, the wall "flickers" (8). Therefore, the mirror now feels lonely because "faces and darkness separate [it and the girl] over and over." (9). We see a transition in the mirror's character; before it was brusque and cold, now it has feelings.

"Now I am a lake." (10). It is no longer a "four-cornered" object. Instead, it is a fluid, suggesting that it has developed feelings for the person staring in the mirror. "A woman bends over me. / Searching my reaches for what she really is. / Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon." (10-12). The once young girl is now a woman. The last line in these three lines suggests that the mirror is so attached to this woman that its feelings of jealousy come out when she "turns to those liars, the candles or the moon." The mirror wants all the attention of this person. "[t] see[s] her back, and reflect[s] it faithfully." (13). The choice of the

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Your Best Friend or Your Worst Enemy Continued

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Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?" (Snow White). This question, originally from the Disney movie, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, has become a popular question that many people have asked themselves when they look in the mirror. The mirror is one of the most private, if not the most private, ways to check one's reflection.

word "faithfully" in this line may be interpreted in two different ways. The first is that now, since the mirror has feelings, it is faithful to the woman even though she is giving attention to the moon or the candles, instead of it. Another understanding of this faithfulness may be that the mirror is faithful by staying true to the woman and not lying to her like the moon or the candles might be.

The last few lines suggest that the mirror and the woman are emotionally "attached" to each other because she spills her emotions out to the mirror. "She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands...She comes and goes." (14-15). The mirror says, "I am important to her." (15). The mirror is the only one that listens to her when she is sad or agitated, creating an emotional bond between the woman and this inanimate object. The mirror then says, "Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness," which probably brings the mirror joy because darkness is a symbol of loneliness (16). This woman "has drowned a young girl" in the mirror "and in [it] an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish." (17-18). This implies that the woman is of old age now and she looks like a terrible fish that shows up every time she looks at herself in the mirror or the "lake."

So what is the purpose of giving a mirror hu-

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man characteristics to the point where it is attached to a human being and the human being to it? Plath suffered from mental breakdowns and even attempted suicide. A reader might conclude that she might have been the speaker of both the mirror and the female staring into the mirror. She might have been so depressed and lonely that the mirror was her escape. People might have disappointed her so much that her only "truthful" and loyal friend might have been the mirror. The mirror tells things as they are in reality. Unfortunately, the mirror could not keep her from committing suicide.

Plath uses detailed imagery and personification to describe the mirror and its point of view. She effectively puts herself in the place of the mirror to tell the mirror's point of view. This mirror is the non-cruel, but truthful object that every person has experimented with. It may be a person's best friend, or one's worst enemy.

Feed My Soul

Third Place Essay



Bryant Stewart
Major:
Criminal Justice

FGCU Comp classes did a excellent job of showing the student that writing is a process.

July seventh, 2000. A young boy of ten is walking through the dense underbrush of secluded Boggs Creek in North Georgia. His mission? To capture the ever elusive Brook Trout that call Boggs Creek home. He is using the most primitive means; a worm and a hook in hopes that one of these mountain beauties will rise out of the abyss and give him the satisfaction of catching a meal, like his pioneer brethren before him. He places the worm carefully near an eddy where two channels of the creek meet and he waits. He feels a sharp tug of a fish and sees the iridescent flash of the gills and knows he hit pay dirt. He feels like a million dollars as he holds his eight inch trophy between his hands, getting the slime on his hands and giving his psyche the manna it needs to function. Paradise found.

July tenth, 2002. The same boy is quite bigger now, as he is having trouble getting through the undergrowth to get to the small clear, creek that holds what he needs. He needed this more than anything. An escape from the hustle and bustle. The boy has been having panic attacks and the last year has been hell on him and his family. The single thing that kept him going was that the trout would be here. He goes at it for three hours, hitting every run and pool that has the slightest indicator of life, but to no avail. He goes back to civilization with nothing but sunburn.

July ninetieth, 2004. The boy is taller now and bearing a pair of cracked rubber waders one size

too small. He cannot complain though; they were free and there is nowhere else he wants to be. He is meticulously working the same run that bore him fish his first time here. The fifth cast into the day, he does just that. That familiar tug and shine under the water tells him that he is successful. He holds the fish under the water and feels its fluid movement in between his fingers and the numbness on the ends of his fingers from the arctic cool water. He should be thrilled, but all he feels is sadness. The catch brought back memories of fishing with his cousin who has been in a coma for four months. As he sits on the creek bottom, he takes down his security blanket that had been up for months and lets the creek have it. He sits there for hours, casting and crying, fishing his way thru the pain and sadness he feels.

July second, 2005. That boy is getting closer to being a man, as his voice is deeper and his chest wider. Instead of live-bait and pole, he is now upgraded to the likes of Isaac Walton and Norman MacLean. He now has a Victorian fly rod and dry fly. He has been practicing his cast all summer, to the point where Carpal Tunnel made even using a pen a chore in itself. He is ready to try the creek to see if he can capture a trout by not going for their hunger, but for their brains. He drags the Royal Coachman fly across the water, with the care of a new parent to a child. Not too quick, not too slow, just right. He is trying to mimic the crane fly, the food source for the trout. He plans out the best way to fish each pool, the way Bobby Fisher planned out his next move. He doesn't capture the prize he came for. He leaves that day wanting more. More time. More casts.

April seventh, 2006. The boy is back to try his luck in a different season, when the spring thaw brings a growl to the creek never before heard by the boy. While in the water, his legs are shaking like Elvis from the sheer force of the water, making every step seem like a mile. He has given up the fly rod for a spinning rod and a Mepps spinner, attempting to exploit the trout instinct to chase shiny baitfish. He feels different now. He feels that he has finally found his niche in school. He has an A in AP History, a first for him. The class isn't a chore like others in the past, but an enjoy-

Feed My Soul Continued

He realizes that it is not the trout that draw him here. It's the fact that no matter what changes in life, this place is always here, with open arms, calling him to it. It is how no matter how his life changes, the beauty, serenity and trout of Boggs Creek are always there, to feed his soul and the boy is me.

ment. He doesn't have to study or prepare for tests. The information about dates, battles and people flows from his mouth like an actor can spew lines. This gives him a feeling of confidence he never has felt before.

He has also been in love and been broken up with. He thought, after four months, he had found the real thing. But he was wrong. She took his heart and made him feel like it was pulled out and put back in. But he is over her now, and he feels stronger emotionally than before the break-up.

There is a chilly mist upon the water, making the creek look like it's in the clouds. He is totally focused on the task at hand. He has spent the last two months getting to know his new Daiwa rod in the same way one can walk through one's house at night and not stub one's toes. He shows his dexterity as he casts his spinner in between two overhanging Mountain Laurel, making the spinner land with the softness of the Snuggle Bear, leaving a subtle ring upon the clay-stained water. Two turns of the reel brings that thud he has traveled so far to get. He brings the fish to the surface and does something he has never done. He releases the fish. He thinks the fish has earned it, having brought a sliver of happiness to his life. He hopes to bring a Karmatic balance to the art he loves so much.

July fifteenth, 2008. The boy is now a man

and yet he still comes to this secluded trout Mecca. No matter who he is in civilization, he is still that boy of ten. Graduation, college, and the future, all came and snuck up on him. But no matter, he is here and that world is far away. He starts in the ever-familiar creek bottom and does what he always does. He hits every pool and eddy like his life depends upon that fish, calling that pool home. Into his fourth cast, he gets his sole Mepps spinner stolen by an Alpha male Brown Trout. It's a long way back to the truck so he does something he has never done before. He sits upon a Granite rock and suddenly sees the forest for the trees. He realizes that it is not the trout that draw him here. It's the fact that no matter what changes in life, this place is always here, with open arms, calling him to it. It is how no matter how his life changes, the beauty, serenity and trout of Boggs Creek are always there, to feed his soul and the boy is me.
