



NATIONAL VETERANS  
**CREATIVE ARTS**  
COMPETITION

**2023**

**Minneapolis VA Health Care System  
Veterans Creative Arts Competition & Exhibition**

# Creative Writing

Minneapolis VA Health Care System  
proudly presents the  
Creative Writing talents of our Veterans

*All first, second, and third place entries from the local exhibition will be submitted to the national level of the 2023 National Veterans Creative Arts Competition.*

## 2023 Creative Writing

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## Rhyming Poetry - Military Experience

*Still Holding On by Keith Deutsch, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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Years after turning a weapon on other people I had trouble living with myself. Relying on family and friends, I asked for help. Today, I'm

### **Still Holding On**

*By Keith Deutsch*

A Soldier, a Boulder.  
Our Nation's defense.  
We're Trained and we're ready.  
Past all recompence.  
Finally get home to find a new world.  
Now I'm a Dad, Love, Little girl.  
This new world has changed,  
Though I have not.  
Many nights spent along.  
Stone cold room, lone cot.  
My brains not the same,  
This is all, I know, How?  
Like I was reset,  
That's all, I know, Now.  
I lost my family; my little girl was taken.  
My ex used my service to help her rake in.  
Any wealth or privilege proud service provided.  
At the end of the day, no one to confide in.  
Intoxicated, Desperate, always alone.  
It should have been a flag, instead of me coming home.  
I know what has to happen.  
I've seen it done before.  
First, I'll leave a simple note.  
Then, this body hits the floor.

*No Victory by Randy Schmidt, 2<sup>nd</sup>*

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**No Victory**

*By Randy W. Schmidt*

Front to back, it plays the same

Rules do not exist

There is no winner in this game

I live upon this desert floor

Forever carrying on

Will we ever settle the score

We've been here before

Yet it still continues

There is no end to this war

No victory is won

It's a never setting sun

They say the anger, roots so deep in everyone

How can I explain it

When you'll never feel the pain

We are the ones that questions what is sane

How do I begin to walk straight

When the crooked path is my fate

The emptiness lives in me, there is no time to negotiate

Over and over, I think things through

My dreams so very dark

Do the shadows get to you

I've been here before  
Do you know  
My demons are at the door

No comfort can I find  
These screams are haunting my mind  
Oh, the trauma! It's a paralyzing grind

For now, alone I dwell  
Do you know how hard I fell  
When you soldier, you eventually answer the bell

How am I supposed to heal  
When I'm not sure how I feel  
When you spend your days deep in conceal

How will you believe me  
When the truth is known by none  
Without you, I have no one

There is no cure, for sure you know  
It's hard to bloom, when I can't grow  
Post trauma, prosper in battles which we sow

I'm praying for a day that favors me  
I'm hoping for a day that's trauma free  
Until then, it is you I need with me

## Rhyming Poetry - Inspirational

*Saving My Ass by Ron Paine, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### **Saving my ass**

I am now done with chemo

How noble it is to be a sicko

After six chemos

Left me with sparkly eyes

How grateful it is to be alive

To the VA workers who knew and a few who did not know their jive

The shields and masks were up to the task

For all the workers who risk their lives

To save my ass

*Ron Paine*

**Being Left Behind**

Bereavement is that we most dread -  
no longer the camaraderie we desire  
A person loved pronounced dead -  
the eternal rest to which we aspire

Spouses, lovers, relatives, friends -  
all in time will meet their demise  
There is a certainty we must face -  
frightful feelings with no disguise

Family is the most significant -  
Husband, Wife, Daughter, Son  
Parents usually pass away first -  
a Child's death slays everyone

Regardless of whom you've lost -  
prayer can be your consolation  
Always be steadfast in your faith -  
being mindful of Eternal Salvation

*Verse by: Ramon the Poet*



## Rhyming Poetry - General Topic

*Death by Michael Kline, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### Death

It's what brought me here  
To this hell like state  
And it's what keeps me here  
In this deep, dark place  
As I cry out for help  
Every way I know how  
But there is no help  
From this place that's so shallow  
The peace that I seek  
For the pain and the hurt  
Is not a bandage for a cut  
It is my mind that must be cured  
Is death the way out  
Or will I end up in  
And eternal Hell  
Worse than my pain within  
I never can be  
That proud Airman again  
For the place meant to help  
Has beaten down this young man

## **The Rhythm of Life**

From your first heartbeat-  
then your first breath  
From the time of birth -  
until the time of death

Everything has Rhythm -  
there is always a beat  
It may be very apparent -  
at times not be so neat

All events you encounter -  
have their own tempo  
An exclusive identity -  
that is how you know

A path of lovely interludes -  
as found in a symphony  
Avoidance of much clamor -  
all unpleasant cacophony

The bells and the whistles -  
they must all be put aside  
Focused upon the positive -  
acquired with much pride

That is about Life's Rhythm -  
for which one must strive  
Keep aimed on the target -  
to ensure that you'll survive

A Life time of happiness's -  
with peace and harmony  
Toward Eternal Salvation -  
meant as your final destiny

*Verse by: Ramon the Poet*  
*"Poet in our Midst"*

## Non-Rhyming Poetry - Military Experience

*I'm Hit by Keith Deutsch, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### I'm Hit

*By Keith Deutsch*

Could not hear, I could not smell  
My senses they'd all gone somewhere else  
I was here now, Still was I there, how?  
No sound at all from anywhere now  
Where's my weapon!? Oh no!! Oh no!!  
But still I cannot see my foe.  
Vision had yet to return. Still could not hear  
I Felt a slight burn.  
I'm sitting in a puddle now, My mind it's all a fuddle how.  
My right legs trapped, Still I can't see, Why am I wet?  
Did I lose my pee?  
Vision comes back  
Almost wish it didn't  
What's left of my leg had been torn to ribbons.  
This puddle is blood! My blood! Oh shit!  
I scream to my friend, Big Mack, "I'm hit!"  
While my mind just a blur  
No shape, like a mirage.  
My first surprise  
Vision sorted out  
No fear of Demise  
This will hurt no doubt  
Already I wondered.  
How I'd snowboard without.

I am confident I would never have snowboarded in the Winter X games 3 years in a row on my own two feet. And I'm not sure I ever would have run the marine corps marathon with both knees either. I can't count the number of opportunities my service in the ARMY has provided me. But I can tell you that it has been enough to make me consider....

**Who is a Veteran**

*By Deanna Griffin*

A veteran is a father, a mother, a sister, and a brother

A Veteran is a son and a daughter

A Veteran is a neighbor, a Governor, a President, and a friend

A veteran is someone who has wounds on the outside

And invisible wounds on the inside

A Veteran wrote a blank check for freedom

And giving their all to save your freedoms

In both Foreign and domestic lands

A Veteran is about signing a contract

And raising their right hand

“I do solemnly swear”

And then fighting to the death

alongside his or her fellow soldier

who cannot go home no matter what

because their time overseas was extended longer than it should have

A Veteran cries silent tears

And then wipes away your tears when he or she is not home

A Veteran was my father

And a veteran is me.

## Non-Rhyming Poetry - Inspirational

*Gratitude by Keith Deutsch, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### **gratitude**

*By Keith Deutsch*

Thank you, for 02:59

**Thank you**, through my next finish line.

For never saying, never!

And for never saying, I can't

Though there was always a new challenge.

You always lead the chant.

You pushed me on to victory.

The likes of which most never see.

My winning lap among the stars.

I even got to race fast cars.

My duty now to thank you.

And so with ALL OF ME, I say.

**"Thank you** from my three right feet!"

My joy!

And your help guiding my way!

***Beyond Respect  
(For James)  
by  
Stephanie M Hipple***

***Snow, Sleet, Freezing Rain***

***You Shelter Us***

***Sinners or Not***

***You Shelter Us***

***You Do Not Judge***

***You Shelter Us***

***You Do Not Punish***

***You Shelter Us***

***You Bring 'The Gift of Warmth'***

***You Shelter Us***

***You Bring Us 'The Gift of Safety'***

***You Shelter Us***

***You Give Us Respect***

***I Give You***

***That Which is 'Beyond Respect'***

***I Give You***

***My Commitment To Be Better***

## Non-Rhyming Poetry - General Topic

*I Stand at the Wall by Deanna Griffin, 1<sup>st</sup> tied*

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### **I Stand at the Wall**

*By Deanna Griffin*

I stand at the Wall  
And the Wall looks back at me  
58,000 names etched in Gold  
58,000 Names that shouldn't be there  
Who all fought in a war that shouldn't have happened

I stand at the Wall  
Looking for the names of men and woman  
Who fought when I was just a girl  
And I am glad my three brothers  
Are not on that wall

I stand at the Wall  
wondering how many men and women  
Were ambushed in the hot steamy rice lands  
Thousands of miles from home  
Thousands of miles to go and die alone

I stand at the Wall  
Where men and women continue to die today  
agent orange and Napalm dropped from high  
And inner voices that never seem to go away

I stand at the Wall  
And whisper their names  
I hear them whisper back to me on the winds of war

Their hearts and souls stolen long ago

I stand at the Wall  
I kneel down  
and touch each of their names  
I feel them touch me back  
from the hard black obelisk  
like the steel weapons they carried  
but never saved their lives

I stand at the Wall  
And give a final salute  
they salute back at me  
and I am alone once more



## *And Momma Said No by Terry Traver, 1<sup>st</sup> tied*

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### **And Momma Said No**

*Terry Traver*

Momma said “your face will stay that way” when I grumbled and turned to her with a look of frustration.

She was both Mom and Dad in our family.

Raising five boys and two girls, each with strong personalities.

Momma tried to keep us together, preaching that if we didn't prepare together we may die alone.

She had a lot of sayings meant to teach us how to live and to demonstrate the strength of our numbers.

She didn't drive she rode the city bus. Momma had an instruction permit for thirty years but never had a driver license. The boys all walked to school never taking the school bus. It wasn't that we didn't like the school bus but Momma set the example so we followed it.

All the children had jobs after school to help support the family.

It was very common at that time. We weren't the only kids to have part-time jobs after school. Momma always said where there's a will there's a way and she expected us to contribute.

I'm not trying to pretend that we were a perfect family we certainly weren't. We all made mistakes even mom. That's where the saying my mother used a lot came into play. She would say, “There is no Hell. It's here on Earth!” Kind of negative huh? But sometimes it's how she felt.

Later she would sit in her living room chair with the windows open and sing a hymn. The neighbors would listen and applaud because she could really sing. For those of you who remember, she used to sound like Ethel Merman. Just like her! We were so proud of her.

You could say for her “practice makes perfect.” She loved the saying. Some of the children suffered a few hard knocks along the way. All the boys served in the military with an Honorable Discharge. With my experience, I would say never criticize a one-parent family.

*Who is thy Neighbor by Raymond Hartmann, 2<sup>nd</sup>*

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**Who is thy Neighbor**

The people next door to you  
Or all up and down the street  
The entire local community  
Perhaps folks we casually meet

Are they friends and acquaintances  
No matter where they may live  
Shall we love them as ourselves  
Whether little or much they give

What about the gangbangers  
Thieves and muggers, etal.  
Including them as neighbor  
Goes way beyond the call

Those crooked politicians  
Make many agencies corrupt  
The leeches of big finance  
Multitudes become bankrupt

So, who is our neighbor  
They, regardless of a stance  
First protect home and family  
Trust not a perilous chance

*Verse by: Ramon the Poet*

## Personal Essay - Military Experience

*River Crossing - Vietnam 1969 by Fredrick Butler, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### River Crossing - Vietnam 1968

*Fredrick Butler*

On one of our missions we were in the lowlands. It was a very different terrain than the rice paddies we were used to. It almost looked like a prairie and at one point there were 2 or 3 large rivers that converged. I was walking point again and wouldn't you know we needed to cross the river. No-one knew if there could be piranha or how deep it was so they tied a rope around my waist and told me to cross and if I was attacked by piranha or went in over my head, they would pull me out. I took off all my gear except my helmet and crossed with my rifle above my head—kind of like I'd seen in some of the John Wayne war movies. I was leery of this not just because of drowning but also because I had taken off my ammo belt to keep it dry. I only had the one magazine in my M16. Eighteen rounds of ammunition across a river all by your self is not much if you encountered the enemy - especially when one of my biggest fears was of getting captured.

Thankfully there was no piranha. But I did go in over my head as I crossed and tried to keep my rifle above the water as they were pulling me back. Just when I was ready to drop my rifle and start swimming they managed to pull me to a shallower spot. I tried two or three more times and went in over my head with my rifle going under water as they pulled me out. I thought I was done with my wet rifle and they would have someone else try. But they brought me dry rifles as replacements so I could continue. Finally I made it to the other side without being attacked by piranha, drowning or encountering the enemy. I tied off the rope and the rest of the platoon and company made the crossing. When Pete Milner from our squad got across the river he started screaming. He had ripped the crotch out of his fatigues and he had 6 leeches in his groin area. We had mosquito repellent, which worked better at taking leeches off than repelling mosquitoes, but it also burned. Pete and the medic finally got the leeches off him but I have never heard someone swear such a sustained blue streak in all my life. At the end of his tirade, he said 'Oh God, how I hate this place.' And this pretty much summed up how all of us felt. Guys would write a saying on their helmets—'When I die I'll go to heaven because I've already been in hell – Vietnam'.

All in all, the river crossing mostly turned out ok – except for Pete's leeches, of course. I didn't get attacked by piranha, drown, nor did I get killed, wounded or captured on the other side. My one regret was that a movie producer had not seen me crossing the jungle river with my rifle over my head. I might have been offered a part in a movie as an extra – or not...

**Traveling the Mason Dixon Line**  
*By Deanna Griffin*

I hopped on a Delta flight from Minneapolis International Airport to Pittsburgh International Airport on October 6<sup>th</sup> for an early 65<sup>th</sup> birthday present to myself. I had two reasons for my trip, and one was to visit my second oldest brother in Pennsylvania on the northern side of the Mason Dixon Line and the other reason was to visit Civil War and other battle sites on both sides of the line.

After hopping off the plane at Pittsburgh, I skirted down the escalator and found a life size figure of Franco Harris. As a teenage girl, I remember him winning Super Bowls and his immaculate reception that took the Pittsburgh Steelers to one of the Super Bowls. There were other life-size figurines next to Franco that told me something about the history of Pennsylvania and what I had to look forward to on my road trip kris-crossing the Mason Dixon Line.

First, I traveled north of the Mason Dixon Line to find a battlefield called Flight 93 where passengers on Flight 93 took down terrorists whose intent was to attack our Nation's capital. Three planes had already attacked the two towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and this fourth plane was taken down by the passengers who did not want to kill any more innocent victims of the start of the War on Terrorism. As I stood on the cement pavement with a clear plexiglass balcony guarding me from falling to the valley below, I looked down to where the flight 93 had crashed into the earth at high jet speed. The wind carried the screams of those who died that day, and I felt the impact of the explosion by others who lived nearby. September 11, 2001 was the first day of the War on Terrorism, and I would soon become involved in that war as a member of the Minnesota Army National Guard. As I traveled south towards the Mason Dixon Line, I couldn't help but think of all the lives lost in wars on this soil such as the French Indian War, Revolutionary War, War of 1812, the Civil War and now the War on Terrorism. How many more lives could be lost and what did the future hold of wars yet to come? My thoughts wondered as I drove south on Lincoln's Highway.

My second stop was to travel to Gettysburg which was on the northern side of the Mason Dixon Line and the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. My brother Chuck and

my cousin Tom took me around Gettysburg and showed me the monuments of War such as the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota regiment who fought there so long ago. I was also a Minnesota volunteer soldier who learned how to attack just like the soldiers who fought from Round Top and Little Round Top at Gettysburg. I still remember how I practiced those battle skills with my fellow soldiers who some of them would later die in the War on Terrorism and felt my heart die a little more.

My third stop took me south across the Mason Dixon line to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia where Yankees fought to hold back Rebel soldiers, and John Brown and his group blew up the Rebels' ammunition dump and fought each other to no end. I looked across the river and saw how beautiful it is now, but I thought about how the blood of the battle must have turned water red where now river ran brown.

Next, I travelled north to Maryland and landed at the Battle of Antietam to witness more Monuments to War. Some Monuments were large and others small that told the story of getting closer to the northern side of the Mason Dixon Line and how soldiers on both sides must have moved back and forth across the line to kill with bayonets and gun powder propelled guns and cannons with no end in sight and brother fought brother. My great grandmother lost her first husband to the wounds of the Civil War, and I wondered if he had lived, would I have been born?

Finally, I was back on the northern side of the Mason Dixon Line and travelled to Ft Necessity to see where a young George Washington fought against French and Native Americans over land the British wanted. Colonel Washington led soldiers into battle, and I felt the soldiers surround me, and wondered if I could escape the ghosts who fought there or the ghosts of war who I try to escape from even now when I drive my car and listen to the sound of metal crashing against metal and silently coming to rest on the side of the road in a country thousands of miles away. I found a part of me that I thought I had forgotten and found also the ghosts that haunt me still today.

## Personal Essay - Military Experience

*Victory in Two Steps Forward by Michael Kline, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### Finding Victory in Two Steps Forward

*Michael Kline*

I find myself sitting in this type of room again. Everything in the room is either built onto the floor or is so damn heavy no one could move it. Mental health issues suck. Constantly feel like I am taking two steps forward and six steps back. So, here I am in another hospital stay. This is my third trip to a mental health hospital in than a year. PTSD. Anxiety. Depression. Alcohol dependency. Porn addiction. None of these are anything to be proud of. But here I am dealing with them all. And yet they never seem to get any better. I may not act out on them all the time. But they are always right there. I see them everywhere. When I look in a mirror, they are there looking back at me. There is no escaping the demons that live within my soul.

So, here I am. Each day is filled with groups and classes that are supposed to help. CBT. Self-forgiveness. Resilience training. Stages of change. Written exposure therapy. Stress relief. Yoga. Tai Chi. They seem like an endless therapy session that keeps marching at us. Are they helpful? Sometimes. Are they useful? Sometimes. Are they effective? Less than sometimes. Yet we continue to go through the motions. It's like we are moving towards something that we can never achieve.

Along this journey, it is as if each diagnosis feeds into another diagnosis. Before the military, I was an alcoholic. This got worse after my traumatic experience. And then all this fed into my anxiety. Simply uncontrollable anxiety. Then, without any warning, the depression moves in and runs me over like a Mack truck. Even if I know the cause, it always surprises me when it hits me. And then, here comes more anxiety. And the cyclone continues and builds its stronghold around my neck. Finally, after all of my defenses are used up fighting my depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms, my temptations and desires to act out on my addictions come. Unstoppable temptations.

I know how I got here. I am not happy with it, but I must own it. When I was working, I always took pride in the fact that if I made a mistake, I owned it. This is different though. Owning all of this is a sign of weakness. And, as soldiers, we are not

supposed to show weakness. The thing is that only through the subtle wins can we defeat the demons that are in constant battle mode. We might take six steps back when we are deep in battle against it all. But we must find victory in the two steps forward. If we are moving forward, it's a win. It doesn't matter how much we move forward. The key to keeping the demons under control is to constantly find the small victories in everything. Soon, we find ourselves looking at our dark life through rose colored glasses. I am not saying that the fight is going to be easy. We aren't going to conquer our battles. Our demons will never die. However, in the small victories, we can find joy and peace that will continue to give us the fire to go forward one more day.



## Personal Essay - General Topic

### *The Band Played On by Rodney Bernu, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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#### **THE BAND PLAYED ON** by Rodney Bernu

New York Mills, a small town located in central Minnesota with a population of some 650-people had ballooned to eight hundred or more for the 1936 Fourth of July celebration. The town's main highway and streets were lined with horses and Buggies, Model A Fords, and shiny new Chevrolets. At the end of the one-block main street, the Ferris Wheel, Merry-Go-Round, and Chair-O-Plane bustled with excited children waiting in line to capture a ride.

The town baseball team had just defeated Verndale, one of its neighboring baseball rivals, in a close ball game. The town band, led by its majorette, and WWI veterans, marched from the baseball field to the central park playing the Star-Spangled Banner, America the Beautiful, and other patriotic songs to entertain the excited public. Both teams and their fans congregated at the decorated sidewalk tents, eating hamburgers and brats, drinking beer, sharing stories, and enjoying the festive atmosphere. And the band played on.

Our family, cousins, and friends had settled with blankets under a shade tree on the edge of the town park for a picnic in celebration of the occasion. Suddenly, Mother asked, "Where's Joyce?" Caught up in the jubilation she had lost track of her 3 1/2 - year-old daughter Joyce. Her neighbor said, "The last time I noticed her she was holding hands with my 5-year-old son, Marvin. They were waving their stars and stripes stick flags at the homeless vagrants riding on top of the railroad cattle cars as the train rambled through town". And the band played on.

Suddenly, the celebration turned into hysteria. The kidnapping of Charles Lindberg Jr., a few years earlier on March 1, 1932, with connections to Little Falls, Minnesota, some sixty miles away from our town, was still fresh in the minds of most Minnesotans.

Everyone spread out to search for them around the busy town streets, taverns, circus tents, railroad tracks, and local hobo jungle. Bill Gilso, the town constable, cautioned the panic-stricken celebrants to keep civil order so that he could conduct a thorough step-by-step investigation in the matter.

Marvin's older brother Wesley had been ill with the flu, so he had bypassed the celebration and stayed home to rest. He rode his bicycle to the park and was astounded by the frantic activity. "What the heck is going on?" he asked. "Haven't you heard?" Wesley's mother sobbed, "Your brother and Joyce have been kidnapped!" Wesley said, "What are you talking about Mom, I just left them!" "Where?" she asked. "That's why I'm here. Joyce told Marvin that she was feeling sick, so he took her to see the litter of our new baby puppies to cheer her up. Since it's a half mile to our house from here, when Grandmother saw them, she panicked. She got me up from the couch and sent me to let everyone know that they are safe and well."

Panic turned to jubilation in New York Mills on that 1936 Independence Day. And the band played on.

## Humor

### *That New Car Smell Won't Last by Bruce Lindquist, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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#### **That new car smell won't last**

*By Bruce Lindquist*

With the arrival of summer each year, car companies have been known to ramp up their annual “race to defile the wilderness” TV ads.

But any reputable mechanic will tell you that the excessive abuse promoted in these commercials is exactly the last thing that should be done to any vehicle. However, with these folks at the wheel, sporting size triple-x egos and size four hats, they gladly strive to become kings and queens of the demo derby.

Fast, erratic, careless driving on steep and treacherous loose-gravel mountain logging trails is featured in many new car and pickup advertisements.

But the ad agencies haven't forgotten the desolate beauty of the desert, either – that's where amateurs emulate the crazy car antics of the once-popular Joie Chitwood Thrill Show. There's plenty of life in the dry, hard-scrabble landscape, you just need to know where to look. That, however, is only before our wannabe monster truck drivers are depicted defiling the mesquite, coyote and cactus environment.

Flying at interstate speeds through dense, pristine forests and meadows, seemingly carefree drivers and passengers decked out in designer evening wear appear to be amusing themselves with knock-knock jokes while looking for a juicebox or loose fries on the dashboard, as the spiffy family trickster careens off of the boulders, deep ruts and half-empty river beds. How many vehicles do they demolish making this stuff?

All the while, squirrels, grizzlies and ducklings flee for their lives, no match for the front grill of a heavy hunk of Detroit iron climbing a mountain goat trail/canyon wall/double black diamond ski slope.

But nowhere is it notes, “No innocent critters were maimed in the making of this fairy tale.”

Talk about wildlife justification for road rage. In fact, several ways to avoid becoming road kill are outlined in “Mother Nature’s Wilderness Survival Guide for Bambi & Buddies.” But I think our furry friends of the forest need look no further than the first sentence of the first chapter of that manual: “At the first whiff of a huma, turn in the opposite direction from whence you came, then concentrate on moving your lower appendages real fast.”

I wonder if the occupants of these sedans, crew cabs and crossovers ever had to deploy their parachutes once they blew through an “end-of-trail” stop sign at 9,000 feet? We can only speculate, but odds are that the shiny, airborne all-wheel drive model probably lost that new-car smell somewhere during the decent.

## *Windchill by Bill Arthur, 2<sup>nd</sup>*

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### **Windchill** by Bill Arthur

Woke up in Minnesota to a beautiful day  
Blue sky everywhere, looks okay  
There's snow on the ground but that's alright  
Looks so pretty in the bright sunlight

Then I wean outside, man what a shock  
Pretty near frozen in just half a block  
The wind like knives that cut my face  
My breath just smoke all over the place

Windchill Why do we live here?  
Windchill Do we have a death wish?  
Windchill Can I get a ticket on the next plane to Florida?

Back inside away from the blast  
Chilled to the bone, nearly breathed my last  
Hand and feet tingle, face red like a beet  
My nose running, feels like frozen meat

Windchill It'll clear out your sinuses  
Windchill Wake you right up  
Windchill Make you wish you were someplace, anyplace warmer

People tell me it'll be spring here soon  
But when will that happen? In May or June?  
Green grass and butterflies I want to see  
Spring can't come fast enough for me

Windchill Why do we live here?  
Windchill Do we have a death wish?  
You don't have to be crazy to live in a place like this but it helps

**Top of the Day!**  
*By Marc DeLosier*

It happened when I was about thirteen and over at my grandma's, who lived at 201 33<sup>rd</sup> Ave N. St. Cloud, MN. At the end of the block was Cecil Little City Trailer Park and across the street from it was an empty lot. A circus sometimes came to town and set up there.

I was not supposed to leave the block. But tell a kid not to leave the block when there's a circus. Well! So, I left the block. I made friends with two elephants – a momma and it's baby. My grandma came looking for me. I did not answer. I was hoping to snack back home before she found me. But she spotted me on the other side of the momma elephant. This but protective elephant would not let grandma get to me. And grandma's voice was loud and angry and intimidating. The momma elephant let loose a huge trumpet sound, took a truck full of water, and sprayed it all over grandma!

Grandma took off like a wet hen. I think knew I was in trouble. I raced her home. When grandma was about to hand her wet clothes out to dry, the baby elephant let out it's own big trumpet. It sounded like it screamed at her.

Grandma was so shocked she threw her wet clothes up on the roof! The baby elephant must have either followed me or picked up my scent. The momma elephant soon showed up too and some circus people were not long behind her.

A deal was made that I could spend time back at the circus tending to the elephants. That night I got my butt paddles but good!

**PRAY FOR A STROKE**

*By Gary Fisher*

If you would like for your spouse to be able to say “He was wet, slippery, and naked.”  
PRAY FOR A STROKE, but also hope your knee buckles as you step out of the shower.

If you want to own the experience of looking at your hand and watching it become  
stupid because it just went on vacation without your knowledge, PRAY FOR A  
STROKE.

If you want to ride in an ambulance, PRAY FOR A STROKE.

If you would like to be poked and prodded a number of times a day, PRAY FOR A  
STROKE.

If you would like to do all kinds of strange exercises every day, PRAY FOR A STROKE.

If you would like to have to deal with sticky things that should slide freely or things that  
slide freely and are sticky, PRAY FOR A STROKE.

If you want to sleep in a bed that is not conducive for sleeping, PRAY FOR A STROKE.

If you would like to eat hospital food for an unspecified amount of time, PRAY FOR A  
STROKE.

If you would like to have to struggle getting yourself dressed because you're still  
working with a stupid hand that is on vacation, PRAY FOR A STROKE.

If you want to have a completely brand-new appreciation for life PRAY FOR A STROKE

## Short, Short Story

*Lost and Found by Adam Rislund, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### Lost and Found

for my dad  
*by Adam Rislund*

Lost is the life I knew. Fresh is the loss, long the suffering, and unfortunate the circumstances. A journey began before I was born that brought me to here. I am what my life has made me. My father unto his own, a man travelling a road with no map, arriving at a destination unplanned. For what reason do we cycle towards uncertainty, and how much are we to suffer to learn our purpose. Speaking without words, an inherited destiny moulds our character. A stoic man obstinate, strong, and bearing the weight of his own pain. I learn the examples set by his actions. Beliefs and ideas that are set in rock as hard as his stubbornness. How to bear the burden, to see a man unable to carry out his own will. Sad is the downfall and heartbreaking the captive of a life independent no more. A tough man was my dad, often enough quiet that I sought his praise without answer. So similar in nature, opposite in personality, two sides of the same coin. Trying to let go and be happy for the time I had. Trying to find understanding for the path that presented itself. His spirit resonant in his wit. Love he gave to family, love he received from friends, a man of the sort we seek. Always did I know I was loved, but at times it felt hard earned. On the day of his dying, my dad, I found.



**The Golden Oak**  
*By Randy W. Schmidt*

Ryan grew up by the Golden Oak, a tree that stood strong and true. Below the sturdy tree sat a double-wide trailer, painted white with metallic mint green stripes. If the trailer could talk, what would it say? Perhaps “happiness, sadness, dark days and many unsettling nights.” Two young adults with three young children dwelled there. Annie, a smiley little girl with blonde hair, her kid sister, Shelly, with straight brown hair and freckles, and the little round headed big blue-eyed boy, Ryan. Their mother, Emma, was the family caretaker. Richard, their father, was a factory skilled journeyman who loved to work hard and play hard. Both in their early twenties, and not skilled at raising children, which is not a recipe for easy living. So, long days turned into long weeks, then long months turned into very short years. Why short years? Their marriage would never reach a five-year celebration.

The three children witnessed a house of poverty, instability, and alcoholism. These kids were very spirited, temperamental, and curious. If a door cracked open, they investigated. If there was an opportunity to seek the world, they would venture out. The two sisters, being the oldest, witnessed the majority of alcoholism and abuse up close. It hindered their trust especially with adult men. Ryan witnessed very little but grew to know things were not right. Eventually, divorce and visitation fell upon them exceedingly early in their lives. The white trailer by the Golden Oak was no longer. After a couple of years in a tumultuous relationship it was time to move on. However, this move was literally a long move. Diane was moving herself and the children back to Minnesota where she grew up, leaving behind her husband in the Detroit area.

Too much alcohol, time with work friends, billiards at the bar, and being non-committal to a relationship leaves things in disarray. Shelly would state several times “the weekend drunk scared me the most.” Was Diane innocent in all this? Well, that was never up for discussion. Emma often stated, “Richard was always drunk” and that was typically the narrative when speaking about him. Emma was a stay-at-home mom and

contributed nothing financially. So, it beckons to be asked, how does the constant alcoholic support his family? Richard never lost his job, he kept food on the table, and there was always a roof over their heads.

Years passed and Emma got remarried, and the kids had visits with their father. Once she remarried, there was a new twist. She no longer wanted Richard to have visitation rights. Not having their father would be the biggest change in the kids' new lives. Richard cleaned himself up and moved closer to the kids to be in their lives. But to Emma, none of that mattered. She did not want him to be around at all, and somehow found a way for him to not exist in their lives ever again. This would have lingering effects on Ryan. Ryan was often confused and unsure of the situation. After all his father had said to him numerous times "I love you."

It took many years for the sisters to trust their new dad, Henry, but eventually they did. Ryan on the other hand grew to love his "new" dad and became remarkably close. Often, he wondered what happened to Richard and why he could not have a relationship with him. He really wanted to know who he was. Emma told the kids Richard had "most likely" passed away from cirrhosis of the liver. She repeatedly said this until the kids had left home and started their own lives.

Ryan's sisters eventually married and had families of their own. Ryan soon had grown as well and fulfilled his long dream of being a soldier. He was an Airman in the Air Force and aspired to be an aircraft mechanic. He spent most of his life living rural and fixing everything on the farm. So, naturally it translated to fix things for the Air Force. When he was deployed, during the Middle East Wars, he would often think about his life and wonder about Richard and if he was anything like him. He truly wondered if he was alive. Ryan felt at that point in his life, he would be ready to reunite.

Eventually, he put his fantasy behind him and accepted his dad was deceased, and there would be no dream of a reunion. The phone rang one day, he picked up and a soft-spoken lady named Donna introduced herself. She communicated she was the wife

of Richard. She said, “he passed away at home from a heart attack a month ago.” She said “he always wanted to meet up with his kids” but did not think Emma would be compliant with that. When all three became adults, they moved away so Richard struggled to track them down. He eventually gave up.

Donna was finally able to connect with Ryan because the internet made it possible to locate people simply from a name. Once the call ended Ryan was CRUSHED and overtaken with great emotion. Many years lost, many years of never knowing, and always wondering who his father was. Why would he never know the truth, until Richard passed away? He never had liver disease from drinking. Why was there so much misleading? Ryan never had a picture of his father, as Emma never kept one. Years of ongoing pain and confusion would continue. Forever, he will wonder.

That little boy who grew up next to the Golden Oak eventually put this behind him. Ryan took solace in the fact that his father was not perfect. He realized how hard it was to be a young father raising children in challenging times. That little boy is all grown and has a family of his own. Ryan knows not only does the Golden Oak grow straight and true, but that it survives through the roughest storms on the darkest of days.

**WEREWOLF FOREST**  
**A Short Story by Edward Tischleder**

Minnesota has nearly sixty state forests and two national forests. The state forests total approximately four million acres whereas the Superior and Chippawa National Forests contain nearly three million acres. All these forests, State and Federal, are controlled and managed by the respective governments.

Unknown to nearly everyone, except the local population, there exists the small Evergreen State Forest, consisting of approximately two thousand acres. It is situated in the northern part of the state adjacent to the Superior National Forest. These woodlands contain mostly coniferous trees, including various pines, fir, spruce, cedar, tamarack, and hemlock. In the center of this forest is a small lake, known as Green Lake. Due primarily to its isolation, the lake is seldom used by people for swimming, fishing, or boating. However, it is frequently used by the animals for drinking, cooling off during the warm summers and an occasional source for food.

Interspersed within these green colored trees, there are many species of wildlife, including black bears, wolves, moose, foxes, cougars and a variety of smaller mammals, amphibians, and insects. Although the gray wolf, also called timber wolf, has a large presence in Evergreen State Forest, it is alleged that a pack of werewolves is also present. Over the years there have been reported sightings of what were perceived to be werewolves.

There is a small village located just outside the boundary of the forest with a population of about five hundred people. Several Oldtimers in the village tell the story of about 1940 or so, when the village became infected with a strange but contagious virus. The people stricken with the virus not only became infected with flu-like symptoms, but also experienced physical and emotional changes. People who were once very friendly and sociable became rude, combative, and exhibited elevated testosterone. Some of them began to grow excessive hair which was first noticeable on their eyebrows. Shortly thereafter they exhibited hairy arms and hands and grew more hair on their bodies than normal. In addition, some developed glowing eyes, fingernails growing into claws and a

taste for raw meat. Medical experts from Minneapolis and Duluth were called in to assist local doctors for diagnostic help and treatment, but the five or six people with symptoms left their homes and retreated into the woods. It is believed that is where they finished their transformation into werewolves.

Several years ago, a man, who was reported as being “mad” began to cause physical harm to some of the townspeople. One day without provocation he attacked his neighbor and was arrested for disorderly conduct and simple assault. He was put in jail but released on bail and ordered to report later for trial. While out on bail he murdered the man he had earlier attacked. The police tried to arrest him for murder, but he resisted and after a fierce encounter with the police he was shot and killed. An autopsy was performed and revealed that his body was mostly covered with hair, his teeth were large and sharp, and his index fingers were longer than his middle fingers.

About a week after the incident, several men with heavy facial hair were watching a boys basketball game. The son of one of the men was pushed aside and knocked to the floor while in the process of scoring a basket. Spectators became terrified when they observed the eyes of the boy’s father begin to glow. Almost immediately the man’s friends were also exhibiting glowing eyes. All these men became very rude and belligerent.

Shortly after the basketball game the local weekly newspaper contained a front-page article about “werewolf syndrome” showing up in the village. Townspeople had described seven people who allegedly were half wolf and half man. Shortly thereafter three medical experts were consulted and the men in question were examined.

History contains myths and beliefs that people who are bitten by a werewolf will become half man and half wolf. Modern medicine has been unable to confirm that these myths have any basis in fact and are determined to be untrue. Furthermore, all the men examined denied having been bitten by a wolf of any kind, or by any other animal prior to developing their symptoms. Two of the medical experts concluded that the men had contacted a rare condition known as congenital hypertrichosis caused by certain illnesses and appropriate treatment was prescribed. The third medical expert said the men had clinical lycanthropy, which is more of a mental illness caused by a psychotic

episode. It causes people to believe they will be transformed into an animal and should be treated as a mental health condition.,

During this period most people in the village were obsessed with werewolf syndrome. It was the talk of the town including those responsible for the town's water supply. The water tower had been suspected of causing an unpleasant taste in the drinking water. Tests revealed that the inside of the tower had become infected with an unknown substance. Since Green Lake is situated above the aquifer that provides the well water pumped into the water tower, it was also tested. Samples of water taken from the lake revealed numerous substances caused by a variety of nature, including sunshine, rainwater, plants, fish, mammals, and insects. Some uncommon fleas from the water were closely examined as they were found in both the lake and the water tower. The fleas were like those found on timber wolves but different enough to conclude they came from unknown species of the wolf family. The water inside the water tower was disinfected and no further werewolf symptoms were discovered.

Although unconfirmed, the people in the village allege that their water becomes contaminated when the werewolves take a bath in Green Lake. Their fleas get into the lake water, which find their way into the drinking water. Annual disinfection of the water tower solves the problem.

## *Reluctant by Stephanie Hipple*

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**Reluctant  
by  
Stephanie M Hipple**

"Yes, Mr. President. I understand. You have my word," Pablo said while looking squarely into his clear blue eyes. "Your Country and I thank you," uttered the President while firmly shaking his hand. At that moment two burly secret service agents ushered Pablo out of the unmarked SUV gliding him past its open doors and a third agent.

Setting foot on the familiar sidewalk in front of his modest brick home, he watched as the entourage of look-a-like SUVs pulled away and disappeared around the open cul-de-sac's corner. Without missing a beat he turned, walked up his front steps and picked up his son's homemade kite. As he opened the front door Pablo thought that it would have been nice to meet with The President in the Oval Office. After all we're talking about 'World Order' here.

Just then his young son, Roberto (affectionately called 'Toto') ran to him and exclaimed "My kite! Where was it? Let's go fly my Kite, Dad." He hugged Toto and said, "After supper we'll go over to the ball field."

"Great Dad" Toto's voice trailed off as he ran through the living room and into the kitchen where Teresa was cooking supper at the stove. "Hey mom, Dad found my Kite." Teresa reassuringly smiled "Good, now come help me set the table."

"Okay, mom" he responded as she handed him the plates. Noting Pablo's exhaustion, she gently whispered, "How was THE MEETING?" Shaking his head "It's done now. I wish there was another way. The benefits; it's, well..."

With a quick kiss on the cheek, Teresa nudged him, "Relax and change out of your suit. Supper is almost ready. We'll all watch a movie later." Smiling, Pablo felt the stress fall from his shoulders "Okay, Toto and I are going to fly his kite right after supper. Toto chimed in "Yeah, we have to fly the kite before it gets dark 'cause we have to make room for all the lightning bugs."

Sinking deep into the bed's memory foam, Pablo so wanted to relive the last twenty-four hours directing the world into reason. His daydream, however, was interrupted by Teresa's voice "Your phone is showing that White House Emblem again." Just as



he reached the kitchen he looked at her with a distant, weary gaze that she had never seen before.

"This is Pablo. Yes. No. I cannot. My son and I are going to fly his kite. Tell the Vice President there is nothing more important than 'flying my son's kite'. Besides, the Micron Executives are all 'three sheets to the wind'. Tomorrow morning. Ten o'clock. Yes. I'll meet the limo at the corner."

Thinking that he'd get to see the Oval Office after all, he joined his family in their dinner conversation that included lightning bugs.

The next morning a sharply uniformed Police Sergeant at the White House Gate's guard station waved his limousine onto the Grounds. To Pablo's surprise the driver continued along the manicured lawns, past the stately trees and rounded The White House Drive up to the main entrance.

A United States Army Major clad in Dress Blues opened his car door and upon introducing himself as the White House Attaché' requested "Sir, if you would please let me escort you inside."

Nodding in the affirmative they both walked past the immaculate statuesque Marines standing guard at the entrance doors. Impressed by their crisp precision, the Marines far surpassed their reputation. Pablo felt reassured and was grateful for their indomitable dedication.

They veered from the main hallway and stopped at a small alcove near an obscure service elevator. Just as the Major took out a card-key from his coat pocket, a Secret Service Agent emerged from the elevator and shook his hand "Thank you, Major."

The Major placed the card-key on a small table in the alcove as he left. Agent Thomas turned to Pablo "Sir, please come with me." Pointing at the card-key he said, "Sir, you'll need that as well."

After a few steps Pablo spotted a second elevator where Agent Wei introduced himself and pressed the down button, "Sir, I'll take you the rest of the way". Its door opened a few minutes later into what seemed like a tunnel.

"Sir, we'll be taking this tram the rest of the way. Do you have your card-key?" Pablo reached into his jacket pocket and handed it to Agent Wei. Agent Wei inserted the card-key into a

lock box under his seat and handed Pablo a, thick, leather bound portfolio with an embossed White House Seal.

Agent Wei asked, "Would you like to wear your seat belt, Sir?" Pablo nodded as it occurred to him that he would never visit the Oval Office. Passing under the overhead lights, however, he realized that the powers to be had cut their deals. Lost in his thoughts, Pablo was surprised when the tram pulled up at the 'Operations Tactical Center'.

He clutched the sealed White House Portfolio as a team of Secret Service Agents encircled both he and Agent Wei as they ushered them through the vaulted doorway. Agent Wei found Pablo a seat immediately in back of the Micron Corporation Executives who were seated across from The President.

Pablo opened the White House Portfolio revealing the Agenda for 'Global Stabilization'. The President immediately struck his gavel "Let us all express our utmost gratitude to Pablo for not just his brilliant pursuit of everlasting energy for humanity but, also, for his generous understanding and personal sacrifice of remaining unknown for the benefit of World Peace and the future of global civilization. We are forever grateful to you.

The President handed him a wrapped gift box. Then, that same circle of Secret Service Agents escorted Pablo out as he and his family embarked on a unique life-long journey.

***the end***

Epilogue

When Pablo opened his gift from The President, he found a small video tape player labeled 'my home movies'. It was The President playing with his dog in The Oval Office.

# Short Script

## *NASA Man by Stephanie Hipple, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### **NASA MAN**

*Scenes I-V*

*by Stephanie M. Hipple*

FADE IN:

1. EXT. COUNTY ROAD IN NORTHERN MINNESOTA - NIGHT

### IN DARKNESS

The stark sounds of Defibrillation Paddles are heard amidst the scuffle of footsteps grating on gravel.

A CAMERA SHOT REVEALS

A young JANE DOE'S barely clad body jerks upward as it responds to the life saving paddles. A purse is seen lying next to her.

As MICHAEL, 27, EMT, applies the defibrillation paddles, Jane Doe's frail upper body jumps upright with each surge. A stream of blood drips from a gaping wound on her head.

2. EXT. SAME COUNTY ROAD - NIGHT

JOE, 28, Passing, the town's recently hired police officer.

JOE

(Showing the evidence to Sheriff Tim)

Sheriff, here's her purse. It's empty, except for this movie ticket that was stuck in the lining.

SAM, 35, Caucasian, the town's established police officer.

SAM

(pointing to the Sheriff's sedan)

Sheriff, that homeless piece of shit over there did it.

EMILIO, 50, Latino, is handcuffed in the back seat of the sheriff's sedan. He is blinded by the ambulance and police sedans lights.

SHERIFF TIM, Caucasian, local county Sheriff.

SHERIFF TIM

Joe, put flares on the road and you, Sam. Put your body camera on and cover traffic. Everybody, this one's by the book.

3. EXT. SHOULDER OF ROAD - NIGHT

MICHAEL

We got a heartbeat! She's breathing! Renee, Let's go!

RENEE, 25, LGBT, EMT.

RENEE & MICHAEL

(Places Jane Doe onto the gurney and into the ambulance)

4. INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

RENEE

(Takes the radio-com in hand)

Dispatch, over. This is transport 54. We are in route.

Defibrillation successful, pulse is steady, breathing shallow and unconscious. Applying pressure to the head trauma. Possible Assault, Rape Kit needed. Estimated arrival in 5 minutes. Over.

5. INT. SHERIFF'S SEDAN ON SAME COUNTY ROAD SHOULDER - NIGHT

SHERIFF TIM

(Looks in the mirror at Emilio)

Hey, hey. You back there.

(Snaps his fingers)

My guts tell me you didn't do this. You could barely walk to the squad car, even with Sam, ah hem, 'helping' you. I think you just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

EMILIO

(LOOKS DOWN)

SHERIFF TIM

Am I right?

EMILIO

(AFTER A LONG MOMENT)

It seemed like I'd been walking for hours on this god-forsaken road without a single car passing by in either direction. The arthritis in my feet was killing me and I was hoping to find something to eat from some litter thrown onto the side of the road.

Just as I was about to rest for a while, a Red Tesla comes speeding by, nearly running me over.

SHERIFF TIM

(Interrupt's)

Are you sure it was a 'Red Tesla'? (In disbelief)

SHERIFF TIM (continued)

Wait a minute! You speak better English than I do. You're not an immigrant. Who are you? Why is a man like you homeless?

(An uncomfortable silence follows)

SHERIFF TIM

(Pages through Emilio's tattered wallet.)

Where did you get this wallet and all these NASA business cards? Did you steal this wallet?

EMILIO

No sir, I worked for NASA a long time ago.

SHERIFF TIM

As what, the janitor?

EMILIO

(is silent)

SHERIFF TIM

(Holds up Emilio's old NASA ID)

Look man. Who are you? Are you an old astronaut or something?

EMILIO

No Sir, I was a flight engineer on the Space Shuttle Discovery's Team a long time ago.

SHERIFF TIM

What are you doin' here? Look at you. You're a mess. You have a beard a mile long. I don't think I've ever seen a beard that long.

(Shakes his head)

Okay, never mind, go on and finish your story.

EMILIO

Yes sir. A few moments after the Tesla rounded the bend, I heard screeching tires as if the car had come to a quick stop. Then I heard a car door slam shut and then the sound of squealing tires.

It was just a few minutes later, when I walked around the bend, that I found the young woman laying in the middle of the road. She was unconscious and bleeding profusely from a deep gash in her head. Her pulse was very faint.

Then I pulled her off to the shoulder of the road as gently as I could. Just as I was putting her head down on the ground that police car over there showed up.

The police officer ran over to me and hustled me to the ground. He didn't have to do that. I didn't resist. When he was finished yelling he put these handcuffs on me.

SHERIFF TIM



Are you sure it was a Red Tesla? There's only one Red Tesla around these parts. Are you sure you didn't see it earlier in the day and are just makin' up a story here?

EMILIO

No sir. It was a Red Tesla.

SHERIFF TIM

Do you have any idea how much trouble your in?

Do you know who owns that Red Tesla?

Well, I know and we are in deep shit here.

(Long Pause]

Okay, Listen to me very carefully. You're gonna do exactly as I say.

Wife ain't ever going to believe this one.

FADE OUT:

## Special Recognition

*My Invitation by Randy Schmidt, 1<sup>st</sup>*

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### **My Invitation**

*By Randy W. Schmidt*

I heard so much about you  
But we never got the chance to grow together  
Your presence was more than others could bear  
Our once upon a time, never came

I don't believe you never wanted happiness  
You said "I love you" so many times  
Those close to me viewed you in a dark light  
You never got your chance to shine

Your fork in the road lead to no where  
Did you look back? Did you wonder?  
You could have come back to the start  
I was patiently waiting for you

Time was never on your side  
Many simply didn't want you to return  
I wanted to see you again, but the chance never came  
Did your one-way street truly lead one way?

I never had a picture of you  
I only remember the childhood times we spent together  
Those that cut you out, only cut us deeply  
The cuts you endured made me bleed with curiosity.

I am a part of you, but which parts I am not sure

The chances to meet again was taken away  
Words became the true course of the isolation  
It's not what was said, it's what was left unsaid

I looked under every rock, were there stones unturned  
Something is only lost, when you stop the search  
Remember I traveled the world to see  
You're not that far, but the travel is steep

Today I invited you! But I learned you were gone  
You passed before you got my invitation  
Then again, I did not truly know where you were  
Those that isolated us, prosper in joy

You're my father, the man I never knew  
I am your successor, but I know not your victories  
They played you as a man of nothingness  
But they never cared to know

Though you're no longer here, I'm still inspired  
Proud that I am the Son of an unknown son  
Wherever you are, please know  
I am you in a younger journey

I know that I saw the better side  
I know you would be amazed by what I have become  
I am the other side of you  
I will make you proud, even if others don't know

When a son never knows his father, he will always seek  
I too will always search to become the greater you

I'll never surrender to see you once more  
We will meet again in another place in time