

INTRODUCTION

## English 111 Awards Program Honors Fine Writers and Teachers

**I** Mary Harmon

For the past two years, the English 111 Program has recognized the fine writing of several of its students at its Annual Awards Program, held this year on March 26th. Amidst the congratulations of their teachers and parents, five Saginaw Valley State University first year writing students read excerpts from their papers and received awards ranging from \$500.00 for first place to \$100.00 for fifth place. These fine writers are to be commended, as readers will readily acknowledge after perusing the essays below. Their essays move both heart and intellect as writers advocate an extension of life insurance provisions, the curtailment or more careful monitoring of nuclear power production, and the value of written versus visual texts, or as they recount life lessons learned in a rural Thumb and a rural Kenyan environment. The Awards Program not only honors award recipients but also acknowledges the teaching expertise of each of the award

winners' instructors: Noah Tysick, Melissa Seitz, Laura Yelsik, Chris Giroux, and Janice Wolf.

Robert Yien, Vice President for Academic Affairs, instituted and funded the English 111 Writing Contest as a means to promote and feature excellent writing; Lynne Graft and Jim Geistman, English Department members, drafted its rules and procedures. Mary Harmon, First Year Writing Coordinator, and Diane Boehm, Director of Writing Programs, planned and administered the contest and the Awards Program. A dedicated group of 29 English 111 teachers coached and guided student writers and encouraged them to submit entries. The seven members of the Selection Committee—Diane Boehm, Ruth Copp, Lynne Graft, Chris Giroux, Mary Harmon, Thomas Meehan, and Helen Raica-Klotz—read 95

entries as they narrowed the field and named award recipients. Thus, the contest became a total English 111 Program effort, and the celebration that accompanied the Awards Program resulted from the combination and culmination of the work of many people. All deserve sincere thanks. And deserving of sincere congratulations are the writers of the five essays that follow in this issue of The Literacy Link: Colette Preuss, Hollie Mizzi, Swenja Granzow, Becky Monroe, and Tabitha Waitaha.

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# Who Will Bury Them?:

## A Look at Mental Health Reform and Suicide Provisions in Life Insurance

**Colette M. Preuss**

Suicide: It is the kind of word that sounds so clinical one rarely thinks of its meaning when speaking it aloud. This changes when the word suddenly has a face or a name. It becomes something only to be whispered about behind closed doors or at the edge of the funeral procession. This stigma that surrounds both suicide and the mental illness that causes such a result has left our country with an epidemic that has been ignored for far too long. According to statistics, "1 in 60 Americans has experienced the loss of a loved one due to suicide" (Laux par.1). Lack of adequate health and life insurance places a monetary burden on the patient while still living and then on the family members left behind. A non-discriminatory mental health insurance co-pay and the inclusion of deaths by suicide on life insurance policies would insure that patients receive adequate care resulting in fewer suicides. It would also take the burden off the family members left to pay for hospital bills and funeral arrangements if such incidents did occur.

The United States provides the service of Medicare to many disabled for whatever reason. Under Medicare, 80% of all medical visits (including such preventative medicine as physicals, vaccines, and pre-natal care) are covered by the policy, leaving only



Dr. Mary Hedberg, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Colette M. Preuss, student writer.

20% to be paid by the consumer (Prevention 1). In the case of outpatient mental health, only half of the services are covered (Prevention 1). This blatant lack of coverage can be considered discriminatory largely due to the fact that of the millions who qualify for aid through Medicare, 40% of them have a diagnosed mental illness (Beronio par.7). This number does not reflect those receiving aid that live with an undiagnosed mental condition. The stigma that surrounds mental health needs to be quickly and effectively wiped out before progress can begin. The idea that one can "snap out of it" is ridiculous. Many mental illnesses are a direct result of brain malfunction. In "The Indianapolis Medical Guide," Dr.

Vicki Burdine states, "We basically believe that major depressive disorder is a medical illness. It occurs because there is a malfunction in the brain's neurotransmitters . . . we're now beginning to learn that thinking patterns and depressed moods do actually change our neurotransmitter patterns" (qtd. in Nixon-Knight par. 9). One cannot be expected to snap out of a chemical imbalance, just as one would not be expected to snap out of insulin dependency in the case of diabetes.

What concerns many insurance agencies and purchasers is the effectiveness of covering prevention programs and treatment. While few will dispute the importance of prevention, not many are sure how the process works, or if it is effective at all. According to recent research, treatment for depression are 70-80% effective, while treatment of medical conditions like heart disease are only 35-45% effective (Colt 327).

At this time, Medicare is unwilling to pay until the mental illness has escalated to inpatient or emergency room care. Prevention coverage can be reduced to an economic matter. It is much more cost effective to treat an illness before it escalates than to wait until it has reached its peak before seeking treatment.

Many have argued, especially in the case of Medicare, that it will cost taxpayers more money to effectively

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# Open a Book and Open a Soul

Hollie Mizzi

In twenty-first century America, books are often replaced by movies because they are believed to be more entertaining and less time consuming. Though the latter is a valuable characteristic of movies in today's fast paced society, Americans are losing something more precious than time as they continue to substitute movies for books; they are depriving themselves of crucial intellectual development that only books can provide. Though many Americans fail to recognize this, reading literature from the modernist and post-modernist eras is far more intellectually stimulating than watching movies and television shows that are popular today and aim to entertain, because books force the reader to grow both emotionally and academically as he or she reads.

Francois Maurice Mitterrand, who served as the President of France between 1981 and 1995, once said "A man loses contact with reality if he is not surrounded by his books" (Quoteland.org). This is a concept that Plato, who advocated the idea that reality comes from within the soul, might have agreed with. In "Allegory of the Cave," Plato communicates his beliefs about reality by comparing people who are happily living in a dark cave, where shadows are one's only reality, to those who crave a different, enlightened existence in the "world



Melissa Seitz, English 111 instructor, and Hollie Mizzi, student writer.

of knowledge" (470). Plato may have argued that books are the gateway between these two worlds of ignorance and enlightenment and by reading, and actively thinking about the words on the page, one abandons his or her ignorance and slowly enters into the light. In contrast, today's movies and television programs can be paralleled with the knowledge that exists within the cave. According to Daniel Boorstin, "The shadow has become the substance" in movies and television (qtd. in Stephens 478). Therefore, books are more stimulating because they promote growth and actualization, while movies reinforce naive acceptance.

One of the ways that books encourage growth beyond the cave is by enhancing the development of the reader's imagination. While movies set boundaries on the physical depictions of a story's setting,

characters, and events, books, though they contain written descriptions, leave the interpretation of such images to the reader. The development of these mental pictures, therefore, requires the reader's imagination, which comes from the soul. In a Platonic sense, the images that the reader develops become his or her own reality, an affect that can only be achieved through books. Using one's imagination enables him or her to feel more actively involved in the story and less like a blind observer. Because books also elaborate on the specific emotions and inner thoughts of each character, they provide the reader with a better understanding of the characters than one would be able to obtain through movies. This affect also makes the reader feel as if he or she is more actively involved in the story.

A perfect example of the effect that a book can have on the reader's imagination comes from Albert Camus's, *The Stranger*. In this short, modernist novel about an ordinary man whose life somersaults when an accident on the beach leads to his conviction of murder, Camus aids in the development of the reader's imagination by providing the reader with adequate descriptions of the events and the characters without limiting the reader.

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# A Bag of Nerves, a Pinch of Doubt

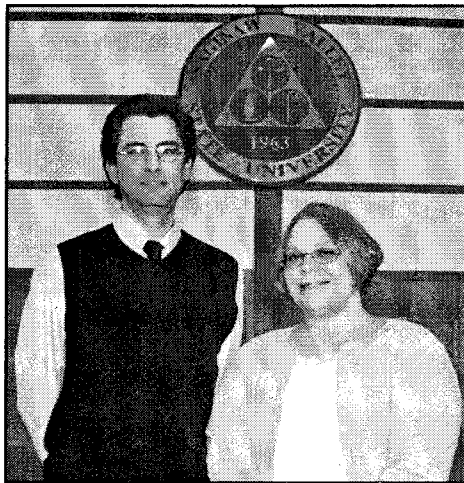
Becky J. Munroe

Annie Dillard, the author of "Handed My Own Life," wrote an essay about a childhood dream. Annie wanted a microscope for a particular Christmas after she read a book about the use of microscopes and their possibilities. After receiving the beloved gift, she spent the next couple of months down in her basement trying different experiments. Dillard's goal was to find an amoeba. After months of searching, Dillard found her amoeba and excitedly went to tell her parents. Her parents, happy of their child's success, were not as enthusiastic about the amoeba as Dillard, but encouraged her likewise (29-30).

Dillard's excitement for her hobby is how I feel about my music. Even though we both have different interests, our determination for success is the same. Her goal of finding an amoeba and sharing that with the people she loved reminded me of one of my goals. Being able to play a piano piece at the county fair was a dream I had had for a long time, but getting the guts to perform was another story.

One hot muggy day I got into my old, rusty blue Cavalier; I rolled down the windows and felt the sticky breeze flowing through the two windows instantly. I threw my bag into the back seat; a fly flew from the seat and buzzed out of the open window. I started my "rust bucket" and drove toward my passion: a pig farm. The pig farm wasn't my future, but what was contained in the small, white chipped house in it was.

As I drove up into the driveway, the dryness of the season sent the dirt from the road up into a cloud of



Chris Giroux, English 111 Instructor, and Becky J. Munroe, student writer

dreams from my tires. Producing a nice layer of filth, the dust on my already dirty automobile clung to my car like flies on a cow. I slowed down looking for barn cats. Immediately I tried to breathe through my mouth because the smell was as pungent as the perfume on an old lady. Quickly, I grabbed my bag from the back seat, which was warm from the sun. I jumped from the car, trying my hardest to get inside and escape the torture of a pig's unpleasantness. The sun was beating down in touchable rays, and my tolerance of the heat was almost at its level. The house was giving off a glare from the sun, and I had to shield my eyes to find the screen door.

The house was familiar to me with the smell of baked apple pie and the look of a whitewashed picket fence. Its white-laced window curtains sheltered the blazing sun. With the breeze, the curtains performed a summer waltz that almost implied a reason to nap. I made my way through the country kitchen, taking note of what fresh vegetables were washed

and ready. Fresh carrots, asparagus, and tomatoes were cut up and chilling in well water. A candle was lit and placed on the counter. I walked through a wall of vanilla.

The actual meaning of my visit was before me. The piano and its eighty-eight keys were waiting for another hour of labor. The piano, adorned with gifts throughout the years, had seen better days. The keys, slightly worn from years of use, were still for a moment. The piano would make a perfect poster in a magazine like *Reminisce*.

"Hello Becky!" came a sweet, soft voice. "How are you today?"

"I'm just peachy," I replied. Always caring, always interested in what I wanted to do with my life, Mrs. Randall was my piano teacher and a good friend.

"Good, glad to hear it! I have some news you might be interested in," she said, taking her seat in her rocker. Her notebook was out and ready to critique. She shifted in her chair only for a moment, and she got down to business. "As you know the county fair is coming up, and you have the opportunity to play in the county's talent show."

My heart leaped just thinking about it. Suddenly my hands went cold, my breath became short and erratic. The fair? I had always wanted to play in front of lots of people just one time, but the problem was the people! Many eyes and ears would be watching and listening. Who knew what they would think? Would they "boo" me? Throw tomatoes?

"I would like you to try it Becky," she continued. "We've been working on your 'Toccata in F Minor' for a long

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# A Glowing, Not a Radiating Future

## The Threat of Nuclear Power on Mankind

**L**Swenja Granzow

"Daddy," I demanded while tugging on my father's shirtsleeve, "will you go with me to the playground to build a sandcastle in the sandpit?" Usually, my father always followed all my wishes, but this time he sadly shook his head. "Why?" I wanted to know. At first, he hesitated, taking some time to formulate an adequate response, and then he said: "Because playing in the sand will make you very sick..."

Back then, I was too young to understand that only a few days earlier, on April 26, 1986, the world's worst nuclear power accident had occurred at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union (now Ukraine) and that a cloud of radioactive dust had been blown all across Europe, contaminating not only sandpits but also forests and fields.

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant situated 80 miles north of Kiev had four reactors and while testing the fourth reactor, several safety procedures had been disregarded. As a result, the chain reaction in the reactor got out of control, creating an explosion which blew off the reactor's heavy steel and concrete lid. It immediately killed 30 people, and as result of the high radiation, thousands of people had to suffer and are still suffering from cancer. Much of the soil in the region is still contaminated and should not be populated.

This accident served as a wake-up call for all European nations which were all exposed to radioactive fallout. The safety precautions people were advised to take served to make them aware of the dangers of nuclear



Laura Yelsik, English 111 instructor, and Swenja Granzow, student writer.

power and caused many protests. My generation, having been only three years old, has a very limited recollection of that time. As the introductory story indicates, we only remember of this period that we were not allowed to spend time at the playground because the sand was contaminated. Furthermore, we were also only allowed to drink soymilk because the grass with which the cows were fed had been exposed to contaminated rain. The memories of not being allowed to build sand castles or making cocoa with soy milk will be forever engraved in our minds. Yet, these restrictions on our day to day life were nothing to the pain and suffrage the children that had lived close to the power plant had to endure. The Soviet government did not have enough money to provide them with the best medical treatment, and only few received help from Western Europe countries. As a result, their baldheads and empty eyes that were aired on TV will haunt me forever.

These images have to serve as a warning to future generations and should make them consider the abandonment of the use of nuclear power, because I do not want to have to fear that one day my children could look at me out of those same empty eyes.

Nonetheless, the rest of the world does not seem to share my fears because there has been an increase in power plants over the past few years. The majority of the people have forgotten about the cloud of radioactive dust that was sent over Europe. Even in the U.S. the nuclear power lobby is growing again, which is surprising because Americans experienced their biggest nuclear power accident seven years prior to Chernobyl. On March 28, 1979, a minor malfunction occurred in the system which feeds water to the steam generators at the Three Mile Island power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This caused the most serious commercial nuclear accident in U.S. history, and it also led to fundamental changes in the way nuclear power plants were operated and regulated. Although no injuries or health problems were related to the accident, the American public was outraged that something like this could happen, and as a result the anti-nuclear power movement was started. Even today, most people are still opposed to the use of nuclear power and are willing to rally against the establishment of new nuclear plants.

However the U.S. government could be accused of being a hypocrite because it does not dare to build more nuclear plants on American soil, but had started to help North Korea build

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# Lessons From The Farm

Tabitha Waithaka

Sometimes I picture myself on a rocking chair, sipping lemonade and watching the sun go down, thinking to myself, "Whatever happened to the years?" The sun won't be the only thing setting then; I'll be well into my own sunset too, and each sunset will be a painful reminder that "tomorrow I might not see another one." I'll look back at my life and wonder what I put into it and what I got out of it.

Today, however, I happened to wake up to a beautiful sunrise, and it's the sunrise of my own life too. I think of my mum, an ardent farmer, when she still had the power to make us go to the farm. She'd wake us, all five children up at dawn and give each one of us our 'jembe' (hoe). She knew how to gauge each of our strength and gave the 'jembes' accordingly. No one had the right to use the other's 'jembe' and you couldn't anyway; it would either be too heavy or too light. "You've got to start working early," mum would say, "because by noon the sun is overhead and it will be too hot to work." She'd find some appropriate 'in-house' work for us to do in the afternoon, and then when it cooled off in the evening, she'd always take a stroll in the garden, which she still does, to see what we accomplished. "She's going to take the inventory," we'd tease.

My dad, on the other hand, takes his walk through the farm in the morning to see what needs to be done that day. His first stop is usually at the cattle shed, where he inspects each of the stock thoroughly, as one might have fallen sick at night and will require some special attention; after that, he'll pass by the poultry house and the sheep pen to check if they had any

bad scares at night. Then he takes his walk through the rest of the farm. I never thought about it till now.

My mum's voice has been replaced by an alarm clock. Angrily, I hit the snooze button, sad that it's not my mum's voice calling from the kitchen and somehow glad that today I don't have to go to the 'shamba' (farm). But I have my own 'shamba' to tend to—it's this life that I live. How well I till it will show in my sunset when I take my evening walk through life. I remember my childhood and the virtues that my parents worked so hard to instill in us, those of hard work and honesty. They had us memorize part of the Proverbs; I still know it by heart. "Go to the ant you sluggard, consider her ways and be wise, who having no commander, ruler or overseer stores her provisions in summer and gathers her food at harvest. How long will you lie there you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest, and poverty will come upon you as a thief and scarcity like an armed man." Well, I guess I don't want poverty, so I lazily crawl out of bed.

My mind races through the events of the day, scheming through some and stalling others long enough to pick out a special area of attention. I don't have enough time to take my breakfast, so I rush out to catch the bus and my day starts. I'll meet with people, I'll "talk with books," and I'll fix in an hour or two at work, and by the time I get home, there's no time to take an evening walk or watch the sunset . . . I'll save that for my old age, after all, that why it's called the sunset years.

This will be my lifestyle for the next couple of decades, and then after that, though I will want to, the sun will be

too hot for me to work. I might have the drive, but the energy will be spent, and I'll have to settle for lighter work and a slower paced life.

I picture my dad making a things-to-do list in the morning, knowing that at the end of the day some chores will be done and others won't. That was like me in my childhood, conjuring every childhood dream, but unlike dad, oblivious to the fact that not all of them will be realized. I dreamed of being a singer, a writer, a teacher, a doctor . . . but a farmer, never! I've taken my morning walk, and I've picked out my priority goals, and now here I am making those goals happen. I work with my all, I give it my all, at least I hope I do. Mum's not there to watch over me, they've done their part, put me through school and given me a good foundation, the rest is up to me. I imagine they are getting ready to pull out their rocking chairs, sit back and think about what they've done with their lives. They will watch my niece and nephew playing in the yard, and conclude that they've done a good job.

I'm just wondering when it's time for me to take my evening walk and see what my life's been about, when it's time to get my rocking chair out and call out for lemonade and when it's time to watch the sunset and reminisce, how many "if-only's," "what-if's" and "might-have-been's" there will be. So to get rid of them, I make this my defining moment. I'll be all that I can be, and when those years are well up, I won't wonder where the years went, rather the years will wonder where I went.

Of all the things I never wanted to be, I realize that I'm, first of all, a farmer, tending to my little life farm just like mum taught me.

# How Dr. Martin Luther King Influenced My Life

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest was a part of the 2003 King holiday celebration, directed by Dr. Mamie Thorns, SVSU's Director of Diversity Programs. Dr. Thorns brought together faculty members, staff members, and student organizations. The theme of the contest comes a student-created prompt that asked, "Why is Dr. King important to me?" Of all of the entries, the one submitted by Ms. Monique Metcalfe stood out to the essay contest judges: Dr. Elizabeth Rich, Chair; Dr. Eric Trump, and Ms. Michele DeVoe Lussy. We think that it will stand out to you, too.

## Monique Metcalfe

You may find it strange that a young woman from South Africa is writing an essay about "How Dr Martin Luther King Jr. influenced my life." This, however, is the power and magic of the life and words of this great man—his influence extended around the world and touched even me, 3,000 miles away and twenty years later.

Early in the 20th century, Mohandas Gandhi started his political career in South Africa, resisting the discrimination against the Indian people in South Africa. Despite some successes, segregation in South Africa remained a very real reality until the 1990's. Gandhi went back to India and achieved perhaps one of the greatest feats in history, liberating India from the yoke of colonialism through nonviolent passive resistance. Gandhi's strategy yielded much less spectacular results in South Africa. It may have been deducted then that nonviolent passive resistance does not work everywhere and was successful mainly due to Gandhi's leadership or the culture of the Indian people.

But then came along another great visionary. Martin Luther King Jr. showed the world that nonviolent passive resistance works, not just in India, not just under Gandhi's leadership, but also in the Western world. What Martin Luther King Jr. achieved inspired millions of South Africans who knew very well what segregation and discrimination meant. I propose that his words and the example he set avoided a bloodbath in a racial civil war in South Africa as it did here in America. Our media was filled with reports of the civil

rights struggle. Despite the South African government's attempts to turn King's work into an example of the anarchy that would explode should apartheid be abolished, people saw and understood that justice will prevail and that violence is not the answer.

I believe that South Africa's own icon of peace and forgiveness, Nelson Mandela, was filled with hope and conviction by what King had achieved. There are so many parallels between the lives of these two great men. Mandela, like King, unleashed great power among his people that led to their liberation. Both men throughout their lives encouraged a path not of hate and violence, but of non-violence and love. It may be what gave Mandela the courage to walk out of prison after 27 years and conquer what must have been a strong innate urge to retaliate with bitterness and hate. It is possible that Dr King's words and work gave Mandela the strength to forgive and the conviction to lead his people to reconciliation in the miracle that is South Africa.

Apart from the fact that I grew up in a country that became a miracle instead of a bloodbath, Dr King's words and life touched me personally as well. I will never forget reading these words used by Dr. King: "If a man is called to be a street sweeper, He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, "Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."

What touched me was Dr. King's dedication to the dignity of the human being. He fought against all practices that robbed people of their dignity and pride. His speeches spoke to the best that resides in all of us. He reawakened my awareness of our ability to walk in righteousness and dignity, despite circumstances and the actions of others. With Dr. King, I too "have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits."

Dr. King's vision went beyond racial discrimination and the borders of the USA. He remained committed to uplifting the

poor and oppressed, white and black, and those committed in war. Dr King's words have convinced me that the only way to heal this world is for all of us to realize that we are all one. We are all part of humanity and the suffering of any one of us, affects all of us. I believe that uplifting the poor and the oppressed can only be done by allowing people respect, dignity and justice. In addition to food and shelter, we all need to hold our heads high in dignity, to be proud of our lives and ourselves. If I acknowledge the worth and dignity of another human being, I will realize that by not taking the responsibility for that human being having food and shelter, I am sacrificing a part of my dignity and pride in myself. Dr. King put this into powerful words: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

Even today, Dr. King's words are relevant, as I protest against the proposed war in Iraq. As Dr. King said: "For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of the hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent."

I carry these words with me: I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world stands aghast at the path we have taken... The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours. These words were written about Vietnam, but still ring true as we stand on the brink of a war with Iraq.

In my life, I hope to always stand against the triad of evil: racism, materialism and militarism. I hope to be a part of the dream stated so well by Vincent Harding of the Iliff School of Theology: "King lives—we saw him facing the tanks in Tiananmen Square, dancing on the crumbling wall of Berlin, singing in Prague, alive in the glistening eyes of Nelson Mandela. He lives within us, right here, wherever his message is expanded and carried out in our daily lives, wherever his unfinished battles are taken up by our hands."

## Who Will Bury Them? continued...

statistics in NMHA's Prevention publication, the overall cost of treated mental illness exceeds 160 billion per year (1). In order to include more preventative medicine, that number is likely to stretch into another 100 billion. When one considers the other numbers that come into play, the amount does not seem nearly as staggering. While all of the wide range effects of untreated mental illness are somewhat unknown, many factors are involved. According to researchers from NMHA (National Mental Health Association) the cost of untreated mental illness (specifically untreated substance abuse and addiction) is estimated to be over 245 billion every year (Prevention 1). This number is even more significant considering that for each employee suffering from depression, \$600.00 was spent. The shocking part is that 72% of that amount was spent on costs related to a decrease in work productivity and absences (Prevention 1). Implementing a much more cost-effective use of these funds would insure higher work productivity and give treatment to those seeking it, allowing both parties to meet their needs.

In the case of life insurance (and many health insurance policies), coverage is even less to the point of nonexistence. Across the board, nearly every life insurance policy in the United States has some sort of suicide provision. For example, the National Education Association's dues-tab insurance policy states, "The accidental death benefit does not cover any loss which results from suicide or attempted suicide, or an intentionally self-inflicted injury . . ." (NEA Member Benefits 1). This

means that in the result of death by suicide, funds allocated for things like medical bills and funeral arrangements will not be distributed, despite it being a service someone has paid for prior to death. It is puzzling that despite thousands of dollars put into a policy, that money cannot be drawn on in the event of suicide.

Insurance companies have created this problem almost single-handedly. The lack of mental illness coverage leads to untreated disorders or treated disorders that, due to insufficient coverage, have led to high medical bills. This causes more stress on a patient who is already mentally unstable. When the lack of resources is added to the jumble, it can be safely stated that suicide itself is not the condition. It is the end result of a series of untreated symptoms. If a person with pneumonia were left untreated, they too would die.

It can be said, by both supporters and critics of reform, that suicide is a choice. Because of this choice, insurers reason, they are choosing to forfeit rights to their insurance policy. When a person dies due to a smoking related illness, despite the fact that they could have long ago made the choice to not smoke, their families receive coverage benefits. If a person dies in an automobile accident because they were not wearing a seatbelt, their families receive coverage as well. Family members in these types of deaths are not punished for their loved one's mistakes. This should hold true for family members of suicide victims as well. Once again, the monetary burden gets shifted to a family who has already lost so much. Life insurance policies are not purchased for the deceased,

they are purchased for the deceased's family.

It is a snowball effect, this discriminatory coverage of mental health. Until a mental health reform that alleviates some of the monetary stress is enacted, mental illness will continue to go untreated and lead to suicide. Even with mental health reform, there will still be those who slip through the cracks and commit suicide despite available resources. The decision to commit suicide lies in the hands of the person who is suffering. Their actions create even more suffering. Forcing bereaved family members to cough up money to pay for a loved one's death does not teach a lesson of choice and consequence. It sends the message that the family has a larger responsibility than either form of insurance to provide medical and other related care. When they "fail" in doing so, they carry that burden of guilt alone.

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## Open a Book and Open a Soul continued...

The following excerpt illustrates Camus's style:

"It was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward. I knew that it was stupid, that I wouldn't get the sun off me by stepping forward. But I took a step, one step, forward. And this time, without getting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun. The light shot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead. At the same instant the sweat in my eyebrows dripped down under my eyelids all at once and covered them with a warm, thick film. My eyes were blinded behind the curtain of tears and salt. All I could feel were the cymbals of sunlight crashing on my forehead . . ." (59)

Camus's language allows the reader to form a clear image of the tension that exists between the narrator and his enemy. The reader can feel the burning sunlight beating down on the narrator, obstructing his thoughts and actions, and the tears of sweat that impede his vision. Descriptions like these enhance one's imagination, and help the reader to feel more involved in the story and the character's feelings. One cannot feel the sweat that runs down a man's face in a movie but can only see it. It is only through books that the reader can become so actively involved in a story.

A second reason that books are more

intellectually stimulating than movies is that they provide more long lasting emotional effects. In books, the reader is able to develop a more intimate relationship with the characters than he or she is able to do with a movie, because not all of the characters' inner feelings are reflected in a movie, as they are in a book. Because of this closeness to the character, the reader is more affected by the conflicts in the character's life than he or she might be had the character been in a movie. In The Stranger, the main character, Mersault, is sentenced to death by the guillotine after his conviction, and the reader is with him as he accepts his fate. Though one would be able to watch Mersault's frustration and anger on a movie screen, it is more effective to read about his emotions as he learns that he took his freedom for granted. The effect that this realization has on Mersault has a reciprocal effect on the reader which is more long lasting than it might have been if the lesson had come from a movie, simply because the reader is more equipped to feel Mersault's emotions than the movie viewer is.

Books serve as the passageway from the world of ignorance within the cave to enlightenment in the world of knowledge. Each one brings the individual a few steps closer to the light, and as one continues to read it becomes easier for his or her eyes to

adjust to reality. While television shows and movies may be less time consuming than books, they lack the depth which promotes intellectual and emotional growth. Time invested in books is therefore time well spent for those who refuse to accept the false realities of the world within the cave. When one ventures outside of the cave and risks losing the comforting numbness which is often accompanied by ignorance, he or she is greatly rewarded.

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## A Bag of Nerves, a Pinch of Doubt continued...

time. It's time to show off. It'll be great."

I didn't know what to say. Herewas my opportunity, my chance! "Sure, I'll give it a try, but we have lots of practice to do yet." The satisfaction alone that shone from her face was enough for me to walk onto the stage and prove to myself that I could do it.

Weeks went by, and Mrs. Randall and I practiced countless hours on my specialty piece, preparing me for my big performance. I was almost ready. I had memorized the piece, hopefully to win the hearts of the judges. My parents were quite excited and bought me a black dress for the occasion. My parents invited everyone they knew to come to the talent show so that they could support me. My aunt and uncle from South Carolina even made it up to see me. All of these people were counting on me, and that only made me feel even more nervous.

On the night of the talent show, I was a bag of nerves and had a pinch of doubt. I wanted to throw up all that morning, and putting on the new black dress didn't help my physical feelings either. I heard nothing but encouragement the whole day, either from my family or friends; however, I just couldn't get the crowd out of my mind.

That night as I stood in the backstage area, I took in my surroundings. The air was heavy with cotton candy, and cold as lemonade. If I breathed right, I could see my breath in the

lights of the stage. Kids were screaming in the background. They were probably on the Ferris wheel, which was the scariest ride the fair had to offer. I could peek through the cracks of the backdrop and look at the crowd. Somehow I was hoping that a road would be closed and people wouldn't be able to make it, but the size of the crowd told me wrong. I looked into thousands of eyes. My heart inched to my throat, and I had to look away before I lost my dinner.

"Ok," I thought to myself. "Just breathe. You're going to be fine. It's like a practice. Nobody but you and the piano are on the stage. You're the only one listening." I paced back and forth. Nothing could help my nervousness.

After what seemed hours, I heard my name being called. My name echoed into the grandstands and back. I prayed as I walked onto the stage that I would not fall. The bright lights hurt my eyes. I squinted for only a second, and then I took in my sights. Because the lights were so intense, I couldn't see much of the crowd. Thankfully the piano was turned away from the crowd, and my spirits lifted. The stage creaked from the weight. It had been built many, many years ago, as was the piano, that had missing keys and was coarse from use.

I could feel the mood breathe. The excitement hit me like a wall. I could feel the eyes on my back, all of the people's expectations in my ribcage,

and my thoughts in my fingers. Placing the music on the stand, I inhaled cotton candy, smoke, fear, and ambition. Time stood still it seemed, and I held the power. I was playing for me. Nothing in the world mattered; I decided I was just going to have fun and enjoy the moment.

And so I played. I thought of nothing but my music. I put my heart into everything. All of my practice, the love of my family, and my own expectations spilled out into my fingers. Before I knew it, I had finished my piece, was standing, and then was bowing. The crowd had blurred, but their recognition was evident in the air. I could feel the applause through the floor, and I turned and walked off the stage.

I didn't win the prize that night. Disappointment, though, was not in my thoughts. I had accomplished a goal in my life. I had made my family proud, and I played well. Like Dillard, I didn't give up. Even though our goals were different, we both wanted success from our life's ambition. It didn't matter to me that I didn't win. I was glad that I had gone through with the anxiety and opened a new chapter in my life. I wasn't unsure of my possibilities anymore, and I had new limits. The three minutes of fame were all I needed to give myself reassurance for the rest of my life. With this behind my belt, I could do anything. The world was the limit, or at least it was at my fingertips.

## A Glowing, Not a Radiating Future continued...

two nuclear plants on the pretext that Korea had to refrain from producing plutonium that could be used for atomic weapons. When the U.S. discovered that Korea had already produced plutonium, they stopped their assistance. The reason why quite a few Americans have started to argue in favor of the use of nuclear power is that power is the only energy source that would make the U.S. less dependent on oil from unreliable states in the unstable Middle East.

To support their opinion, many proponents of the use of nuclear power point out that one of the major requirements for sustaining human progress are adequate sources of energy. They believe that the current largest sources of energy, coal, oil, and natural gas will run out or become harmful in the future. In addition, they support their point of view by stating that the fission of an atom of uranium produces ten million times the energy produced by the combustion of an atom of carbon from coal. They also try to make everybody believe that nuclear power does not greatly affect the environment, as is the case with gas or coal which cause air pollution. It is also said that because the energy released from splitting the uranium atom is so much greater than the energy released from combustion, the amount of land, materials, and fuel used are much smaller. Yet they leave out the fact that when burning uranium in reac-

tors, one accumulates radioactive waste which keeps contaminating its environment for hundreds of years. This fact has caused huge problems in Europe because places where the waste can be stored safely are relatively scarce and there are always demonstrations against the transport of nuclear waste by train through residential areas.

Protesters have been known to chain themselves to the railroads to keep the trains from passing, but the police have always intervened to keep the trains going. The protestors include those living close to where nuclear waste is stored, but also those who live close to nuclear plants. One has to keep in mind that it has never been proven that living close to a nuclear power plant is not dangerous to one's health. Nuclear plants are usually placed close to metropolitan areas. This also applies to Hamburg, Germany which uses the nuclear power plant Krümmel situated right outside the city limits. Scientists have not yet been able to prove the relations between the high rates of cancer, especially thyroid cancer, in the area, but it is very reasonable to assume that the radiation of the reactor is to be blamed. Even if it cannot be proven that these illnesses are related to the exposure to a reactor, there is always the chance that an incident like that at Chernobyl can reoccur, even though lobbyists claim that Western nuclear plants are safer and modernized. Yet

it is always possible that human failures might occur. Having in mind that when the Chernobyl reactor exploded it released thirty to forty times the radioactivity of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, one can justify saying that even if the risks are limited, the impact of a smaller explosion would still be very devastating. Fortunately, most European governments have started to acknowledge the danger that impends when nuclear plants are used and therefore are debating how quickly to shut down their nuclear plants.

Over the past decades, scientists have been constantly making improvements on how to use alternative resources, such as water or wind power, more efficiently. This supports the belief that nuclear power is no longer necessary to provide us with electric power. The risks and bad effects on the environment of nuclear plants greatly outweigh the benefits of nuclear power.

Even though it is obvious that nuclear power is no longer needed, we should all keep trying to reduce our use of electricity to save our environment. Even small actions such as skipping the use of a dryer can save energy. Each one of us can make a difference and make sure that our children will have a glowing, not a radiating future.

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